

EPISODE 47

*List-Aiming 2020
(Hindsight, that is!)*SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: AUTHORREVOLUTION.COM/47

Welcome to the Author Revolution Podcast. I'm your host, international bestselling indie author, Carissa Andrews – and CEO of Author Revolution, the indie author's hub for learning how to create a bestselling series.

Launching a new series is no easy task, my friend. List-aiming that launch is even nuttier. You can prep and plan for a year or more, but when it comes down to crunch time – everything else goes out the window. No joke. I had big plans of still popping in and doing a quick podcast episode last week. That, obviously didn't happen. I planned on writing a minimum of 3 chapters in Cursed Legacy – my final Windhaven book. That didn't happen. I planned on checking in to my Rapid Release Roadmap founding members group each day to update everyone... yeah, I managed twice. Even after my pep talk about working out, meditating, and enjoying the moment – I was still a headless chicken. It is what it is, I guess.

As it stands right now, I don't know if Secret Legacy did anything spectacular. I won't know if it hit its mark or if I hit any bestseller lists until Thursday. For those of you who don't know, it's currently Tuesday, September 22. What I do know is this – for three out of the seven days of launch week, my ranking was below 1000 in the whole of Amazon.com's store. Secret Legacy hit #1 bestseller in five categories, it also hit bestseller status on Barnes and Noble and Amazon! Not to mention, maintained its #1 Hot New Release status across multiple categories as well.

So, even if it didn't make the USAT or NYT, I do know that the launch was a huge success and that people who may never have heard of me before are now reading the first of hopefully many books. In looking back, however, there's obviously things that worked and things that didn't. Some of the things I was sure would be the best route ended up not to be and things I thought I'd let go of turned out to be my saving grace. So, it's with that in mind that I wanted to share my list-aim launch strategy, complete with hindsight. Because it, of course, is always 2020. See what I did there? Yes, I'm a dork. Just roll with it.

So, first off, let's talk about what didn't work – or at least didn't work as well as I would have hoped.

Pre-order budget – One of the things I wish I would have known sooner is that while it's much easier to get sales once the book is live, it's not as much as you might think. When we list-aimed last year with *Playing with Fire*, I didn't have access to the promotion strategy. I ran my own ads for it, but beyond that, I didn't know what was done, who was picked for promoting, or anything. So, I did ALL THE THINGS in trying to get as many preorders as possible in advance. However, in July I learned that sometimes the best way to distribute your budget is small during the preorder phase and save like a crazy person to blast for the launch week. This time around, I really operated opposite to this strategy and who knows? It may have cost me. Next time I do something like this, I will definitely make sure the bulk of the budget goes to launch week ads.

Bookbub ads – After testing ads all summer, I was almost certain that BookBub was going to be where I put the majority of my ad spend during launch week. I had 14 different ads set up and scheduled, each going off on different days to build on each other. What I found right away though, was my CPC was way higher than what it was when I tested earlier. So much so, that I ended up shutting them off and swapping to Facebook, where my CPC was lower and I could maximize my budget better.

Blog tours – I will never say that blog tours are a waste of time, but I will say that with this series, I have never seen as little comeback from tours. I don't know if it's because book blogs are dying a death thanks to video book bloggers, or what. I also did two different types of blog tours. One was a basic one where everyone used the same information and posted it. Obviously, for someone who has been to every tour stop, it got a bit repetitive and I doubt it made people want to go from stop to stop. The other tour was more interactive and had different posts – interviews, excerpts, playlists, and lots of reviewers, thankfully. The reviews were awesome, so that was a good thing and for the bloggers who did read it and post their thoughts – they got more engagement and Secret Legacy got more eyes on it. So, for this one, I definitely have mixed feelings. It didn't pull in as many sales as I had hoped, but blogs also have a long-tail effect, so we'll see what happens as some of the other books launch.

Media Outreach with IBPA – Because I was list-aiming and trying to get the attention of the NYT – I figured media outreach would be important. I spent \$350 or so on a media outreach package with IBPA in the hopes that I could get some media interested in reading/reviewing/ or sharing the details of this book or series. In total, I got all of six contacts who requested books. I sent all six out and never heard a thing back – with the exception of one dude who didn't want a proof copy of the book and wants me to send the book once it's actually published. A bit ridiculous in my mind, since the point was to build buzz for the book BEFORE it launched. Not to mention the book he has is the EXACT copy of the book that published. The only difference is that I had to order proof copies since the book wasn't published at the time. So... this was a total bust, IMHO.

Publisher's Weekly Most Anticipated Books of Fall – While this was also a good idea and maybe holds some sort of long-tail effect, I can't tell if it was worth the \$400 I paid for it. I have as of yet to hear from anyone who caught the feature or from any media outlets who happened to see it. Overall, this budget would have been better spent on ads.

Apple Most Anticipated Titles of Fall – Luckily this one was a free feature, so there was nothing paid out on my part. I was just a great opportunity run through Draft2Digital. Unfortunately, I didn't see a big enough spike in sales to keep Secret Legacy wide once launch week was over. Instead, I've gone ahead and pulled it from other platforms and placed it in Kindle Unlimited to maximize my page reads instead.

Okay, so those were the aspects that didn't work so well. So what about what DID work? Obviously, there was a lot that did otherwise I wouldn't have sold thousands of copies and hit all of those bestseller rankings. Right?

Long preorder phase – First off, I will say that having a year to capture preorders for this first list-aim was crucial for me this time around. If I hadn't done that, I would be sitting here telling you that I don't think I hit either list. The preorders that came in definitely locked in a decent chunk of my sales and I'm definitely glad I had them ready to go. Thankfully, I didn't have any of the strange issues happen where preorders mysteriously vanished right before it went live or anything like that. It was all good. However, like I said earlier, next time I'll focus less on the pre-order phase and more on launch week ad spend.

Incremental increase to ad budgets – One of the keys to a good launch is growth momentum. All of the stores want to see a growth pattern in sales before they start to send traffic to you organically. In order to do this, I planned out my ad budget spends so they grew with each day. In fact, they pretty much doubled every day.

Incremental newsletters – Same thing goes for newsletters. I created segments for my newsletter based on their interaction with me. Then, I created my newsletter announcing the book was available. Every day a new segment got the email, starting with people who hadn't interacted much and ranging down to those who had participated in the last 30 days.

Every day, I went into Flodesk, my ESP, and resent the previous day's email to anyone who didn't open it the day before. This definitely helped with the growth pattern and helped to get in more sales toward the end of the week, when it's sometimes harder.

Promo sites – I think I mentioned before I had set up a number of promotions to go off during launch week. All in all, there were 65 different sites who were promoting *Secret Legacy* throughout the week. I tried to also plan those where they were placed in a growth pattern, but one of the things that's hard about that is not all promo sites are created equally – as I found out during the BookBub Featured Deal for *Pendomus* earlier this year. So when I got the BookBub Featured New Release and the ENT promo and they picked launch day, I knew I would have to pick up the ad spend the rest of the days to make up for the big guns coming out at the start. Overall, while I think it was successful to pick some of these sites, I don't know that it was as successful as relying on ads only. The dollars spent may have been better in ads, but since all marketing touchpoints were really important for me this time around, I still consider

this a success. Plus, it helped that I was able to plan well enough in advance to make all of that work out.

Newsletter swaps – Holy moly the swaps! Okay, so for a good part of this year, I was a newsletter swapping crazy person. We swapped with so many people to try to get *Secret Legacy* out there. I was aiming to have 100 newsletter swaps for launch week and we managed to get 54 with another 20 the week before and another 24 the week after (so, basically right now.) Not too shabby. These are obviously free, so the more the merrier – as long as I had room to swap, of course. Much of this year I was operating with 6 swaps per week. Yes, per week. Jenny hated me. HA! Now that we're done list-aiming, it goes down to 3 per week. Just like with blog tours, newsletter swaps can be nebulous. Not every author has a great audience or an engaged one. So, there are definitely better swaps out there. It was Jenny's job to locate the really good ones for me and any that she didn't find, I filled with Story Origin swaps – and let me tell you, there are some good finds in there, too.

Facebook Ads FTW – Okay, so I mentioned in the things that didn’t work out so well, that I had to pivot from Book Bub ads. Well, Facebook came to the rescue. I ended up having four ads running at much higher budgets than originally anticipated. One ad was my standard cold audience who liked Amazon. Another one was my retargeted pixel ad. Then there was one for BN and Apple users. The retargeted and Amazon user ad both had the highest budgets. Then BN and Apple were set at their own lower budgets.

Amazon Ads – I definitely used Amazon ads a lot. Both for the preorder phase and the launch week. The ones that worked best were specifically Sponsored Brand Ads & Video Brand Ads with the Advantage Dashboard. I run Amazon ads on both my KDP account and the Advantage dashboards, but for this launch, I upped the budgets for the brand ads because I knew they were the most eye catching. The video brand ad had my 45-second trailer connected to it and the sponsored brand ads just feature the series at the top of the search result pages. Both converted really well. I did have a lot of other normal sponsored product ads running too. But none of them were as effective as those brand ads.

Miscreant Reader Launch Party – Oh man, the launch party. I am so exhausted by the launch party! It was an all week fiasco of fun. Jenny and I worked really hard on interactive engagement posts, puzzles, countdown images, and so much more. I can’t even remember now all the different things we did to get people inside the group excited about the party and the book. Overall, though, I think it was a smashing success and people really had a lot of fun!

Book Trailer – This year, my husband had the idea of creating a live-action book trailer for Secret Legacy. Originally, we planned on having it done much earlier in the year. But thanks to the pandemic, everything was kind of thrown on hold until later this summer. While we did get the trailer recorded, the longer ones are yet to be finished. We currently have a 45-second trailer and a 60-second trailer. But the good news is, they have created some fun buzz for the book (and even some buzz for Colin’s awesome videography and book trailer skills.)

My only regret, and probably his, too, is that it wasn't put out there sooner. We literally launched it the week before Secret Legacy's launch and hardly had time to promote it – other than putting it on Goodreads, in comments on all of the blog tours, and of course, those Amazon ads. I also boosted the original post to the video when I first shared it on Facebook – which did really well.

So, with all of this in mind... what's next, you ask?

Secret Legacy was pulled from wide – As of Monday morning (9/21), I had delisted Secret Legacy from all of the additional sites using Draft2Digital. I also pulled it from Google Play/Google Books since they had to be done separately.

Price upped to \$2.99 - Once that was done, I upped the price of Secret Legacy on Amazon to \$2.99. Unfortunately, they have, as of yet, to up the price because something in their system is still flagging a price match to 99¢ at Barnes and Noble – even though it's no longer listed. So, hopefully that gets resolved soon.

Put in KU – Once that was done, I enrolled Secret Legacy into KDP Select so it could be part of the Kindle Unlimited program. That took effect and page reads were almost instantaneous. My hope is that it will be enough to help keep the rankings low on Secret Legacy without the astronomical ad spend.

Soul Legacy – Last but not least, next up is the full price launch of Soul Legacy on October 6th. We're just 13 days away (12 if you're listening to this on Wednesday Sept 23). As of right now, I don't have any promo sites or anything outside the ordinary scheduled for this launch. I plan on leaning on ad spend alone to get this book going. Of course, the ad budget will be nowhere near what it was for Secret Legacy, but hopefully it will be enough to continue the snowball. That's the plan, at least. ;)

Haunted Legacy and Cursed Legacy – Last but not least, the final two books will also be full priced launches. Haunted Legacy comes out November 3rd and Cursed Legacy comes out Dec 1st.

As I get closer to Cursed Legacy, I'll kick off another big promo for Secret Legacy – I'm not sure yet if I'll do a Kindle Countdown Deal or if I'll have it go for free the week before launch. We'll see what happens as we get a little closer.

Alright, so there you have my break down of how things went for Secret Legacy – without obviously knowing if I hit the list or not. Next week, I'll fill you in and let you know the results. So, stay tuned.

Also, this coming week, there are some changes going on with Author Revolution that I also want to share. For the past year, I've been on the waiting list for Amy Porterfield's Digital Course Academy and, of course, during launch week of Secret Legacy is when the course finally opened up. Go figure. HA! While I'm technically starting this week, it's making me rethink some of the aspects of my Rapid Release Roadmap flagship course. Namely, its name.

Over the summer, I put course creation on hold so I could focus on the Windhaven Witches series. Things were getting a bit too hectic and to be honest, there were aspects I wanted to make sure I was clear on. The time away, mixed with the start of DCA, has provided me some invaluable insight into something that was bugging me about the course and its name. As fast as I am, as much as I love rapid releasing, I uncovered that the name itself does one of two things: First, either people have no idea what rapid releasing means, so the name of the course means nothing to them. Or second, rapid releasing strikes fear into their hearts and just the thought of rapid releasing is enough to not want to get the course.

Well, as you can imagine, neither of those are a good mix. Right? That's why I'm in the process of reframing/rebranding the course – but following the DCA method. Let me just say, I have worked with mentors on my books and the one thing I want to do that's different, is give truly actionable advice that feels personal. Amy Porterfield's style and teaching model is the way I want to teach my students as well.



Right now, I have a new name in mind, but I'm split testing it to see which one resonates the most. Once I land on the official new version – you will be the next to know.

Okay, so with all of this in mind, let's take this discussion online. Hop over to the Author Revolution Facebook Group and let's talk about list-aiming and the idea of rapid releasing a series. Do you think it's something you'd like to try? Or are you thinking HELL NO, Carissa. There's no way I'm going there! HA! What do you think of the name – rapid releasing? Or would you be more prone to look for something that helps you learn how to create a profitable series?

As always, you can download the show notes by heading to authorrevolution.org/47.

Alright my writerly friend, until next time... Go forth and start your author revolution.



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