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BOOK MARKETING: How to Better Market Your Book in the Digital Age Interview with Jane Friedman

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 publishing industry expert. Jane Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry with expertise and digital media strategy for authors and publishers. She's the co-founder of the hot sheet. The essential publishing industry newsletter for authors and has previously worked for F+W Media and the Virginia Quarterly Review. She's been interviewed and featured by NPR, PBS, CBS, the Washington Post, the National Press Club and many other outlets. IN addition to being a columnist with the Publishers Weekly and a professor with the great courses, Jane maintains an award-winning blog for writers at JaneFriedman.Com. In 2017 in partnership with the Authors Guild, she helped produce the Author's Guild guide to e-publishing and is currently presenting an educational series on the digital age author.

Jane has a book forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press, *The Business of Being a Writer*. Jane, welcome to the show, thank you for being this week's guest, expert and mentor.

Jane Friedman: A pleasure, thank you Susan.

Susan Friedmann: I want to tell our listeners straight away, that even though we have the same last name, I have two N's you have one N and I'm not sure that we're related, but hey, I love the name Friedman.

Jane, let's start of talking about your new book or the upcoming book, *The Business of Being a Writer*. Knowing that our listeners are primarily published authors already, what's the most important thing that you think they should know about when it comes to considering making a business out of writing?

Jane Friedman: Well I think you've partly answered in the question itself, which is so many writers don't see it as a business, when they're going into it,

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they're lots of reasons for that. Some of them are base on myths or strange ideas we have about publishing about very artsy, literary people, drinking fine Sherry and talking about literature and we don't sometimes think about these people as business people, but of course they are and the decisions that get made in publishing by authors, by publishers, they're all business decisions and so you have to be able to tackle the art alongside the money. My book is really trying to bring that idea to the forefront and explore what it means to approach writing as a business and to think about what your business model is to make it sustainable for the long term. And so businesses have to think about both revenue and expenses. They have to consider their reader ship and how they are going to grow the audience and the means of reaching that audience. The book looks at it on both the big picture level and on a more granular level.

Susan Friedmann: You're considered one of the gurus in the digital publishing arena. Talk to us about digital marketing opportunities that our authors need to know about.

Jane Friedman: Currently I feel like there's a lot of attention on advertising through social media as well as through Amazon. We can talk about those more specifically as we go. There's also I see a lot emphasis on email newsletters, both the ones that you would create yourself as well as the discount newsletters that are out there like Bookbub or Bargain Booksy and so on. Lots of emphasis I think right now on paid promotion and rightly so. Sometimes there's maybe too much emphasis on using social media generally, there's so much conflicting information about the effectiveness of social media and the effectiveness of social media advertising and I think some of the conflicting information comes from people of varying skill levels and varying purposes using these tools and you don't necessarily get the same results, even if you're following the same best practices, because so much depends on the resources you're starting with and the sorts of books that you're promoting.

To pull back, so there's advertising, social media advertising, Amazon advertising, the email newsletters for yourself and through other discount channels and then also the hub of all this that I think helps the engine of any digital marketing or promotion that you do, your author website. The site that you're mentioning on social media in any kind of promotion [inaudible 00:04:55] always sending people back to that hub that is your turf where you tell a story and you hopefully get people subscribed to your email newsletter list. Beyond that there is always emerging tools and trends, I know we might talk about Facebook chat bots as one of those trends and things that you, I think that can become

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interesting but also distracting. I think core to any digital marketing and promotions strategy is what you own and what you can control, which is your website, your email newsletter and very loosely, maybe social media. You can't control what Facebook or Twitter or any of those sites do with your following or how you reach that following. That's why I tend to emphasize people's websites and email newsletters as central to everything that they do.

Susan Friedmann: I think that's so key, because you're right, I get many authors who say, "Oh I've got thousands of friends on Facebook." And I'm like that's great, but what happens if Facebook goes away, where are those people going to go, so getting them back to your site, something that you own, your own turf as you say and getting them to sign up for a newsletter, then they're yours.

Jane Friedman: Right. Precisely.

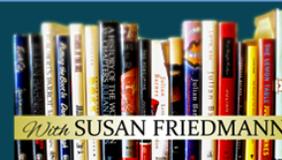
Susan Friedmann: You can start marketing to them. You mentioned Facebook chat bots, I've never heard of them, so help me in my ignorance, tell us what they're about and how can we use them, how will they benefit author marketing?

Jane Friedman: Everyone's probably aware of the popularity of messaging services in general. Facebook has its own messaging service, it's called Messenger and there's also We Chat and some others. I think worldwide there's somewhere around 3-4,000,000,000 people who use messaging services. When you reach that sort of size and impact, that becomes very appealing to marketers as a way to sell things. What Facebook did about a year ago, is they opened up their messenger platform, the private messaging service that you've probably used to communicate with friends and family, they opened that to developers to create these chat bots, which means it's a mix of artificial intelligence and real human beings using Messenger to communicate, but you do have to opt in to those messages. If you follow a particular Facebook page, whether that's an author or a business or someone else, you can opt in to receiving those private messages from them, which are likely generated by some sort of AI, a chat bot is what we call them. Think of it as like a multiple choice, sort of interaction, the chat bot might say, "Are you interested in a new book about such and such?"

And you can answer yes or no, and then if you answer yes it gives you more information and you go through a messaging sequence. There are authors and publishers that have started using this technology in order

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to give away eBooks. If you think about some of the success that self published authors have had lately in giving away eBooks, particularly through Bookbub, Bookfunnel, Instafreebee, so many people use these services to both sell books and get email newsletter subscribers. If you think about that this is kind of the same strategy but in a different channel. So it's using Facebook to present the offer of a free eBook and so there's one in particular that's out there that serves as an example, it's called Bookbot Bob, which is a bit of a tongue twister.

And so Bookbot Bob will ask you what's your favorite genre and once you tell him what your favorite genres are, once a day, he will give you a free eBook offer, which you can then go download at Amazon or your preferred eBook retailer. And you can pay for promotions through Bookbot Bob, they currently cost \$5 and it's very early. Bookbot Bob has only been around for maybe a couple months if that. There aren't that many people who are having conversations with him, but authors ave already seen some really good response in downloads as a result of doing promotions through this chatbot. Part of it's the novelty. People aren't accustomed to these interactions through messenger yet.

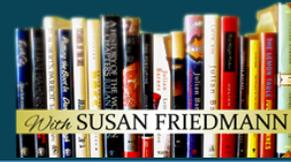
There's also the plus that people aren't giving up their email address, because people have been inundated unfortunately with unwanted email promotions for books and so this is a way for readers to get eBook recommendations without sacrificing their email address, although you might say, or I would say anyway, maybe giving up your Facebook Messenger account is maybe just as permissive, but in any case, that's what a chatbot is and there are a couple of publishers who are currently using them, although we haven't heard any results or case studies from them yet.

Susan Friedmann: Sounds fascinating, I'm going to check that out. What's coming next? I think the world is just so open to all these incredible innovations and of course they're affecting the publishing industry I think by storm now, keeping the publishers on their toes.

Jane Friedman: Oh, most certainly. I think another interesting thing that's happening on the Facebook front and I'm sure many people listening are aware of the popularity of Facebook groups. Private ones. Almost every author I know at this point belongs to some sort of a private group, whether it's other writers, or other marketers or just friends from your high school or college alumni groups, that sort of thing. But Facebook recently announced that they're making part of their mission to help facilitate these private groups and many authors and other marketers have found

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that groups offer better engagement than a page, because Facebook hasn't quite throttled as hard the reach of a group, like they have with the Facebook page and so a lot of authors have started nurturing these groups.

However, the cynical people, well you might say the more realistic people knowing that Facebook now has their eye on the Facebook group, that probably means eventually we're going to see calls to monetize the groups in some way, which will mean maybe you can't reach as many people without paying et cetera, et cetera, so I expect in the long run groups will end up in the same bucket as pages in terms of having to pay to get your group the same visibility it enjoys right now, but in any event I think the savvy authors I know are making really good use of those groups to reach their readers.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah it's sort of getting on and answering people's questions and just being a part of that group, which for me is challenging, because I don't really use Facebook. Just to see pictures of my grand children.

Jane Friedman: Right.

Susan Friedmann: Lets talk about mistakes. I love talking about mistakes people make in this arena and how we can avoid them. When it comes to marketing, what are some of the things that come to mind for you?

Jane Friedman: It's possible to spend so much money on all sorts of promotions that get people to your Amazon page, but then you haven't optimized the page. You always want to start when you're running any kind of campaign, always start first with, "Have I optimized the landing page for this in the best way possible?" That means you have a cover that's genre appropriate, hopefully you tested the cover. It means having marketing copy that is going to appeal your target audience that you optimized that copy to the best of your ability, that the pricing is in line with the sort of market that you're trying to promote too. Having all of the fields filled out, the editorial reviews, having the number of customer reviews you might need for the type of promotion that you're running. On page optimization at Amazon, so critical, but many people aren't thinking about that when they're thinking about best practices for marketing and promotion.

After that, I think, if you do advertise, whether that's on social media, if you advertise through the Amazon sponsored products, you have to experiment. You can't just create one ad, say that it didn't work and

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then leave the game. There has to be A/B testing. You have to test the creative, you have to test all aspects of the images and messages that are in that creative, you have to test the targeting. Without that testing you won't be able to improve and figure out what really works to reach the right readers.

Susan Friedmann: When you talk about testing, is there an optimum time that you say, "Yes this works, no it doesn't." Is it a week, is it a month, is it three months?

Jane Friedman: I think it's an ongoing process. You want to run small experiments. Like \$5 experiments for example. Or you say, "Okay for this month I'm going to allot a \$100 budget." And so you might put together an ad, ad number one, you put it out there, you see, "Am I earning money or losing money on it?" And then if you're quickly losing money, obviously you stop the ad and then you create another one and you see, "Did I do any better?" And if you have an ad that performs well, then your next goal is to get a ad that performs better and so it's just as much as you have the time or energy, re-running tests on a weekly basis, depending on of course what your budget is and lots of variables, but I think even ads that perform very well, like you feel like you hit on the right thing. Eventually the ad is going to deteriorate in its performance, so you have to revisit it and create another ad to stay fresh.

Susan Friedmann: What else?

Jane Friedman: There is always I think really good return on investment, when you revisit what your website is doing and what your email newsletter is doing. Sometimes we get on auto pilot with those things. We don't really keep them up to date or we haven't looked more closely at the language we have on our website or in our email newsletter, that could dramatically affect the performance. Just some things as small as what is the call to action on your email newsletter sign up? Many authors I know have very generic language. It says something like, "Sign up for my email newsletter." But you want to have something distinctive, that could not be used any other author. That has your voice and personality. Has a specific thing that you're delivering that someone else has not. Go and look at your language. Have you customized it? Can you do better? Maybe you should A/B test that copy as well. And then look at your email newsletter sign up sequence. Have you customized all of the messages people are getting that are automated? Like when people receive the confirmation that they really do want to join your list? Have you customized that?

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Do you say something special or unique? Do you have good headers and footers in your emails? Just some of those details really can make a huge difference in how you engage and also how well you're selling.

Susan Friedmann: Do you feel that people are still signing up for emails or would they prefer a PDF, "10 Ways To Do This." Or, "The Five Ways To Do That." Or, "Mistakes People Make." What do you think about that versus an email?

Jane Friedman: I think so much is dependent on the audience and what sort of content that you're sharing but generally for my audience people still love to have a mix of email and then useful downloads. I know from talking to my readers that people save the emails and refer to them and they like them because they can search them just by going to there Gmail or whatever it is, they just search for some keywords that they know will bring up what I sent them. There's lots of variables that you have to take into account, but I don't think email is dead by any stretch.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah I've heard that said many times before. And Jane, how can our listeners get a hold of you? Find out more about your services?

Jane Friedman: Everything that I do is at JaneFriedman.Com, so that's the hub for all of my activity and I run an email newsletter for authors, called TheHotsheetPub.Com, we come out every two weeks, for instance we just came out Wednesday with the chatbot coverage. What we try to do is offer up to date information on what other authors are doing that's effective, plus traditional publishing industry news that is relevant for all authors. We're not particularly towards self publishing or traditional. We think that all industry issues affect all authors equally and so we're trying to be a go to resource for what's happening around you today.

Susan Friedmann: I'm going to sign up, because I'm like I don't want to miss out on any of these trends. And Jane if you would leave our listeners with a golden nugget if information, what would that be?

Jane Friedman: Patience. So many people are in a rush to see results and they don't give anything enough time to really pay off. There's a lot of looking at someone else's paper, worried that maybe someone else has the answer and you need to copy what they're doing. Which is fine, we should study what others are doing and learn from what others are doing, but we also need to keep our eyes on our own larger goals and strategies and look for consistency and being patient in seeing if what we're trying is in fact paying off for us and our audience. Everyone is

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going to be a little bit different. Everyone's model is going to be a little bit different, so don't be anxious or worried if what you're doing is different from what the author next to you is doing.

Susan Friedmann: Always love it, you should zig rather than zagging.

Jane Friedman: Precisely.

Susan Friedmann: Going the opposite direction, on the cover book *Riches in Niches, How To Make It Big In A Small Market*, I've got one fish going in one direction and the other fish going in the opposite direction.

Jane Friedman: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Susan Friedmann: Jane, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom. And thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview and I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.