
INDEPENDENT BUT NOT ALONE

**WHY WORKING WRITERS NEED
COMMUNITY AND HOW TO BUILD
YOURS**

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YOURS IN WRITING...

Books | Games | Working Writer's Mastermind | Working Writer's
Week | Writing & Publishing Services | Convention Programming |
Anthology Management | Game Master Services



Photo By: Kimberly Laberge

For decades, I have used the salutation "yours in writing" as the sign-off from my communications. Sure, it was meant to be clever, but those aren't just words to me. I believe that all writers work independently, but not alone. We are better in community, and I would love to have you in mine. I am sincerely "yours in (the world of) writing" – whether you are a reader of what I write, a fellow

author needing guidance, or a creative in our shared world. Let us be gloriously human . . . together . . . even beyond the pages!

Get a free story when you allow me to be "*yours in writing.*"



Get your free Sci-Fantasy Super Short, *The Cost Of Time*: <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/801d07966x>

INDEPENDENT BUT NOT ALONE

There's a unique exhilaration that comes with being an independent author. You're the one making the choices, setting the goals, and crafting the stories. You're free to explore your creativity on your own terms, and the journey is yours to navigate. But this freedom also comes with its own set of challenges—days when inspiration is sparse, times when self-doubt creeps in, low points, burnouts, and the countless decisions that need to be made to bring a book from a mere idea to something readers can hold in their hands. The path of an independent author is often painted as a lonely one, but I intend to show you that it doesn't have to be.

While it's true that you might be sitting alone with your manuscript, trying to pull a world out of your mind and onto the page, the creation of a book isn't a solo venture. It involves the hands, eyes, and insights of editors, beta readers, designers, marketing specialists, and—perhaps most importantly—a community of other writers who understand the intricacies of the work you're doing. We've heard the

term “starving artist” thrown around too often, but the idea that creativity must be futile, hungry, solitary, or indulged at the expense of connection is a misconception. In reality, finding and nurturing a supportive community can be one of the most powerful tools an independent author has.

Community is the space where our ideas grow and evolve. It’s where we find the support we need to stay inspired, to push past setbacks, and to keep going even when the journey feels overwhelming. For me, the strength of community has been in its ability to create resilience. We all have days when the doubt is a little louder, when the sales don’t match the effort, or when the manuscript doesn’t want to come together. It’s during these moments that a community of like-minded writers can make all the difference. Whether it’s feedback on a draft, advice on marketing, or simply knowing that others have been where you are, community gives us the strength to keep going.

As an independent author, you may be the captain of your ship, but you’re also part of an armada of creators, each navigating their own waters. And, as my own mentor and, *Oh Captain My Captain*, leader of independent author communities, Craig Martelle, says (albeit adopted from John F. Kennedy), “a rising tide raises all ships.”

When we come together, we’re stronger, smarter, and more resilient than we could ever be on our own. This is why I believe so deeply in the power of connection. In fact, “connection” is literally the purpose of my gift of words. Connection, in this case, comes in building and being part of a working writer’s community. I’ve had the privilege of learning from other writers, sharing insights with them, and seeing how our mutual and varied experiences can create something far greater than any one of us could achieve alone.

In this short guide, I’ll explore the various ways community can uplift and empower independent authors, from collaboration and

critique to marketing and mutual encouragement. By the end, I hope you'll feel inspired to seek out your own writing community or even to join me and other dedicated writers in the Working Writer's Mastermind, where we support each other in our journeys, celebrate our wins, and continue growing together. Remember, while the writing itself may happen in solitude, the path to success is always better traveled together.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Community for writers isn't limited to a single group. It's a diverse ecosystem that includes mentors, readers, other authors, and industry professionals who support, encourage, and challenge one another. We may write in solitude. But, as a writer, you can be in community . . . a network of individuals with shared goals, a support system, and a collaborative space where writers can grow together.

Let's break down the elements of that definition:

- **Support System:** A place to exchange feedback, gain motivation, and find encouragement.
- **Network:** Connections with fellow writers, editors, marketers, and other creatives.
- **Learning Space:** An environment where writers continuously learn, share skills, and improve their craft.
- **Collaborative Platform:** A community where resources are pooled, and members support each other's journeys.

TRANSITION YOUR COMMUNITIES

Now let's look at the different types of people surrounding independent authors and how you can transition them to grow your career . . . and community.

1. Fans to Friends

Fans are those who admire your work, but transforming them into friends builds a deeper, more meaningful connection. These relationships often lead to a loyal reader base.

- Engage through direct communications like newsletters, social media, or Patreon.
- Remember their names and interests, and thank them personally.
- Celebrate their successes and invite them into your creative process with behind-the-scenes updates.

2. Competitors to Colleagues

Other authors can be seen as competition, but collaborating with them can lead to mutual growth and support. Building these relationships turns competition into camaraderie.

- Network at events, online forums, and writers' groups.
- Collaborate on projects, like anthologies or shared promotions.
- Share resources and refer readers to each other's work when appropriate.

3. Clients to Partners

Clients might start as simple customers, but building them into partners allows for long-term relationships and collaboration on future projects.

- Focus on over-delivering to build trust and loyalty.
- Fill gaps where you can add value to their projects or needs.
- Foster a long-term perspective, anticipating and planning future collaborations.

4. Leaders to Collaborators

Connecting with industry leaders who inspire you can be a way to fast-track growth. Transforming these mentors into collaborators brings their influence into your journey.

- Identify leaders in the field who embody where you want to be.
- Reach out with gratitude and humility, offering value and support.

- Find ways to work together, even if it means starting with volunteer roles.

5. Producers to Team Members

Your editors, designers, and marketing experts are more than just service providers; they're key players in your success. Treating them as team members fosters loyalty and dedication.

- Recognize their work publicly and privately to show appreciation.
- Invest in relationships that go beyond one project, building a team over time.
- Invite their input and ideas, treating them as partners in your creative process.

6. Coaches to Community

Coaches and mentors provide guidance, but they also form the backbone of your professional community. Learning from them is an ongoing process.

- Attend workshops, seminars, or group sessions to stay connected.
- Follow and engage with them online, asking questions and seeking advice.
- Be an active participant in professional development communities, whether online or in person.

7. Event Organizers to Advocates

Event organizers aren't just gatekeepers; they can become advocates for your work. Treating them as part of your community opens doors to more events and speaking opportunities.

- Build relationships by attending and actively participating in events.
- Show gratitude for their hard work, and offer to help or volunteer.
- Refer others to their events and promote their work, creating a reciprocal relationship.

8. Social Media Connections to Support Network

Your followers on social media can become a genuine support network, offering encouragement, spreading the word, and providing inspiration.

- Regularly interact with your followers, responding to comments and messages.
- Host Q&As, live streams, or virtual events to engage them directly.
- Share your challenges and achievements to create a sense of shared journey.

9. Readers to Raving Fans

Readers who buy your books are important, but turning them into raving fans means they'll eagerly share your work with others.

- Run giveaways, post exclusive content, and thank readers personally.
- Offer incentives for them to share your work with others.
- Show them you value their loyalty by involving them in special projects or sneak peeks.

10. Beta Readers to Beta Collaborators

Beta readers are invaluable for feedback, but treating them as collaborators creates a sense of shared purpose. They feel more invested, and you gain deeper insights.

- Invite them to be part of the process, from early drafts to final edits.
- Implement their feedback and let them know how they've contributed to the work.
- Celebrate with them at your book's launch, creating a team atmosphere.

11. Reviewers to Promoters

Reviewers provide essential social proof, but building relationships with them can turn them into passionate promoters.

- Send personalized thank-yous, and offer to connect further on future projects.
- Keep them informed of upcoming releases, especially those relevant to their interests.
- Highlight their reviews on your social media, showing appreciation for their support.

12. Authors to Resource Sharers

Authors writing in similar genres are not only potential collaborators but also incredible resources for information and support.

- Share information on industry trends, book marketing strategies, or tools you find helpful.
- Collaborate on cross-promotions to share readership.

- Be open about the lessons you've learned to support one another's growth.

13. Patreon Supporters to Partners

Patreon supporters can move beyond simple patrons to become true partners in your journey. These are your core supporters, and treating them as partners strengthens the bond.

- Give them behind-the-scenes access to your work.
- Offer exclusive content and opportunities to participate in your creative process.
- Show appreciation for their ongoing support with personalized messages and gestures.

14. Friends and Family to Cheerleaders

Friends and family may be your biggest cheerleaders, but they're also your foundation. Involving them in your work can deepen their support and commitment.

- Share your journey and let them see your progress.
- Celebrate achievements together and invite them to events.
- Ask for specific support when you need it, whether it's spreading the word or attending your book signings.

15. Local Community to Brand Ambassadors

Your local community, including libraries, bookstores, and schools, can become powerful ambassadors for your brand.

- Connect with local businesses to host readings, signings, or workshops.
- Volunteer to speak at local events, festivals, or schools to

establish a local presence.

- Build relationships with local media for promotion opportunities and event coverage.

Each of these community types adds a layer of support to your journey as an author, bringing encouragement, inspiration, and practical resources. By fostering these connections, you not only build a more resilient career but also create a community that celebrates and amplifies your success.

Originally, I intended this to be a full-length book as opposed to this short guide, diving into the many areas where community shapes and enhances our writing lives. I planned to dig into all fifteen of the outlined ways that community can grow a business for independent creatives. But, instead of putting the essence of community into these pages, I'm going to focus on one particular experience where community transformed my career as an author: live events. I hope that this singular spotlight on the concept of community is something you can then direct on every one of the areas in order to see it shine in your career.

Through live events, I've witnessed firsthand the strength of collaboration and the support of others in ways that go beyond what words on a page can capture. So, let's step into this light together, where I'll share how community brought my work to life in ways I could have never achieved alone.

LIVE COMMUNITY

It was my fourth official event after my transition to the world of genre fiction when I met Ben Wolf (www.benwolf.com). I'd had success at my first two genre fiction conventions: a small-scale fan-run Comic-Con in Des Moines, Iowa and a large-scale multi-fandom expo in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Between those two larger scale happenings, I also held a local, well-attended release event that at first didn't feel like a win based on my past nonfiction experience, but in retrospect, selling eighty-three of just a single offered title today at any one event would ring true as a successful outcome.

Still, I was fumbling, pantsing the live events portion of my writing and publishing career. I had this sense that the Comic-Con world (and I called them all Comic-Cons at the time) was where this genre fiction stuff belonged, so I just booked events to which I could easily drive, and I went. But I really had no idea what that world was all about. I spent the eighteen months between my first genre fiction release and my finally "earning" exactly the live event model I sought, doing years' worth of test-and-measure so that I could figure it all out and get on with the work. Over those eighteen months, I attended just shy of

sixty live events. Building my working writer community in pursuit of bettering my live events gained momentum after I met Ben Wolf.

The convention where I met Ben was Planet Funk Con in Davenport, Iowa, and I had managed to get assigned to a well-run panel on the purpose of horror in fiction. Mind you, I didn't write horror at the time, (although I proudly am a writer on the folk horror campaign *The Crooked Moon* from Legends of Avantris now), but I did have some dark and horrific elements in my work. So, by dog, I made sure to make that argument work as a selling point to sell myself as a welcome addition to the only available program for me. (More on why that matters later in this chapter.)

The panel went well. We were graced with a pretty incredible moderator (Eric Wesselman) who was quite prepared and did a decent job of giving space for each participant to speak. He also worked hard to reel in a panelist whose insecurities insisted on the spotlight never veering too far from them. For the most part, the group was collaborative, recognizing that all of those at the table had earned the right to be there to share what they knew or experienced through their careers with regard to the topic.

I can't say that Ben specifically bowled me over with anything particular he said during the panel. He didn't say anything with which I disagreed and that was good enough. He knew what he was talking about. I liked that, but that's also not the reason he became a part of my community. At this point he was merely not somebody I "eliminated" from my mental list of potential collaborators.

Following the panel, I did something I used to always do (and something to which I should get back). I grabbed my phone and visited all of those I could find in the exhibitor hall to get a photo for one of my cross-promo posts on social media. Ben was not hard to find. He had this massive, tallest-in-the-aisle banner declaring himself

a “legend.” His booth was packed to the gills with great covers, lights, shelving, digital signage, and beautiful stacks of titles that made his at-the-time twenty or twenty-one books look like fifty.

‘Whoa. Who IS this guy?’

While some of the authors and creatives I’d approached in the vendor hall had confusing or even less than receptive responses when I asked to do a cross-promo, Ben was in for the quick bit. In fact, he even suggested that we do videos for one another on TikTok rather than just a still photo. (To this day, that remains my most viewed cross-promo.

‘Okay. He’s willing to work together and level up that work, too. I like that.’

I shared that I was just getting into the convention scene, and I had found a couple of resources online to discover conventions and events, but what did he know about finding them? Could he use the sites I had found? Did he know of other resources I could use? Let’s share! While I knew that I was a baby in this arena, I gave freely what I did know, and Ben shared information on some pop-up cons. I added his recommendations to my own search tactics.

‘Cool. He’s collaborative. My kind of people.’

There wasn’t a whole lot more to our initial meet than these couple of interactions. I don’t think we even exchanged contact information. It was actually a break-even convention for me, so I was already losing momentum in this game. Maybe some of my initial release energy was wearing off? I wasn’t sure. But two things occurred to me after that weekend. One was that this guy Ben, who seemed to be willing to share information rather than lead with a scarcity mindset, knew what he was doing. And two was that I could not do live events at a break-even point, or I would never grow this stage of my career.

Let me pause here for a moment in the story of my friend Ben. After all, I’ve led this chapter with the assumption that you might

actually want to do live events and, perhaps, that is not true for you. You might think you can't, don't want to, or aren't able to travel, haul or ship books around the country, keep inventory, put together a booth display, work to arrange your own tour, or any number of other reasons for not including live events in your overall working writer business model.

I don't discount that there are legitimate logistics to work through when it comes to live events. Like any aspect of your business model, it will require effort. This is where I remind you that we are *working* writers, not watch-it-happen writers. On my tour I've seen parents of young children managing a toddler behind their booths, scraping-by artists who bring their grandmother's card table and a hand-me down tablecloth to build out their first booth, disabled authors who bring booth helpers, corporate professionals who can only do nearby week-end shows until writing alone pays the bills, and non tech-savvy writers who enlist the help of friends or family to help them find and book the events.

Why are these hurdles even worth it, though? Can't you just sell your books online?

Yes. You can sell your books online. And doing shows does not have to stop that piece of your business model. In fact, you'll be able to follow up with those who meet you at live events and they may convert to future online sales readers. But there are some things you get from live events that you cannot get out of the ease of pushing "GO" on an ad button, social media post, or product page.

Live events provide at least:

1. A tour that can be posted to your website and socials, bringing legitimacy to you as a professional author (for readers and also to potential collaborators and professionals).
2. An ideal setting for social media posts.

3. A network of like-minded working professionals to share ideas or cross-promos. (It's about community!)
4. Hands-on knowledge of *exactly* who is buying your books; your target market.
5. Photo and video opportunities to build out your marketing collateral.
6. True fanbase building as readers get to know YOU (you'd be surprised how many will return to visit at future shows).
7. Soul refreshment. I'm not being overdramatic. Your creative spirit will be rejuvenated when you personally are able to put your book into the hands of your readers. You'll remember why you love the power of story.
8. Oh, and did I mention a nice payday? If done right, live events can be a nice infusion of cash when you need it most.

Now that you might be a little more convinced that live events are for you, let me get back to my friend. Let's fast forward a couple of weeks past when I met Ben to when I did PhoenixCon, a small-scale but consistently growing game convention in Appleton, Wisconsin. This was my own stomping grounds for the most part, one of the conventions that is drive-in/drive-out for me and therefore convenient and less costly. I was surprised to see Ben there once more because I didn't yet realize we were working in the same general region. At PhoenixCon, Ben had a corner booth, as in, the corner of the room. It looked just as stately in this smaller conference space as it did when we were in a large convention hall.

I said hello to Ben, reminding him that we'd met on the panel a couple of weeks ago (after all, this "legend" might not remember me). When he visited my booth, he was supportive when he asked, "So is this your first book?" about the singular displayed title from my science fiction quintology. (The rest had not yet been released).

“Um. No,” I said. “This is just my first genre fiction.”

“Where are the rest of your books?” he asked. “You should have them here so people can see how much you’ve done.”

My facepalm truth was that, when I met Ben, I was on my twenty-sixth year of some form or other of professional writing and publishing. That single title I had been displaying (although with all sorts of signage and related merch and “booth garnish”) was my 100th title. One hundred titles and there I was at an event to sell books with just one on my table. One. It should have been obvious, but I thought this genre fiction world wouldn’t want anything to do with my nonfiction, my children’s books, my sportswriting, my ministry works, my plays, or any of the other past seasons of my writing career. It was the first of many DUH moments that Ben would highlight for me with a simple question or suggestion.

The next time he saw me, I had pulled in a smattering of inventory from my backlist. Today I bring around fifty titles as some really were not right for the conventions, but many have meant the difference between break-even shows and those from which I grow my fan base, my following, or my bottom line.

Other things that Ben has directly led me to change in my booth include my signage, my banner, my data collection, my shelving, and—most drastically—my book covers. I considered myself a student. I watched, I listened, and then . . . here’s the sticking point . . . I IMPLEMENTED. Because knowing all of this stuff means nothing if you don’t use that knowledge to improve. Following the advice and example of my live event mentor has made a world of difference.

Ben and I would come to see each other often throughout our show region. At many of my live events, he and I booth beside one another and refer to one another’s books. We have even each put the other’s books into the hands of customers or pitched one another’s books

to guests who are looking while the author is occupied in a different conversation or has stepped away for a bathroom break. When not near one another at the same show, we still direct traffic to each other with recommendations and, in the usually rare slow moment, we've each been known to walk a guest from our booth to the other person. I believe the support we have for one another feeds into the decision-making process of those customers picking up the book of our fellow writer. After all, if we are taking a reader to a different writer, well that writer must really be worth reading.

Sometimes, if a guest wants a subject or genre that is not on my table and not even close enough to attempt to pitch, but I know it's in Ben's collection, I'll send them on (and vice versa). When we have something that is similar, that works, too. If I'm signing my YA fantasy book for a guest, I may tell them to check out his YA fantasy while they wait (and vice versa). Sometimes, if it benefits us to get into an event, we'll even work a single space together; it's our "Ben & Jeri's Bookstore."

It's been closing in on three years since meeting Ben, the very same time period during which I've negotiated my path through live events. I know his wife (yet another colleague, community member, and author, Charis Crowe) and have met some of his children. He knows my husband and has met some of my children. We've stayed in each other's homes to save expenses when doing shows near one another's respective cities.

Above all, we are deeply trusted writing community colleagues who support one another.

And the community of other authors we each added around is growing in both numbers and talents. Ben and I, and our larger community, connect one another to opportunities, let one another know when there is a valuable convention or learning opportunity, and refer to one another for various services or products. We recom-

mend resources, dig for opportunities to save on expenses through collaboration, and keep one another positive in the face of exhaustion. The road between us is very much a two-way street . . . a path we are unafraid to share as we each grow. We have honest conversations about trust and the industry. We both know well that we may sometimes take lead, giving something that we learned, discovered, or for which we worked hard, but the other will have his or her turn, too, reciprocating in the sharing. We lift one another up, learn from one another, and grow together. We hold an abundance mentality at the heart of this collaborative relationship.

My and Ben's paths are not mirrors as we each lead different overall work models. However, in the live event world, specifically, something that is a piece of both of our business models, we chose to grow together rather than to compete against one another and I believe we are both better for it.

Let's dig into some stats, different types of events, lessons learned, some live event and resources, and why and how "finding your Ben" will work for you.

Take a look at my genre fiction live event story in statistics from my first *independent* year to my second *not alone* year:

2022

- o Total Events: 17
- o Season Dates: April to Thanksgiving
- o Average Net: \$400
- o Average per transaction: \$17.22
- o Top show: \$1200
- o List emails collected: 0

2023

- o Total Events: 47

- o Season Dates: February to December (with three blocked off time frames without travel shows)
- o Average Net: \$1200 (Up 300% when not alone)
- o Average per transaction: \$29.32 (Up almost 60% when not alone)
- o Top Show: \$4200 (Up 350% when not alone)
- o List emails collected: Over 600

In 2024, after two years of live events being the primary financial engine of my work model, I stepped way back from conventions. I've gotten my schedule to a place where I only have very specific shows and those shows have me paid, running programs, managing publications, selling at provided booths, running games that I write, or otherwise featured in one way or another. For my business model, live shows were part of a bigger picture to build my brand and make my writing discoverable by the other brands with which I wanted to work. When I achieved that goal, I was able to decrease the quantity of shows I do. However, the other (now thriving) parts of my career model—writing retainers, coaching, and games—would not be where they are if I had not put myself in front of my ideal market through those live events.

Ben, on the other hand, continues to be one of the top success stories in live events across the entire independent publishing industry. It is the core of his business model. For both of us, live events are part of the success path and, for both of us, choosing the right events . . . whether to be in front of a specific market or to maximize sales . . . is a vital key to that success.

What are the right events for you?

This question is determined entirely by the books that you write and then refined further from there as your book proliferates into the world and you find your unique market.

An earlier season of my career was in children's books. This meant that I had a built-in audience with SCHOOLS. From there, I narrowed down the audience. What level of schools? Elementary (picture books, chapter books), Middle School (young adult), High School (young adult, writer's resources). Narrow the audience down even more from there. Region; to where am I willing to travel for a show? Thousands of possible events!

Schools are unique in that every one of them works just a little bit differently when it comes to how they manage visiting authors, events, or "artists in residence" programs. With that in mind, here are a few tips for working with schools from my years in children's books:

Working With Schools – The People:

Love the children.

Cater to the teachers.

Respect the administrators.

Dote on the parents.

Sources Of payment:

School Budget

District Budget

PTO/PTA/Governance Board

Nonprofit Education Foundation

Reading Resource/Media Specialist/Resident Artist Budget (*or a specific budget item for which your offer, book, or program fits*)

**Many other pay sources can come into play, but these are the most common.*

Most Common Manners Of Structuring Compensation:

1. Free program and sell books.
2. Paid program and include books.
3. Paid program and sell books.

Create Your Program:

Schools are filled with people who enjoy reading your book to children. You must bring them something more.

Reading

Teaching

Interactive

Group Work

Family

Programs

Leave-Behind Worksheet

Book Through A 10-Touchpoint Plan:

1. Phone – Info Seeking
2. Mail – Sell Sheet, Biz Card, & Trinket
3. Email – Follow-up Mail & Let Intentions Be Known
4. Phone – Follow-up Email & Ask To Schedule Time To Talk
5. Email – Follow-up Phone & Send Program Info
6. Stop In – Meet an Influencer and Give Gift of Book and/or related Merchandise.

7. Email – Follow-up to Stop In

8. Mail – Postcard of Dates Looking To Be Booked

9. Phone – Follow-up to Mail

10. Email – Campaign Closer with all collateral

Communications With Client:

1. Book & Schedule the Details in person or by phone.
2. Thank You Postcard for Scheduling
3. Initial Email Thank You with Administrative Collateral
4. Book Pre-Orders
5. Book Order Due Date with Excitement Expressed
6. Program Plan
7. Program Day

8. Social Thank You Day Of
9. Email Thank You Day After (with next steps)
10. Mailed Thank You Sent Day After (with next steps)

Be A Social Friend:

- Follow school on socials.
- Celebrate with school.
- Send Pictures following events (to administrative types).

Be A Business Partner:

- Ask for recommendation.
- Collect names.
- Ask to use school or leadership names.
- Determine needs for next season.

Suggestions For Steady School Work:

- Reach out to 10 to 25 schools per each touchpoint campaign and keep growing your circle
- Each campaign should last 30 to 45 days bookings in the next semester (fall for spring; spring for fall).
- Best times to book include 1) May for the fall of the next year, 2) August for winter of the upcoming semester, 3) November for January to February, and 4) February for the end of the school year. Expect a 5% to 10% conversion on campaigns and slightly higher for repeat clients.
- Focus on single a region at a time

- CONNECT to them! Why are they your choice to visit? Be personal.
- Respond with gratitude . . . to every “No.” (And there will be many.)
- Offer discounts and opportunities
- Consider district deals for multiple schools within the same district
- Ask what THEY are teaching, so that you can reference the terminology that is already being used in their school
- Communicate outside of campaigns (Thanksgiving, Read Across America, Start of School Year, End of School Year, Education Appreciation Week, and dates related to YOUR books)

I promise I’ll get back to convention-style author events, but I wanted to give you an opportunity to think outside of the box and to recognize that what you write plays a huge part into what sort of live events you determine are best in your working writer business model.

Business and leadership writers can work with chambers of commerce, corporations, and conferences. Literary fiction writers can look to literary events, publishing conferences (Book Expo America, National Book Festival, etc.), and bookstores. There are countless men’s, women’s, and professional organizations for which your men’s, women’s, or industry-specific fiction or nonfiction are ideal. Youth, parenting, and sporting organizations may tie into any number of books about those specific organizations’ foci or about parenting and personal development. Think about businesses that cater to your tar-

get market. Maybe you know a cosmetologist who would feature your romance in her storefront. That local gaming club may hunger for your high fantasy. Are you writing a devotional? Then reach out to all of the churches and faith-based schools in your area.

Here are a few more “target-market” style live events to consider beyond the Comic-Con and convention world (and how to land them).

There are five primary avenues for continuing to share your book, resulting in recurring revenue for you and a great read for countless others. There are certainly many ways to earn a profit from your work, but the following are those that I have found to be most relevant:

1 – Hosted Speaking Events Either alone, or in partnership with another author, build a speaking and teaching program that could be presented. Think beyond the bookstores and professionals who may host you! These spaces can be found primarily in: Banks, Chamber Organizations, Community Organization Rooms (such as your local YMCA), Libraries, and Small Businesses.

- Create a program that combines speaking, interactive learning, and book sales. You can certainly do a signing and “meet-the-author,” but these added values can help book your events to more and larger markets.
- Market the program using your a media release calendar and collateral. Feel free to utilize the original or editable materials created during your book’s buy-a-thon, including screen grabs that showed your book as a #1 Bestseller.
- Determine a price for the event, as well as your book price for copies sold at the venue. (Consider getting a sponsor to cover the fees allowing this sponsor to speak at the beginning and end of your program and have a handout or other business

items available to go home with the attendees.)

Traditional Payments for Live Events Include:

- FREE, but with allowed book sales
- FREE, but with guaranteed number of purchased books
- PAID for the event and allowable book sales
- Each guest PAYS for the event and the price includes the book

2 – Independent Stores Barnes & Noble, Costco, Walmart, and Sam’s Club are great signing venues for your books presuming you have aligned Ingram, Baker & Taylor, or IPG Distribution. If this is not part of your publication package, you may need to work with “Small Press” event organizers in those venues, work with local stores only, or sell on consignment (and that’s if they’ll have you at all). Your best bet, though, is reaching out to independent bookstores, topic specific stores (such as a sports memorabilia location if you have written a sports book), and resource centers (again, topic specific). You will have to do your own research to determine the stores in your area, but small businesses are typically quite receptive to professional authors as they get traffic from your event.

Using a five-touchpoint contact system, work with large or independent store owners to schedule an event that will benefit both you and the retail organization:

1. Send mail (as in, paper and stamp!) to the store with the sell sheet and a letter requesting to do an event.
2. Call (on the actual phone!) the store to speak with the person in charge of events and mention that you sent the book information and are seeking an event.

3. Email a follow-up thank you to the phone conversation, regardless of how it turns out.

4. When possible, stop in (yep – on actual feet to speak to the actual face of an actual person) and bring SOMETHING for the person booking events (preferably a copy of your book, but a press release with business card, bookmark, or even small gift would work, too). If stopping in is an impossibility, send a video message.

5. Follow up by phone AND email as a final step to try to nail down the event. THEN...REPEAT!

- Respect the manner in which the business holds events; sometimes you bring a program, sometimes it's a reading, sometimes you're one of several authors with tables set up. The store may pay you in many different ways, too. Work with them!
- Market IN PARTNERSHIP with the business. Do all that you are able to do in order to market the book, but nothing that they don't wish you to do.
- At each step, give yourself permission to continue communications unless and until they tell you "No." For instance, when you send your mailing, include in the request letter: "I look forward to reaching out by phone soon." When you call, consider purposefully trying to reach a voicemail by calling outside of business hours and say "I'll be following up by email."

3 – Small Group Events Whether in a home or a public setting, utilize the impact of small groups of your target market to dig into your writing and get your book directly in the hands of those who are using it.

- Reach out to personal contacts or well-connected individuals, as well as those with a single degree of separation in friend circles, professional groups, and organizations to see who would be interested in hosting you as an author in their home or where their group meets.
- Plan a reading and/or teaching time to take approximately twenty minutes, possibly followed by discussion. This is different than a speaking engagement, which is a large attendance event (typically more than fifty). Consider this to be more of a small circle approach.
- Group Members should purchase the book at a price you have determined, possibly higher because of having you sign the books and attend their meeting.
- Consider running your book sales in a similar fashion to direct sales companies in which the host of your meetup gets a free book and others in attendance can book you for a future reading event.
- Set up featured “sponsors” or “ambassadors” in communities you could visit via livestream or in-person; these key connected persons could even be compensated via a commission or percentage of sales.

4 – Guest Presenting It’s different from small groups that are you-directed in the home of a (probably) personal or second-degree contact. It’s different from hosted speaking events in which you select the place and the topic. Guest Presenting is when you reach out to established groups, organizations, and businesses who you believe

could benefit from your work. This could be corporations, networking groups, clubs, teams, etc. Make a list!

- Do your research! Where are these places in your area or in the areas where you will be traveling, what do they do, and how do you fit into their (regularly meeting) group or organization?
- Market yourself to the organization as a resource and using your choice of the 5- Touchpoint system used for store events.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Use the marketing materials such as your sell-sheet, press-release, or social media graphics that advertise you or your books.
- Be specific and tie your relevance to THEIR events. If your story is about recovery from addiction, you may wish to reach out to a church's Celebrate Recovery program or a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. If you have declared victory over abuse, you could present in a domestic violence series from law enforcement or a community organization. If it's a baseball book, try little league organizations. Your stories are different, so your potential audiences are, as well.
- Once again, sell the book at the event, either directly, or included in a cost of having you as a speaker, or as a requirement of a certain number of sales for you to attend.

5 – Direct and Bulk Sales The more people who HAVE your book, the more who will want it.

- Use media to spread the word about your book and send potential buyers to your purchasing site.

- Continue to post on social media when relevant, and communicate with the audience you built so that they don't feel used and they continue to support and refer to you.
- Ask to obtain bulk sales (perhaps at a decreased cost) or single book sales from:
 - Churches
 - Schools
 - Organizations
 - Fan Clubs
 - Businesses and Non-Profits Related To Your Book's Subject(s)
- Attend vendor events, craft fairs, farmer's markets.

It may seem like I'm getting away from the idea of community by digging in on events. Remember I am using live events as a microcosm of how community can affect each part of your business and live events are just one part of my career model. Community helped me see how live events would sell my work. Community of my ideal clients is what I had to join in order to become part of their world (and eventually write in it). Community is how I hear about, connect to, and get into events. When community becomes a part of your independent author career, it becomes a part of all that you do to keep your business viable. It's not something that can be separate from the whole.

With that shared, let's get back to our spotlight on live events.

Knowing what type of events are right for your book means knowing who your readers are. If you know your reader, you go where those

readers are. So, let's go through one last exercise before we get back to those staple events.

Narrowing down your target market.

When narrowing down a target market for a specific book, it's essential to align your understanding of the book's content, themes, and appeal with the potential readers who would find it most engaging. Here are some questions tailored to helping you define the target market for a book:

Content and Theme:

What is the primary genre of the book (romance, mystery, self-help, fantasy, niche business topic)?

What are the secondary themes or topics covered (coming-of-age, comedy, historical events, post-apocalyptic, self-improvement)?

For what age group is the content most suitable (children, young adults, adults)?

Reader Demographics:

What is the age range of the potential reader?

What is their gender or preferred genre inclination?

What is their educational background or reading level would be expected in your ideal reader?

Do you need trigger warnings? (I tend to lean "No," on this, by the way, but some genres are more likely to include these for emotional consideration.)

Reader Psychographics:

What interests, hobbies, or values align with the book's themes?

What kind of emotions does the book evoke – humor, sadness, inspiration, fear?

Are there specific lifestyles or experiences to which the book caters?

Comparable Titles:

Are there other popular books or authors with a similar style or theme? (If you like ‘*ABC*,’ then this ‘*CDE*’ book is your next great read!”)

What kind of readers are drawn to these similar books?

Reading Habits:

Do potential readers prefer eBooks, audiobooks, or physical books?

Where does your market typically buy or source their books?

Engagement Channels:

What platforms or channels do potential readers use to discover new books (e.g., Goodreads, book clubs, book review blogs)?

Are they active on specific social media platforms where book discussions take place?

Localization and Culture:

Does the book cater to a specific cultural or regional audience?

Are there local events, histories, customs, or peoples referenced in the book?

Pricing and Value Perception:

Would the target market be willing to pay the price set for the book?

What does the book offer value in terms of insights, entertainment, or educational content?

Feedback and Interactions:

Have there been reviews, ratings, or feedback from early readers or beta readers (or for you, the author, on a past work)?

Are there common praises or criticisms that can give insight into the target audience?

Marketing and Promotion:

Where would potential readers most likely see or respond to promotional efforts (e.g., book fairs, literary festivals, online ads)?

Are there influencers or popular figures in the literary world who would appeal to the target market?

External Factors:

Are there current events or popular culture trends that align with the book's themes, making it timely or relevant?

Are there evergreen activities or recurring holidays that make the book relevant?

As you answer these questions, you'll be able to create a more refined profile of your book's ideal (and most likely) reader. And when you know *who* your reader is, it will be easier for you to determine *where* your reader is.

For my genre fiction authors, where that reader is will often be at those staple events where we began this entire chapter: themed conventions, Renaissance festivals, and Comic-Cons. While the world of independent authors is growing literally day-by-day across all genres, it is in that realm of speculative fiction where most find themselves working the "convention tour scene." And speculative fiction is right at home in these types of fan and *nerd*dom gatherings. (I say that word in love as a proud nerd, myself). It is in this world where I learned from my friend Ben.

Finding shows is where you begin. Honestly, I started very simply with a Google search to dig into where conventions, fan gatherings, and Comic-Cons were taking place. I was initially led to the site: fancons.com/events/ and it is still a staple I recommend. From there, if you can find one or two events to attend, all you need to do to discover more gatherings after those initial ones you find is to ask those in attendance at the events. You'll learn how to narrow down the specific fan gatherings that are ideal for your books.

I've found that (for me), with my grounded brand of genre fiction that is factional, heavy on map graphics, and filled with action-inten-

sive encounters, the specific type of gathering where my books thrive is gaming conventions. (And that then led me, by the way, into game writing, developing my own core D6 RPG system, and joining with Tiffany Rose Nickel to create one-page dice dungeons based on her D4 system.)

If you write manga or Japanese-inspired genre fiction, you may do better at anime conventions. Graphic novels are great there, too. Religious fiction and nonfiction is at home in mega church groups and gatherings around the country. Nonfiction topics can align to specific industry events. Military sci-fi? Perhaps align yourself to fan conventions featuring guests from Star Trek, Star Wars, and other successful franchises. Horror conventions may work if your writing has paranormal gore or dark elements in it. Romance conventions may find you in front of markets featuring everything from dating apps to intimate apparel, but you'd better believe they'll be buying your cozy (or spicy) fiction, too! If you write for an under-eighteen audience, you could find yourself in schools or educational and library gatherings or book fests and expos.

There are general or "multi-fandom" gatherings, as well, that may touch on any number of other speculative fiction genres. Test and measure within your budget to find the right fit. This isn't to say that your book might not do well in multiple settings, but consider finding the one (or the few) where you won't just do good enough, you'll thrive.

And don't forget about vendor markets, malls, and craft fairs!

Once you find your shows, you'll have to follow each unique convention's rules to apply for and secure your booth. Start at the event's website. If you know another author who has attended the event, he or she may also be able to help guide or connect you through the application process. Going to these events, even if it's intimidating at

first, is exactly how you'll find those other authors, too, and most are willing to share details about the specific events they are attending, too. Each event may have its own application process. Pay attention, pay fees on time, and pay kindnesses to those running them for artists . . . we need each other!

Consider this checklist for finding your right shows:

1. Test and Measure to Find Your Niche
2. Hone In To Your Very Specific Fans
3. Try Different Types Of Shows
4. Go Where You Sell Best
5. Can You Double Yourself? You work an event and have another event with a helper or person related to your work.

6. Alternatively, can you personally do additional events in an area where you have to travel for your main scheduled tour stop.

1. I call this an EVENT STACK and it could look like:
 - a) Travel to a craft fair.
 - b) Reach out to a bookstore in the same area and offer to do a signing.
 - c) Tell the local library that you are an author on tour doing (now TWO) events in the area and would they like a reading or program?
 - d) Now you have three events in an area! Tell the media and offer a special to watchers/listeners. Make your own buzz!

By the way, side note: do you notice that I call these stops your "tour?" That IS what you are arranging; your very own author tour. That terminology is not only accurate, it's powerful for your marketing. Just as you look online to see where your favorite band or singer is touring, so too will your fans once you start to build that base.

Now that you are ready for your event, set yourself up for the greatest possible success. Here are a few things I picked up for convention-style events inspired by (or affirmed by) my friend Ben:

Sales Packaging

- o Bundles
- o Gift Packaging
- o Multi-Book Deals
- o Gifts at Certain Thresholds
 - Easier Pricing for More Books
- o Single book purchases at uneven amounts
- o 2, 3, or more books at even totals
 - Serial Fiction
- o I sold more bundles of my book (Book 1 & 2) once serialized than I did of just the single book
 - o I sold more bundles at an event than I did of just the first book once more were written
 - o I sell more overall genre fiction (even outside of my featured series) since my signature series has expanded . . . because readers trust me to finish it
 - Add-Ons
- o Bookmarks and merch
- o I've added plushies, games, and more related to my titles

Booth Appearance

- Have floor-length table coverings.
- Have an eye-catching backdrop
- Carry More
 - o More books looks more legit
 - o You can reach more customers with more offerings

o If you don't have more work (yet), fill out your display with artistic stacks and shelves as well as display implements and add-ons (booth garnish)

- Lighting
- Have Genre-Targeted Covers
- Bold Simplified Signage with Fewer Words
- Clean But FULL Displays
- Know When to Scale or Target a Display

o I have a "tight 6" in which I can condense many titles in a very small space

- o Remove Low-Selling Titles
- o Have Backshelving
- o Feature Your Centerpiece Titles
- Work with Other Vendors to create a cohesive display

Sales Operations

Connect with passers-by

- Stand; don't sit; for as long as possible and as often as possible
- o Alternatively, invest in a high-standing director's chair for behind your booth

o Writers writing is not a cool thing to see; even if it is your next

great novel; it's not the same as visual artists creating

- Put your book in the hands of potential buyers
- Smile

Remember You Are A WORKING Writer. (The reminder throughout this book!) Events can be filled with activities, shopping, and after-hours engagements, but you are there to sell your books and the services that make you a working writer. It doesn't mean you don't network and have fun, but behind that booth, you are a salesperson.

Logistics

- Ease of Email Collection; Have a computer, tablet, or even a notepad out for customers to share their email addresses
- Partner with other trusted vendors where possible to travel or share lodging as a group
 - Track your show expenses . . . all of your show expenses
 - Track your inventory and sales so you know what to stock (and what, no matter how much you love it, is taking valuable space away from a selling book).

Having a friend like Ben in my working writer community was pivotal in my ability to test and measure a lot of practices and event types and also to learn quickly. At times it was a bit like drinking from a hose. But growing quickly on the live event front enabled me to then begin to form my own business model and discover where and how live events played into it. While Ben and I both have live events and an author's tour as part of our working writer plan, I needed to determine my own type of show and my own approach to getting those shows. My friend and I have a lot of crossover, but he does horror conventions and I do not. I partner to shows for programming and other means to build the other aspects of my business, while Ben is focused primarily on the success of the shows, themselves. We both grow into one another's spaces, bringing greater value to our clients by having one another to whom we can refer. And this attitude goes well beyond just Ben and I. TR Nickel and I share booths. Ben has pulled in Luke Messa. I've partnered Tiffany Rose Nickel in Red Rose Works and—together—we work with AG Wedgeworth and Christopher D. Schmitz in a mastermind group of author coaches. All of us have gathered many other authors around us to write together, booth together, run programs together, and grow together . . . always celebrating one another's wins.

Specifically in the convention style event scene, I made some discoveries about what I most desired in my business plan. I had spent a number of years working as a coach and guest author, so teaching, seminars, and workshops were important to me. Therefore, working to bring programming to different organizations became my unique way of bringing value to different conventions and events. As an author leading her second publishing company, I also love to help other people put their stories in print, so I wanted to work with some conventions to create anthologies. In addition, as somebody who has spent much of her “parallel career” in marketing and helping to build other people’s businesses and publishing lines, networking and connecting of like-minded professionals is always front-of-mind for me, so I wanted to bring some of that essence to my tour.

With these things in mind, combined with what I’d already inferred from my unofficial on-the-job training with my friend Ben, I expanded some of my own live event protocols.

Test and Measure to Find Your Niche and Hone In

- Different Types Of Shows
- Go Where You Sell Best
- Can You Double Yourself or Do an Event Stack?

Bring Value to Be Valued

- Programming
- Anthology or Book Management
- Customize Your Offerings
- Seek WIN-WIN-WIN Collaborations (The Event, You, The

Guests or Customers)

Volunteer Or Help

- Get Featured
- Be Seen as the Expert
- More Importantly, Be Seen As A Team Player

Be A Promotional Cheerleader

- Refer To Other Authors And Vendors
- Relentlessly Promote The Events You Love
- Make Connections Within Your Network

Keeping Good Records

- Use A Tool To Measure True Profit
- Inventory Management
- Be Creative In Where And How To Cut Costs

Ben is hardly my only community in the sphere of live events as I've highlighted several times. He was my first ally and remains one of my most trusted friends, but the mindset I chose on the first day I met him, and then again when I saw him a few weeks later, was the same I held onto for all connections I've made since. The mindset was one of humility and an eagerness to learn. Twenty-six years I had been in writing and publishing when I met Ben. I could easily have thought, '*I have more books,*' or '*He's just selling better because he's not a woman,*' or any other number of excuses. Rather, I looked at what he was doing, respected that he'd found success with it, and determined that I could learn something. And, thankfully, he was also somebody willing to teach that something to me.

I'm not going to tell you that my impostor's syndrome doesn't still occasionally kick in when I see Ben's amazing booth, or—quite frankly—the booths of AG (Tony) Wedgeworth, Christopher D. Schmitz or other authors who have setups packed with phenomenal genre fiction covers stacked high, but what I've chosen to do with that feeling has meant the difference between *giving up* and *moving up*.

When I am at a show where one of my colleagues outsells me, even when I've had a really great show, I go home and remember the things I can do better. What can I learn? What did I observe? I get back to work continuing to build out my genre fiction library. Ben, Chris, Tony?

They are good at what they do because . . . well . . . they're good at what they do!

Several times throughout this chapter, you may notice that I made choices which allowed me to strive for the same level of expertise that was exemplified to me:

- Ben suggested new resources for finding conventions . . . and I used them.
- Ben wondered why I didn't bring more of my titles . . . so I brought them.
- My covers, my signage, my banner, etc. needed updating . . . so I updated them.

I looked at somebody who was succeeding in an area of business where I was trying to grow, and I learned from him. I didn't make excuses; I made adjustments.

I got to work because, remember, we are *working* writers.

Before a few last recommended resources for the live event portion of this author career deep dive, let me share my last bit of live event advice. After all, this book is all about why working writers need community and how to build yours. Who in your community will be your live event partner?

Find Your “Ben” and Partner Humbly

- You Can Choose Arrogance and Excuses OR Humility and Applied Learning
 - There Are No Real Excuses; EVERY Event Can Have A Win
 - Give More Than You Take (And Find Someone With Whom This Seems An Impossible Task)

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY

So why would I tell you only about one area in which community has affected my career? It's simple really. I could break down every one of the areas of my writing career affected by community, but something else that I've learned in my several decades of professional writing and publishing is that every writer's business model is unique. It's not about how community affected my specific writing endeavors, about how it affected the live event aspect of my business model, but about how it can affect general areas of your career and how you therefore work to build community around your own creative life.

Here are a few areas where community has proven vital for me as a lifelong creative professional.

Idea Development

Developing story ideas is where the seed of a book is planted. Community can help you brainstorm, refine, and breathe life into new ideas.

- Share initial thoughts for feedback and new perspectives.
- Gain inspiration from others' experiences or suggestions.
- Test story concepts to see what resonates with others before

investing time.

2. Writing Motivation and Accountability

Writing is often a solitary task, but community helps sustain motivation and ensures you stick to your goals.

- Join writing challenges or word sprints to maintain momentum.
- Set goals with accountability partners who check in on your progress.
- Share achievements and challenges to keep motivated.

3. Editing and Feedback

Editing requires fresh eyes. A community of writers can provide insights and point out areas for improvement that you might miss on your own.

- Exchange beta-reading services or participate in critique groups.
- Get feedback on plot holes, character development, and pacing.
- Gain encouragement to “cut your darlings” and make necessary revisions.

4. Craft Improvement and Skill Building

Writing is a craft that benefits from constant learning. Being part of a community exposes you to new techniques and approaches.

- Attend workshops or classes together and discuss what you learn.
- Share resources, articles, and books on writing craft.

- Get advice on genre-specific techniques, such as world-building or dialogue.

5. Research Collaboration

Some projects require in-depth research, which can be more efficient and effective with others' support.

- Pool resources for hard-to-find materials or specialized knowledge.
- Exchange research tips and tricks with others working in similar genres.
- Get quick answers to questions from experts within your network.

6. Project Management and Goal Setting

Setting and tracking goals is essential to productivity. A community can help you set realistic targets and follow through.

- Share project timelines and deadlines to stay on track.
- Break down big projects into manageable milestones with accountability partners.
- Celebrate each other's progress to stay inspired and committed.

7. Publishing Knowledge and Strategy

Navigating the publishing world—whether traditional or independent—requires knowledge. A community can provide insights on the industry and trends.

- Share experiences with different publishing platforms and methods.

- Exchange tips on cover design, formatting, and book layout.
- Learn about potential pitfalls or scams from those who've gone before.

8. Marketing and Promotion

Marketing is essential to reach readers, but it's challenging to do alone. A community can amplify your efforts and share valuable tactics.

- Cross-promote each other's books to expand reach.
- Share marketing tips, like effective social media strategies or book signing best practices.
- Collaborate on joint giveaways, newsletter swaps, or book bundles.

9. Building an Author Platform

Your author platform—your online presence and brand—is the foundation for connecting with readers. Community helps you grow this platform efficiently.

- Participate in each other's blog tours, podcasts, or online events.
- Share ideas for building email lists and improving reader engagement.
- Receive guidance on personal branding from those with experience.

10. Networking and Industry Connections

Networking opens doors to new opportunities and partnerships. Community can connect you with people who have resources or expertise you need.

- Share contacts for editors, designers, and agents.
- Attend industry events, like conferences or conventions, together for a confidence boost.
- Learn about upcoming opportunities or collaborations in your genre.

11. Emotional Support and Mental Health

The writing journey can be filled with rejection and self-doubt. A supportive community provides encouragement and helps you maintain perspective.

- Share challenges and celebrate successes to stay balanced.
- Offer advice on handling rejection or difficult feedback.
- Connect with others who understand the emotional ups and downs of the writing process.

12. Live Events and Book Signings

Live events provide direct access to readers but can be intimidating. Community members can help by sharing experiences and teaming up.

- Share tips on successful booth setups, book signings, and event preparation.
- Partner for live events to reduce costs and increase visibility.
- Exchange leads on local events or festivals where books sell well.

13. Financial Management and Business Insight

Running an author business requires budgeting, planning, and financial decision-making. A community can help you understand and improve the business side.

- Share tips on budgeting for marketing, events, and book production.
- Discuss strategies for managing taxes, royalties, and expenses.
- Gain insight on setting and meeting revenue goals.

14. Legal and Copyright Guidance

Understanding rights, contracts, and copyright is critical but can be complex. A community can share resources and experiences to help protect your work.

- Exchange information on copyright, licensing, and intellectual property.
- Share experiences with contracts and royalty agreements.
- Get advice on handling legal issues like plagiarism or protecting your work.

15. Expanding Reader Reach and Engagement

Reaching readers is the ultimate goal for any author, and community helps you expand your audience in meaningful ways.

- Collaborate on anthologies, shared universes, or themed collections.
- Share strategies for reader engagement, like book clubs or Q&A sessions.
- Boost each other's work by recommending books to readers

with similar tastes.

Each area of writing and publishing becomes more attainable, enjoyable, and successful when supported by a strong community. Independent authors may write alone, but they thrive in connection with others!

WORKING WRITER'S MASTERMIND

Writing is a journey filled with countless steps, from the initial spark of an idea to a finished book . . . and beyond. For many independent authors, the path can feel daunting, and the weight of each decision can seem like a burden we carry alone. But it doesn't have to be this way. As authors, we don't just benefit from community—we thrive within it. We gain insight, we find encouragement, and we discover the resources we need to grow. That's the foundation of the Working Writer's Mastermind, and it's an invitation I'm extending to you. This very special group of working writers, my dear friends and colleagues, they are my core community.

The Working Writer's Mastermind is built on the belief that it *is* possible to make a living from your words. Our motto isn't just words; it's a promise. The Mastermind exists to provide a flexible model for both spoken and written word creatives, helping you align your unique skills and passions to build a viable writing career. Here, you'll join a community that values creativity, individuality, growth, and,

above all, collaboration. Together, we lift each other up, share in our collective knowledge, and support one another to defy the stereotype of the “starving artist.”

Our mission is simple: by following the ten-step working writer model, we align your skills, joys, time, and tools to create a personalized business plan that works for you. From crafting your story to reaching your readers, every part of the process benefits from community, and I’m here to help you discover how.

A Skill/Joy-Based Approach

Central to the Mastermind is the *Skill/Joy Index*, a powerful tool for understanding where you should invest your time and energy. Here’s how it works:

- **Love & Skilled:** This is your sweet spot. When you’re both skilled at and enjoy an aspect of writing, this is where you can monetize your passion and do the work for yourself.
- **Skilled & Dislike:** Here, you’re good at something, but it doesn’t bring you joy. In this case, doing it for yourself makes sense in the short term, but the goal is to eventually outsource it or find a way to lessen its impact on your workload.
- **Enjoy & Unskilled:** If you enjoy something but aren’t skilled at it yet, you can choose to spend time developing these skills. Eventually, you can monetize this area or at least perform the task independently until you’re ready to pass it on to someone else.
- **Dislike & Unskilled:** Finally, if you neither enjoy nor excel at a task, this is an area where outsourcing becomes crucial. Community connections are key here—whether it’s finding someone to handle your social media or a designer for your

book covers.

With the Skill/Joy Index in mind, the mastermind helps you take actionable steps toward building a sustainable writing career. But the Index is only one tool. In the mastermind, you'll also engage with the full ten-step model, which provides a clear framework for structuring your journey.

The Ten-Step Working Writer Model

Every step of the writing process benefits from community and collaboration. Here's how each step aligns with our core values in the Mastermind:

1. **Righting Your Mindset:** Having the right mindset is the foundation of any successful endeavor. Together, we help each other stay positive and grounded, focusing on strengths and reminding one another of the power we each hold as writers.
2. **Building Your Community:** This is the heart of the Mastermind. We foster a supportive network where we can exchange ideas, cross-promote, and celebrate wins. Community lifts us up, makes the journey less lonely, and increases our reach.
3. **Developing Your Craft:** Through workshops, feedback, and skill-sharing, we refine our writing skills. Our community members support each other in mastering the craft, whether it's dialogue, plot development, or prose style.
4. **Your WORK Business Models:** We explore various ways to make a living with your words, from freelancing to self-publishing to coaching. The Mastermind offers insights and ex-

periences from diverse business models, helping you choose what works best for you.

5. **Your BUDGET Business Models:** Budgeting is essential to any working writer's plan. We discuss ways to make financially sound decisions, share budget templates, and help each other understand the costs and investments involved in building a writing business.
6. **Your TIME Business Models:** Time management is a critical skill for success. The Mastermind encourages members to share tips and tools that maximize productivity, ensuring you spend your time where it matters most.
7. **Admin, Logistics, Tips, Trends, & Tools Of The Trade:** Keeping up with trends and utilizing the best tools is vital in today's publishing world. Here, we share resources, compare tools, and support each other with logistics—everything from email marketing platforms to print-on-demand services.
8. **Production:** The production phase includes formatting, cover design, and book layout. We collaborate on finding the best vendors and designers, discuss DIY options, and ensure each member has access to the resources they need.
9. **Marketing:** Marketing is one of the most challenging parts of being an independent author, but it's also one where community shines. The Mastermind is filled with tips on launching campaigns, managing social media, and growing your audience.

10. **Sales:** Sales techniques can be daunting to master alone, so we work together to demystify this area. From direct sales at events to online sales strategies, we share what's working, offer guidance, and celebrate one another's successes.

Define the process.

Discover your joys within the process.

Apply the ten steps of the working writer model to your joys.

Get better at the steps by working in and with community.

The Working Writer's Mastermind is more than a community, though—it's a movement. Our vision is to create a path for writers to make a viable living from their work, without sacrificing creativity or individuality. We're dedicated to defying the myth of the starving artist by embracing innovation, strategy, and the boundless potential that comes from working together.

When you join the mastermind, you're not just gaining access to tools and resources; you're becoming part of a group that celebrates your victories, learns from your challenges, and supports you at every stage. We believe in building businesses capable of sustaining human endeavors.

If you're ready to take the next step, align your skills and passions, and create a successful writing business, the Working Writer's Mastermind is here for you. I would be honored to have you join us on this journey. Together, we can help you prove (even to yourself) that it *is* possible to make a living from your words—and that we are never alone in the pursuit of our dreams.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR COMMUNITY

Yes, I would be honored to have you in my community, and I truly hope you'll accept the invitation. But what if I'm not the right kind of community for you specifically? That really is okay, too. I still want you to find your people. As an independent writer, building and nurturing a community can transform your journey . . . and I want you to experience that transformation fully and deeply. Whether you're looking for accountability, inspiration, or collaboration, having a supportive network makes the path less lonely and more fulfilling. Here are five practical steps to help you connect with, build, and grow with your writing community.

Step 1: Define Your Community Goals

Before diving in, clarify what you hope to achieve by building a community. Having a clear sense of purpose will help you attract the right people and stay focused as you grow.

- **Identify Your Needs:** Do you need support, accountability, marketing advice, or creative feedback? Knowing this will

shape the type of community you build.

- **Consider Your Strengths:** Think about what you bring to the community. Are you good at editing, marketing, or brainstorming? Being able to offer value will make you a more integral part of the community.
- **Set Short and Long-Term Goals:** Establish both immediate and future objectives, like finding critique partners, collaborating on projects, or organizing group events.

Step 2: Start Small – Connect with Like-Minded Writers

Building a meaningful community doesn't happen overnight. Begin by connecting with a few like-minded writers who share your interests and goals.

- **Engage in Online Writing Groups:** Join groups on platforms like Facebook, Discord, or Reddit. Be active in these spaces by asking questions, sharing insights, and offering encouragement.
- **Attend Writing Events:** Attend local or online writing workshops, conferences, and book fairs. These events are great opportunities to meet fellow writers and begin forming connections.
- **Follow and Connect on Social Media:** Start following other writers on Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn. Engage with their posts by liking, commenting, or sharing their content, and make sure to introduce yourself.

Step 3: Create Opportunities for Collaboration

One of the most powerful aspects of community is the potential for collaboration. Working together on projects not only builds relationships but also enhances your own skills and reach.

- **Start a Critique Group:** Gather a few writers who are willing to read and provide feedback on each other's work regularly. This can be done through online platforms or local meet-ups.
- **Collaborate on a Shared Project:** Work on a collaborative project like a blog series, anthology, or themed collection. This is a great way to reach a larger audience and share marketing efforts.
- **Offer Guest Posts or Cross-Promotions:** Reach out to other writers to contribute guest posts on each other's blogs, or run a cross-promotion campaign for new releases. This helps expose you to each other's audiences and build credibility.

Step 4: Engage Authentically and Consistently

To build a strong community, it's essential to show up regularly and engage authentically. Share your journey, celebrate others' successes, and contribute meaningfully.

- **Show Genuine Interest:** Take the time to listen, respond, and show interest in what others are doing. Ask questions and show that you value their insights.
- **Share Your Own Journey:** Don't be afraid to share your own challenges and triumphs. Letting people see the real you fosters trust and connection.

- **Offer Value Consistently:** Make a habit of sharing valuable information, whether it's a resource, a recommendation, or feedback on someone's work. Consistency in giving makes you a trusted and valuable member of the community.

Step 5: Foster Growth and Encourage Reciprocity

For a community to thrive, it needs to evolve. Encourage mutual growth by supporting others' goals and allowing your own network to expand naturally.

- **Encourage Others to Share and Participate:** Give your community members opportunities to shine, whether by leading discussions, sharing their projects, or organizing group events.
- **Offer Help and Ask for Support:** Be generous with your knowledge and experience, and don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it. This kind of reciprocal support is what makes a community thrive.
- **Expand Your Circle Slowly:** Over time, invite new people who share your values and goals. Avoid growing too quickly; instead, prioritize quality relationships that align with your community's vision.

Building a community as an independent writer requires intentionality, patience, and a willingness to contribute. By defining your goals, starting small, collaborating, engaging authentically, and encouraging growth, you'll create a support network that not only enhances your own career but also brings value to others. Remember, your journey as a writer doesn't have to be a solitary one.

The writing itself is often a solitary act, but the path toward a writing career is collaborative. When we surround ourselves with a community, we gain strength, insight, and perspective that allows us to achieve what we couldn't alone. Community is essential to thriving as an independent writer—it gives us allies, teachers, and advocates who stand beside us. In today's publishing world, by embracing community, we can fulfill our potential and find joy and success in our craft. With the right community, you can be independent—but I promise, you're never alone.

ABOUT JERI SHEPHERD



Photo By: Kimberly Laberge

Red, who writes under the names Jeri Shepherd, Reji Laberge, and Maggie McMahon, is a 15-Time #1 Bestselling, award-winning, 30-year writing and publishing professional of well over 100 independent and traditionally-published titles as of Summer 2024. Red leads the writer's series for many game and comic conventions around the country—including at least Gary Con, Game Hole,

and Nerd Street—and she has been a proud member of the Origins Author’s Alcove and Gen Con Writer’s Symposium. She writes genre fiction novels, anthologies, and novellas, as well as TTRPG adventures and systems as Jeri Shepherd, romance as Maggie McMahon, and, as Reji Laberje, her work for general audiences includes: children’s books, writer’s and author’s resources, celebrity biographies, and a diverse library of nonfiction and memoirs. Red Writes Books is the parent company of her publishing (Lucy’s Lantern Literature) and writing where she works as a touring author, writing coach, workshop and panel leader at conventions around the nation, and professional of writing and publishing services of all kinds in client partnerships, a working writer’s mastermind, and an expert-level professional writing workshop. She is also one half of the Girl Power GM duo (alongside Rose Nickel aka author TR Nickel) and an occasional podcaster. Red is a USAF Arabic Linguist Veteran, wife, mother, Gigi, pet mama, indie artist supporter, lover of adventure real and experienced around a game table, and explorer of life and the world. Red is happily living in Wisconsin, though she enjoys travel all over! *Be gloriously human, friends!*

Learn more at: linktr.ee/RedWritesBooks And join the Working Writer’s Mastermind at: www.workingwritersmastermind.com

YOUR REVIEWS MATTER



Still reading? I'll say it again! In my experience, when people read every single word in a book (as I often do!), including those before and after the story, it means you must truly enjoy the story and you're looking for more of the author's words. I sure would appreciate a review of this or any of my other books online so that you can tell others how much they'll enjoy my work and so that I can, indeed, continue to bring you more stories.

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