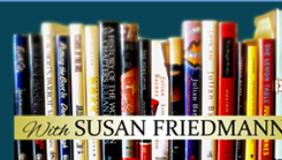


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BOOK MARKETING: How to Crack Best Seller Rank Code on Amazon Interview with Tom Corson-Knowles

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.

Today, my special guest mentor of the week is Tom Corson-Knowles, a serial entrepreneur, blogger, and international bestselling author. Tom's best selling books include *Secrets of the Six-Figure Author*, *The Kindle Publishing Bible*, *The Kindle Writing Bible*, and many more. Tom started his business career at the age of 13, and over the years of ups and downs has become a financially independent entrepreneur. Today he enjoys sharing the keys to his success through his multiple books, videos, and seminars. He works with new and established authors and writers on how to achieve incredible success by writing and selling eBooks on Amazon Kindle. I am excited to welcome Tom to the show, so thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Tom Knowles: Thanks so much for having me, Susan. It's great to be here.

Susan Friedmann: Tom, I know that one of the many areas of expertise you teach is how to crack the code to the #1 bestselling rankings on Amazon. I know that our listeners would really value knowing how to crack that code. Share whatever you can that would be helpful to our listeners.

Tom Knowles: There's a lot to it. Normally I give an hour and a half long presentation, and we walk through the main principles. Basically, the whole idea is that Amazon has 28,700 bestseller lists. That's just in the US and the UK, for eBooks and print books. With 28,700 bestseller lists, it's actually really easy to become a #1 bestseller in about 95% of the categories on Amazon. There are certain categories, like contemporary romance, which is the most competitive category on Amazon, where you need to sell thousands of books every month just to rank in the top 100 in that category. It's very, very competitive and very tough.

Most categories aren't that competitive, and they're not that hard to rank for. You can have a book with maybe 20 sales a month, 30 sales a month, or 5 sales in a day and be number 1 in many of the categories on Amazon.

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Once you understand where the categories are and how to find the right categories for your book, it's really simple. You don't need a lot of sales. What you want to do, is you want to make sure that your book appears in all the right categories for your specific market.

That comes down to really doing your market research and understanding who are your readers exactly, what do they want, and how do you give them what they want? That's really what market research is about. When you talk about marketing a book, most authors, when they talk about marketing, they're not talking about marketing. They're talking about promotion. They're talking about advertising. They're talking about things like book club promotions, tweeting, and Facebook posts. All that stuff is great, but it's just promotion. It's just advertising. It's not actually marketing.

If you go to any major branding firm, marketing firm, big company that does major branding and marketing campaigns for huge corporations and huge businesses that do millions or billions of dollars in sales, they're never going to start with advertising or promotion. They're always going to start with branding and market research. That's where you should start as an author. You need to start with branding and market research. You need to understand who are your readers, what do they want, and how do you give them what you want?

The easiest way to do that is just to go to Amazon and start looking for books that are like the book that you have either written or are planning to write. If you're writing a paleo diet cookbook, go to Amazon, you can type in "paleo diet cookbook," and you can find the bestselling paleo diet cookbooks on Amazon. You can see how many copies are they selling. I actually created this free tool. It's called the Amazon book sales calculator. It tells you, for any given sales ranking on Amazon, for eBooks or for print books, it will tell you exactly how many sales that book is currently getting on Amazon, either each month or in a single day.

The way that Amazon sales rankings work is that to maintain a certain sales ranking, let's say you want to be number 1,000 paid in the Kindle store, you need about 2,650 sales each month to maintain that ranking. I know that because one of our clients has that exact ranking and has had it for about a year now. If you want to maintain that rank, you need 2,600 sales per month.

If you want to get that ranking in a single day, during a single book launch, you take that monthly sales figure and divide by 15. If you divide 2,650 by 15, it's like 170 or something like that. 180. Something like that. Let's just

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say 200. 200 sales in a day. If you're launching a book on Amazon, it's a brand new book, and you get 200 sales in a single day, you'll be number 1,000 paid in the Kindle store. That free tool is available for everyone at tckpublishing.com/calculator. It will tell you, again, exactly how many sales you need either in 1 day or in 1 month, to hit a certain ranking on Amazon.

When you have that calculator and you're looking at the top books in your market, you can tell right away how profitable that market is going to be. If you see the number one book in your market is selling 100 copies a month, that's not a very big market. The number 1 romance novel is selling tens of thousands of copies a month. The number 1 self-help book is selling several thousands copies a month. If you're in a niche where the top, number one book in your niche is only selling 100 copies a month, it's a very small market. You wouldn't expect, coming into that market, you're going to be able to sell more than 100 copies a month, unless you think you're just going to be able to blow the competition out of the water.

That's one part of market research, is understanding just how big is your market, but there's so much more to it than that. You can dive in much deeper and then you can look at things like all the top books in your market and look at their book covers, their book titles, and their book descriptions. You can read the first two pages of their books. You can really get a clear picture of, how are your competitors branding their books? How are they positioning their message to your readers? The same people who are buying your competitor's paleo cookbooks are the same people who are going to be buying your cookbook.

I think a lot of authors don't understand that most readers, the people who are buying most books, they read lots and lots of books. Someone doesn't just pick up one romance novel and then they're done. They read one, then another and another and another and another. They're more than happy to read a series of novels from the same author and from different authors. There really isn't that competition on that level. When you're a top author, you're not really competing with your fellow authors. Harry Potter is not competing with Hunger Games. They've both sold millions and millions of copies, but they're not competing with each other. In fact, a lot of readers have read both books and loved them.

What you really have to do, is you have to understand who are your readers and how do you get your book in front of them. That's why it's so important to look at the titles, the covers, and the descriptions, to understand what your competitor's are doing and where there's an opportunity for you. I think a big mistake a lot of authors make is they try to write a "me too" book. You looked at Harry Potter and Harry Potter is so

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successful. You're like, "I'm going to write a book that's just like Harry Potter." No one wants to read a book that's just like Harry Potter. They want to read Harry Potter.

You have to have a unique message, a unique story, a unique voice to share. You have to, in your marketing, which is your messaging, your branding to your readers, which is everything from your book title to your book cover, to your description, to the first pages of your book. That's all the stuff that they're going to see before they decide to buy your book. If all that messaging isn't aligned in a way that tells a compelling story to your reader, they're not going to buy your book. No one is going to buy the next Harry Potter because they don't care. Does that make sense?

Susan Friedmann: It does. Something that you said earlier, and I'd love you to expand on, that is the idea of categories. I know there are so many different categories. How do you go about finding the right categories? How many categories can you actually list your book in?

Tom Knowles: Great question. Again, there's 28,700 categories for the US and the UK, for eBooks and print books. Amazon allows you to select two categories in each country. Amazon US, you can select two categories for your book. These are called "child categories." Child categories, if you're ever published your book in Kindle direct publishing, your KDP account, you've published an eBook on Amazon, in that account when you publish your book, you have to select two categories for your book. In that drop down menu, you'll see there's a romance one. You click it, it opens up, and there's historical romance, contemporary romance, and all those different things. You're looking for the child categories. Those are the ones that you actually select.

Every child category has what are called "parent categories," or categories that they're kind of nested under. Your book might be listed in harlequin love story romance, which is in the romance parent category. That's the child category, the harlequin whatever. Then the parent category is romance.

For fiction, these hierarchies tend to be pretty simple. There's usually not more than 3 or 4 different parent categories, sometimes 5. For nonfiction, they can be much more complicated. You can have 6, 7, or 8 different categories. When you select that one child category, you can have up to 10 different categories that it's nested under because of all the different parent categories that are above it. Even though you can only select 2 categories, I've seen books ranking in as many as 18 different categories on Amazon at one time. Not only do you have two child categories for your

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eBook, you also have two child categories for your physical book as well. There's also separate categories for audio books.

You can get your book listed in a whole lot of different categories, but the key is not how many categories your book is listed in, but how well it's ranking in your categories and how much exposure you're actually getting and how relevant it is to your audience. If you're writing a cookbook and your book is featured on a romance bestseller list, it's nonsense. No one who is looking at that list should be buying a cookbook, and so you're not going to get the sales. You're not going to get the conversions. Your sales ranking is going to drop because you're getting exposure on a good list, but it's not the right list for your audience.

It's super, super crucial that when you're doing this research you find the most relevant categories for your book first and foremost. Maybe out of all 28,000 bestseller lists, there might be 10 super relevant categories for your book. Those are your 10 possible options to list your book in. Then once you've found those lists, that's when you're actually going to go through and decide which two are the best for me at this time, based on my current sales and what I'm trying to do, and who I'm trying to reach in this marketplace?"

I think your question was basically how do you find these best seller lists. The way that I used to do it is you go to amazon.com and you search in the Kindle store on Amazon or the bookstore on Amazon. There's these drop down categories that you can eventually get to them. It's kind of complicated. I created a simple link that takes people right to the right page. It's at tckpublishing.com/amazoncategories. It's one word, amazoncategories. That takes you directly to the Kindle bestseller list on Amazon. Then you can browse them from there.

- Susan Friedmann: Did I understand you correctly that the hard copy of your book and the publishing version, you would list in two different categories?
- Tom Knowles: Yes because the categories are different. The industry has different categories for eBooks versus physical books. Sometimes they'll look exactly the same, like they might just say "contemporary romance." Sometimes they look completely different. The listing of categories for eBooks versus print books are very different.
- Susan Friedmann: Interesting. Would that apply the same to non-fiction as well as fiction?
- Tom Knowles: Yes, exactly.

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Susan Friedmann: That's very interesting with regard to the parent and the child, or the child and the parent, categories. What are some of the biggest mistakes that you find authors make when they're selling their book on Amazon/Kindle?

Tom Knowles: I think the biggest mistake is that they don't do the market research. What happens is you find the first editor you look for, your neighbor's best friend's cousin, and you find the first cover designer you come across that you found on a forum, and you just get all these people together to create the cover. You used the first title you came up with in the shower. It's not really organized. It's not branded. You don't really understand who your reader is and what they want. What you come up with is this version of your book that you want, the version of the book that you would like to read, as the author.

You have to realize that your reader is not you. If you really want to create a book that's going to sell well, you have to understand who your reader is and what they want and design your title, your book title, your description, and everything about your book, design it from the reader's perspective. The balance is, as an artist, you have to balance that with your reader's perspective, the business side of it, with your own unique voice and your creative talent. I think that's where a lot of authors mess up, is they say, "Hey, I want to make a million dollars, but I want to write a literary novel." They want to make lots of money, but they're not willing to do the commercial aspects of running a real business, which is understanding who your readers are and how to reach them.

You can do both, but it's two very different skill sets. It takes a real commitment to be willing to learn both the business side of it and the creative writing side of it.

Susan Friedmann: I think that's a really important point that you make there, Tom. The hardest thing, as you rightly said, is for the writer to take themselves out of the picture because they always think of the book in relation to themselves and what they want, as you rightly said, rather than transferring it to the reader and what the reader wants. That's a very important skill that balances you, as you rightly say. What other mistakes?

Tom Knowles: I think another mistake that people make, that's related, is that they hire the first person they think of. They're not really getting quotes. I have a rule in business called the rule of three, where I never pay for anything above a certain dollar limit, maybe for you it's \$10 or \$100 or \$1000 or whatever, but I never pay more than my limit of a significant amount of money, unless I get at least three quotes. If it's a \$5 service I'm paying, I don't really care. If it's \$100 or \$500, I'm not going to buy that service

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unless I'm really certain I've done my research, and I've interviewed at least three potential service providers that can provide that same service, so I can get a better idea of what really goes into that process and how I can get a great result.

A lot of authors, I've seen authors spend \$5,000 on a book cover that's a terrible book cover. It doesn't help them sell books because it's so fancy and there's so much clutter on it and there's so much design and so much intricacy on it, that you can't even read the book title. When you're browsing books on Amazon, you see this cover and you can't see the nuances and you can't read the title. It just looks like a blur.

I think that's the big mistake authors make, is that they get so excited about their project that they don't, again, do the business aspects that are required to be successful, which is really doing your research and finding out who could design my book cover? Can I get quotes from all these different people, to see where are the ranges? It might be a range from \$5 to \$5,000 for a book cover. Then you have to decide where do you want to be in that range? Look at the quality of the work of the designers, and look at their portfolios, call references. Call their past authors and clients and see how easy it was to work with them.

All this grunt work, it's boring, it takes time, but it's what saves you from making big, big mistakes. I think most authors, most people in general, we would just rather take the shortcut than take a little bit of extra time to make sure we're doing the job right. I think you have to take that little bit of extra time to really save yourself from making big mistakes, especially if you're new to the industry. If you've got 20 books under your belt, you don't need to go through this whole process every time. When you're just starting out, you're going to get ripped off if you don't really be careful, do your research.

Susan Friedmann: I think something else that you said earlier could probably be counted as a mistake. It's the idea of promotion versus marketing. Would you address that in a little more detail, please?

Tom Knowles: The major factors that I've been talking about, your title, your cover, your book description, this is where you brand your book. If you browse the bestseller lists on Amazon, if you go to Amazon and you go to that like I said at tckpublishing.com/amazoncategories, and you scroll down and you click on "romance." Then you look at the top, bestselling romance novels in any specific genre. Every different subgenre is different, but in any one specific genre, there's certain types of book covers that predominate.

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For most romance subgenres, you'll see like 60% of the book covers have a picture of a handsome man who has no shirt on with rippling muscles. 30% have an image of a beautiful woman who is scantily clad. 10% is just other things, random images, or maybe no image at all, and different things. Then if you look at the fonts, the fonts for most romance novels, they're calligraphy, they're fancy. Whereas if you look at thriller novels, they're kind of hard, bold, and cold letters. It's very different, and the imagery is very different.

This is all stuff about branding. It's the image that you're portraying. The emotion that you're portraying to a reader. We all know that book covers are really important because when people are browsing these bestseller lists, when they're looking for books on Amazon, they click the images and the covers that they think are attractive, that make them feel good or feel a certain emotion that they want to feel. If they're looking at horror, they will probably click on the covers that make them feel a little bit scared.

You have to realize that when people make purchasing decisions, they make purchasing decisions with emotion first and foremost. Everyone buys with emotion. We justify purchases with logic, but we buy with emotion. If you have a romance novel, for instance, and your cover looks like a horror novel that's scary, no one who is an avid romance reader is going to click on that book cover because it doesn't give them the emotion that they're looking for. Someone who is looking for romance and they look at your book cover, and they don't feel that feeling of romance, they're not going to click it. They're not going to buy it.

This is what branding is. This is what it's really about, is getting your message clear. Before you ever design that book cover, you have to understand the readers. You have to understand the market and understand where do you want to be branded. How do you want readers to think about your book? What do you want them to feel about your book? When you're clear on what you want readers to think and how you want them to feel, that's when you do the design. That's when you create the book title. That's when you write the book description. Everything you do to promote your book has to be aligned with that message that you want to share.

What most authors do is they don't think about this, so they just write random things. The book cover doesn't match with the title, it doesn't match with the description, it doesn't match when you read the first two pages of the book. It doesn't give this coherent, clear experience of what this book is about. Readers are confused. There's this a great quote in business. I don't remember where I heard it from. It says, "The confused

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mind always says no." The confused mind always says no. If your branding, if your covers and descriptions are confusing readers, they are not going to buy.

That is, I think, the biggest mistake I've seen authors make, day in, day out, is that their book is confusing. You click on their book on Amazon. They'll say, "Hey, Tom, can you take a look at my book on Amazon? Think of some ways to improve it." You click on the book on Amazon, and it's like you read the title and you have no idea what the book is about from the title. Then you see the cover, and it looks like a children's book. Then you read the book description, and it sounds like a horror novel. Then you look inside the book, and it reads like a romance novel. It's like nothing in here is coherent. I'm so confused by that point that if I was a reader, I would never buy that book. I don't know what I'm going to get. Does that make sense?

Susan Friedmann: It certainly does. If our listeners wanted to contact you, I know you've been generous enough and given us a few different free gifts, but how can they get hold of you?

Tom Knowles: The best place is check out the blog at tckpublishing.com. We have tons of free information, resources, and checklists on everything from how to write your book to get it published, to marketing and promotion, and more. Then you can check out the podcast show, The Publishing Profits Podcast. Every single week, I interview bestselling authors, agents, publishers, marketers, and branding experts to find out what's working right now in the industry, to really drive more sales for your books. That's at publishingprofitspodcast.com.

Then for folks who are just starting out and want to learn the basics of how do you actually get your book published on Amazon and do it the right way without getting ripped off, without spending lots of money on services that you don't need, I have a free training course at ebookpublishingschool.com, that walks you through the step-by-step process to getting your book published on Amazon like a pro. That's the best place to reach me.

Then folks, if you go to tckpublishing.com, you can just hit the Contact form. If you have any questions or anything I can do to help, you can just contact me personally, and I'll do my best to make sure you have everything you need to succeed.

Susan Friedmann: I highly recommend people go to the site, because there is a wealth of information there. Once you get in there, it's like a rabbit warren. You can't get out because there's so many great things that you're giving there.

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Thank you for what you're doing for the industry. That's fabulous. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?

Tom Knowles:

I think one of the best things you can do to really become a better author and a better writer and to better understand your readers, is to go to Amazon, find the top bestselling authors in your market, and read their reviews. Read all the reviews, the positive reviews and the negative reviews. Have a notebook with you, and take notes when you see readers mention the same thing over and over again. If they mention something really positive that they loved about a certain book, or something they hate about a certain book. Create this list of things that your readers love and things that your readers hate. With this list, what you can do is when you're writing your book or you're revising your book or you're creating your marketing, your branding campaign, you can understand really crystal clear what your readers actually want.

I know most people aren't going to do it, but for those of you who do do this, it will transform your career and will help you shoot to the next level so much faster. You're going to have a clear picture of what you need to do to make your readers happy.

Susan Friedmann:

That's the difference between people who are successful and people who aren't, the people who do it versus the people who wish these things would happen. Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing all this valuable information. Thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.