

## EPISODE 49

*The 20 Hats of Indie Authors*

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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.

Most people new to indie authorship are vastly under-informed on the expansive roles encompassed in the seemingly mundane job title. Self-published, indie... whatever you call it, it's being an author by your own rules. Right? Most of us start out with the simple concept: "I wanna write a book!" and believe it's as easy as that. I sure did! Oh, how wrong we are, my friends. Even knowing my own journey, time and time again, I'm surprised by the jaw drops of those who had no clue how far down the rabbit hole one can truly meander when building a long-game strategy for an indie author career. In some ways, it's an exciting and fun challenge. At other times, it can feel daunting and overwhelming. When this is the case, it's important to come back to this episode and remind yourself about all of the different hats you're forced to wear. We will obviously be better at some more than others and we need to embrace that concept so we can become the best author version of ourselves.

Okay, so with this in mind, if you're thinking about engaging in the wonderful world of self-publishing, as I'm sure you are, or you wouldn't be listening to this podcast, you don't want to go in blind. I mean, you could, but then you'll likely sink into the depths of despair.

Or worse — quit. And we don't want you to quit. We want you to be wildly successful. Right?

So, let's go in with eyes wide open.

Get a big space in your closet cleared out because you're about to fill it with a minimum of 20 hats. Don't believe me? Oh ye of little faith. Let's go over them so you can see for yourself. Then, I want you to try them all on to see how they suit you. You'll learn pretty quickly which ones work best on your head and which ones need to be... sold on, so to speak. Maybe they fit better on your PA's head? Either way, it's still good to at least know for sure. Deal?

#### HAT #1 - WRITER

Ah yes, the origin story begins here. You've made the decision to write the novel burning in your soul. Or perhaps you've decided to craft the perfect nonfiction title you've had your heart set on delivering to the world. Whatever your journey — it all starts with the simple decision to put words on the page. However, this is not the end of the story. Most of the time, as we set off on this voyage, we know very little about story development, writing a novel, being an author, or how to set up and structure our nonfiction titles. But deep down somewhere, we know we were chosen to write. So, we accept the burden and begin.

#### HAT #2 - GRAMMAR NAZI

If only writing the perfect story was the beginning and end of it all. Alas, indie authors are competing with traditionally published authors and big money publishing houses. We can't afford to let grammar and typos trip us up. Yes, they happen to the best of us. Yes, we can be a work in progress — but we must learn the ways of the grammar nazi and hone our craft. This includes proper sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, etc. Not only does this make the job of your editors so much easier, but it will increase the speed of which you can deliver new works to your readers. A win — win!

### HAT #3 - EDITING AUTHORITY

No, editing isn't the same as being a grammar nazi. While the two can and do, often go hand-in-hand, they are different animals entirely. As indie authors, we need to master our wordcrafting. Wordsmithing? Eh, we need to get better at writing, dammit. This means shooting past the weeds of grammar and into the high realms of passive voice, tense, perspective, theme, continuity, overall arc, etc. Some of these things can be incorporated in the writing process, but when you're first starting out, they will most often be applied in the editing phase — and for sure perfected in the editing phase, regardless of your skill level.

### HAT #4 - LAYOUT GURU

So, you have finished your book, you say? You're winding down and it's almost complete. In fact, you're almost ready to move on to the next one. You're adorable. You're now entering the realm of headless chickendom. Before you can run, you have to learn how to walk. Before you can walk, you learn how to crawl — yada, yada. My friend and compatriot, you must learn how to master your words in the beauty of what's called your layout. It doesn't matter if it's for ebook only, print, or both. You'll need to understand how to get your words to flow within the context of the platforms you'll be publishing in. Do yourself a favor. Get Scrivener (or if you have a Mac, Vellum). Both can handle the layout for you, but in my humble opinion, Vellum does this graphic designer's heart better justice in much quicker time. Scrivener, on the other hand, is the master at the organization of your writing — so get them both. Plus, if you want to write from your phone, Scrivener has a cloud-linked app to make your 21st-century mind happy.

### HAT #5 - COVER DESIGN HEADHUNTER

Covers sell. Period. At some point, people are gonna want to see a cover for your lovely new literary masterpiece, and you're gonna want to give it to them. Even if you have no artistic or graphic design-y bone in your body, you'll still need to know who has the "stuff" you're looking for in the genre you want to compete in.



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Don't do it yourself unless you have the chops: i.e., know how to incorporate spectacular typography, great layout, striking colors, great stock photos, the difference between ebook and print design, etc. Step into Facebook groups explicitly designed for cover creation, genre-specific pre-mades, cover auctions, or hook yourself up with a Reedsy account and headhunt one who will do your book justice. I found my Diana Hawthorne cover designer through a recommendation from Jenny, my incredible PA.

#### HAT #6 - BLURB BUFF

Oh, the mighty book blurb – how we indies love to hate thee. As you get ready to push your new title out in the world, you'll need to understand its concept well enough to see it in a brief set of sentences. While many mistake this for a straight up summary, a book blurb is so much more. It's the gateway between enticing a reader to buy – and putting them to sleep. You need to understand the elements of hooking them from the first word and getting them to race to the "buy now" button as fast as they can. This is easier said than done, my friends. It takes practice. It takes trial and error. It even takes evolution, as the blurb that worked last year might not be working this year. There are companies out there who can write them for you, which may be wise for some. For those who wish to gain the knowledge, this is a skill that will pay for itself tenfold. I highly encourage you to check out Bryan Cohen's company Best Page Forward or his book How to Write a Sizzling Synopsis.

#### HAT #7 - SOCIAL MEDIA SAGE

If you haven't started your author platform before now, you'll want to get started ASAP. Ideally, before your book is even finished, if you can help it. The more time you have to develop a base of fans waiting for your book, the better. As time goes on, you need to learn how to master social media (and all of its quirks) to your advantage. Find the sites that work best for your audience, for you as an author, and most importantly, won't detract from your writing. I personally, am on most social sites, but Facebook is currently my go-to. I'm old, what can I say?



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However, in the coming months, I can see myself transitioning more to Instagram or even TikTok. We shall see... The main thing is you pick one you can live with and run.

#### HAT #8 - WEBSITE WHISPERER

Speaking of author platform, you better damn well have an author website, too. It's your "home" out in the interwebs. It's the first place readers are going to look when they hear your name or book title. You don't want to disappoint your readers now, do you? However, this means learning the ins and outs of your website — how to make changes (add new books, new covers, new whatevers), how to add blogs (yes, you still need those at times), how to attract newsletter subscribers (popup integrations), etc. Wordpress is my go-to website builder, and it is for most authors I know, too. But if you've never worked in the backend of a website before, it might take a little getting used to. But you got this. Trust me, it's not as crazy as it sounds. Plus, do you really want to be calling up your brother's best friend's coworker every time you need to make a change to your website?

#### HAT #9 - DISTRIBUTION VIRTUOSO

The big day has arrived. Your book is ready to sail away from the virtual world of your hard drive to the ether that is the ebook and print-on-demand markets. But...where do you publish? How do you get it out where people can see/find/buy it? You have to know your distribution channels and options, my sweet. And this can be trickier than it sounds, so bear with me. Are you looking to just post an ebook on Amazon and be done? Are you looking to go wide (distribute on all major bookseller sites)? Are you wanting to do print copies? Series pages? Audiobooks? All of these questions lead to different answers, and you'll have to research them all to know which options are right for you. For example, publishing exclusively with Amazon (KDP Select) can be great for exposure, page reads with Kindle Unlimited, promotions, but it limits you in how you do reader magnets, make bestseller lists, or be seen on other sites. However, being wide can be super tricky to crack if you're a newbie indie with limited means. Just a note from personal experience, here.

#### HAT #10 KEYWORD WIZARD

The deeper you go down the rabbit hole, you'll run into requirements you seriously need to understand. Keywords are one of them. While this does have a role in wide distribution, it's especially crucial in the backend of Amazon's search algorithms. You'll want to get hooked up with PublisherRocket (previously KDPRocket) or another program that's known to help filter keywords that have potential. Why is this important? Because it gives you organic, free, discoverable exposure. It works not only with distribution channels, but with blog posts, website content, ad creation, and more.

#### HAT #11 - CATEGORY & COMPETITION CRITIC

Do you know who your competition is? What are they doing well? How do you compare? Then, what genre category should your book be in? Subgenre? How can you best leverage these to boost your book(s) in the ranks? All of these questions are part of embracing indie authorship. You'll need to dive deep and obtain as much information as possible because this is how you find your readers. You can do this by comparing and contrasting and putting it all in a spreadsheet manually, or you can again, use PublisherRocket to obtain a good chunk of this information. You could also rely on reports by K-lytics to give you some clear insights on not only where to place your current book, to writing trends to keep your eyes on.

#### HAT #12 - COPYWRITER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Writing a novel and understanding copywriting are two completely different things. One is likely a creative endeavor, the other is writing to sell. You need to master both to do well as an indie. The good news is, if you can write a novel – you can learn to be a copywriter, too. So, where does this come in handy? Pretty much anywhere you want to sell your book: in person, social media, promo images, book blurbs, sales pages, landing pages, your website, blogs... you name it. It is the art of persuasion, hopefully without being an ass about it. If you can, look into courses that teach copywriting and how to do it effectively for books. Again, Bryan Cohen is pretty stellar at teaching this.



#### HAT #13 - MARKETING MASTER

Which leads us into marketing. Many of these things go into the tasks of marketing, but each needed their own hat. This hat is big. It's the master of hats (besides writer), and it is the one that keeps the engine of sales running. If you skip this hat or think you don't need it, your sales will be great on day one and fall off a cliff of no-where'sville by the end of month. Being the Marketing Master means having a plan. Knowing your promotion schedule, your editorial calendar (blogs and newsletters), social media calendar, new releases calendar, and how to revive your back catalog (when you have one). It's the eagle's eye view of your entire marketing deployment and all of its moving pieces.

#### HAT #14 - ADS GENIUS

Ads – a curse and a blessing. With the advent of digital marketing, we are now closer than we've ever been to attracting the right readers, right where they are. However, it means learning the ins and outs of copywriting (as previously mentioned), as well as the ad platforms you wish to use. As authors, we have a menagerie of options: Amazon Ads, Google Ads, BookBub Ads, Facebook/Instagram Ads, Goodreads Ads, Twitter Ads, etc. The list could technically continue on, but you get the point. Each one of these platforms offers their benefits, and each one has a learning curve all its own. You'll need to learn, test, and implement often so you can figure out the right combination that works best for you and your books. It will not come easy and likely won't click the first time around. So, don't get discouraged. Just know you're in good company and keep testing.

#### HAT #15 - PROMO PRO

The best way to get new eyes on your book as it ages is through various promotional opportunities. This could be using a KDP Select Kindle Countdown deal, Freebie days, or simply reducing the price of your book for a while. Then, you have to get the word out about the promotion by leaning on promotion sites like BookBub, ENT, Fussy Librarian, etc. as well as newsletter swaps with other authors, group giveaways, and more. Combining them with your paid ads will boost visibility and get your books noticed amongst readers – yay!

#### HAT #16 - NEWSLETTER SENSATION

You don't have a newsletter, you say? Well, hope thee over to Flodesk, MailerLite, or MailChimp right now. I'll wait. Seriously, though, you want to get your newsletter set up yesterday. It's that important. Building your list of avid readers / fans is your direct link to the PtB (Powers that Be). Why would you NOT want to get this thing going? Stop worrying about "what would I even say?" and just start where you're at. Tell them about your new dogs. Explain where you're at in the editing process. Be silly. Be fun. Be you. That's what readers want. They want to get to know you. Selling your books comes secondary – but it does come. You want to maintain a frequent, consistent presence, so you don't drop off their radar and wonder where the heck you came from. If you're only ever emailing your list to let them know you have a new book or promotion, you're doing it wrong.

#### HAT #17 - AUDIOBOOK GOD/DESS

Sorry folks, but audiobooks are a growing market, and they are in DEMAND! If you're an indie author who isn't thinking about how to get your books in audio, you need to get it on your radar. You can hire people to narrate and produce your books, sure. But you're a badass indie, aren't you? This is just another self-publishing realm you can tap into and make good money while you're at it. Utilizing ACX, Smashwords, or Findaway Voices isn't as difficult as you might think. You can successfully record, master, and produce your own audiobooks with the same quality as professionals if you do a little research. In 2018, I released all of my major books in audio by doing it all myself, from start to finish. I say it can be done because I've been there and live to tell about it.

#### HAT #18 - ROCKSTAR AUTHOR

Once your lovelies are out in the world – be prepared to be beloved. Sounds weird, because most of us don't get into the business to have "fans." We do it for the story. However, within your readers, your story lives on. It grows and evolves, and you want to maintain as close of an interaction with your readers as possible. These engagements happen in person at author signings, book fairs, or readers groups. Or online via email, social media, or even your sales sites. Either way, you need to embrace it and run with it. Be kind, courteous, and above all, the rockstar author they already assume you are.





#### HAT #19 - AUTHORPRENEUR

It might seem a tad obvious at this point, but as an indie, you're not just a "writer." You're an authorpreneur who is running a business in the world of digital publishing. All of these hats – all of the effort, lessons, blood, sweat, and tears is preparing you to be the badasest (Hey, it's a word! Okay, a made-up word, but we can do that here.) authorpreneur out there. That means, you treat it like a business. Set up your S Corp or LLC. Get your taxes in order. Nail down your income and expenses. Sign up for QuickBooks. Hire a PA when it's necessary and feasible. They are a GODSEND and can take on many of the lesser hats we've discussed. Conduct your business to be a business, and you'll be able to scale it up to meet all of your wildest dreams.

#### HAT #20 - PERPETUAL STUDENT OF THE CRAFT

Never ever, ever stop learning your craft. The second you do, your competition will surpass you. Yes, no joke, even I am in constant learning mode. Anyone who tells you they have mastered all there is to learn to be successful at this indie author business is blowing smoke. If you've chosen to be an author – and a badass indie one at that – you've chosen a lifelong career in apprenticeship. Embrace it. Even if all you wanted to do was become the most prolific writer who ever lived, you could submerge in the world of exploring the craft of writing and still never learn it all. But indies don't have the luxury to pick only one topic – at least not most of us. Instead, we have to keep our eyes on the prize (entertaining and gaining loyal readers), our hand on the industry pulse (trends), all while keeping our brains tuned into the new waves of technology that makes our lives easier (and often, more complicated). This means deep diving into all manner of topics we didn't expect to: digital marketing automations...for example. Whatever it is, you name it.

Taking on the monumental task of indie authorship is no joke. It's not for the faint of heart, or those looking to make a quick buck (although the rare few have done so). These days, being self-published means just as much dedication, if not more so, than our traditional counterparts. We're badasses not simply because we write.



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We're badassess because we can and will run circles around most authors in this business. We know the ins and outs; the sideways and the cross-eyed. Hell, if you think this list was a lot of hats, let me just say there's more and you'll learn them intimately as you grow in indie authorship. I could have mentioned Beta-Reader Wrangler, Swag Vendor, and even Writer's Group Groupie. But let's just leave it at 20 for now, just in case you're new to this gig. There's still plenty of time to learn about the other hats. ;)

Now, I don't tell you these things to overwhelm you even more. It's to set a clear foundation for authors looking to up their game. Because, believe it or not, we exist out there. We take a look at those hats and laugh in the face of adversity. Okay, so we might cry into a cup of coffee from time to time, too, but for the most part, we laugh. We're crazy like that.

By having these clear expectations, you can move forward more quickly with confidence. Starting next week, October 12th, I'm officially launching the Rapid Release Roadmap Founding Members group. There are only 30 slots available, seven of which are taken and five more who are considering joining. They have their offer links and I'll be reaching out again to them later this week. So, that's almost half of the spots and it's a first come, first served basis.

For those of you who didn't hear the idea last week, this founding members group will be a hands-on learning experience inside the Facebook group. We're going to be going through each module together to discuss any potential hang-ups or issues that arise as the course is being created. As of right now, many of the lessons are written, but videos need to be recorded and PDF downloads made. But the framework is here and it's ready to help you if you've ever wanted to learn how to juggle all the aspects of rapid releasing a series of books over a year. I'm teaching you how to start with four books and you can level it up from there.

This course will be launching officially to the public in January 2021, so this Founding Member group will be getting in at the ground level as it's created and for their help and participation, I'm discounting the course from \$997 to \$147.



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If you've been imagining your future as a full-time writer, wondering how you'll get there, this is the way. I encourage you to email me today at [carissa@authorrevolution.org](mailto:carissa@authorrevolution.org) and let me know you're interested. I'll shoot you an email with the special offer and away we go. Like I said, the Founding Member Group participation starts October 12th and it's going to be amazing.

We discussed a lot in this episode, so, as always, if you'd like links to anything we discussed or a download of the transcript, head over to [authorrevolution.org/49](http://authorrevolution.org/49). You can also pop into the free Author Revolution Online Community Facebook group to talk about the Founding Members offer. I'd be more than happy to give you the answers to anything you're looking for.

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



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