

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

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BOOK MARKETING: How to Best Publicize Your Book on the Internet Interview with Penny Sansevieri

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

Today, my special guest mentor of the week is book marketing expert, Penny Sansevieri. Her company, Author Marketing Experts knows how to create a strong buzz about your book, and build a tremendous online presence. She helps authors make the internet a 24/7 promotion machine. She's dedicated to her clients' marketing success, and really knows how to ramp up the energy in your book marketing campaign.

Penny writes a regular column for the Huffington Post, and has been a noted guest and contributor to several other nationally recognized media outlets. I also want to say that the way that I met Penny was many years when Career Press, my publisher for "Riches and Niches: How to Make it BIG in a Small Market," hired Penny to do some marketing, put her magic touch to marketing my book, and she did a fabulous, fabulous job. It became a number one bestseller. I'm thrilled with what you did for me.

Penny Sansevieri: Oh, thank you.

Susan Friedmann: Penny, welcome to the show.

Penny Sansevieri: Thank you so much for inviting me to be on. It's great to chat with you again. Obviously, it's such a small world.

Susan Friedmann: It is. Penny, you've represented numerous bestselling authors, but what does it actually take to make a book a bestseller?

Penny Sansevieri: It's interesting because since you and I worked together, it has changed drastically. When we did your campaign, this was well before the tsunami of e-books flooded the market. This was also well before I think Amazon was big, but at the time, there were still a lot of other places, Borders is still

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around, and Barnes & Noble was more robust than it is now. It used to be that if you wanted a bestseller, meaning New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, you had to have certain number of books in a bookstore.

Generally speaking, you wanted to have a 30,000 print run of your book, and books had to be pre-sold in the bookstores because that was pretty much the main and only way that consumers found books was bookstores. Bookstores, Target, Walmart also considered to be part of that. There had to be a major national media campaign. National media, so morning shows, maybe 60 minutes, Dateline, talk shows, Ellen, Oprah when she still had a show, those types of things.

That has now changed significantly because self-publishing which used to be the little step child of publishing, self-publishing was considered the last choice that you had. Now, it's the new black. Everybody is self-publishing. In fact, we worked with Guy Kawasaki who self-published his amazing book about publishing called APE. So many more people are doing it. Some people in fact are going direct to e-books. We see this in a lot of genre fiction where authors are going straight to e-book.

What it takes now is it does take a significant push to "hit a list". You have to have a surge of books sold within a certain period of time, but that number has changed drastically because the e-book numbers, and now, the New York Times is reporting e-book bestsellers separately. However, that is all the good news. The bad news is is that there are 4500 books published everyday in this country.

The channels while they are open and welcoming and the playing field is leveled, they are fairly cluttered. An author really has to, it's rare nowadays that we see the author's first book just ricochet out of the gate like a shot out of a canon, amazing things, bestseller list, et cetera. It's really rare. Even people when *Gone Girl* hit it big, everybody said, "Oh, my gosh! I didn't even know that she wrote books, and I'm so excited, and now I'm going to ..." Everybody assumed that that was her first book, and it was her fifth or fourth or fifth.

A lot of times it takes time and an accumulation of effort. I always tell authors that it's really the long runway. If you're leaving on a jet plane, it generally is not going to push away from the gate and just launch itself into the air. It takes a little bit of time. Publishing is the same way.

If you put in the right amount of effort consistently which is the key, right? It doesn't necessarily take daily. I mean, if you have days and days and days

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to promote your book, great. Look, I do book promotion for a living. I don't have days and days and days to promote my book because I have a company to run. If you do all the right things, people will start to pay attention. Then fans tell other fans, and bring in new readers, and the wheels start turning.

One of the very significant changes that we see is that oftentimes, authors with multiple books have a bigger, better chance of hitting the bestseller list because the second book helps to sell the first, the third book helps to sell the first and second. At some point, they all start to sell themselves. Not that the author can step back and take a vacation and say, "Well, I'm just going to wait for the royalty checks to come in," but it becomes significantly easier.

The other thing that we've seen is that short is the new long. Shorter books ... I have a book called *How to Sell Books by the Truckload on Amazon* which is all about the Amazon algorithms, and I speak a lot about it around the country. We have a lot of authors who come to us specifically for that.

This book surprisingly was only 72 pages. However, this book outsold "Red Hot Internet Publicity" which is three times as long by 15 to one. I realized that a lot of it is the title, but a lot of it is also that people want smaller consumable content. We talk about bite-sized content a lot especially, and in particular in social media, but the same thing is true for books. In fact, I had a publisher tell me that 20,000 words is their sweet spot now for a lot of fiction, in particular.

Susan Friedmann: Absolutely fascinating.

Penny Sansevieri: Thank you.

Susan Friedmann: I'm like, "Oh, my goodness!" My head is spinning already with some of those things, especially the statistics. Red hot strategies to some old books. This is a sweet spot for you. Can you give us a few of those secret strategies you've got up your sleeve?

Penny Sansevieri: Let me tell you a little bit about, so everything that we do is tested. Every single program that we do, everything I talk about on stage is all tested. This isn't just something like, "Wooh! This sounds like a good idea. Let me show this with the crowd." I wanted to test some particular strategies on a genre fiction books, specifically contemporary romance. The reason that I picked contemporary romance is because a lot of people are writing romance novels now. In fact, it's one of the busiest genres in genre fiction.

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I decided to see whether or not I could gain fan momentum for this book, whether fans could to some degree carry the success of this title. I had read a book by Jason Lovell called *The Curve*. Basically, it's about how to make money in the age of everybody wants everything for free which is something that I know a lot of people struggle with.

I took this book, unknown author, no platform, really no social media to speak up, and I gave it away for two days. We gave away 61,000 copies on Amazon. Within two days, the author got 200 letters from readers. Now, I think that number is closer to 500. The reviews on Amazon went from 20 to over 200. Now, the number is I think just over 300 for this book. We did not actually work with this title. I specifically used this title to test these theories.

I said, "Look, this is what I really want to do. If it fails, we'll promote you for life, but this is really what I want to do." Now, these reviews, the 20 reviews were bloggers or viewers or what not that had been pitched. The rest of them were all readers. These are all reader reviews. Part of what motivated me to do this also was that in this book, *The Curve*, he talked about how it only takes 1,000 super fans to hit that New York Times bestseller list.

The number is considerably smaller, but when you think by definition of a super fan, a super fan is someone who loves something so much, they're going to tell 10 or 20 of their friends. They're going to post on social media. They're going to do everything that they can to help you just to succeed. You talk about *X-Files* is coming back this month in January. Whether a fan or not, the story about the show is pretty amazing because essentially, the fans are the ones that brought it back.

These super fans had enough power to bring back a show that had been showed whatever 13 years ago. That's really where I wanted to harness the power. Now, what I did in order to do this is I put a letter in the back of the book. I know that a lot of people are like, "Well, I have a letter. I have this ..." but most of the time, these letters aren't really compelling enough. What I did is I literally said, "You know what? Look ..." and I wrote this letter.

I said, "I want to thank you so much for reading because the first piece of it is that you want to thank your reader for spending time with you because this was an unknown author, so they were really taking their chances. If they got to the letter, they either flipped ahead or they actually read to the end of the book. I want to thank you so much for reading. Look, I hope that you stay in touch with me. Here's my e-mail. I'd love to know what you

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think about the book because you're the reason I'm writing, and you're important to me, you're the reader. Second, I would really love to get a review because reviews are really hard to come by."

Good Reads, Patrick Brown was doing from Good Reads, he was doing a session at a conference I was at. He said they did a survey, and found that the number one thing that readers want at the end of a book is to connect with the author. A lot of times, what you see is you see page that sells the other books or just talks about how the author lives in Michigan with her two dogs.

There's nothing really compelling. People have to be told what to do. They like to be told what to do. Give them direction and they will change the world. By putting this letter together, I said, "Look, I really want you to contact me, let me know." All these letters from readers started to build the super fan base. Got all these reviews.

Now, these people were written back all of them individually, "Thank you so much for writing." There's nothing blanket or automated about this system. When the next book in the series came out, I said, "Okay. I want you just to trust me on this one." Again, very little social media, not a big footprint out there. I said, "I want you to trust me on this one. I want you to release this book on December 15th." It was released December 15th of 2014. "Release this book on December 15th. Let's put it on pre-order for three weeks. We'll let the super fans know. We'll incentivize them to tell their friends," et cetera, but beyond that, we did no promotion for this book, whatsoever.

In pre-order, this book by an unknown author, second book did 1500 in pre-order. Within the first two weeks of the book going live on Amazon, it did 1,000 copies. Now, if you can do that without really lifting a finger in promotion, with just dedicating yourself to building your fan base, one reader at a time, you can really change how your book does. The problem, Susan, that I find is a lot of times authors say, "I only really want the big name bloggers. I want the big names. I want this, I want that," but what they're missing is the bottom-up marketing that can really leverage success on a book.

A lot of people look at like Fifty Shades of Grey. For years when I taught in conferences, romance writers were writing those types of books, so erotic romance has been around for as long as I've been in business. How did Fifty Shades of Grey take off? A lot of it had to do with the super fans. A lot of it had to do with the fact that when you've gone to that site, the page on Amazon, she's got probably 5,000 reviews now. Eighty percent of them are

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readers. There's a certain moment that a reader creates when they are engaged by the author, when they feel like they're part of the tribe.

That's where a lot of authors aren't spending their buy. They're buying ads. It's not that being on Twitter and Facebook because we do this as a business. It's not that pitching bloggers is not a good thing, but authors say to me all the time, "What can I do on my own? I've hired you to do all this great stuff. What can I do on my own?" I'm like, "Build your fan base because your fan base will change your life."

Susan Friedmann: Would this work as well with a nonfiction book as it does with you said, these romance novels now?

Penny Sansevieri: Yeah, and part of the reason why I did it on contemporary romance again is because I wanted to pick a really saturated market. I wanted to pick a market that was so cluttered with other books that if I could gain success for this book, I could probably replicate this for nonfiction as well. That's part of the reason why I tested it there, yeah.

Susan Friedmann: You mentioned book reviews. Book reviews often give authors real grief, and we've had a few speakers talk about book reviews. Still, I know authors have a lot of trouble getting them. I believe you've got a secret tool that authors can use to leverage to get more reader reviews. Can you share that with us? Can I entice you to do that?

Penny Sansevieri: Yes, absolutely. The secret really is that letter in the back of the book. That's probably one of the biggest secrets of getting ... Part of it is that you have to really ask readers, just ask them for a review. Say, "If you liked the book or you didn't like the book," never ask them for a good review because that starts to get very sketchy. Ask them for a review. Not every review that this author got or any of the authors that we've done this with got was necessarily a five-star, "Oh, my gosh! I don't know what I did before this book came into my life." They were honest reviews, and that's really what you want.

By engaging your reader, and I have authors who create VIP clubs, so special clubs on Facebook that say, "If you want to be a part of this club, you could be part of this club, you'll get exclusive access to content, content that wasn't included in the book for nonfiction authors, maybe a checklist or workbooks or something like that that you will get for free. The only thing I ask in return is that when I have a new book coming out, I need you to be part of my review tribe. I will give you this book for free." Don't make them buy it because you want to treat them like a regular reviewer. "I'm going to give you this book in exchange for an honest review."

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I will tell you, you will be surprised at how well that works. Once you put these readers in place, and they want to be treated like they're a part of something exclusive, but once you put these readers in place, getting reviews becomes that much easier. The thing is that when we have first time authors come to us and say, "I really want big blogger reviews," sometimes that's very possible for first time authors; sometimes it's a little harder because they're just starting out, and I realized it's not fair and their book may be amazing, but these bloggers are really busy. They can be selective because they get to pitch so much. They can be selective about what they take.

By having other voices on that Amazon site, on Amazon, the bloggers look at that and they ... Well, you know what? People like what other people like. The more reviews you get, the more reviews you'll get. It used to be that 50 reviews on Amazon was amazing. Now, it's really just a good start. You want to get to that 100 number, 200, 300, and up from there because it helps with your exposure with your visibility on Amazon because it triggers the algorithms, but it also helps when somebody just lands on the site and they think, "Oh, my gosh! Look at all these great reviews."

Susan Friedmann: I know a big thing on Amazon is finding the right category for your book. Can you address categories and how that can drive sales? How do you identify those?

Penny Sansevieri: Two things about categories. Amazon is really a search engine. Think about Amazon as a search engine, and think about your category as a way to get more exposure within Amazon. Don't think about your category as I want to be the bestselling book in mystery or in self-help or in my case, in social media. Categories, the more niche that you can get, the better because if you put yourself into the wrong category, not only will your exposure diminish, but amazon's algorithms tend to support books that are holding their own in a category.

Not necessarily number 500 in a category or something within the top 10, and sometimes in very busy categories within the top 20. An example of that, all right? I had an author that I was consulting with, and she had a book about teen bullying that leads to teen suicide. She put the book in the category teen suicide because intuitively, that makes the most sense. That's what the book is about.

However, the psychology of that is that people aren't really searching for that. The two things that Americans really don't like to talk about are death, and whether or not we've saved enough money for retirement.

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Those books do not tend to do well. Period, end of story. It would send these into those categories would also be more challenging.

When I looked at this book and I looked at Amazon, I realized that there was a category called teen health, teen health which makes sense because mental health is also health that only 95 other books in it. When we moved her to that category, the book went from 400,000 or 500,000 sales rank up to a 20,000 sales rank. If you were at the top 27,000 on Amazon, you're considered the top 1% of Amazon in terms of sales. Changing a category can really change where the book sits in terms of getting it on to the readers' radar screen.

Susan Friedmann: How do you go about even searching for these categories?

Penny Sansevieri: Well, you do have to do some digging. The categories and the keywords, when I train authors, and when I teach this, I always tell them, I say, "You know what? This is probably going to take you the longest. However, you don't have to go in and change this all the time. Unless you're sitting on a topic that changes consistently. If you have a book where the market changes all the time, probably you want to get in there and do some tweaking.

In terms of the categories, what I would recommend that you do is start, this is going to sound a little backward, but start outside of Amazon. There's a site called ubersuggest.org. Übersuggest, just like the car service, Übersuggest is a site that will if you plug in your keyword, it scrapes Google everyday to find out what people are searching for.

The first thing is and a lot of times, this is really a wake-up call for authors, you want to really know how people are searching for your topic because they may surprise you. That's the first piece of it is figure out how people are searching because this author was very, very hyper-focused on teen suicide, and I had to get her off of that conversation because it wasn't productive to the success of her book.

When we search on Übersuggest, I said, "What about mental health? Let's take a look and see what we find?" Then we went over to Amazon, and I started digging down digging through the categories. I said, "Oh, look. Here's one. Oh, my gosh! It only has 95 others books in it." When you're talking about a site that according to Amazon has four million other titles, which I think is inaccurate because with 4,500 books published everyday, I think that number is way above four million at this point, but let's just go with four million.

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If there are only 95 other books in that category, I mean, that's probably a really good place for you to be. However, what I recommend that you do is if you find a category like that and think, "Whoa! This is golden. This is amazing," take a look at the sales rank of the books in that category. It's a little bit of a two-step process because if the sales rank is really high, it probably means that even though there aren't a lot of books in that category, they probably aren't selling either because a high sales rank means that you're not selling a lot of books. Does that make sense?

Susan Friedmann: It does. It certainly does. I like the idea of going into Übersuggest and looking at that because as you say, I mean, that's going to give you some ideas that you may not necessarily have thought about going to Amazon and searching that. Fabulous. Mistakes, let's touch on a couple of really big mistakes that you find that authors make.

Penny Sansevieri: I think the number one is not really knowing where their audience is. When authors come to us, they say, "I need to be on every single social media site." They'll say, "You know what? I want you to do my social media. I want to be on every site." I'll say, "Why? Why do you want to be on every site?" "Well, because I think I need to be. I think I need it for exposure, big exposure." I will tell you that it's not about being everywhere. It's about being everywhere that matters."

What I always suggest to authors is first, be your own detective. Get on and see where other authors in your market are. For example, if you write mysteries, let's say. Take a look at the top authors on Google, and stay away from big brand names. Let's say James Patterson, any of the really big Mary Higgins Clark, obviously or some mystery because those folks are brands, and they've been grandfathered into a system where Mary Higgins Clark could hop on Instagram tomorrow, and maybe she's already there, but she could hop on Instagram tomorrow and have a million followers in an hour.

You want to find people who aren't necessarily top of mind in terms of household names, but are still ranking fairly high on Google. Then take a look and see what social media sites are they on, how often do they blog, what social media sites are they on, and what are they saying when they're on those sites because if they're ranking, if they have decent ranking on Google, it probably means they're doing everything right or at least pretty right. That will start to give you a roadmap because what happens is is authors exhaust themselves.

They say, "Okay. I'm going to be on Facebook, I'm going to be on Twitter, I'm going to be on Pinterest, I'm going to be on Instagram. I'm going to do

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videos for YouTube." I'm sitting here thinking, "Well, then you have more time than I do because there's no way that I could be on all those sites." The first thing is don't worry about being everywhere, just the everywhere that matters.

I will tell you that you are far better if you spend all of your energy building your fan base on let's say Facebook, on Facebook or even LinkedIn if you have a business title. Put all of your energy in there and really build it as supposed to having five social media sites where you're only active maybe once a week because it becomes very hit and missed.

The second thing that I see that where authors missed is being consistent. Here is an interesting thing about consistency. Consistency sounds like, "Wow! That's a little boring," but I will tell you that if you do anything consistently, you will do it well, maybe it's blogging, be it on social media like we talked about, whatever that is because what happens is that authors, they get on to their blog, and they post five blogs, and they get really excited, and then nobody comments, and they think, "Well, I feel like a loser, and I'm not going to get on this blog, and nobody likes me, and I'm done."

I get that, believe me because when I first started blogging on the Author Marketing Expert site, I was like, "Ugh! Nobody's listening." It feels like nobody is listening. If you're saying things that interest people, and you consistently do this over time, you will start to drive attention to yourself, but you've got to ... Sometimes you have to talk to an empty room before the room starts to fill up, and you start to build fans. I mean, that's just the reality of it.

We can't all stand on stage and have 200, 300 people in the room cheering us on. Sometimes it's just one guy or one woman and it's your mother, and she's clapping in the audience until the other people join her. There's a period of that which I know can be really discouraging for authors because they're like, "Well, I'm not ..." Maybe you aren't posting the right stuff, and if that's the case, if you're not really sure, spend some time with a professional who can look at your audience and maybe give you some feedback because sometimes we're a little too close to our own thing. Consistency is really, really a big thing.

The third thing that I would say, and I'll stop after this because I know there's probably, there's a lot. Not that authors do a lot wrong, but there's just a lot of stuff that I see. The third piece of it is that authors price their book incorrectly. While this sounds counterintuitive, do not price your book too high. I mean, there's difference between pricing your book too

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high and just pricing it out of the audience.

If you're a new author, you are far better off, and it will serve you much better in the long run if you keep your book priced low enough to attract that new reader who's willing to take a chance on you. If you only have one book out, and I look at your book on Amazon, and your e-book is 10 bucks, I can tell you right now, I'm not going to get it, unless 10 people had said, "Oh, my gosh! It's the best book ever," but if you're a new author, you probably don't have that.

Be careful how you price your book. A lot of people say, "I need to price my book high because I have to make the money back that I've invested in it so far." I will tell you, that's the wrong thought process, especially with e-books and paperback. Keep the price at what is reasonable in terms of take a look at some other books in your market and see what those books are priced at.

Susan Friedmann: A lot of segues for you to tell us more about your services and how our listeners can get hold of you.

Penny Sansevieri: First off, I welcome feedback. My e-mail address is penny@amarketingexpert.com. Our website is amarketingexperting.com. We do book marketing and publicity at all levels. If you have a big budget that's great, if you're starting out and you have a smaller budget, we can help you too. I also have, I'm super excited, I have a new book that was born this week, very, very happy about that, very happy that it's out because it's a social media book. Every time I finish a chapter in that book, this social media site that I was writing about would change something, and I'd have to go back and revise that chapter, so it was a little bit of a nightmare, but Red Hot Internet Publicity just came out this week and I'm keeping it at \$3 for the next couple of weeks for the e-book on Amazon. It's a pretty good deal for a 300-paged book.

Susan Friedmann: Very much so. I'm heading right over there right now, I tell you. Fabulous. Thank you, Penny. Penny, if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?

Penny Sansevieri: The first piece of this I would say is to pick your battles wisely. Figure out what you can realistically do because the worst thing that can happen to an author is that they get discouraged, and that they feel like, "I've just done all this stuff," so pick your battles wisely and make sure that you identify your audience. Then build your fan base. I'm going back to that. I got to tell you, your fans will carry you through a lot of tough times, and they can really change the life of a book.

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Susan Friedmann: I've heard it many times. I love hearing it because it reinforces something that we all should be doing just building those super fans, those raving fans because as you said, those are the ones that are going to help you climb that mountain. Penny, thank you. You've been amazing as always.

Thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview and I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas that you can use to sell more books. This week's podcast is sponsored by PickFu, the company that quickly and easily tests market book covers, titles, promotional material and more. Go to pickfu.com/aviva to claim a special 10% discount on your first poll

And here's wishing you much book marketing success.