Shelley Adina

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple Books, Kobo, and Google Play all run on algorithms, but each of them is different. Each provides tools to authors to help them become more visible to the right readers. But how is an author or small press to know what works best where? And should you publish on one platform, or "go wide" by publishing on many? Bestselling author and instructor Shelley Adina takes us through each retailer, pointing out which tools are best. She also talks about selling direct on your website. What is metadata and why it is essential to your publishing success?

Introduction:

Shelley's contact information is: www.shelleyadina.com, www.moonshellbooks.com, & moonshellbooks@outlook.com. Her talk was given in three parts. Part 1 was about deciding whether to sell to a specific sales retailer or to "go wide." Part 2 showed how to make metadata work for all the retailers. Part 3 described ways to capture and keep readers.

1. Going Wide or Not?

Many authors are simply going with Amazon KDP and the Kindle Unlimited program in an exclusive relationship. Some are very successful this way, especially if they can connect with "whale readers."

Alternatively, "going wide" is a viable option. In either case it is important to make your metadata work for you. Each of the retailers have a dominant reader type which is important to understand. Barnes & Noble has older buyers, Apple and Google Play have a little younger and tech-savvy audience, and Kobo addresses the international market.

Kindle Unlimited is better if you have little time. You are paid on pages read (about $.0041/page). It's easy to manage and you might be eligible for author bonuses for high sales. It's also easier to update your book.

"Going wide" means your books are everywhere and you are paid by the copy, but it takes more time. The metadata needs to go to each retailer and the requirements vary. Using a cheat sheet helps on the submittals, but new releases require resubmittals. You can receive a full 70% royalty this way. You can also sell merchandise this way.

Draft2Digital is another option, Benefits: login once, access to all retailers (with royalty splitting, 10% to D2D), and access to more libraries. You can also avoid accounting this way.

What is Metadata and How to Make it Work

Metadata is the little things you enter in a book's upload form: title, cover, subtitle, series name, book description, categories, keywords, pricing, reviews. No matter who sells it, metadata matters. Your goal should be to appear on page one of search results.

The <u>cover</u> needs to appeal to the reader. In should include genre markers (for example a rocket ship for SciFi) so a potential reader knows they have hit pay dirt. The cover could also include tropes that signal what the book will be about.

In the <u>book description</u>, focus on the "above the fold" first words. On search engines there will be a "read more" button, so you have to make the first few lines very attractive so they will click to read more.
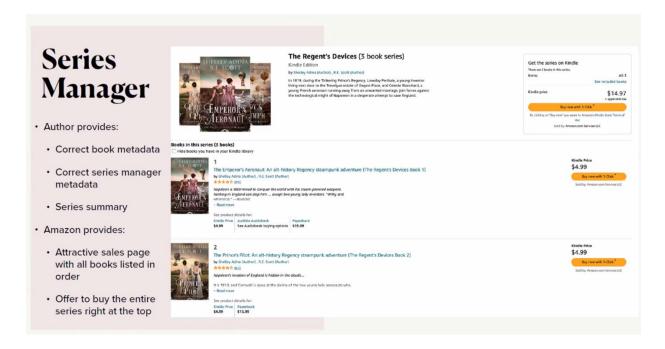
Next, make the <u>back cover</u> copy also appealing. On Amazon they may then click "look inside," which hopefully will clinch the deal for a purchase. Then the algorithms go ding, your rank goes up, and the book is presented more often.

Pen names can be useful if you write in multiple genres. In searches for your name, all the books will appear (all the genres) which can confuse the searcher. Shelley Adina uses different pen names for each genre. For example, Adina Senft for Amish romance and Charlotte Henry for regency romance. This also keeps the "also bought" (the ribbon of book pictures at the bottom of the page) pure for the genre.

2. Metadata tools for each retailer:

<u>Amazon</u>: Promo tools are best on Amazon.

<u>Series Manager</u> (kdp.amazon.com>Your Books>Manage Series) can be helpful if you write a series. Insert the names carefully and consistently. Even an extra space will throw the book out of the series. Box sets can become their own series. Large print becomes its own series. Produce regularly in a series—the algorithms will notice. Amazon also has a related content option where you can highlight box sets, large print versions, prequel novellas or in-between books.

An example below for some of Shelley's books.

A+ Content (kdp.amazon.com>marketing>A+ content). This goes in the Publisher section. Put your own marketing content in this section (if you don't, Amazon might advertise something else), and it will show up in your book on the publisher page. Make this marketing info mesh with your genre series, your website, etc. A typical structure is: review words on top, series covers, and the promise on the books at the bottom. Here are two of hers:

You could also add a timeline or a more informative bio.

Amazon Categories: When you upload you book to Amazon you are limited to two categories, but you can request eight more. To get more categories start here: kdp.amazon.com/en_US/contact. There is lots of info online to tell you how to choose the best categories for your book. Just one example is the creative pen.

Author Page (authorcentral.amazon.com) Claim all your books! Add a headshot. The follow button sends a new-release notice. Include your short bio. All your title covers should appear.

Amazon Affiliate (affiliate-program.amazon.com) When advertising, it sends readers to your website to capture affiliate money. You could get a gift card each month. You have to qualify for this program with certain rules.

Apple
You can only upload to Apple via iTunes Producer or authors.apple.com. Apple claims these advantages over KDP: 70% royalties on all books, no file delivery fee, no payments for preferential placement, no price matching, and no third-party sales. Be careful what you put in the "what's changed" field. It takes keywords in your book description into account. To get a promo on Apple Books, you have to contact a rep, who are often at conferences taking appointments. There are 250 promo codes available via iTunes Connect.

Apple provides marketing tools for you at https://tools.applemediaservices.com/apple-books which will get your book on social media sites automatically. You can't change the look of their sales page, however.
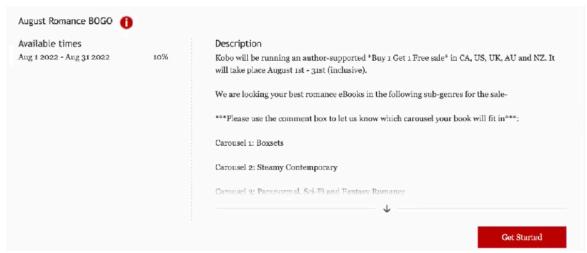
Google Play (https://play.google.com/books/publish/)
Google claims these advantages: over 3 billion android users in 75 countries and a 70% revenue split. They also have several promotion/sales channels, like Google Play Books and Promo Code Campaigns. Keywords are key. Bots think repeated keywords mean something important if they show up in the title subtitle, tagline, or book description. You can also say things like, "If you like Author X, you'll love this book." This isn't allowed on other retailers.

Related Products. They want to make it easy to connect to audiobooks, large format books, or translated versions. Set the price at full price, and later you can show a lower price or free.

Kobo (https://www.kobo.com/us/en/p/writinglife)
They offer access to global markets and a simple process for access. They are also a good conduit to libraries. They have promo tabs that can be requested. Affiliate codes are also available but confusing. Their royalties are higher than through Draft2Digital. Apply for every promo you are eligible for because they really work. Here is what one opportunity might look like:

Barnes & Noble (https://press.barnesandnoble.com)
Legend has it that you produce the books at B&N press it will appear in all the stores—that is not true.

They do offer promo tabs, but you must request one and you must have several books in the Nook Press for this. Promo tabs give you access to the Friday Freebie newsletter which goes out to thousands.

Selling Direct from your Website.
There is growing resistance to the retailer channels in general. It is great to have worldwide accessibility, but there are constant algorithm changes, preorder cancellations, expensive ads, and a lack of control of your business. Using you own website means you are not competing with hundreds of other people's products.

Some barriers to direct sales include: taxes, cost, piracy, ease of use for the buyer. But it is getting easier. There are also companies that will help your sales like: Shopify, Payhip, WooCommerce. They take a cut, but it is more like 10%. You can use Lulu to print an order and deliver it on demand. Book funnel and other providers send an e-book to a reader with customer service, not the author.

Some examples: One author deleted her entire website and moved the domain name to Shopify (http://www.samanthaprice.com). Another maintains a website, but the books are on their own tab (https://marieforce.com).

Some resources: Joanna Penn interview of Katie Cross called Selling Books Direct at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWFSvn7Ld74. Or Stop Making Other Rich: How Authors Can Make Bank by selling Direct, at morganabest.com.

3. **How to Capture and Keep Your Readers**

Do It Yourself/Free Approach:
Social Media—use whatever platform is comfortable for you AND where your demographic is active: Facebook (age 50–70), Instagram, or TikTok (18–35), Twitter (both), Discord, Substack, and Mastodon are growing. Know where you readers are: build personal connections and participate in genre-specific groups.

She recommends having an author newsletter. Unlike Amazon or Facebook, on a newsletter you know who your subscribers are. They can't be taken away (but back up your list). You can also use paid group promotions like BookSweeps to gain subscribers. Newsletter swaps with authors in you genre may be good.

Paid Advertising:
In the golden age of Facebook, ads could make an author a bestseller. Now, not so much. It is getting expensive fast and is not well targeted. It takes constant vigilance. It still is a tool for indie publishers. You create how they look and where they go.

Amazon Marketing Services (AMS) They are still complex but it's getting easier.

Other paid advertisers: BookBub, E-Reader News Today, Bargain Booksy, Freebooksy, Fussy Librarian, Faithful Reads, and many more. You can do entire campaigns via these newsletters. They are getting more expensive, but they work.

Group Projects: Muti-author box sets can help make you more known. Split royalties in a muti-author series. An example: shared worlds are popular in fantasy.

Questions & Answers:

Q1: In multi-genre situations using different pennames, do you use different photos?
A1: I use the same photo, it probably doesn't matter.

Q2: One person clicked the "exclusivity" box on Amazon, what does that do?
A2: It mean you can't sell the e-book anywhere else. You can sell print books through other retailers.

Q3: Can you compare your sales through the different channels?
A3: Amazon is about 62%, but I wish it were 50%.

Q4: Does the A+ content apply to a series?
A4: Yes. But it can be used for single books.

Q5: If you sell your book on your website, does Amazon drop you?
A5: How would they know? They don't really care about that.

Q6: You spend about $600 per month on Amazon advertising, right?
A6: I hire somebody to help on this. For each $18 spent he makes $82. Or find a friend to knows how to do that. You need several books in inventory to do this effectively.

Q7: How do you buy your books for direct sales?
A7: On Amazon you can buy author copies at a good discount.

Q8: How do you write four books per year?
A8: I am a one-draft writer and write about 1000 to 1800 words a day.

Q9: How do you find a title that catches a reader?
A9: Look at your theme and what your characters' emotions are doing and find something clever and new.

Q10. Do you have someone uploading to all these platforms?
A10: I do it all myself. I have a daily schedule to get to all areas, 7 days a week.

Q11: How are you reaching the Amish audience?
A11: I don't—they just scoff. These books are for women between 50–75 in Midwest non-urban areas.

Q12: Do you ever try to sell direct to bookstores?
A12: Not often, I work mostly through Ingram.