



EPISODE 20

Pantsing v Plotting: Time to Talk Outlining

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Hey there, everybody! This is the Author Revolution Podcast and I'm your host, international bestselling indie author, Carissa Andrews.

Holy moly, I can hardly believe it. Today marks our 20th podcast episode. That's five whole months' worth of writerly content. Crazy. When I first started the Author Revolution Podcast, I wasn't quite sure how I'd like creating content this way, but I have to tell you, I absolutely adore it. So, here's to another 20 episodes and beyond.

Anyhoo, today I wanted to jump into a conversation about launches and, in particular, when they don't go as well as you'd hoped. Last week, not one, but two author friends had new book launches that didn't go as well as they'd hoped they would and both of them were feeling a little worse for wear.

See, as authors, we put our blood, sweat, and often tears into our new creation. It doesn't mean we bleed for our words every time, but they certainly do take a certain amount of our essence and talent to come to fruition. So, when it takes months and months to accomplish the whole thing from start to finish...only to end with lackluster results, it can be really discouraging.



**EPISODE 20: WHEN BOOK LAUNCHES BOMB:
BUSTING THE MYTH OF OVERNIGHT SUCCESS**

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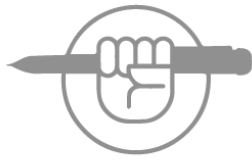
So, here's the thing... I think many of us have bought into a magical myth that if you write it, readers will come, and overnight success will follow. I can so totally relate. When I wrote Pendomus, I was 100% certain it was going to be the next Twilight or Hunger Games. When it launched to okay results, nothing spectacular, I attributed it to the first book, first-time author syndrome. Plus, the whole series wasn't out yet. In part, I was right. When I finally launched Polarities and Revolutions, Pendomus went #1 International Bestseller on Amazon. But look guys, that's just a tag. That's all. It still didn't earn me the big bucks I'd envisioned, even after that. I mean, come on, it was going to be the next Twilight or Harry Potter. Right?

Now, I'm going to let you in on a secret. In the past, I had this little thought in the back of my mind (and maybe you've had it, too), that this next book... this will be the one. It will be the title that finally launches my career as an author and catapults my sales and page reads into the stratosphere. Then, whomp, whomp.

Well, okay, maybe not complete lack-luster, but in comparison to my expectations, totally a dud. I felt that way for Oracle, for Awakening, for Playing with Fire last year. I think that was the title that finally broke the camel's back on expectations. At least I'd like to think so. (Says the woman trying to hit the NYT bestseller list in 2020 with Secret Legacy. Oh, man, who am I kidding?)

But it's all relative. When I have a book launch that drips me into the top 5K-10K of all of Amazon, I'm pretty damn thrilled about that. But I have author friends who reach that status and think, this blew. Won't be writing in that series again, it's dead to me. I also have other author friends who feel that if they don't make a certain dollar amount, it was a bust. What my romance writer friends make a month compared to my monthly royalties are so vastly different that if I measured myself to their expectations, I would have closed up shop years ago. I write urban fantasy and supernatural/paranormal suspense. As much as I'd like to think it was as popular as romance, the truth of the matter is, it will never beat out sex. Plain and simple. So, the point of this is, the metrics you measure are relative to your own expectations.





If you were disappointed with the results from your latest launch, you really have a few of choices to consider.

Number one – do you give up? Cut the series or even an entire pen name loose? This is a viable option for many people and maybe even you. There's no judgement here if it is you, either. Everyone walks a different path. There's a very good chance you'll write in a different genre under a completely different name and come out ahead. One of my writerly friends did this. TS Welti was writing in YA scifi/fantasy like I was back in 2010/11. She was one of my critique partners and one of the first people to read Pendomus. Her first book didn't launch to superstardom, but she persisted in writing anyway. However, on the side, she decided to start writing steamy romance books. I don't think she overly intended to drop her YA pen name, but when she saw more success with her romance novels, it was hard not to give in to the calling. Especially when she hit NYT Bestselling Author with her romance pen name. If you read in this genre, you might know her as Cassia Leo.

Number two – do you focus on a backlist marketing plan? Sometimes our launches don't go super well because we really didn't implement a plan in the first place. Let me remind you, this isn't Field of Dreams, my friend. We live in a crazy crowded market space and if we don't have an audience or a marketing budget to back our play, we're going to be met with less than stellar results. It's just the way it is. People who don't know about your book can't buy it. No matter how good it is. So, if you didn't plan it out well, think about the ways you can continue to bring readers to the books you've already finished. Think in terms of what moves the needle forward – special pricing promotions like Kindle Countdown Deals or Freebies, newsletter swaps with other authors, paid advertising with a low CPC. Pay attention to small free tweaks like adjusting your categories or keywords in Amazon or even reworking your book blurb on the Amazon sales page. If you want to get fancy, pick a new cover designer and see a rebrand makes a difference. But one caveat – don't do it all at once. Don't spray and pray. You want to know specifically what worked and what didn't so you can be smarter next time around. You feel me?



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Number three – do you keep on trucking? This one can really be considered more like 2.5, in my mind. You can keep trucking and still focus on your backlist marketing plan at the same time. I should know, it's the one I do. So, I don't give 100% of my attention to my backlist, but I do make tweaks monthly to see if I can get my past books more visible. However, I put the majority of my focus into the next thing. When our combined USA Today list-run with *Playing with Fire* failed last year, sure, I took a few days to lick my wounds, but then I pulled up my big girl panties and made a bigger, badder, bolder plan. It's not to say this one won't flop, but I won't worry about that until it happens. Instead, I need something to keep me pushing forward. I'm a storyteller and if I'm not writing, I'm not a happy person. As much as I want my books to earn their keep, I'm also acutely aware that I need a backlist of books and multiple entry points for readers to find me. So, what do I do? I write my next book, that's what.

It's not sexy or magical but let me tell you a secret: it's got more power.

Now that I've been doing this a while, I realize I don't really want overnight success. I don't want the pressure of having to live up to expectations from readers who read a first book. Can you imagine that? Think about it for a moment. Are you most creative under that kind of pressure?

I'm willing to wager you aren't. I know 100% I'm not.

So, instead, I want to prove to myself I know what I'm doing so it can be a repeatable process I can do over and over. Then, guess what? When success comes, and it will, I have the ability to maintain momentum and keep readers happy until the end of my days. I want to be like Sue Grafton, cranking out books until my dying breath. Because I am my stories. This isn't a quick buck thing for me. It's a creative outlet and a necessity I have to bow to. Simple as that.



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I'm sure you, do, too. I know you... if you're here and drawn to my podcast and lessons, the chances are, you're not a snake oil salesman. You want your books to do well because you genuinely believe in them. You love your characters and stories and you know the world will, too, if given the chance. Plus, you write because you can't imagine not writing. It physically hurts if you don't get to your current work in progress.

I get it.

So, I want you to perk your ears up because you have a gift inside you that 80% of the other authors don't have. You have staying power. You're developing skills, growing your reach, growing your expertise, and honing your craft. The world might not know you yet, but they will.

So, here's the thing, awesome author... if you've had a launch that hasn't gone well, I want you to take your days to grieve. Be down, be disappointed, then pull up those big guy/gal panties and evaluate the strength of that launch. Take a good, hard look at it and see what worked, what didn't work, so you know how you can make it better next time.

Here are 9 Evaluations You Need to Do After Every Launch.

Not only are they good metrics to have for comparisons, but they also help you see how your launches are growing over time. Trust me, if nothing else, that's a good feeling. So, if you have a pen and paper, go grab them so you can write these down. If you're driving, you're going to want to listen closely so you can burn them into your memory. Or you know, just come back and relisten when you're near a pen and paper... whatever.

Here we go...

1. How many books sold on preorder? This one is optional, because not everyone uses the preorder functions, but they do come in handy to build buzz and if nothing else, get your sales links ready to rock. If you plan to have a bigger launch, you want your books up for preorder because you'll have a longer marketing runway. Plus, how else would you get your book links to bloggers and other authors to swap?
2. How many books sold on launch day? Keep track of both the newly released title AND any sales from your backlist. Remember, a new release is always a great entry point for someone to find you and often times, it will mean they go back to your previous books. The more books you have, the more opportunities you have for readers to find you.
3. How many books sold on launch week? Again, track both the new release and any additional backlist titles that went out the door.
4. How many books sold during launch month? Finally, track all books that went out during the month of launch. The reason for that will be apparent in a moment, but again, track both the new release and any additional backlist title sales.
5. If you're in KU, what were the page reads? Page reads can be an elusive thing because authors sometimes forget to count them. Plus, even Amazon doesn't track them with ACoS in the Amazon Ads Dashboard, but they play a dynamic role in the visibility of your books, as well as your royalties. Keep track of the new release and all of the backlisted titles in KU, specifically for the month of launch. If you see an uptick in page reads from your older books, but not your new release, it could mean the launch missed its mark. It gained you visibility, but people weren't interested in the new title. If you see an uptick in the new release, but not in your backlist, it could mean the story itself missed its mark, or you forgot to add your other titles as parts of your backmatter in the new title.

1. How much money was put into advertising the launch? Most of us, when we start off, don't have a ton of funds to put into advertising. I totally get it. When I launched the Pendomus Chronicles, I was on a tattered shoestring budget. The amount isn't what's important. What is, is that you keep track. As your spend increases, you will see an increase in awareness. But not every dollar spent is equal, so it's important to understand if it was successful. Sometimes this is more difficult to pick out than it should be. If an advertising platform gives you cost per click (CPC) or any other metric to verify its success, it will help you more than those that don't. I recommend taking a close look at each area you spend money so you know which ones were most successful and you can cut those that weren't. But that's not always viable or it might not be where you're at. If money's not the issue and you're just looking for visibility and brand exposure, you might want to be tracking your rankings instead.
2. What was the overall return on investment (ROI) on the advertising dollars spent? Assuming earning a living as an author is your goal, you do want to know if you came out ahead or lost money on the launch. Now, keep in mind, for list-runs and brand-new authors establishing themselves, you might take a negative ROI for a couple of books. Don't panic. But if you're new to ROI, let's make it simple. Tally all the royalties you got for the month of launch on all your books (remember, it's a symbiotic thing). Then, tally every dollar spent to advertise the launch. Compare the numbers. Did you spend more than you made? Or did you make more than you spent? If you earned more, what was the difference? This is your ROI. If you determine you didn't earn enough or lost money, ask yourself what your launch price was. Was it 99¢? If so, remember, you only earned 35¢ per book. Would a full price launch be better for you? If you lost money, that's where you want to go back and see which advertising dollars were better spent and which ones can be cut next time around.



Finally, I want you to ask yourself two questions...

1. What went well?
2. What could be improved for next time?

So, what went well... Did you do a good job with newsletter swaps and Facebook ads? Did you find a new advertising source that panned out? Did you get a bookbub deal? Whatever it was, write it down.

When it comes to the stuff that can be improved, don't judge yourself or your process. Just take note so you can do better. Did you forget to send out ARCs? Did you spend zero dollars on the launch? Whatever it is, take a hard look at it and find a way to improve on it.

Trust me, there is always an up button.

Now, as this episode is coming to a close, if there's one thing I want you to walk away with, it's this: slow and steady wins the race. Being a modern author is a long game, my friends. It's not a get rich quick scheme.

If you want to get rich quick, you are in the wrong market. Maybe become a realtor or banker or something.

But if you want your creative endeavors to live outside of yourself so you have a legacy that lives on, even once you're gone, keep going. Success will find you, but you have to have the courage to hold fast to your resolve. Don't chase every shiny thing that floats by and don't be pressured by the things that are trending.



There are plenty of authors who flit from thing to thing, but they waste valuable time because they aren't building a brand doing things that way. I wrote a blog post a long time ago called Fuck Being Relevant. It still holds true. Your stories are trying to come through you for a reason. Trust them and trust the process. All trends come back around and even if your book's genre isn't currently trending, I promise, at a certain point, it will, and you'll be able to capitalize on it because your book or books will already be written.

Now, just a reminder, we can always continue this discussion online. Head over to our Author Revolution Facebook Page or if you're a student, go into our Facebook Group. Let's talk about our successes and frustrations. We've all been there. Be sure head over to authorrevolution.org/20 to visit today's show notes. I'll make sure the 9 Evaluation Questions are posted up on there.

Next week, I want to talk about how to manage the synergy of writing and releasing books quickly. I get questions all the time about when to start an author platform, when to start marketing, and how to juggle everything. So, we're going to talk about all the things. As a side note, I might also have some exciting news about the Rapid Release Roadmap course, so stay tuned.

Alright, that's a wrap. I hope you have an incredible week full of writerly things.

Go forth and be awesome.