

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 131

How to Create a Business Plan for Your Book With Kathy Meis

Hello! Welcome to the RealFastResults.com podcast! Today's special guest is Kathy Meis, and it's very exciting to have her on the show. Kathy is an expert in multiple areas, including marketing, publishing, and selling more books in general. Kathy is president and CEO of [Bublish](#), which is a company that provides marketing and promotion information for self-publishing authors. Please welcome her to the show...

Promise: How to Position Your Book in an Overcrowded Marketplace

I am going to show you how to position your book in and overcrowded marketplace, so that your marketing is more effective, and you sell more books. **This is exactly the type of help authors need, and this should be the foundation of anyone's publishing journey.** If you don't get this right, your marketing isn't going to work, and you won't sell books. If you do get it right, everything will work out well.

Business Plan for Your Book

You need a business plan for your book. **For the first time, as an author, you'll need to step away from the creative and just think about the publishing side of your business.** If you are placing a product in the market, you write a business plan. Well, a book is an entertainment or information product, so you've got to do a business plan for your book.

If you just want to write books, that's fine. However, if you want to sell your book and make money from it, this is an entrepreneurial endeavor. It's a start-up. It really is. You need to have that mindset.

When you have that mindset, you've got to act in a certain way in order to really understand what you're doing and do it effectively. **That starts with a plan and research, and it can be a lot of research.**

Set Your Goals

The first step is setting your goal.

- What is your goal?
- Where is this book supposed to take you?
- What are your creative intentions?
- What do you expect professionally?
- Do you want to be a speaker?
- Do you want to make money off of the book?
- Do you want to do seminars?
- Do you have a non-profit?

There are a thousand different reasons why people publish books, but many people never really articulate those goals.

If you articulate your goals, then you can speak to an audience that can help you achieve those goals. Plus, you can write a book that delights that audience. **A “market fit” is what they would call this in business. That’s when your product is built for a particular audience.** So, that’s the beginning. What are your goals? Define those, and then you can go out and look for that audience.

Research Your Audience

Now you’re going to research that audience, and you’re going to find out what they are reading now.

You’re going to research the comparable titles to what you want to create, and you’re going to learn some of the best practices so that you can create a “virtual bookshelf”. What are the big brands? If you could put your book next to the biggest in your genre, what would they be?

Once you create that “virtual bookshelf,” you work out how you would fit there and how you would differentiate yourself. **You’re going to write all of this down in your business plan, and you’ll need to write down all of the things you learn along the way.** You’ll want to study the ways that authors have titled their books, what their cover looks like, and what subtitle they use.

The subtitle of a book has become really important because, these days, we are looking at tiny little pictures of covers, and we can’t read anything. We read the title and subtitle next to it, and we say, “Oh, this is exactly the type of reading experience I’m looking for.” As a marketer, you can look at the synopsis, and you can study the metadata and look into the categories and where it’s placed. **You’ll find fascinating things there, and you can be a bigger fish in a small sea if you can find those categories that are spot on for your book, but maybe not as many of the big players are there.**

It’s just a methodology that you go through to start to document those things. **Start with a working synopsis.** Does it fit on that shelf? Does it look like the others but still have a differentiator in it? Again, if you have a product, you would have to say, “I belong in this category, but here’s how I’m different

than the other players in this category.” It’s really no different for books, but we get uncomfortable when we talk about books as products. But, for consumers, they are information or entertainment products, and there’s a lot of competition out there.

Some authors like to say, “Well, I don’t know. My book is not like anything else in the world, and that makes me immediately nervous.” They think that’s going to be really hard. Like, how do we explain to people in comprehensible terms what your book is about? **What are the comparable titles that the audience, which you’ve defined, is already reading?** And then, look at those and study those.

You can look at best practices and learn a lot by just studying. You know, Amazon is a great resource for research. So, your first couple of steps are going to include a lot of market research, and that’s an intimidating term. Everyone is like, “I don’t know how to do market research,” but literally, if you go on Amazon, you’ll find what you need.

How to Research

Let’s say you write international spy thrillers. **You can plug the words, “international spy thrillers,” into Amazon, and you can go to the bestseller lists and start to look at some of the top books.** From there, you can search deeper and deeper into the categories, and you’ll start to see trends. Right away, you’re going to notice certain things about the covers, and you are going to notice certain things about the titles. Maybe they are always written in a series. Did you consider that? Are you writing a series? Well, if you are in that genre, you’ll see that almost every one of the books is part of a series that’s based around a character, or an empire, or whatever.

You’ll see trends in the subtitles. You’ll see trends in the way they title the series. You’ll also see trends in the synopsis. You can start to document all of these trends, and it’s very educational. It doesn’t have to be intimidating; it’s meant to be a learning experience. **So, now, when you go to make all of those decisions that you have to make, such as what to tell your cover designer, what to name your book, and how to do your copyrighting, you’re informed.** You aren’t just writing and guessing, and there’s so much to guess wrong if you aren’t doing this research.

I talk to authors every day, and this is the number one problem that I see. Someone ends up coming to me and saying, “Could you help me? I’m not selling enough books.” I look into it for them, and I immediately point out something like, “Your book cover looks like a literary fiction cover, and you are writing an international spy thriller.” I may notice that it’s not a series like the rest of the books in its genre, or I might notice that the synopsis doesn’t have enough action, or something else. Every single genre has specific qualities, and you want to understand these so that you know what the reader’s expectations are going to be and how to meet that so that you delight them and get great reviews.

Reading reviews is another great research activity to take care of during your positioning study. Literally, read the top five or ten reviews that are 5-star, and then go to the middle 3-star, and finally, read over the lower ones. This will tell you what people liked and hated. I always say that positioning and great marketing start in the manuscript. Another interesting thing that I see often authors get wrong is the “Look Inside” feature. Well, you have only seconds for people to be convinced that your book is the kind of reading experience that they want. If they don’t believe that, they’ll quickly click away.

You really have to understand how that opening should feel. If you are writing an international spy thriller, for example, and you don't pack in that action and take them on a ride right away, you're probably going to lose them. It's all about how to sell a person on your book in seven seconds. Really, that's what you have, and it's in a space where you never get to speak to that person. It can take a lot of work because you've got to get a lot of things "just so".

Can I Do All of My Research on Amazon?

Yes, it's a great resource. **Amazon is the second largest search engine in the world.** They really have the search feature mastered, and you can really find out a lot. You can also use Google and search books in order to study some there. **You can use YASIV.com, which is a free tool.** Maybe you know about two or three comparable titles to yours, but that's all. Well, if you plug in those names, it will show you other books that were purchased on Amazon with that title.

Another cool thing about YASIV.com is that it's very visual, and there is a list on the side that allows you to go in and look a little deeper. There's also a lot of keyword and synopsis information there, but mainly it gives you a visual on books and how they are clustered. So, let's say you're building your business plan, and you are starting to see trends in what people are buying. **You can use the keywords and the book titles for your Amazon ads, and your Amazon ads will do better because you really do understand where you fit in the marketplace.** That's what the business plan is supposed to do. It's supposed to get you to that point.

You're essentially going to say, "Serve my ad up on this book's page because my readers are there, and I've got a great read for them," and then your product page is going to be optimized to convert them. Again, that's because you understand the kind of experience they are looking for. You've got the synopsis, the title, the book title, and the "Look Inside" feature primed for that conversion to a sale. That's how it works in a virtual world where you don't get to sell by hand anymore. I think that YASIV.com is a great tool to use for that type of research as well.

What Tools Should I Use to Collect All of This Data?

There are a few different things that you can use. A Word document is one. Think of your business plan as a living, breathing document that you update as you move along. **If you write it down, just put it in a Word document.** You're going to put down your goals, and you're going to articulate as much as you can about your audience. You are going to do research your audience as well.

There are a lot of places where you can go, such as Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America and Romance Writers of America. If you are in a genre, you can usually find a group that fits. Another is Historical Fiction Writers of America, and there are also groups for non-fiction writers of different types. These groups have a lot of audience information. **You can go grab that and put it into your business plan.** Start to define your audience. What age group do they fit into? What movies do they like? What

books do they like? Are they mostly male or female? Are they mostly professional, or are they stay-at-home? Just anything that you can put down.

Again, it's going to be a lot, so write it down and document it. You can always go back and add to what you have noted or change things as you learn more about your audience. You'll want to do this for one or two audiences. Then you're going to begin brainstorming about your title and subtitle. That's going to consist of pieces that you can pull together later, so put them in there.

Next, you'll start drafting a synopsis. It will be a working synopsis, but you'll get better and better. You know, they call that enriched metadata. So, a synopsis has to speak to you, the consumer, who came to my product page. It also has to speak to those backend databases that are trying to make sense, and there's no gray area in that language. You'll want to have a mix of great consumer-oriented language and keywords that the databases can interpret.

It will work the same way with the subtitle. It's going to give you insight into what the reading experience will be like, but it's also going to let the backend databases know whether your book is a thriller, a young adult novel, etc. Your subtitle should be a little more keyword-oriented than, maybe, your shocking, cool title that makes things a little harder to figure out.

All of this should be documented so that you can go back to it. On YASIV.com, you'll find the comparable titles and search terms that people are using. Just open an Excel or Google Drive spreadsheet and stick the data that you find in those. You are going to find lists of authors that you may have never even heard of, but you'll put them in. You know, that document can be used later when you run your Amazon ads, and you can put in up to 1,000 keywords. Usually, putting in keywords is a big job for an author, but if you did all of this early on, it will inform you for a lot of your marketing later on. This is going to help you with your selling, and you'll be using smarter keywords.

What Should I Do After I Gather a Lot of Data?

When you reach the point where you are going to go into the publishing process, and you are going to engage a cover designer, you'll already have ideas for the cover design, the title, and the subtitle already listed out. So, you have that nailed, and now you'll be able to speak to your designer in a much more professional way. That's going to help you come out with the product that you want, and they will have an easier time getting it right because you aren't guessing. You've got a plan, and you've done your research.

We use a tool called [Canva](#). You can go on there and use templates. **This gives you the ability to play around with ideas a bit.** Sometimes it's hard to explain things visually to your designer, so you can just show them some ideas and say, "I kind of like this look." You could also screenshot books that you like the look of. You might show them one and say, "I like the feel of this one. It seems popular in my genre." As you go through your research, you can begin mapping out how you are going to talk to all of those service providers that you need to guide you through the publishing process. That way, you'll end up with a professional product after everything comes about.

Another thing that's great to do is to go to the bottom of the product pages and copy the category strings. Essentially, these are the bestselling categories, which are provided in the "Product Details" section of any Amazon listing. This will give you details about where each of the books you are listed is placed among the categories and subcategories in the Amazon marketplace. That's yet another super-important type of data to have included in your marketing, and you can use this information later to better categorize your book later on, or even to turn it into a bestseller in some cases.

Finding potential categories for your book isn't something that you want to do at the last minute. You really need to be accurate in finding the right category, where your book belongs, but also, take note that you can ask Amazon for up to 10 categories. You do have to email them or contact them to get this done. You'll be able to choose to begin with, when you are uploading your book, and when it comes to those two, you want to choose wisely.

There's not always a perfect fit, though. If you've done your research, and you've seen all of these big players who have gone and said, "No, no, I need to be here," then you can say to Amazon, "Well, I need to be in this category too." And, you can show them because you have captured it during your research. I suggest you just copy those and put them in the "Categories" section of your business plan.

You'll keep learning, and I always say to people, "Every six to nine months, you should be changing your categories if they aren't working for you." You'll find books that are very, very popular, and they have a long tail, and they are still selling. If you watch the publishers, you'll find that they are always placing the books in categories that are accurate, but not crowded, in order to keep a high ranking. Then, there's also the visibility that's associated with higher ranking.

What Should I Do After I Upload My Book to Amazon?

Now it's time to go further into the publishing process. I mean, you can dive really deep by doing more and more research, but for now, you've got a really solid plan. I do recommend that you refine what you have as you learn. It depends on your genre, but if you are in the kind of genre that needs traditional reviews and traditional exposure, outside of just online genres where eBooks rule, you'll need a different kind of publishing timeline.

I mean, if you were launching a product, you'd understand your timeline, right? You'd understand your industry too. Like, is it something that needs to be launched before Christmas? Is it best to launch it in the spring, or is it a summer product? It works the same way with books, and how well you learn that timeline could make or break a book. Again, this is dependent on your genre, so you need to research this.

You can even look at the key authors that you found, who are creating comparable titles, and you can study their social channels, what kind of marketing they are doing, and where they are advertising. After all, they are servicing a similar, if not essentially the same, audience as you. You'll want to document everything you can about these authors and how they are marketing to their audience

because that's going to become very valuable information to use in your own marketing. After all, you are still trying to learn the ropes in a highly-competitive and incredibly confusing world.

So, This Will Help Me to Market in a Smarter Way?

Yes. All the decisions that you make will help you to thrive in your chosen categories. You'll be able to create a product page that really pops in that category, for instance. You are really going to delight your readers because you know where your book belongs. The more you research, the more you are going to realize that there are more options than you would otherwise know about. As a consumer, you aren't quite as aware of all of the stuff that's happening with those categories on the backend, but as an author you really need to know what your options are.

If you get it wrong, you'll know sooner where you should be too. It happens all of the time. For example, let's say you were to write a piece of historical fiction, and you place it in a subcategory of "Historical Fiction," such as "American West". However, your historical novel is kind of a loose interpretation of what happened in the West, but you have readers coming in and giving you bad reviews because your novel isn't historically accurate. Maybe the readers in that category are just crazy about the precise history. So, you find that your book isn't fitting in there, and you aren't getting good reviews because you aren't delighting those readers. That's because you aren't delivering the reading experience that they expected.

That's actually a real mistake that I just walked an author through. She hadn't published yet, but I read the manuscript, and it was a great story that's set in the West, but if she were to place it in the "Historical Fiction," she just wasn't going to make those readers happy. It was more of a western romance, so we needed to put it where it belongs. That way, it would delight the readers instead. She also needed to work on her setting. That's another thing that's important. When authors think about marketing, often it's something that they start three months before, but truly, marketing is part of the creative journey. It starts in the manuscript.

I've been an editor for 30 years, and it's rare in the distribution world to have someone come in with an editing perspective. If you get your marketing to fit in with your manuscript, that's the secret sauce. But, if you are writing it and you start doing this research, and you read books within your genre, then you'll begin realizing what aspects of your book you could make better.

As you go along, you'll begin to understand more about what your readers will be looking for. So, it's part of the process of writing your manuscript to take these types of things into account. If you just want to write a story and put it out there, in the world, and you don't care about sales, that's fine. On the other hand, if you really want people to discover it, buy it, and read it, so that you can make money off of it and publish again, then your positioning should start with your manuscript.

Connecting with Kathy

My email is Kathy@Bublish.com. Bublish (Bublish.com) is the world's first complete publishing platform with built-in marketing, branding, and discoverability features. So, you can write your book and publish, and you can promote it with the technology we have created, called Book Bubbles. These "book bubbles" are kind of like social director's cuts for your book. You can share an excerpt, there's beautiful branding, and then you share the story behind your story.

People buy your "why," and book bubbles help you to share the creative struggles that go into your work. This is very effective, and people spend about 3.5 minutes on a book bubble, which is a lot more than 7 seconds. It was designed because I love bookstore browsing, and online, there was nothing like that. So, we created a browsing experience. You know how you turn the book over, and you look at the acknowledgements and things like that. It's literally a social moment. It's a very quiet social moment between the author and the reader. That's what I wanted to recreate on my end.

I also wanted to brand around the author because, to me, it's the author brand that breaks through the noise. Well, the author brand is about the author's "why," and it's about the journey, and what went into it, and the author's commitment. Also, we have anything that you need to publish a book, including the editorial aspects, which is a big area of expertise for us. We also offer services that deal with cover design and interior layout. We also offer email and print distribution throughout the world.

Resources

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[Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America](#)

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As always, go make results happen!