

# BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

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## BOOK MARKETING: How to Build a Powerful Author Platform to Be More Visible Interview with Alinka Rutkowska

- 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 is a book marketing expert. Alinka Rutkowska is a multi-award-winning and number one Amazon best-selling author and coach. She's published more than 20 titles, both nonfiction and fiction, including her award-winning guide, *How I Sold 80,000 Books*, which breaks down how powerful marketing strategies into actionable steps. She's been featured by Fox Business Network, Author Marketing Club, *Kindlepreneur*, *The Author Hangout*, *The Writer's Life* and many more. She's the founder and moderator of *The Readers' Favorite* forum for authors and the CEO of *Library Bub* which connects indie authors and libraries. Alinka is passionate about transforming struggling writers into profitable authors. That's why I knew she'd be a great fit for the *Book Marketing Mentors* podcast series. Alinka, welcome to the show and thank you for being this week's special guest expert and mentor.
- Alinka Rutkowska: Thank you so much, Susan. I'm so excited to be here with you and your audience.
- Susan Friedmann: I believe you're calling us from Italy, so that's very exciting. We've had somebody from Australia and from Switzerland but nobody from Italy. This is the first, so that's very exciting.
- Alinka Rutkowska: Excellent. I'm glad to be the first.
- Susan Friedmann: Alinka, you're known for applying your corporate background into your book business. In your *How I Sold 80,000 Books*, you talk about the 4Ps. Can you tell us what exactly that strategy is all about?
- Alinka Rutkowska: The 4Ps is a marketing strategy or a marketing term also known as the marketing mix. Any multinational company and I work for multinational companies in the past. Every multinational company, before they launch

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any product on the market, they go through these 4Ps and we as authors also need to go through this 4Ps for our book if we want to successfully sell our book. The 4P's are product, place, price and promotion. Is there any particular order that you'd like to talk about this 4Ps or should we start from the beginning?

Susan Friedmann: I think let's start from the beginning. Because when you think of your book as product, which many authors don't, this is the mindset that you have to take home for this. Can you take us through that, please?

Alinka Rutkowska: How authors usually start is by writing something that's been in their heart for a long time and they just feel the needs to get it out or they're passionate about something and they write it and they publish it. It's the hard book, which means that it comes from the heart but the opposite of a hard book would be a commercial book. Or if you look at your book as a product, then you wouldn't just write something that you're passionate about or that you want to get out there. You would do proper market research because any product that goes out there that you actually see on the shelves, or on the online shelves, there's been a lot of market research behind it. No company will launch a product if they're not sure that people will buy it. Whereas the majority of books are just being released and the only strategy is hope. Hope that somebody will buy it. What type of research can you do? Very simple research.

First of all, you need to go on Amazon and see if books in the genre that you want to write in are selling. Because if it's something so peculiar, that there's not a big enough market for it, then you might be struggling when you release your book. If there are books that are selling, you still want to go and start reading the Amazon reviews for those book. Because very often in these reviews, especially the three-star reviews, the long three-star reviews. There's a lot of gold in them, so you'll see what people enjoyed in the book and what they didn't. That's where they are really just saying out loud what their needs are. You need to understand what your market is and what they need and then provide the thing that they need. That's an overview of market research that you can do for your book right now, just in a really simple way by going on Amazon and at looking at the information that is available there for you.

Susan Friedmann: One of the things that I find very often Alinka is that, people writing a book as you say and they hope that it's going to sell. The question that I

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always ask them is, who's your market? Who's your target market? So often, they don't know and they say, "Oh, well, it's for everybody."

Alinka Rutkowska: Yeah.

Susan Friedmann: You know as well as I that's not possible to market to everybody. If somebody comes to you and talks to you about their market, what strategies do you give them?

Alinka Rutkowska: The number one strategy would be to find your niche and niche down. Exactly what you're saying. Your book can't be for everybody. One example, somebody just recently wrote to me that they released a children's book that is for people from the age of three to nine to three. It's cute but that's never the case. Children's book, it's just too broad. If something appeals to everybody, it really appeals to nobody because it's not niched down enough. A really good example is again to look at these multinational companies. Think about the washing powder that you use. Those companies know what they're doing. There is no washing powder for everybody. There's one for your whites, one for your blacks and one another one for wool, another one for colors. Even if you do like I do and just throw everything altogether, there's a special washing powder for that. There is no washing powder that's for everybody.

They niche it down and they niche it down like really narrowly, if you check out the aisles of what they provide. The interesting thing is that very often, these are brands of the same company. Something for example, nonfiction authors can do, they really want to have a solid strategy is to create these books that are niched down that talk about a small part of what you know about. That's how you find your readers. Because they have problems and they're looking for solutions for their problems and if you can provide them the solution to that problem, they will be asking you to provide solutions to other problems they have. That's when you can introduce other books or other services. Because if you're a nonfiction author, then there's much more than you can provide to your audience than books.

Susan Friedmann: That's so true. It's so funny that you use the washing detergent example and there's so many different varieties. Because I remember when I came to the US from England and I needed some detergent and I went down the aisles at the supermarket. Two aisles lined with different products, none of which I recognize. I just broke down because I was

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overwhelmed. Yes, there's so many out there and it's just finding the one for you. That applies to your book as well.

**Alinka Rutkowska:** Another example is cereal. I can never believe how many different types there are. To give you another supermarket example, let's say a grocery store example. Let's say you get into a supermarket and every aisle is marked food. Yeah, you are looking for food but you're looking for specific type of food. Let's say that you're looking for dark chocolate and you're just going to be lost there, not knowing what to buy, wondering around and eventually probably not buying anything. If you find an aisle which is clearly marked dark chocolate, that's where you're going because that's what you're looking for. That's just the idea of niching down. Also, you can't really differentiate yourself from the others if you're too general.

**Susan Friedmann:** Exactly. Let's transition and talk about the second P, place. Talk to us about that and the things that we need to consider in that arena.

**Alinka Rutkowska:** I do, I place into online and offline. Now, people usually sell books online. It's really easy with CreateSpace and KDP. You can very easily upload your books and sell them online. Then, there are all the other platforms and the aggregators that you can use if you don't want to upload on every single platform. While people do that and very often don't even publish paperbacks, which it is actually a good strategy just start with just an eBook for various reasons. We can talk about that. Once your eBook is selling, you know that it's a good book but it's a really good idea to publish a paperback and consider all the places where you can sell your paperback that's not Amazon. Not necessarily just bookstores but you can start thinking about getting your physical books into libraries, into supermarkets, airports, cruise lines, into independent stores, into gas stations, therapist offices.

You just have to think themes. If you're a savvy businessperson, you think about it before you write your book. You might start thinking about it right now and still find a really good match somewhere. To give you an example, I have a children's series which is about two kids traveling on a cruise ship and it wasn't so difficult to get that onto cruise lines, these cruise line boutiques. Because the children visit different ports of call and the ship goes and docks in these port of call. It really made a lot of sense to have those books there. I'm sure if you start analyzing, just brainstorming where does your book fit, you'll find a place.

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- Susan Friedmann: What I would love you to touch on is the whole idea of getting into libraries. I know that that's something you specialize in, in your Library Bob. I'd like to just take a moment and transition a little bit and talk about that because I know that that's a growing market that many authors could take advantage of. Could you touch a little bit on that service you offer?
- Alinka Rutkowska: Until very recently, it was very difficult to get into libraries because this was a really reserved area for only traditional publishers and the big ones. The only way a self published author could get into a library would be if the patrons started bugging the staff about this book. If they find out that it's you and your friends bugging them about the book, then they would obviously get very angry about it and they wouldn't order it. Authors are acknowledging how important it is to be in libraries especially if you have more than one book. Because if you can get one book into a library, somebody will discover you there. It's very easy that they will buy your subsequent books. Also, one book in one library is usually read by 200 people. That's sort of how long it can live before it dies because the pages are being torn out and it just physically deteriorates.
- It can be borrowed around 200 times, depending on the quality of the book if it's paperback or hardcover but that's a lot of people you can reach with just one book. If it in that book for example, you have a call to action saying, "Go, get something else. Come to my website, leave your email address and go get something else." You then have a direct channel of communication with that person who can buy your other stuff because they got to know you through a library. Now, one of these 200 people, that could be anybody. That could even be a movie producer who's looking for their next project and they might find you. It's really huge what you know, having this type of exposure can do for you. A good idea is I think even to go to your local library and even donate a book because that's already a lot of exposure that you can get, if they accept your book. Then, that's already a great start.
- Then, of course, you can do things on a mass scale. Like via Library Bob where I send out a newsletter to 10,000 libraries with really good indie and small press books. These books need to meet some criteria. I don't just send out any book. I want them to have some kind of recognition, like a five-star review from one of these places that give authors reviews. Also, it needs to have some social proof on Amazon. That means, several reviews both editorial reviews and also customer reviews. Amazon page needs to look because librarians, even though they buy, they buy through Ingram and through Baker & Taylor, they do

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check out the Amazon pages to see what people are saying about the book.

Susan Friedmann: Fascinating. It's a hot market and we've had a few people talk about that here on different book marketing mentor section, so thank you. I think we could do a whole podcast on that and perhaps you consider coming back and doing one on that. I'd love you to go into depth on that but let's go back to our marketing mix and touch on price. I know that many authors come to me and they say, "What should I sell my book for? I don't know how much I should put on it." Talk to us about that. The difference between your eBook, what pricing is optimum there versus a soft or a hardcover book.

Alinka Rutkowska: What I recommend is something totally outrageous that authors don't want to hear about and that's to publish your first book permanently free. This works only if you're in it for the long run. Because if you just want to publish one book and you want to try to live off that book. Then obviously, you will employ different strategy. Let's divide this into three possibilities. If you're in it for the long-term, what you really need is visibility. Before people can buy something from you, they need to know that you exist. The best way for them to discover that you exist is for them to find your book online. It has to be optimized for online sales, which means for example that it needs to have excellent keywords. Also, a great title, a great cover, a great description, well, we don't have time to get into all that. The number one thing here is that it's free. Free books get 100 times more downloads than \$1 books. The exposure that you can get, the people that will give you a chance as you know, as any author, increases drastically if you give your first book away for free.

Let's say we're done with this and you're either on your second book or you don't want to do the free strategy. For this book now, we're going to sell it, we're not going to give it away anymore. What you need to do here is test. Basically, test the price. What I recommend for new authors who don't want to do a permanently free book, is to do a free lunch where [inaudible 00:16:25] and KDP Select and you do this five-day free launch. So that as many as possible can download your book and they will review your book as verified reviewers. After that, you would set your book at \$1, 0.99, and you don't change anything. You're now ... All the other factors have to be constant. We are going to test this one factor at a time and this factor is price. Let's say we're going to do a one month testing period. Where the first week, the book is \$1. Let's say that you send a certain amount of traffic to your book.



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You're maybe running some ads or you're using some promotional sides or you're doing some social media campaigns of various types.

Whatever you decide to do, you keep doing that in exactly the same degree the whole month. Nothing else changes. You don't play with categories, you don't play with keywords, you don't change your title or your cover. Just the price. The first week, we set the book at \$1 and we see how much in royalties we get. Then the next week, we set the book at \$2 and we see if we're making more in royalties. The third week, we set the book at \$3 and you know where I'm getting with that. As soon as you see that your royalties start decreasing, then you switch back to the previous week where they were at maximum. That's how you will price test your eBook.

Susan Friedmann: That's next on strategy. Let's talk about print soft cover, hardcover. What are your thoughts on that?

Alinka Rutkowska: Print book. This is a different story especially if you want to sell your books in bulk to the places that we mentioned and the place, P. When you sell your book to a store, you have to give them a 55 to 60% industry discount. This means that you have to be able to give them that discount off your retail price and still be profitable. For example, let's say that your book is \$10 on Amazon. That means that the store will want to buy it at \$4 or at 4.50. If it cost you \$5 to produce it, then you would be in the red. This means that you would have to price your book on Amazon at \$12 for example, or 13 to at least to make \$1 or \$2 off that bulk sale. That's something important to keep in mind if you want to sell to those places. You do the same calculation whether it's a paperback or a hardcover. A hardcover has a higher perceived value. In the past, the hardcover was released first and then the paperback.

As self published authors, I don't think it's even necessary to have a hardcover. Just as long as you have a paperback, so that you don't leave money on the table, then that's great. Because if you don't have a paperback, you are leaving money on the table because a lot of people still like paper books. Plus, it's a really great thing to be able to hold it in your hand to show it to people, to gift it to people, if you want to. My book, the book that we're talking about, *How I Sold 80,000 Books*. You can download it for free if you know where to go but I also sell physical copies. Even though you can get it for free, people still buy the paperback. Sometimes, they check out if they like the free book. If they do, then they buy the paper book. Do it. Don't just leave money on the table by not creating a paperback because it's so easy to create. So many opportunities are wasted if you don't do it.

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Susan Friedmann: Full agreement with you there. Before we run out of time, I'd love you to talk about the fourth P, promotion. Which is obviously the one we should have started with because it's the biggie with regard to book marketing. Let's talk about promotion and some of the most important things that authors could do with their book.

Alinka Rutkowska: Promotion is a biggie and I divide it into three categories, three different categories. In the book, I divide it into within book, so what type of promotion you can do inside of your book. What to do online and what to do offline. Then, to my students, I also give them another split which is before launch, during launch and post-launch. It's such a huge topic that I divided it into different ways. Something that is really important and that online marketers have been doing for years now but authors are only catching up now, is to have that landing page and every person who opens your book should be able to go to your website and leave their email in exchange of something else that you will give them. Because then, you will have a direct channel of communication with them and you can sell them your other stuff. Not necessarily books. There's so much you can offer to your readers.

If you're not doing that, you're missing on a huge opportunity. Some people focus on having Facebook fans or Twitter followers or Amazon, I don't know what's that now, likes or followers. That can disappear overnight. Building a following on a platform that can kick you out whenever they want because maybe you violated some law or there's another person who is using your name. For any other reason, it's their platform. They can do whatever they want about it or maybe they will start charging for Facebook or Twitter. There were networks that I even belong to that started charging for the opportunity to be a member and nearly went bankrupt and people's whole platforms and businesses magically who disappeared overnight. You really want this people on your platforms, on your email list. Because then, you have absolute control of what's going on and that's how you can make retailers redundant.

Because when people are following you directly, they have a huge benefit and you have a huge benefit because while your method is obviously that you can contact them whenever you want and offer them whatever you want, whenever you want on your terms. Their benefit is that, with no middlemen, the price that they will pay, you can start building your following. Even if you have just five or 10 or a hundred people on your email list, you can tell them, "Look. I sell this book for \$5 on Amazon but you guys, if you buy directly from me, you can get it for \$3 or \$4, or whatever." You may have to make the calculation. You



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basically say that money that the middleman is taking, you're going to save that because you're going direct. That's one thing but that's really important thing that a lot of authors are not doing.

Susan Friedmann: Yes. I would agree with you. I've had too many authors who tell me, "Oh, I've got thousands of people on Facebook who like me." I'm like, "That's not going to help you with Facebook." That's what you said that they suddenly decide to do their own thing and you're kicked off or whatever the reason.

Alinka Rutkowska: Yeah. That doesn't even have to be so drastic. They can change the algorithm. It happen not so recently with Facebook pages. People were running ads to build their following with Facebook pages and then suddenly now, when you post something on your page, I don't remember the percentage. Was it 5, 10% of the followers actually see it.

Susan Friedmann: Interesting. Let's talk about how our listeners can find out more about your services and the different programs that you have.

Alinka Rutkowska: The best place to start is to get *How I Sold 80,000 Books* and you can get that for free at my website [authorremake.com/book](http://authorremake.com/book). That's [authorremake.com/book](http://authorremake.com/book).

Susan Friedmann: It's a great resource. I've downloaded it. I think it's excellent and you outline all those different piece, the marketing mix strategies, so I highly recommend people to download that. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget Alinka, what would that be?

Alinka Rutkowska: Well, I just talked extensively about the mailing list which is one of the golden nuggets but I'll give you another one that's equally important that we talked about at the beginning. That's to do some kind of market research before you decide to publish your book. If you've already written your book and haven't published it yet but are in the process of getting it ready for publishing, you can still do that research to understand which category is best for you. Understand which keywords are going to make your book show up on top of Amazon searches. Find a title that is attractive. If it's a nonfiction book, how to titles have always worked very well. You basically want to show your reader the benefit that they're going to get by reading your book.

If you're a fiction author, you want to see what type of titles capture reader's attention. Whatever genre you want to write, go to Amazon and check out the 20 best-selling books in that genre and try to analyze

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what they have in common. Because they have in common the type of copper that they're using. That color palette that they're having, the type of title. It might not be obvious when you look at it for the first time but when you start studying these things, read their reviews and see what they're all about. Because that's how you will start to understand who your audience is, what they want and provide them that. That's the recipe for not just any successful book but for any successful product.

Susan Friedmann:

I love it. Thank you. Thank you for being our guest and thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it's box some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.