

# BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

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## BOOK MARKETING: How to Use Powerful Effective Ideas to Market Your Book Interview with Joanna Penn

Susan: 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 book marketing expert Joanna Penn. Joanna is a New York Times and USA Today best selling author of numerous thrillers under the J.F. Penn pen name, and numerous non-fiction books specifically for authors. She's a professional speaker and award winning entrepreneur. Her site, [thecreativepenn.com](http://thecreativepenn.com) is regularly voted one of the top sites where writers can find plenty of resources to help them write, publish and market their book. Without further ado, get ready to learn some proven book marketing strategies from this week's special guest, expert, mentor and fellow Brit Joanna Penn. Joanna, welcome to the show.

Joanna: Thanks for having me Susan. That's a lovely introduction.

Susan: My pleasure. It's exciting to have you here. I've followed you for many years. I've read many of your books. It's such an honor to have you here with me. You have such a wealth of knowledge when it comes to book writing and marketing. Would you be willing to share some essentials that, let's say, a first time author needs to do to get started marketing their book?

Joanna: Yeah, Sue, as you know it's such a massive topic. I think I'm going to go with the book itself, to me, and this is something I've learned more and more, people can get into blogging and podcasting and social media and all these other things, but if the book itself doesn't have the right marketing baseline, it's going to struggle. For example, self-published authors need to look at a professional book cover. It's amazing how many people don't get a professional book cover that fits in the right niche. Spending a couple of hours on Amazon in the category that you're aiming for, and looking at, what are the best selling books? What do they look like? How is the text on the cover? What are the subcategories that you can rank in? What keywords can you use to actually even use as your book titles, big tip for non-fiction authors, for example, is actually using a book title that people are searching for.

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I have a book that is called *How To Market a Book*, which surprisingly does what it says on the box, but the title itself is a keyword on Amazon. I have another book called *Career Change*. Same reason. These types of baseline marketing things around the book itself titles, subtitle, book cover, categories, meta data like that, keywords, these are so critical. They can actually give you a big boost before you even start with your own marketing. Obviously, Amazon can always sell more books that you can. It's just you need to help the algorithms with some of these basic settings. Some of that is to do, well it is publishing, but to me it's the baseline marketing that so many people forget.

Susan: Absolutely. Let's talk about categories and some of these keywords. How would you recommend authors go about finding those?

Joanna: You have to remember that Amazon is a search engine, so put in one of the books that is like yours. Every author should understand where their book fits in the market. Think about five books that are like yours, or five authors who are similar to your books. For example, my London Psychic Series is a dark crime thriller trilogy, and some readers of Stephen King enjoy that, so I could look at Stephen King "Doctor Sleep," for example. If you search for a book like that and look on the left hand side, you'll actually see the categories that the books are in. Obviously, somebody like Stephen King is famous, so he can be in a category like fiction and actually sell books, whereas we can't. Then it's looking at one of the subcategories that he might in, and then diving down even further. Obviously, it's a good idea to use authors that are perhaps smaller names, but often, you might not know who they are. It's really spending a good amount of time on Amazon diving down into the niches and getting to know who the top sellers are, and looking at what they're doing.

The second thing with subcategories, you can actually use subcategories to get into keywords into other subcategories. I have an arcane action-adventure series that ranks in conspiracy thriller. You cannot select conspiracy thriller through the, when you self publish, you actually can choose that as a keyword and then appear in that category. Understanding how keywords work is so important. Essentially if you go to amazon.com, start typing anything in the search bar, you'll get a drop-down. That's where you can basically choose keywords. They're often keyword phrases these days. For example, "how to market a book" is a keyword phrase.

Susan: That was a brilliant one for you to capitalize on because, as you said, that's what people are looking for, which is, how to market a book. It couldn't be more simple, couldn't be more direct.

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- Joanna: That's true. We also have to acknowledge that there is no copyright on book titles in the English language. Although there are in some other languages like German. There are other books called *How to Market a Book*. The next thing is important which then is developing your authority in a niche, talking about non-fiction so that your book does rank at the top if there are lots of books on the same topic.
- Susan: That's a great segue into the next question that I have for you, and that is about building an author platform. Can you talk about some of the best advice you would give an author to build their brand and their platform? Again, I know this is so broad, but you've got such gems of information.
- Joanna: It's very different for a fiction author and a non-fiction author. I'm going to assume you're talking non-fiction here. Many non-fiction authors don't have an entire business based on book sales. In fact, often the book is a tiny part of their business. Many non-fiction authors are speakers. They might have products. They might have an offline business, and the book is more like a business card. When we're talking author platform, you have to decide what you want to achieve with your book. Someone like Michael Hyatt, for example, who is a well-known, he used to be a publisher and now he's in the leader space, leadership space and Christian as well, so in the Christian book marketing, book space too. He sells products. He's a very high paid speaker. He has a community. His books are more relevant to his online platform.
- For me, in terms of my site, The Creative Penn, my books are actually very tiny part of my income for The Creative Penn in terms of non-fiction. Whereas my fiction business, the books are everything. When we talk about author platform with fiction, we're actually more talking about the number of books you have and how big your email list is. Whereas, with non-fiction, it could be how you, your speaking gigs that you might get, or a podcast, for example, does much better for non-fiction authors than for fiction authors. It really has to depend on what you want to achieve as an author, what your goals are in terms of income, in terms of building your business, and also where you get your energy, I suppose. I don't do written guest posts anymore. I'll do interviews, but I use my words to write more books. You have to make these kind of choices around your platform, and then build it in that way which is why everybody's looks different.
- Susan: You managed to do it so brilliantly, both from the fiction and the non-fiction. I know very few people who have made such a big name for themselves in both arenas. I applaud you.
- Joanna: Oh, thank you.

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Susan: You've done an amazing job with that.

Joanna: The other thing is, winding time back eight years, I didn't know anything about marketing. I didn't know anything about publishing. I'd written my first non-fiction book. I didn't have a blog. I had no Twitter audience. I had nothing. What we have to remember, if people are listening and they're like, "What is she talking about?", with things like meta data, is we all learn this stuff over time. I started out writing non-fiction, started a blog, started a podcast, then wrote a novel and things developed. I always say it's a bit like skiing. We never go straight down the hill. You zigzag across and learn things along the way, and things change. What's so important is understanding where you want to get to. I mentioned Stephen King earlier. Deep down, my biggest goal is, by the time I'm his age, sixty-five, I will be known for my fiction and my stories rather than the fact that I know anything about self-publishing or book marketing.

Susan: Again, this is a great segue. Thank you for this. Let's talk about mistakes, mistakes you've made or mistakes you've seen other authors make when it comes to book marketing.

Joanna: Probably the biggest mistake is expecting anything to happen quickly. For example, I started a podcast in 2009, before podcasting took off. I was in self-publishing while it was still a dirty word, and before the Kindle, for example. There are lots of things that you will do that will pay dividends later if you are consistent over time. This is what I see most. A lot of people say they want to write a book, then of the people who do write a book, many of them will only ever write one book. One book is not something you can build a business on. It's not something that you will be able to make a living with. It's not something that you're going to get that much attention for. Sure, there are some lightning strikes, but most people who are authors for the long term have a lot of books, and they've spent years plugging away everyday to grow their backlist, grow their platform, grow their email list, grow their relationship with their readers.

The biggest problem, I think it stems from the publishing industry, which has sold this myth of, "Publish a book and you'll make a million dollars." That's just not reality. Understanding that you have to do things regularly, if you're going to podcast it's every week or every two weeks for years before you can probably stand out in a niche, or a blog takes years to get noticed. It might take a good deal of time before you can make decent money from your books if that's your goal. It's thinking about these things on a much longer timescale. Also, that's very encouraging because, again, if I wind back the clock five years, I was still working my day job as a IT consultant. I hadn't even started with fiction. Time changes a lot if your just consistent and you're aiming for your ultimate goal.

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- Susan: Based on your experience, how long has it been since, for you to really make your mark?
- Joanna: Like most people I move the goal post all the time. You have to decide what your definition of success is. When I was in, I was part of a group of authors and we hit the New York Times and USA Today list, that was actually an anticlimax. It was really weird. It was one of those things everyone thinks that they want and then it's like, "Okay. That was a false goal," in a way because that's not what makes you happy. I advise people to read Steven Pressfield *Turning Pro*, which is a great book. He talks about, basically, what you do should be the reward. The fact that writing a novel, the hours I spend writing fiction every day, that is in itself, is its own reward.
- In terms of more measurable goals and definition of success, leaving my day job in September 2011 was really a big deal for me because I was just miserable in that job and I wanted to be a writer. That was a big deal. I never went back, obviously, and then hitting a six figure income and hiring my husband out of his job, that's probably another big goal. Lifestyle goals around what you can do for your family, that type of thing. Ultimately, I always wanted to be an author. Being an author is its own reward.
- Susan: That's so exciting to hear. Your enthusiasm behind this is contagious. We got to keep you going here.
- Joanna: On that, this is so important because, if people want to make a lot of money then don't be an author, realistically. You only do this if you love this. The people who are successful for the long term love writing. It depends on how you want your business to be, but if you're a writer and you love writing this can be amazing, but you have to love it. A lot of people are leaving the author world at the moment because it's difficult. There's loads of content out there, but nobody promised it was easy. It just has to be fun. It's certainly fun for me.
- Susan: I think you referred to this earlier, the fact that the publishing myth is, "Write a book and become a bestselling author." Whereas you're saying, "No, that's not reality. You may have to write several books before you could become a bestselling author."
- Joanna: Yeah. If that's what you love doing then that's not really an issue.
- Susan: You have a myriad resources. When I look through your books, read through your books, you're constantly referring to different resources. From a book marketing standpoint, what are some of your favorites that you could share with our listeners?

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Joanna: You mean books or tools or...?

Susan: Tools. Tools, yes. It might be books as well if you've got some, like you mentioned this one *Turning Pro* by Steven Pressfield, maybe there are a few other books that you could recommend, but other, also tools that would be helpful.

Joanna: When I think about the tools I use for marketing, they are essentially the platform building tools that many people are using. I couldn't run a business without WordPress or iTunes for podcasting, that type of thing. Those are really important. I also am a big user of Twitter, and the tool I use to help me schedule my social media is BufferApp. That's really super useful, [bufferapp.com](http://bufferapp.com). As soon as I learned that I could schedule my social media I was like, "I am in there," because otherwise you spend so much time on it, so I do a lot of scheduling of everything I do, actually, all my podcasts, all my blogs. Nothing is ever done. I respond to things on the fly, but most of my content is done way in advance.

I didn't use massive amounts of things. I mainly used the main apps, Twitter, Facebook, that type of thing. For writing, my biggest tool is Scrivener which is software for writing and publishing. I definitely couldn't run my business without that, and then probably [bookbub.com](http://bookbub.com), is probably the biggest book marketing tool that we're using at the moment. [BookBub.com](http://bookbub.com) is a website for free and discounted books, and they have a email list of hundreds of thousands. It's quite expensive and they're very picky, but if you get a BookBub, you get a book marketing spike, so that's pretty good. Those are some of the things I use.

Susan: One of the tools that you mentioned is Twitter, and we haven't talked in any of the podcasts yet about Twitter. Can you tell us a little about how you use it, and the frequency?

Joanna: I use Twitter for [thecreativepenn.com](http://thecreativepenn.com), my non-fiction business. I've been tweeting six to twelve times a day for five years, I think. As I said, much of that is scheduled. I think I have around sixty-seven thousand followers now on Twitter. For me Twitter has been amazing. It has directly brought me speaking gigs all over the world, Bali, America, Europe, all come from Twitter. It's an incredible social [proof 00:17:23]. It's also the way to connect with other entrepreneurs. A lot of my friends, and the people I have on my podcast and my friends in real life, I've met on Twitter because, if you're the type of person who likes it and uses it as a regular thing, then we're more likely to connect that way. It brings me a lot of traffic. It's pretty much my number one social media.

Obviously, everyone has their own favorites. I do use Pinterest for my fiction. I use Facebook like everybody. I use other things, but for me, Twitter, in its

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current incarnation with these short tweets, is what I like the most. I share probably eighty percent of the people's content and then twenty percent of my own content. It's super.

Susan: You said you schedule them to go out six times a day. What are you tweeting? What are you scheduling?

Joanna: Links to other people's content. People can go to [twitter.com/thecreativepenn](https://twitter.com/thecreativepenn) and you'll see my Twitter timeline. Basically, I monitor around a hundred blogs in the industry and I tweet, and I schedule those articles, those videos, whatever. As I find them on my RSS feed I'll put them in the buffer and they'll just turn up there. I always try and put the other person's Twitter handle on the post because then the other person sees it and that's how you end up connecting. It's definitely a way that I've connected with influences over the years. I will share their content until they notice me. Once they notice me I'll get into some kind of conversation through Twitter, and then eventually invite them on the podcast. For me it's been just brilliant at meeting other people.

Susan: Excellent. Thank you for that because that's a great marketing tool. Personally, I just haven't made enough use of it, and I might send one thing out and then wonder why nothing's happening. It's because I'm not sending out enough.

Joanna: It's not just sending out enough. It's connection. You have to choose your primary social network, I believe. That's the one you should focus the most attention on, and connect with people and retweeting and conversations and joining Twitter chats. That's what I do on Twitter. If you have another favorite, that's the thing to put your energy into. I just don't believe we can all do everything. You have to choose the one that works for you, and that you naturally enjoy already, and then use that to connect with people.

Susan: I'm so pleased you said that because so many times authors ask me, "Which is the right social media platform to use?", or they want to be on everything. You're right. You can't do everything. It's such a time suck otherwise if you're all over the place. That's great advice. Excellent. Let's talk a little bit about Joanna and what services you can offer our listeners.

Joanna: People can come to [thecreativepenn.com](https://thecreativepenn.com), and there's a free Author 2.0 Blueprint which is, essentially it's a pdf. It's also a video course and a set of emails that essentially takes you through writing a fiction or non-fiction book, through self-publishing, through book marketing to making a six figure income as an author. That is free at [thecreativepenn.com/blueprint](https://thecreativepenn.com/blueprint). There's also a ton of books and videos, and my podcast is two hundred and fifty odd episodes

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now. There's a lot of information which is why I try and use that blueprint as a main thing for people to have a look at. That is free on the website.

Susan: Yes, I endorse that because there's so much information on there. You can easily get lost on that site just going from one resource to the other. Thank you for putting that out there because it's brilliant. I aspire to some of that, so some of your greatness there.

Joanna: Again, it's just years of cumulative work. I'll recommend another book for people, *The Compound Effect* by Darren Hardy, brilliant book about how these little actions we take every day compound over time into way beyond what we could ever imagine. That includes writing a couple of hundred words a day or putting out tweets everyday or blogging every week, that type of thing. The power of that compound effect is, I've seen it in my own life, and building something just a little bit at a time, suddenly you wake up and you're like, "Okay, this is actually working." It can take some time, but you'll get there. That's a really useful book.

Susan: Which speaks to book marketing, the fact that just doing something small everyday will also have that compound effect. Correct?

Joanna: Yeah, exactly. You mentioned Twitter there, as someone who is a Twitaholic, and I'm on there all the time, if I go to someone's channel and they haven't updated it every day, I know they don't care. I'm unlikely to connect with somebody who is not an active, everyday, small little things person in that environment. People can tell, I often say to authors, "Just go check out your website," things like, "Check out your website on mobile." Last year Google changed the rules where they now penalize websites that are not mobile optimized. This something a lot of authors are behind on is redesigning their websites, getting a new theme for mobile. There's just little things to be doing everyday, all of which work together to help you sell books or build your business over time.

Susan: I know now that I'm going to have to put a lot more effort into Twitter if I want to connect with you. [crosstalk 00:23:28]

Joanna: On Twitter, anyway.

Susan: Yes. On Twitter. That's correct.

Joanna: I still take emails.



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- Susan: You do, and you're very good at responding to them, so thank you. If you were to leave our listeners with one golden nugget of information, what would that be?
- Joanna: Really is decide on what your definition of success is and consider what your ideal life looks like because if you start taking steps in that direction, like the compound effect thing you will get there. I take the example of, well one, I feel like I'm doing well in my new career, but in my old career when I spent thirteen years as a business consultant, and I ended up going to my very highly paid job crying everyday because I hated it. It was the day I looked at it and went, "Do you know what? I've spent thirteen years consistently building this career, that's why they pay me so much and that's why I'm an expert, but this is not where I wanted my life to turn out." At that point that's when I decided what I really wanted to do was writing, and this type of thing, and started again from scratch building that new career. It really is about your definition of success, what you want to achieve, and then just start taking those little steps everyday towards where you want to get to.
- Susan: I'm so pleased that you decided thirteen years ago to give up that job.
- Joanna: I left my job in 2011, so... it wasn't quite thirteen years ago, but I spent thirteen years in that previous career before I changed. I'm getting old.
- Susan: It feels like thirteen years.
- Joanna: Yeah, exactly.
- Susan: Joanna, you've been fabulous as I knew you would be. Thank you so much for sharing how to market, book market and be better at what you're doing. Thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books.

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Here's wishing you much book marketing success.