EPISODE 65

Using Plottr to Plan Your 2021 Rapid Release Series

Thanks so much for joining me today!

Things are finally settling down with my Author Revolution courses. As you already know, the doors closed on Rapid Release Roadmap last week, and thank goodness... There's a lot of moving parts to a live-launch, my friend. I'm so glad I have some breathing room again. Right now I'm settling into a routine with my students, and I'm finally in a place where I can start turning back towards my own creative writing schedule. For those of you who've listened to this podcast for a while, you already know that I put my own writing on hold for a bit so I could focus on the content I wanted to bring to you and the students joining Rapid Release Roadmap. Because I'm turning back toward what I'm teaching my students, I'm inadvertently reminding myself of the way I want to come at my own publishing schedule. Because, obviously, I teach what I actually do myself.

So, this week, we're talking about planning our year and I'm taking a critical look at my timelines and coming up with a revised editorial calendar based on the information I know as of right now. One of the things I've been playing with is Plottr for this. Now, for those of you who don't already know, Plottr is a tool that helps authors plan out their books and even their whole series of books in a way that is more dynamic than just about anything I've seen on the market so far. At least, without getting into the realm of higher-priced products like Causality. But that's because Causality, for instance, is mostly for movies and tv shows.

What I like about Plottr is the ability to manipulate the information in a drag and drop way and then to dive in deeper by adding notes, tags, and even characters. It's nice when plotting novels, but it can also work extremely well as a visual Gantt chart for those of us who want to see how our timelines will play out across the year. I've been looking for a quick and easy way to do this, but many Gantt charts are expensive because they come with a much larger software package.

So, what do I mean by a Gantt chart? For those who don't know, a Gantt chart is a sort of bar chart that illustrates a project's schedule over a period of time.

When I'm planning a launch date, for instance, I like to sit down and map out the entire process for all of my books from start to finish. This gives me a very visual idea of how my months will lay out over the year. I can see where things overlap and where I might need a little additional space – like in, say, December. Because who wants to be on a tight deadline in December? When all of that's said and done, then I can decide on a reasonable release date for each book so I'm comfortable in putting the preorder links up.

In the past I've tried various project management tools to see if they can help eliminate some of the headache for myself and my students. But what I've found is that tools like Asana seem to be more than most indie authors can handle (not that you can't pull it back a bit and only function with what works), but when people get overwhelmed, they stop using it anyway. So, in an effort to cut down on that, I wanted to incorporate utilizing a program they might already own, even though it's used for something completely different – but that still allows them to only track the stuff that really matters. Thus I decided to play around with Plottr.

If you've ever used Plottr, you know that you edit the top and side components.

I like to use the horizontal view, so I can view it like a forward and back timeline. On the top row, I label those with the months of the year. Then, when adding a timeline, I write out the book name, then add the next one beneath it, and so on, until all of the projects are in there with a horizontal line going across the screen for each. I know this is super weird to describe when you can't see what I'm talking about, but those with Plottr, will get it. I can post a pic in the show notes so you can see what I mean, as well.

Then, I start adding in the phases I want to keep track of. We don't need to go wild when creating an editorial calendar. In fact, I've found a lot of the details become second nature and tracking them down to a day isn't really necessary. However, there are some big pillars that should be mapped out and planned so you know whether or not you're staying on track.

With that in mind, these are the things I like to add to my rapid release editorial plan inside of Plottr:

Name of Book/Series – I even use the color-coding to make sure I know which books or projects go together. Because I have my Rapid Release Roadmap course launches to think about, I've even added a timeline for them so I know when I'm going to be focusing on my Author Revolution community, and… of course, so I don't get overwhelmed and stressed out trying to do too much. Because we know that's been a common trend in my world. Right?

Create a PLAN section. Because of the way we're using Plottr here, it's not super granular. It's literally showing you a snapshot for the month. So, I add in a full box for the PLANNING phase but go into the notes to add more details. What day do I start planning/plotting? When does that phase end? What do I expect to do for the planning – is it just this one book? Or am I going to map out the whole series, for example?

Create a WRITE section (or two) – Next, I add two boxes for my writing phase. Because I teach writing in a 6-week sprint, it will basically go across the whole two months, with 2 weeks of leeway, in case you need more time. When the boxes are added, I go more granular in the notes for each month by labeling out my weeks, starting Sunday to Saturday. I'll literally write, February 1 – 6th, for example. Then continue on until the whole month of February is mapped out. That way, I know what date will I start writing. I also know what day I plan to finish the first draft. I already know my goal is 10K per week, so if I write 2K in a day, that leaves 2 days a week free of writing, which is perfect for me. Plus, if I run into a day that's more of a struggle and the words don't come easy, I have a buffer to play with.

Editor Due Date – Even though I clump editing into the WRITE phase when teaching, I break it out on my diagram, so I know when I plan to either self-edit, or the month my editor will have the book and I'm waiting. This allows me to plan out the next phases. Which include…

Layout Design – Once the edits come back, I go into post-production mode. The first thing I know I need to do is the layout for the books. Because I have Vellum, I can do this basically as soon as edits are back and I've implemented the changes. If you hire this part out, you'll want to make note of when the final edits are going to go to the layout person. I typically won't add this date to my list, since I do it myself, but I've added it here, for those of you who might be hiring it out. Another reason why layout is so important though, has to do with the next item on the agenda…

ARC Copies – If you have a street team or ARC team, you'll want to make sure your story is ready to go to them as soon as possible. The more time they have to read the book and ready themselves with a review, the better. So, I add a section called PUBLISH to each book and it includes the layout design deadline and ARC delivery so I can keep track of it.

Keep in mind, this might cross over into the realm of promotion, too, because many Blog Tours will want ARC copies of your books.

Date you plan to publish – Inside the PUBLISH section, I also put the date I plan to publish the book. You can't really plan anything concrete around it until you have that date, so it's important when going through this whole process, to come up with your drop date. And finally...

Any promotion dates for the year – If I plan on doing a blog tour, a BookBub deal, a Kindle Countdown, or any other kind of promotion, I add those to my calendar. It's hard to do inside of Plottr, however, because sometimes they all crisscross. Instead, I'll usually add those to my desk calendar or create a new timeline on the bottom that is PROMOTION only. Then, I drop a PROMOTE box in and list what items are all on sale or going through something special. I do this in one place because sometimes, I have multiple promotions going on in a given month and they sometimes don't even go with one of the books I'm currently writing. I just want to know what they are and how they'll affect my time during that given month.

So, with all of this firmly mapped out – remember, I'm still in the early planning phase for the year. This means there are a few items I'd typically get taken care of right away, but they aren't listed on the plan itself. For instance, I'd either contact my designer for a cover, or if I was doing the cover, I'd add it to my to-do list to get done ASAP. You'll need that before a preorder link can go up. I would also hire out or start writing my book descriptions or descriptions so they're ready as soon as the sales pages go up. And before I get questions on this, yes, I believe it's still good to craft a book blurb even before the story is written. It can help you identify some really cool plot twists or hype that can be muddled once you're knee deep in your story. It's a lot easier, at least in my opinion, to craft a compelling blurb, when you're not trying to overcomplicate it based on everything you know about the book. Does that make sense?

Like I said, Plottr is working really well for me so far, both in plotting my novels and my year's release schedule. It's a simplified editorial calendar I think many authors can live with. If you've ever struggled with keeping your releases or plots organized, I think you'll find it useful for you, too. They have a ton of templates in there to base your story off of, as well. If you don't have this program, they're offering my listeners a free 30-day trial, or you can get it for just $25/year, and it even comes with a companion app. I will say that they've also offered up lifetime deals from time to time, too. Which is something I snagged up, just saying. If you're interested in checking them out and poking around the program, head over to authorrevolution.org/plottr

Well, guys, hopefully that was helpful. I know it's gotten me charged and fired up to get moving on Amends. Shhh... don't tell Jenny that, though. She's been harping on me to get my butt moving. HA!

As always, if you'd like to download the transcript from this episode, head over to today's show notes at authorrevolution.org/65. Like I said, I'll also include a screenshot of what the plan looks like so you can get a feel for it.

All right, my writerly friend... that's it for today. Time to make some magic happen and get some writing done.

And it's time for you to go forth and start your author revolution.