

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

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BOOK MARKETING: How To Create A Best-Seller Using Fans To Be Your Champions Interview with Adam Houge

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 launch expert who likes to help authors make their book a bestseller. Adam Houge is a number one international bestselling author of over 100 books in the Christian faith. He has hit the top of the religious charts in both the UK and the US during his launches and has consistently outsold his competitors such as Joel Osteen, Billy Graham, and Alex Kendrick on Amazon.com.

Adam has also written numerous other titles in many various genres under his pen names, including romance and business. Over the past three years he's distributed more than 2,000 copies of his books globally through his paid and free launch strategies. He's been ranked among the top 50 highest selling authors globally, both traditionally and self-published. Adam and I were recently on the Five Figure Challenge Panel together. I was so impressed with the powerful strategies he uses, that I thought he'd be a valuable addition to the show, so, Adam, welcome and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Adam Houge: Thank you Susan. It's good to be here.

Susan Friedmann: Adam, so many of my authors aspire to being bestselling authors. Tell us how you came about to develop your powerful book launch formula?

Adam Houge: It all began, just a quick story, I had struggled with a health-related illness that forced me to quit my job. In the past I had been an itinerant preacher, so I decided with my time off, since I was retired now in my mid-20s, I decided that I would finish putting together a book I had been working on, and I had heard about the success that others were having on kindle, so I put it out there. My wife and I, we were buried in medical bills. We absolutely needed money, but I wasn't doing it for the reason of money. I was doing it for the reason of spreading a message, but at

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the same time if it earned something, my family really needed it, so I've been happy to receive that.

At that time I did not perform very well. I only made about \$50 that month. The next month did considerably better because I hit a better chord, where I made about \$300. I slowly built my way up not really understanding. I was feeling through the dark exactly how I'd do it. I tried to focus on what I knew that was working, but I didn't understand fully what I needed to do to continue to grow my visibility. That was the main issue that I was struggling with was not only getting my book visible, but continuing to keep that visibility. As I followed along this journey, I began to realize that as I launched my books that there has to be a better way to connect with my readers on Amazon.

I decided to figure out exactly how Amazon gets their algorithm to work, and how your visibility is found on there. When I finally had that breakthrough of understanding what brought your books to the front of the eyes, I began applying those methods for my launches. The results were extremely significant where I had gone from 1,800 in one month to \$14,000 that very same month in royalty earnings. There were ups and downs in the market. I've had \$40,000 months, and I've had \$20,000 months. It's the same thing everyone experiences, but the ultimate point behind everything is that in order to get the visibility that you need, you need to have a true step-by-step book launch formula that will help you to gain and maintain your visibility.

Susan Friedmann: That's a wonderful segue into understanding that book launch strategy in more detail. Fire away. Go ahead. Tell us whatever you can. We're all ears.

Adam Houge: Over time, I began to realize that there is a strategy that would work best, and I tried to simplify it as easily as possible so that I could follow it like a system, just formulas, and continue to apply it again and again. What that is is it comes down to two variables. It's your traffic, what you're driving to your sales page whether on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, or wherever it is that you might be selling your books. Then it's conversions. There's various factors of your book that are going to result in a higher possibility of sales when the potential reader looks at it. Then there's one more factor that I should include in there, and it's understanding how to get that basic visibility on Amazon, and that's going to be most of their algorithm is controlled by a sales rank and by a 30 day rolling average.

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Without getting too in-depth about it, to simplify it, almost everything comes down to the keywords and categories that you choose. They're going to control much of the visibility that you're going to find on Amazon. From there you need to also consider the conversions because there is this 30 day average, so they're taking how many books you've sold each day, they add them all together. It's not going to be the same every day. One day it might be 10, the next might be 15, another might be 9. They add that all together and they divide it by 30, and this gives them an average of your book sales, and they compare that to every other book in the store, and that gives them an idea of where you would rank in that part of their store in the 30 day algorithm.

The sales ranks works differently. It's just how many sales you've had in the past hour, or how many you've had over the course of the day. It's updated hourly. If you focus on the things that help you get a sale, those conversion factors, you're more likely to have more sales per day, which will give you more visibility over time with the 30 day algorithm, which controls a huge part of the store including the search engine and the popularity list. This is found by just typical browsing on Amazon's main webpage where they have a majority of their traffic. If you focus then on six key conversion factors, I would say they'd be your title, something that speaks to your target audience.

If you can get a keyword in there, that's great, but don't keyword-stuff, and if you can't get a keyword in there, it's better to have something that's catchy. If they read the title, they're going to want to know more. They're going to want to peek at that. Then your cover, it needs to speak to your target audience but also be really, really good. Best way to determine how well it fits is by looking at the bestseller list on Amazon, so whatever your genre is, if, let's say, you write romance, open up the ... There are various genres of romance. Open up the genre you're in.

If it's just contemporary romance, open up the contemporary romance bestsellers page, and look at the book covers that you see there on the top 20. Now, imagine yourself being there. Put your book there. Does your cover look as good as theirs? If it doesn't, fix it, because if you plan to be on the bestseller list you're more likely going to get there when you're able to drive the sales. I'll explain that in just a moment. There's the title. There is your cover. Then there's also your description. This is going to be the first thing that people read from you. When they open up Amazon, and they type something in the search engine or they look anywhere, the first thing they see is your cover.

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They judge books by covers. I know we have the saying "don't judge a book by its cover." People will look at your cover, they'll look at your rating and reviews because they can see it right under your cover, and they'll look at your title, and so those three things need to be well suited for your genre: the title, the cover, but also if you can help it, as you build and maintain an audience, you'll be able to get reviewers. What I mean by that is if you grow an email list, you can just simply ask them. You put out a copy of your book to them and say, "Would you review my book?" It's a great way to get some reviews upfront, so that you can have that polished thumbnail on Amazon. Everything looks really good, so they'll click into that, and the very next thing they'll see is your description.

Most people, this is where a lot of authors struggle, they'll look at the description and they'll hum and haw. They're not sure what to write. I've struggled with that myself. You finish writing a book, and you know what it's about but for some reason you have a hard time explaining it. This is some of the most important words you'll ever write, because these are the first things that any reader is going to read from you, and it's what's going to determine whether they're going to buy your book or not, whether they're going to be blessed what you write or not.

I personally, I'll take hours. I've already taken sometimes a whole day or two just to write those two paragraphs to make sure that they're as engaging as possible. If you make an epic description, one that hooks really, really well, your sales will be epic. They'll be incredible. Take the time to make it really good, and not just sounding good, but to hook them, to drive that interest and that curiosity. From there it's going to be the sample, the first five pages that Amazon might show. As they read through and are hooked by your story, they need to purchase your book to satisfy that burning curiosity that you just created in them.

Then the last thing would be the traffic. The traffic you can do that through book blogs, places like kindlenationdaily.com, Book Gorilla, booksends.com. If you do a free book launch, there's Freebooksy. They drive quite a few downloads for a very reasonable price. There's many others to that list. That's a great way to start if you don't have an email list. You can still get a really good punch of sales that way, and still get visibility on the algorithm if you pack that together in about a two or a three day promotional period. The last thing you'd want to do, but it's one of the most important, is to grow and facilitate your own fan base to create your audience for your email list.

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This you can do by setting up a short story that you put on your website. You put it there for free and you just ask ... You'll give them the free book in exchange for their email list. I know that's a whole lot I threw out there, but basically if you follow those exact steps, your book is not only going to be able to be a bestseller, but it's going to be able to continue to maintain those ranks. Then to actually get the bestseller status, a bestseller how it's made is by two things. It's a highly appealing product with a lot of traffic or visibility all at once. In order to get that bestseller status just within one, two, or three day period you're pushing a lot of sales through the book blogs and through your email list, and it'd be very easy for you to rank especially as an Amazon bestseller that way.

Susan Friedmann: That was a lot. You're right. Good stuff. A couple of things that I want to focus in on. One is some of these sites to build traffic, could you go through those again? You mentioned them, and I don't know that our authors necessarily know about them, so could you repeat some of them again, please?

Adam Houge: Sure. There's ohfb.com, which is 100freebooks.com. They also promote paid \$0.99 promotions. Although they're called 100 Free Books, they've kind of gone to a broader spectrum. They do very well. There's Kindle Nation Daily. There is booksends.com. There's bookgorilla.com. There's Freebooksy if you do, and that's Freebooks with a Y at the end, .com, if you do a free book launch using KDP's five free select days, and if you do a free, there's other places too. There's BKNights, B-K-N-I-G-H-T-S. He's on Fiverr. A lot of people have experienced very good success. I myself, I've gotten quite a few downloads for a free launch with him. Being on Fiverr he's really inexpensive, so it's a very good place to go.

Susan Friedmann: What does he do? Sorry. Say that again?

Adam Houge: He has a couple of blogs and instead of going to the blog to order his service, he reroutes you to Fiverr where he has his whole set up there for his payment processor and everything. I think he goes there because it's just an easier set up, and it gives him more visibility being on Fiverr that way, for his website.

Susan Friedmann: Interesting.

Adam Houge: He posts it on his blog and then sends it to his email list. It works very well for free. I have not tried it with paid, so I'm not going to suggest to

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do that. Free works very well for sure. There's bargain books, with a Y at the end, bargainbooksy.com, and they do pretty good.

Susan Friedmann: Those are some great resources that I know that our listeners can use. Another thing that you said that you really spend a lot of time on is that description, and I know how important that it. As you said, those two paragraphs really critical because that can make or break a sale to create interest. Do you use any kind of formula for that description? How do you go about writing a description especially for one of your non-fiction books?

Adam Houge: With non-fiction, it's going to work a little bit differently than fiction. In fiction, you can easily write a story and make it really engaging and interesting, and people want to buy that. With non-fiction, I follow a little bit different formula. For example, I have this firm belief that if I'm not going to ... We live in a very ADD world, now that we have the internet. It just takes one click for someone to move on. You've got one sentence to catch their attention. I like to make my first sentence a hook, something that catches their attention, something that appeals to that genre the best.

I write religion, so depending on which book I write, if it's prayer I might make a statement, a bold statement about the necessity of prayer. If it's a devotional, I might make a statement regarding that. Just something that you know will hook them right away so that they'll want to read the rest of the description. Then, from there it's easy to start describing, well, you're going to learn this and that about the book. Some people say put some bullet points, and that can be good depending on a genre, to put bullet points, especially if it's a book where they're trying to gain information to apply.

There's a difference between a devotional, which I write, people sit down to meditate on, versus other non-fiction where somebody might sit down to different self-help, or someone is learning how to do plumbing, other things, they're going to want to see that detailed bullet list somewhere in there of the most important points that will solve their problem. That's the definite right there, is that you want to make sure that it shows them. You wrote this book to solve a problem, if you're writing non-fiction, usually, especially if it's some form of a self-help, for example. If that's what you are writing, then you want to make sure that it clearly defines their problem that they have and how you're creatively solving it in a way that really drives their interest.

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Even if it's not creative, even if it's respinning the wheel, it's most important that you drive their interest so that when they read that description they definitely get the strong urge: "I know this person is going to solve what I'm looking for." Then I usually like to end it with one more hook or something else so that they want to open the sample, or they want to click purchase so that they can just begin reading right away.

Susan Friedmann: In your opinion where are the biggest opportunities right now for new authors?

Adam Houge: Again, a lot of that is going to be on Amazon. Granted, there's a lot of stores out there, but Amazon, even to this day, still holds the lion's share especially because of eBooks. The reason why I continually point people to that is when you're first starting as an author, you have a small fan base. You're not going to get a lot of traction at Barnes & Noble. You're not going to get a lot of traction at iBooks Store. The reason is is you're not going to be able to get onto their algorithms. The algorithms produce the visibility. It's just like getting the visibility in the physical store, and you can get to the front of the store for free if you grow your fan base and push those sales on day one of your promotion.

The problem is in Barnes & Noble or iTunes, all of these stores combined, so Books-A-Million, Barnes & Noble, iBooks Store, Kobo, and the list goes on and on, all of them combined represent, and it changes each year, but roughly, I'm not sure what the variables are this year, but it's roughly about 40% of the entire market. One store, Amazon, controls 60% of all the rest of the market. If you prescribe to the Pareto principle which is 20% of what you do is going to create 80% of your desired results, so that 20% for me is Amazon. They control 60%. I only have to worry about getting visibility in one place, and especially when you're starting out it's a lot easier to focus on that one thing that will help you succeed.

Then as you grow, you grow your email list and everything else, it's easier to gain that traction in other stores. That's why you'll find USA Today bestselling self-published authors, they're out [wide 00:17:37]. You have to be in order to get on those lists. If you do it on day one, it's just too many options for your very, very small reader audience that you're building. It's better to give them that one audience and that one thing. Again, to answer that question, I really feel like the best place to start is going to be Amazon for everyone.

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- Susan Friedmann: Mistakes. I know that you love talking about mistakes authors make. Give us a few of them.
- Adam Houge: One would be, the biggest one, that they're not building their fan base, not taking the time to grow and facilitate an audience, to nurture that audience so that they not only desire to know you as an author, but to purchase your books. There's other things that happen, for example, not branding. By branding I don't mean having similar covers or similar titles or books in a series per se. If you're writing a series, you can look at the various characters or the various worlds that you've made. If you're making a science fiction or a fantasy, for example, you're going to develop, likely, a different world than the real world that we know that we live in.
- With that said, whatever that world might look like or be, there are people who would be interested in hearing additions onto that. An example might be with JK Rowling she wrote ... They have another movie out or another book out with *Fantastic Beasts and How to Find Them*. It's the same world that she has created a different timeframe, different characters, but it's still driving that interest. Brand is really what you have, the ideas that are still bottled up inside your books and inside you, things that your readers have already shown an interest for. One of the problems I see is people write a series, book one, two, three, then they'll move onto another series.
- If that series has done well, their readers have shown an extreme interest in it, so why not focus on and just really drill down in what they already showed that they like? Again, going back to someone like JK Rowling focusing on her one thing. In her Harry Potter series she focuses on that one thing and drills down deep into that. Not everybody can be a James Patterson or Stephen King. Stephen King doesn't just do horror, he has other various genres that he writes for as well, and not everybody knows that. With that said, if you have a big name like that it's easier to begin branching off with your same name.
- For myself I personally choose to use pen names because I feel like that's another mistake that others make. They don't focus on their genre. They don't focus on that fan base. For me, not just as an author but as a preacher, under my main name I want people to know who I am, what I live for, what I stand for, what I speak when I teach, and in order to do that it would cause a lot of confusion if they start only seeing business books from me, they start only seeing romance stories or other things. I create pen names to grow those audiences separately

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because it produces a better targeted traffic for the day that I go to launch the book.

One more mistake I like to throw in there is that people will write a book and then create a series for it before they even know whether the series is going to be successful or not. I'm a firm believer in testing the waters and to understand what people want, what they're looking for. Even if you're writing non-fiction, if you want to reach your target audience, the best thing to do is to understand what your target audience wants from you in the first place. We as an authority figure, we might feel like, well, I already know what they need. I'll just speak it like this. It doesn't necessarily mean that that's how they want the message presented to them.

It's the same message that you have, but they might need it brought differently. For example, from the religious side of it, when I'm writing my Christian books, there's a particular message as a preacher that's laid in my heart, and if I just write it down and I send it out as a book, I know it's going to reach fewer people from my audience. If I look at the things they want, for example, they might want a devotional or a prayer book, I'll meet them where they're at, and I'll just put that message into those daily devotionals. It gives them more time to really meditate on it rather than like most people would experience, they go to a Sunday sermon focusing on where they can go afterward, you know, the football game is coming, whatever it is. There's distractions.

In an example like this, by being able to speak to them in a way that they want to hear, it makes it easier for them to receive what's being said. Again, that can be from any kind of non-fiction author. It doesn't matter whether you're teaching business. It doesn't matter whether you're teaching plumbing, or you're teaching childcare, or parenting or any of these things. It is better to speak to the person's heart in a way that they want to be spoken to. With that said, the big mistake that can be solved is by you could start with a shorter book or shorter story, and look at the bestseller list in your genre. What kinds of things are being written about?

Try to title yours the same, some kind of similar topic, but then you can take it from that topic and begin describing the things that are important for them to hear. It's your book. You're allowed to do that. Here's your permission card. From there if you use that shorter book and test the waters rather than a huge full-length novel, they will tell you based on how your book performs whether or not a series or a

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concept written around everything that you've been planning will even work. When you can drill down on that, when you find that one book that works, it's easier to write a few shorter books, like novellas or shorter length books than it is to write ...

A long length book could take one or two or three months to go from start to finish, editing, everything. The problem with that is it might take you three books to find that successful idea, so if it's taking you two months per book, that's six months from now, versus smaller books, you could write two or three in a month. In one month you got your successful idea. If you follow those steps, it allows you to find your bestselling idea faster.

Susan Friedmann: I've often talked about how you can actually repurpose books, too, in terms of maybe splitting up the book into various chapters so that those could be standalones maybe, so allow you to have a series instead of sitting down and rewriting or writing the stuff all over again. It might be an easier way. What do you think?

Adam Houge: That's actually a true point. Some people will write a huge 70,000 word non-fiction book, and if they just think for a moment, if they broke it down into the chapters. It could be broken down more easily into 10,000 words. Again, that's a bit short, but I've written a few that length, and I've never received any complaints. I've actually received constant praise for it, and the reason is especially with non-fiction books, people read them slower because they're trying to absorb the details. The problem is that if it's extremely long, they're not even going to get to the end of the book. They're going to read two, three chapters in, put it down. Baby is crying. Got to take care of this and life gets in the way.

I have found if you break them up, just like you're saying, it gives the person opportunity to get the whole concept grasped. They might read this book that's five chapters long, 2,000 words a chapter, or it could even be 10 chapters long, 1,000 words a chapter. They're able to just open it, start and finish it within just a few hours, get the concepts grasped, and then turn around and they'll purchase the next book. They can read it in their own timeframe. It's like miniature goals that you're giving them. People can't accomplish things without goals, and it helps your reader that way.

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Again and again I get high praise, and then you can still compile them together into a box set, and also that gives you a further product as well.

Susan Friedmann: I'm sure our listeners are itching to know how they can get hold of you, so how can they?

Adam Houge: The best place to find me would be at my website, the fanbaseformula.com. I offer a free training there to show how to launch your book to be a bestseller, and I explain in detail a lot of what we discussed today, and I go in further depth as well, because it's just easier to do it through a video format like that.

Susan Friedmann: That's well worth it, listeners. Go there and definitely download those videos, because extremely valuable, and Adam is extremely generous with his information. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, Adam, what would that be?

Adam Houge: There'd actually be a couple of things. The first is to identify your target audience. Building an email list doesn't help you if you don't specifically know your genre, and genre is based on interest. Your target customer is not necessarily a man who is 35 with two kids. It's what his interest genre is or her interest genre is. Then when you can drill down on that, you grow your email list around that, and that creates your highly targeted traffic that's going to help you to gain a lot more sales. Just people who are already interested in what you're putting out there, they're going to buy at a much higher rate and this, even alone, is what will help you, one, in creating your books, understanding what they want to read, because you know your customer.

Two, being able to have those books sold at a much higher rate. Then from there it's all about just keep moving forward, just keep that next project coming. Just keep going. If something hasn't gone right in the past, don't let that define your present and your future, because the only thing holding you back, the only thing that's in the way of you and your next bestseller is just that information, that piece of information you need to know.

Susan Friedmann: What great wisdom. Thank you so much for sharing. If you would like to take your author marketing to the next level of success, make sure that you go to bookmarketingmentors.com, and sign up for a 15 minute complimentary coaching session with me, Susan Friedmann. Thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I

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sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books.
Here's wishing you much book marketing success.