



Understanding Amazon

*The self-publisher's guide to
marketing on Amazon*

BY WHITEFOX

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) has provided independent authors with an untraditional route to publication. Seasoned self-publishers will remember that, once upon a time, there were two separate self-publishing platforms: KDP, which allowed authors to publish their ebooks directly to Amazon, and its print-on-demand sister, CreateSpace. In 2018, however, Amazon merged the two platforms and made it possible for authors to self-publish in both print and ebook format via KDP. Since then Kindle Direct Publishing has become the self-publisher's best friend and the service has expanded, creating tools (and prompting tricks) that help the indie author market their books and boost sales.

The whitefox team are experts at self-publishing, so we know a thing or two about Amazon. Below you will find the steps to marketing your book via KDP in simple, plain English. Every author deserves to have their story read and enjoyed, no matter their route to publication. And, with the right knowledge and tools, KDP makes that possible.

THE SECRET TO BECOMING AN AMAZON BESTSELLER

Whether it's on the front of your book, in your Twitter bio or 'slipped' into conversation with a new acquaintance, there's nothing like the title of 'bestseller' to denote legitimacy, quality, expertise and much more. Every author dreams of becoming a bestseller, but very few know that the title is much more attainable than it may at first seem. In fact, Amazon's algorithm puts the possibility of becoming an Amazon bestseller into the author's own hands; if they have the tools, they can achieve bestseller status.

The books on Amazon are organised according to browse categories (more commonly thought of as genres), and there are over 500 categories on Amazon. The categories the everyday reader is more familiar with (such as Crime, Biography, Food and Drink or Comedy) are known as parent categories, and within each parent category are a number of subcategories: specific ways of categorising your book, such as Doctor-Patient Relations, Theatre & Performance Artist Biographies and Practical & Motivational Self-Help.

Amazon ranks its books according to sales figures (with separate bestseller lists for paid books and free books), and automatically updates every hour. To become a bestseller, you simply have to outsell the other books in a particular category, and even if it is just for one hour before the system updates, your book will be number one. While it is likely you will need a big PR campaign behind you to compete in the parent categories, if you choose your subcategories carefully (bearing in mind that you can change them whenever you want) you may be able to watch your book steadily rise through the Amazon ranks to number one. And, once it has got there, Amazon's algorithm (very helpfully) begins to take more notice; the higher the ranking, the more sales. The more sales, the higher the ranking. It's a fantastic cycle.

So, how do you choose the right categories to make sure your book climbs the literary ladder? When your book is set up on KDP, you are given the option to choose two categories, be they parent category or a subcategory. We would recommend choosing niche subcategories, because if there are fewer books to compete with, there's more chance of hitting that bestseller spot, and increasing your sales.

Pro Tip: The KDP categories you are required to select are actually BISAC codes, so when you make your selection on KDP, Amazon automatically finds a corresponding Amazon category when implementing the categories on your page. For this reason, they may be slightly different from the categories you selected, because Amazon has many more specific categories than the classic BISAC codes and regularly updates its list. However, if you're having any trouble you can get in touch with Amazon directly and let them know exactly where you would like to see your book listed, e.g.: Business, Finance & Law > Management > Human Resources > Training. You can find some more helpful information about choosing the right categories for your book, and check for Amazon's regular updates of new categories, by clicking [here](#).

When you enter your categories in KDP, you will also be asked for up to seven keywords, which can help make your book even more discoverable (and therefore more likely to rank highly), but we will go into more detail on this in chapter five of this guide.

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To become a bestseller, you simply have to outsell the other books in a particular category, and even if it is just for one hour before the system updates, your book will be number one

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HOW TO GET DOZENS OF AMAZON REVIEWS IN 6 SIMPLE STEPS

When making the decision to buy a product, the first thing many people do is check the reviews. In fact, 79% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and considering that Amazon is the world's largest e-commerce search engine, with an algorithm that automatically increases the Amazon ranking of products with a high number of reviews, getting those all-important customer recommendations should be high up on your list of marketing priorities.

You should aim to generate a healthy number of reviews both before publication (when your book is available for pre-order) and on an ongoing basis afterwards. Often fifty is cited as the minimum number of reviews you need in order to generate consistent sales, but of course it varies with each book and author, and the general rule to apply is: get as many reviews as possible! It's important to note that many ebook promotion sites provide exclusive marketing tools for ebooks that have a certain number of 5-star reviews, adding another incentive to generate as many reviews as possible!

There are two types of reviews: editorial reviews and customer reviews. Editorial reviews are often generated with the support of a PR freelancer who will snag your book shout-outs and feature articles in physical and digital publications, the key quotes from which you can include in your Amazon blurb. Although these are important, in this chapter we are looking at customer reviews: the organic reviews left by your book's readers. Of course, getting reviews is easier said than done, so we have compiled some tips that many whitefox authors have found helpful in growing their number of Amazon reviews.

Pro Tip: Remember, even with all the tips in the world, the key to getting positive (and honest) reviews is to write a good book. There is no point in trying to generate reviews if they're dishonest. Trust us, your readers will know.

1 When you ask your readers to leave a review either on social media or on your author website, make sure to include a link straight to the page where they can write their review, rather than to your Amazon book page. This will make it as easy and fast as possible for them to leave you a (hopefully positive!) review.

2 How many times have you, unprompted, taken time out of your day to leave an Amazon book review? We're guessing the answer is not often, if at all. Even if someone loves a book, they're more likely to recommend it to a friend than to leave an Amazon review, which, though very helpful, isn't going to improve your Amazon ranking. To get Amazon reviews, you need to ask for them, while being careful to do this in the right way. Many authors find success in gifting copies to book bloggers and social influencers and following up with a polite request for a review. However, be careful not to offer a free copy of your book in exchange for a review – that technique has got a very bad reputation in the book world.

3 Many authors find huge success by working with beta readers – avid readers who read, feed back on and often review unpublished literature. There are multiple writing groups for authors of all genres to connect with beta readers; you can find more information about connecting with these helpful readers by clicking [here](#).

4 If you have the time to invest in a little research, you can get a long way by spending some time on Amazon reading the reviews of books similar to your own. Often, the people who have left one Amazon book review are the people who regularly leave Amazon reviews, and sometimes you can find their contact information quite easily by clicking on their Amazon profile. Similarly to tip 2, why not reach out and offer the reviewer a copy of your book for free, since you noticed they enjoyed something similar? You don't need to ask them directly to leave a review, but if they enjoy it, the chances are high that they will choose to. You may even want to check out the [Amazon Vine programme](#).

- 6 Whether you decide to approach book bloggers, work with review sites or increase your social media activity, there's one technique to acquiring book reviews that is often fail-safe and easy to accomplish: ask the people you know. It's important not to generate inauthentic reviews, but if your friends, family or colleagues have read and enjoyed your book, they're more likely to leave a review and, let's face facts, easier to hassle. You could even set up a launch team of your nearest and dearest, get them on an email (or WhatsApp!) broadcast list and occasionally send them freebies, updates and reminders. Nothing says true friendship like leaving a positive Amazon book review. . .
- 7 When you're asking people to leave a review, be it a family member, a friendly beta reader or a reader in a bookshop, ask if they would be kind enough to post a photo alongside the review. Snappy pics of attractive internal pages or the front cover can really help to generate more sales!
- 8 Our final tip is for the lucky authors who have managed to generate a few positive reviews using the above information. If you're struggling with what to post on your social channels, sharing positive reviews can offer the opportunity to create a beautifully designed graphic (using Canva, if you're unfamiliar with design) and let people know what others are saying about your book.

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There is no point in trying to generate reviews if they're dishonest. Trust us, your readers will know

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THE KEY TO NAILING YOUR AMAZON BOOK BLURB AND BIO AND CATCHING THE BUYER'S EYE

Your Amazon book blurb is one of the most important elements in taking readers from interest to purchase. Even if you're not distributing physical copies, having the right wording on your ebook's Amazon page is the difference between another book sold and a lost customer. Have you ever turned over a book, read its blurb and decided against buying it? We're guessing the answer is yes, but there's every chance you could have enjoyed that book if something hadn't changed your mind, and the same goes for digital blurbs.

Here at whitefox, we work with indie authors to self-publish their books, from copyedit all the way to publication and marketing. Here are five tips from our marketing and sales team on including the right information in your book blurb and making sure you catch the customer's attention and keep it.

- 1 When you first land on an Amazon book page, your eyes will automatically be pulled towards the text that is formatted uniquely, for example, the text that is in bold. When inputting your blurb text into KDP, make sure to use [this tool](#) to bold the text you want to stand out, typically a headline, endorsement quotes or an intriguing hook.
- 2 When it comes to the body of your blurb, the tone of the copy needs to appeal to your target audience. Whether the reader is looking for a new business book, a thriller or a self-help title, their attention will be caught by the tone they are looking for, so make sure that the tone of your blurb reflects what the reader will find inside the cover.

3 Whether your book is fiction or non-fiction, your blurb needs to leave the reader wanting more, so hint at the climax or cliffhanger but don't let the reader in on the big reveal, otherwise they'll have absolutely no reason to spend their well-earned cash. In the case of non-fiction, however, you need to sell the skills your readers hope to acquire from the book – there's no mystique when it comes to knowledge-building.

4 While this topic is explored in depth in chapter five, it's worth noting how essential it is to include your selected keywords in your book's blurb. If your blurb copy corresponds with your keywords and categories, Amazon's algorithm takes note of consistency and may just increase your overall ranking. Just make sure that you don't overdo it by littering keywords throughout the text to the detriment of the blurb itself.

5 The formatting of your blurb is very important. We've already mentioned putting your headline in bold, but make sure to take extra care when creating paragraphs, and putting text in italics for emphasis. Your blurb should be easy to read at first glance, and the most important elements (quotes, endorsements, calls to action) should be emphasised.

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Even if you're not distributing physical copies, having the right wording on your ebook's Amazon page is the difference between another book sold and a lost customer

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The same rules that we've mentioned above apply when writing your Amazon author bios. Depending on the number of books you have, you can have multiple Amazon author bios, but the central description will sit on your Amazon author page, as opposed to on individual book pages. While people are more likely to read the bio on the book pages, as this is where they will be looking at your book, perfecting each bio is very important. Luckily for hundreds of thousands of authors, Amazon Author Central is very simple to register with and use.

Of course, the blurb of your book goes hand in hand with the cover. Since you're publishing an ebook, you have to visualise your book cover as a thumbnail image, so make sure the design will look good at that size. You also want to make sure that the design, title and subtitle immediately signpost the viewer to the genre you're writing in; if it's not immediately clear whether your book is fiction or non-fiction, or what genre it fits into, you could lose out on potential readers.

Writing in the third person and making sure to maintain the same tone as your blurb (remember, you're talking to your target audience), craft around 100 words that include some personal attributes but are focused on what makes you qualified to write a book worth buying, whether that's a writing award, an experience or your career. Last but not least, don't forget to tie all your marketing endeavours together by providing a link to your website and social platforms.

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The basics of metadata are very easy to get your head around, and essential for making sure your book is discoverable online by your target audience.

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SHORT-TERM KDP PRICE PROMOTIONS FOR LONG-TERM REWARD

While many authors discover natural talent with social media marketing, blog writing and advert designing, for some authors hoping to make their books discoverable on Amazon, there's not enough time or expertise to take these routes. That's why many authors choose to run KDP price promotions, which (although slightly more risky) have been known to bring huge rewards. In this chapter we're going to tell you a little about Amazon's most notable price promotions, and whether they might be the right fit for you and your book. You can find more information on all of the price promotions we explore by clicking [here](#).

1 Free Book Promotions: If your ebook is registered with KDP Select (which means you agree to publish exclusively via KDP), you can make your book free for up to five days of each 90-day KDP Select enrolment period, either for the full period or sporadically throughout it. There are a high number of Kindle users who consume free ebooks at a fast rate, and will help to drive your book up the free ebook rankings, thereby encouraging more downloads and, eventually, more sales.

2 Kindle Countdown Deals: Kindle Countdown deals offer readers the opportunity to buy discount books on both Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk, and through the [Kindle Countdown website](#), which many readers use to snag deals. Potential buyers will be able to see both the original price and a countdown clock (the term is a minimum of one hour and a maximum of seven days) on your Amazon page, encouraging them to make a speedy purchase, rather than delaying their decision.

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Buying and Gifting eBooks: Many authors find that running competitions and free giveaways is the best way to grow an audience on social media, especially Twitter and Facebook. KDP helps facilitate this by allowing authors to buy or gift the book for others. You simply purchase the book as you would typically, and enter the recipient's email address before confirming the order. Amazon will share the ebook with your prize winner, reviewer or whoever will do a good job of talking loudly about your new release!

AMAZON'S SECRET FORMULA: PERFECTING YOUR KEYWORDS AND METADATA

When you first hear the word metadata, it can sound overwhelming. The whitefox team have spent years perfecting their Amazon-friendly metadata when supporting whitefox authors through the self-publishing process, so we're experts when it comes to inputting those all-important keywords. The basics of metadata are very easy to get your head around, and essential for making sure your book is discoverable online by your target audience. If you think of all the things that make up your physical book: the title, subtitle, your name, the barcode and ISBN, the publication date, format, page count. . . that is all metadata. All of the information that separates the book you have written from every single other book.

The key thing to remember is that there are two types of metadata: the metadata that, when decided upon, is permanent, as in the examples above, and the more flexible, updatable metadata such as your blurb, your descriptive keywords, your categories, your author profile and, of course, the price. One of the keys to making sales is to perfect this kind of metadata, and to do that you will have to become very familiar with your Author Central account. We've already explored various price promotions you can run, how to use categories to boost your book up the Amazon rankings and how to perfect your blurb and bio, so in this section we're going to go into more detail on keywords.

1 Keyword Strings: Understanding keyword strings is step one to ensuring your book is discoverable on Amazon. Think of a keyword string like a small sentence – people tend to search online using a set of words, rather than just one or two, so instead of typing ‘music memoir’ they might type ‘best biographical books about music’ or ‘famous musician biographies’. Amazon allows up to seven keyword strings when you’re setting up on KDP, but remember that you can change them, so don’t be afraid to test a few out and replace them with alternatives if you don’t see a great response.

2 Distribute: Use your keywords and keyword strings liberally in your blurb, author bio and any text area on Amazon, but make sure not to be too generous, or your readers will know something’s not quite normal. [This helpful resource](#) contains more information on specific keywords you may want to try out.

3 Research: When it comes to keywords, understanding your target audience and the climate in which your book’s genre sits is essential. Begin your keyword research by spending (a lot of) time on Amazon. Visit the parent category your book aligns with, explore subcategories, and while on the page, begin typing a phrase or sentence you might expect a reader to use, for example ‘love poems for’. The dropdown suggestions generated by Amazon will give you a good idea of the search terms people are using, which you may want to consider using as your keywords.

So, there you have it, the self-publisher’s guide to marketing on Amazon in just five chapters. While this guide is of course not exhaustive, you may find it helpful to use it as your starting point in making your book discoverable, increasing its ranking and prompting those all-important sales.



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