

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 71

How to Sell Your Books in Stores...Even if You're Self-Published

With Amy Collins

Welcome to this edition of the Real Fast Results podcast! Many of the listeners of this podcast are either authors or aspire to be such. In fact, some already have a book out through some sort of [print on demand](#) service or on Kindle. For the most part, they are self-published, and a lot of self-published authors struggle with is how to go about selling more books.

Amy Collins is today's special guest, and she is the former director of sales at Adam's Media in Austin, Tx. She's also a specialty sales director for the parent company F+W Media. She has been profitably [selling to libraries](#) since 1996, and in 2006, she started her successful book sales and marketing company, called New Shelves Books. Over the years, she has sold to Barnes & Noble, Target, Costco, Borders, Books-A-Million, Walmart as well as becoming a trusted partner and recommended sales consultant for some of the largest book and library wholesalers in the industry.

Obviously, Amy has been very successful when it comes to selling books, but what really makes Amy truly unique is the fact that she was also a book buyer for a large regional bookstore chain. So, she's experienced on both sides of the book-selling transaction. During her very, very sterling career in publishing, Amy has been responsible for selling over 40,000,000 books for small and mid-sized publishers. This is a great feat indeed. Please welcome Amy to the show...

Promise: How to Get Your Books into Bookstores--Even if they are Print on Demand

I want listeners to know that the world of independent and chain bookstores are changing. What you are going to learn today is how to get your books into bookstores, even if they are print-on-demand and even if you are self-published. It used to be that you were kept from the bookstore world, from the independent gift store world. Libraries everywhere would have a “no self-published” rule.

I’m here to tell you, and I’m promising you, those days are over. **I’m here to tell you that you can get into bookstores, paint stores, independent stores, pet stores, hardware stores, yoga shops, etc.** You now have a way in. There are rules, and you need to know the rules. You need to know how to follow them. **That’s another thing we are going to cover today, what some of those rules are and how to get in.**

If you had asked me five years ago, I would have giggled and said no. Independent stores were dying. They were shrinking at an alarming rate. By 2007, they were closing 30 or 40 independent bookstores for every one that was opening. It was bad. Independent retailers across the country, and across genres, are seeing a resurgence. This is an enormous, enormous resurgence.

Since 2007, over 700 independent bookstores have opened, and only a few dozen have closed. We have seen a tremendous amount of growth in independent bookstores that sell new books, just in the last few years. And, what was less than 5% of the publishing industry has now become over 11%. Over \$2.8 billion has been spent on books, alone, from the independent bookstores. Just the independent bookstores have sold, and purchased, and spent almost \$3 billion. When you think of where we were five years ago... **Yes, you should spend your time and energy trying to get into these stores.**

Over View of Getting into Independent Bookstores

We’re going to use the word “author” just for the next few minutes. If you are an author that published your book yourself, if you bought your own ISBN, and if you named your own imprint and published the book yourself, that’s great. If you are an author who paid someone else to publish a book for you, and if you went through Lulu, or Outskirts, or Author Solutions, the process is the same, in essence. **So, we’re just going to talk**

about authors for a moment. If you are a publisher who wants to understand this on a deeper level, you are going to learn more about this in a moment.

Right now, the process looks like this. I'm an author, and I want my books in Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, and Costco, but these stores are kind of competitive. They are tough to get into. They aren't going to just give me two or three inches of shelf space in every store that they have across the country, based on my charming good looks. As much as I wish that they would, they won't. **So, what I need to do is I need to earn my way onto their shelves. One of the best ways to do that is through independent bookstores.**

Process for Authors

Independent bookstores have a lot more freedom and a lot more leeway. Here's the process:

Step 1 - Book Should be Available from at Least One Wholesaler

I make sure that my book, as an author and whether I'm the publisher or not... It's my job as an author to take some responsibility for my business. This is my business. So, as an author, I make sure that my book is available from at least one wholesaler. **A wholesaler is a company that buys books from publishers and makes them available to retailers to purchase when they need them.**

If I'm doing [IngramSpark](#), that means that my book will be made available to [Ingram Wholesaler](#), which is a sister company to Ingram Spark. It's not the same company, but a sister company. If I'm not going through IngramSpark, and let's say that I printed the books myself. I want to make sure that I've applied to [Baker & Taylor](#), or [Bookazine](#), or [American West](#), or one of the many wholesalers out there that sell to bookstores in my area. That's Step #1.

Step #2 - Marketing Plan

Step #2 is to make sure that I'm creating some demand. It's not okay to approach anyone, not even a mom and pop bookstore, and ask them to take my book if I'm not willing to do my part, which is to drive people to try and buy the book. **So, Step #2 is making sure that I've got at least a minimal marketing plan.** Am I going to be writing some guest articles? Am I willing to reach out to some book clubs? Am I willing to come and do an event? I need to do something to show that I am willing to drive sales.

Step # 3 - Make Sure Your Book Is Ready for the Marketplace

Step #3 is making sure that my book is ready for the marketplace. **Is it priced right? Is the cover right?** Is it the perfect topic for the type of store I'm reaching out to? If I have written a bodice-ripping erotic romance novel, that may not be perfect for the tried and true Mormon bookstore down the street. It might not be a great fit. So, just think about where your book belongs and go after those stores. That's Step #3.

Step # 4 - Approaching the Stores

Step #4 is approaching the stores. You don't approach the stores excited about your book and tell them how much you want them to buy your book. **You approach them with those first three steps in mind.** You are making the job easier for the book buyer. That's the person whose job it is, at that store, to decide if your book is going to show up on their shelves. So, you approach them, and you say, "I'm going to be doing some marketing to drive people to your store so that you can make some money Mr. Bookstore Person. **I'm willing to help you market this book by doing...**" It may be a guest article, or giving out some bookmarks, or even a poster. Maybe you could provide an interview for your website, or maybe you're willing to do an event. You might want to host a book club.

Let the buyer know that you are willing to do something, whether it's online or in person. Let them know that your book is easy to purchase, "You can order it from me on consignment and I'll give you good terms, or you can order it from your local wholesaler. Here's a list of wholesalers where my book is available." Do you see how nothing about my approach to the bookstore buyer has anything to do with how great my book is? It's what works.

If I'm a bookstore buyer, which I was for many years, my goal is to improve my business, not yours. I'm glad you wrote a book, I'm thrilled for you, and I'm sure it's lovely. That's not my job. My job is to make as much money for my boss as possible, and what are you going to do to help me do that? Whether your book is good or not is a matter that's almost secondary and almost tertiary.

Why Can't I Just Sell My Book Straight to the Stores?

Since your book is available at a wholesaler, you are making their job easier. You are also making their job easier. Yes, it's fun to contact your local bookstore and have them buy four copies from you, but man, that will get exhausting once you are into 100 stores or 200 stores. You aren't going to be able to keep track of all that. So, the third step is making sure that a wholesaler is part of the process. Make them part of the process, and you will be very glad that you did. You'll be glad that you took that initial first step.

In short, you can get your book into [Ingram Wholesaler](#) pretty much by putting your book on [Ingram Spark](#). Ingram Wholesaler is a company based out of La Vergne, TN. It's the largest book wholesaler in the United States. They are very picky. They will not take an author that only has one book, or even two books. They want to see that you are selling tens of thousands of books a year before they will take you and purchase your books directly. But, they do have a sister company called [IngramSpark](#), and also known as Lightning Source. You may have heard of Lightning Source. They are the exact same company. They are just rebranding it and slapping the Ingram name on it, which they slap on everything.

It's a little confusing, but [Ingram Wholesale](#) is owned by the same family that owns IngramSpark, but they aren't the same company. So, you put your files up on [IngramSpark](#), and you use them as a print on demand distributor, and they, in turn, will distribute your book to the wholesaler down the street, who will then sell your book to the retailer who you are reaching out to. The retailer will then, in turn, sell your book to the customer who is looking for your book.

Question: If I get my book into IngramSpark, do I automatically qualify with Ingram wholesaler?

Yes, it's automatic. They are going to ask you if you want your book fully discounted, and the answer is "yes". That's because wholesalers need the full discount so that they can turn around and give the full discount, that they are required to give, to the bookstores. Bookstores want a 35-40% discount because they need it to sell the books and keep their lights on. They have to pay for their employees and pay for all the advertising to get people in their stores as well as other expenses such as the computers and all of that. So, they need their cut.

The wholesaler needs a small cut. They keep about 8%. That keeps their lights on and pays their employees. It pays for the gas for their trucks. It pays for a lot. You get the remaining 45-50%. You still get a big chunk of your own book, which has to pay for printing and your own trouble and time. But, that's how that works, and yes, as long as you check the box that says "Yes! Please make me available to wholesalers and retailers everywhere," you'll be in great shape. It happens within days.

Distribution via CreateSpace

For some of us, your journey has already started with IngramSpark, but some people start this journey with [CreateSpace](#) and clicking on their "Expanded Distribution" tab. [CreateSpace](#), which is owned by Amazon, have their own Lightning Source/IngramSpark account. So, if you check "Expanded Distribution", what you are doing is giving CreateSpace permission to put your book in their account. This will also make your book available at Ingram through them, but you don't get that big discount because CreateSpace can't afford to give the full discount. At that point, your book is on a "short discount," meaning that it's slightly smaller than the discount that other people give.

Can I Use the ISBN that CreateSpace Has Given Me?

It will work in this process, but not as well. You are really hampering yourself, and if you've ever been on my website and/or heard me speak, you probably know that I wail about this a lot. **I'm going on record once again, saying that it's never, ever a good idea to put a third-party ISBN on your book.** If you have written a book, if you have designed it, if you've laid it out, and even if you have hired someone else to do some of these things, you should own your own ISBN.

Yes, you still own the copyright, but why would you take a book that you wrote and slaved over... It's your business. You own the copyright, but then you are turning the publishing rights over to someone else. You are turning the publishing and distribution rights over to someone else. When they put their ISBN on your book, they have control over where it's distributed. So, I would recommend, and I've said this before... If your book has a third-party ISBN on it, from CreateSpace or any other third party, I would recommend that you go to www.MyIdentifiers.com. **Now, this is US advice only.**

Go to MyIdentifiers.com, buy your own ISBNs, and put your own ISBN(s) on your book(s). Then, you can just re-upload your book to CreateSpace. I have no argument with CreateSpace. I love CreateSpace. I just don't want their ISBN on your book because you don't want them to have control. What happens if they ever go out of business? What if they decide to pull all of the books under their ISBNs for some reason and assign them to someone else? It's not a good idea. You need control. These are your books.

If you are listening from another country, aside from the United States, it's very simple. If you live in Canada, Ireland, or the UK, your local government will supply you ISBNs for free. Just Google your country and the phrase "ISBN" and search results will appear, explaining how you'd get one.

Some people say that CreateSpace makes you forfeit the right to use your own imprint on your book. This is true sometimes. It was the case all the time, but in the last year, CreateSpace has figured out a way for you to put your own name as an imprint under the CreateSpace name. So, when you are on Amazon, if you have agreed to put a CreateSpace ISBN on your book, it can still be listed under your company's imprint, but only on Amazon. Everywhere else, you'll have this problem. The average reader won't be able to see that it's published by CreateSpace, but every bookstore owner, librarian, and every pet store owner will be able to see that, and you will look a little less than professional.

Marketing Plan

You need to have a marketing plan. **Before you approach any retailer, make sure that you have a great plan.** Someone will agree to stock your book, but they are going to want to know what you are going to do to create demand. What are you going to do to let people know that your book exists? You better have an answer. So, before

you pick up the phone or start typing on your keyboard to reach out to any retailer, you'll need to have a marketing plan in place.

Marketing plans are not hard to come up with. There are some great companies. A marketing plan includes any activity that will get the word out about your book. That's what all of this is about. People will want to know what you are going to do to get the word out, and you need to know what you are going to do before you reach out to a retailer.

If you are a novelist, and you've written a thriller novel or a romance novel, it's all about reviews. I don't mean six reviews from your three dearest friends on Amazon. I mean tons of reviews. I want you to go to Midwest Book Review and Booklist. I want hundreds of book reviewers to get emails. These should be personalized and well-written emails from you, which let them know that you are reaching out to them because you know that they review books like yours and you would love to get an honest from them. Don't forget to ask, "Would you like a copy?"

Start sending out review requests immediately. Do not stop until you have hundreds of reviews, and I'm not exaggerating. You'll need to have hundreds of people online talking about how awesome your book is. This advice is also true if you've written a non-fiction book. It could be a descriptive how-to, a business book, a leadership book, and so on. Non-fiction is also great, and reviews are wonderful, but what you can do as a non-fiction author, that's a little easier than a novelist, is you can also get interviewed about your topic.

Yes, if you are a novelist that has written a novel that's based in Southern California, and you become an expert on the La Brea Tar Pits because it was a plot point in your novel... It's not going to be as easy to get interviewed about the La Brea Tar Pits as an author as it would be if you were a scientist who actually wrote a book about how to not get stuck in tar pits. So, what I need you to do as a non-fiction author is to get reviews as well, but also start writing guest articles on other people's blogs and newsletters. Reach out to editors and freelancers. What a great interview you would be on a particular topic.

Make sure that you spend a few minutes a day getting your name out there. For those of you that are saying, "But, I have a hundred reviews on Amazon." That's great, but this is a different marketplace. If I walked into Burger King and asked them to buy my hamburgers, I'm afraid that I can't say, "Well, everyone loves them at McDonald's." Burger King would kick me out, and they'd laugh! You can't do that.

Bookstores, pet stores, gift stores, and mind, body, and spirit stores... These guys are not going to be sitting on Amazon, reading your five-star reviews. That's not how it works. They are the competition. You need real reviews from real reviewers. Hopefully, that makes sense.

Reaching out to the Stores

Reaching out to the stores. **Once you are ready, and once you know that your book is perfect for a particular store, it's time to approach them.** Let's say, for example, that you know your book about how to live a wholesome life and keep a good home is perfect for the Mormon bookstore down the way, it's time to approach them. Tell them that you've done marketing, and you are going to be on the following radio shows in the area, and tell them that you would like to mention all the stores that have your book stocked. Wouldn't they like to be mentioned on the air? Wouldn't they like to be listed on your website with a link?

Offer to promote the store, and ask them if they would consider testing your book. It's a very simple request. If they say yes, they will place the order from the wholesaler. In many cases, they will also want to place an initial order with you on consignment. We've talked about consignment before. Consignment means that they are going to buy a few copies from you, and if they sell, they'll pay you. You can do that once. Sure. But, once you are in a dozen stores, you don't need to prove yourself anymore.

Once your book is selling, those sales numbers are going to show up on something called Nielsen BookScan. Nielsen is a company that tracked CD sales back in the 90's and book sales now. You may have heard of the Nielsen ratings for television too. They are all about tracking. If your book is in a few dozen bookstores and starting to sell, you don't need to prove your way into anymore stores. Those sales will show up, Nielsen will be tracking them, and those stores can look to see that the book is doing well.

How Can I Learn More About This?

If you are interested in this topic about actually selling your books in the bookstore market, and not just bookstores but with all kinds of retailers, then there's a [free webinar](#) you might like to see. It's the [Real Fast Indie Book Marketing](#) course, which is a one hour class plus another hour of Q&A. I've been to a lot of online classes where they will talk to you for 30 or 40 minutes, and they don't stop and really take the time to answer questions. We don't do that, and there are replays, so if you can't sit through the whole 120 minutes, we get it. It's a full hour that teaches specifically what book buyers in the book industry, and book buyers in the gift industry, are looking for.

We walk you through all the steps. I've talked about reaching out to stores. In this webinar, we actually take a full-fledged cover letter that I have written and go through it line by line. We walk you through how to do this so that you don't have to figure it out. The reason why we don't do these types of training every day is because they are exhausting. They take so much time and energy.

We walk you through the entire process, and then we sit there and answer any questions that you have. If you don't know what a BISAC code is, I'll tell you. If you are confused about whether something will work for coloring books in particular, I will specifically talk about coloring books. These webinars take a lot of time and a lot of energy, but they are completely free, and we've gotten a lot of wonderful comments from people who say

that it's some of the best time they have ever spent. It has really educated them about how to get their books out into the marketplace. If you are interested in learning how to do this, you can head on over to RealFastIndieBookMarketing.com/launch and make sure that you register for the next upcoming webinar.

Again, it's completely free to [view this webinar](#). There is an offer at the end, which is a way for you to continue your education further, if you choose to do so. In either case, after you have reviewed the material in the webinar, you'll have a much better idea of what it takes and whether this path is for you or not.

Resources

Free Webinar: [Sell Your Book In Stores-Even If You're Self-Published](#)

[How to Effectively Use a POD \(Print On Demand\) Publisher With Robin Cutler](#)

[Creating Passive Royalties From eBook Sales To Libraries With Amy Collins](#)

Wholesalers:

[Ingram Wholesaler](#)

[Baker & Taylor](#)

[Bookazine](#)

[American West](#)

[IngramSpark](#)

[CreateSpace](#)

[MyIdentifiers.com](#)

Real Fast Results Community

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Of course, we also want to know your results. Please share those results with us at <http://www.realfastresults.com/results>.

As always, go make results happen!