

Handout

Adapted from

Carolyn's multi award-winning HowToDoItFrugally series of books including
THE FRUGAL BOOK PROMOTER:
THE FRUGAL EDITOR
And her newest
GETTING GREAT BOOK REVIEWS FRUGALLY AND ETHICALLY
BY CAROLYN HOWARD-JOHNSON

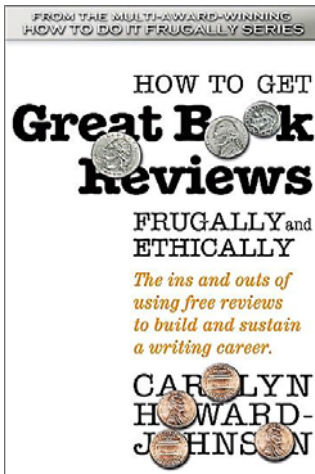
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HANDOUT

PROSPER FRUGALLY IN THE BOOK BIZ IN 2020 AND BEYOND: THE HOW-TOS FOR NUDGING YOUR BOOK'S AMAZON SALES WHETHER IT'S A NEW RELEASE OR A NEW CAMPAIGN TO NUDGE AN OLDER BOOK TO STARDOM

NOTE: This is a selected excerpt from my *The Frugal Book Promoter, 3rd Edition*,



published by Modern History Press. Because Amazon.com is so important to the welfare of a book, you will find tons more on the topic of Amazon scattered throughout *The Frugal Book Promoter*. It is the flagship book in my #HowToDoItFrugally Series of books for writers, but this more abbreviated handout will help you get a start on the “stuff” you need to give your launch—for a new book or old—on Amazon and do it now. You will also want a copy of *How to Get Great Book Reviews Frugally and Ethically: The ins and outs of using free reviews to build and sustain a writing career* if one isn't already in your library. It may be if you are published with Loving Healing Press when they generously gave copies to the authors published under its imprints. The chapters on getting, understanding, and managing Amazon reviews in my [Great Book Reviews](#) are essential to maximize effectiveness of reader reviews

as well as the professional reviews Amazon now lets you install for your book or books.

ONLINE BOOKSTORES (YEP! INCLUDING AMAZON!) are rooted in tradition. One of the major differences, of course, is that Internet thing—connectivity. Brick-and-mortar bookstores encourage browsing. So do online bookstores. You can connect with authors and readers at bookstore readings and seminars. You can connect with authors and readers at online bookstores, too. But at online bookstores that association is less personal and more sporadic but, on the plus side, readers (and authors!) can review and recommend books almost as if they were bookstore sales associates.

Online bookstores have been game-changers in the blossoming of e-books and e-readers. They say they contributed to the demise of the several chains of traditional bookstores. Still—just as radio survived TV and TV seems to be surviving the web—the old fashioned printed word on paper and assembled into a book will never disappear. Nor will the indie bookstores that cater to the interests of its customers.

MAXIMIZING YOUR LAUNCH OR RELAUNCH
OR THE IMPORTANCE OF NUDGING AMAZON'S ALGORITHMS FOR THE
WELFARE OF YOUR BOOK

I'm going to be daring. Authors—especially new authors who dream of seeing their books in bookstores—won't like hearing this: You can do without having your book in brick-and-mortar bookstores and still sell lots of books, but no book can reach star status without online stores.

This section on using online bookstores is the most essential advice in this book beyond the need to market in general. Really. Don't let anyone tell you that you can relegate book sales to your own website. Or only to bookstore distribution. Or only to your publisher's website. Not if your goal is to sell books to those outside your mother's sewing circle.

The power of online bookstores is both a blessing and a curse. Your publisher should manage your online bookstore pages, but sometimes publishers don't do it. Or they don't do it in a way that presents your book in its best light. You're tired of hearing this I know, but no one knows your book like you do. No one cares as much about your book as you do. The blessing: Online bookstores—especially Amazon—sell tons of books. The curse: You'll probably have to give your book's online bookstore pages—especially Amazon—all the tending, loving care it needs all by yourself.

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Ahh, Amazon. Theodore Roosevelt said, "The mightiest river in the world is the Amazon. It runs from west to east, from the sunset to the sunrise, from the Andes to the Atlantic." The Amazons of mythology were warrior women. Talk about great branding! Amazons, including Amazon.com's bookstore, perform amazing feats. When it comes to book *sales*, Amazon.com strides on the sturdiest of legs. She sells your books here and overseas, print or digital.

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Hint: RSS is a way that anyone (yes, *you!*) can distribute what you do once—maybe your website—to make it appear magically on your blog or your social networks, too. You simply copy and paste either computer code or website addresses. It is a time-saver and effort-expander like none other I can think of.

Amazon's many features contribute to its algorithms. For your book to climb the **Amazon ratings** and receive other Amazon benefits, those techy formulas must be fed like a mama lion feeds her voracious cubs. Amazon is a search engine and its algorithms are watching what you do on that site! A few things they watch are in this section. Did I tell you their features are always subject to change? Amazon gives and it taketh away.

Hint: Details for choosing the best categories for your book and how to use them to nudge your sales ratings are in my *How to Get Great Book Reviews Frugally and Ethically* (<http://bit.ly/GreatBkReviews>). Why are they in a book on getting and using reviews and the endorsements gleaned from them? Because getting book reviews are so important to Amazon ratings. It's part of keeping that hungry algorithm mouth well fed.

Amazon posts sales ratings on each book's **Buy page**, but they're confusing, I wouldn't be surprised if Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, can't explain how they calculate them. We *do* know that the categories a publisher or author chooses for a book and the reviews posted for that book influence its ratings. Don't believe it when you hear that readers pay attention to them. Most readers don't know or care about ratings. Still, ratings *are* important because publishing peeps know a little about them and check them often. They also jog algorithms, and Amazon cares about algorithms—a lot!

Caveat: Don't let bestseller stardust lead you astray. Author David Vise received bad publicity for allegedly rigging *The New York Times'* bestseller list by buying huge numbers of his own books. It doesn't hurt to Tweet about bestseller successes, but those in the industry are distrustful and rarely fooled or impressed by unethical shenanigans. Don't waste too much of your valuable writing time tracking your ratings, either.

Here's how to (and how not to!) nudge algorithms:

- Amazon's **KDP feature** lets any independent publisher or author post a book to Amazon. Most subsidy publishers and traditional publishers list their books on Amazon or publish their e-books on Kindle, but if yours doesn't, get permission from your publisher to do it yourself.

Caveat: Check the contract you have with your publisher and proceed accordingly. If your publisher resists (but your contract doesn't limit you), do it on your own.

- Though readers pay little attention to ratings, many publishing professionals do, and high ratings qualify your book for Amazon's bestseller lists. Making that list qualifies your book for bragging rights, even if a top-ten rating only appeared for a short time.
- The only things you can do to influence those rates is promote like crazy and choose categories (genres, themes, etc.) that have the fewest competing books in them. Denise Cassino (bestsellerservices.com) says, "You can request more effective Amazon categories from either Author Central or Kindle Digital Printing (KDP)

using their Contact Us buttons.” Denise helped me choose categories for *The Frugal Editor* and it is often a “bestseller” in one of its categories. Do a search on this ever-changing technique for using this Amazon feature on your own or hire someone like Denise or Penny Sansevieri (amarketingexpert.com) to help you with it. But do *not* expect your publisher to do it—or do it effectively. Just go to your Buy page and see what is there now. How can you improve on it?

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Amazon lists both its **top reviewers** and those it designates as Vine reviewers as headers for each review and each is linked to the author-reviewer’s Profile page. Top reviewers are those who have reviewed the most books on Amazon. Vine reviewers are readers Amazon selects and sends books and other products to in exchange for the promise of a review. Use these links to find individual reviewers. Many Amazon reviewers also review for other blogs, journals, and websites. Send query letters only to those reviewers who have reviewed books similar to yours.

Caveat: Occasionally an author tries to become a top reviewer to nudge algorithms and to expose their own writing to readers. It is useful to write reviews for books related in some way to yours, but the “top reviewer” designation may be an impossible goal. Harriet Klausner may have spent every waking hour of her life to read 7,000. It’s probably better to write another novel or have a root canal than try to beat that record.

- Online bookstores’ review features take on a new importance for authors who write reviews in addition to their books. They can be networking goldmines and they offer wide exposure of their names to *readers*. Authors should be avid readers anyway; it takes little time to add a thoughtful review on sites that allow voluntary posts. Choose a great title. Edit well. Read the submission guidelines.
- You may post **videos on your Amazon page** and others’ pages when you write reviews for others’ books. Always put ethics first or you may be banned from the site. See more on writing reviews in Chapter Sixteen of *How to Get Great Book Reviews Frugally and Ethically*.

Hint: If you can’t recommend a book, don’t post a review. That doesn’t mean that noting a book’s weaknesses isn’t valid. It’s just that there is no point in slashing and burning a book an author has invested herself in. Besides, that kind of review isn’t likely to help your branding unless the image you are trying to create is that of a curmudgeon.

Each sales page has buttons near each review for readers to vote “helpful” (or not). Voting encourages readers to peruse the reviews, which is good for the reviewers and good for your book. Encourage your readers to post reviews and vote for content, but don’t try to influence their choices. You should vote—occasionally—too!

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- Amazon has **tabs** that give readers a choice of buying paperback, e-book (or both) of any title. If there is no such link on your book’s **Buy page** even though both are available, contact administration at Author Connect.
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- Amazon provides **SALES RANKINGS** that are dandy little aids for evaluating how your book is selling. Not that you should fixate on those statistics, but having an indicator that your book might need a little boost is nice. And—when those ratings are nurtured—they nudge Amazon’s algorithms to do more for your book. You will find lots of specifics on managing sales ranking in, [How to Get Great Book Reviews Frugally and Ethically: The ins and outs of using free reviews to build and sustain a writing career](#) . Also know that the categories you choose for your book (see above) affect the rankings for your book.

Warning that bears repeating:: Do not spend a lot of time checking your ratings. They should be used as *indicators*. They shouldn’t become an obsession.

Hint: When your book does well enough to make the algorithms extremely happy, you qualify for several of the benefits Amazon offers to bring your book to the attention of readers who might be interested. That includes their direct-mail campaigns, their bestseller lists, and discounts.

ABOUT YOUR PRESENTER

Carolyn Howard-Johnson is the author of the multi award-winning HowToDoltFrugally series of books for writers. The first edition of *The Frugal Book Promoter* (bit.ly/FrugalBookPromoIII) was given USA Book News’ “Best Professional Book” and the coveted Irwin Award. The second edition is also a USA



Book News award winner. Her *The Frugal Editor* (bit.ly/FrugalEditor) also won a nod from USA Book News and won Readers’ Views Literary Award. Her marketing campaign for that book won the marketing award from Next Generation Indie Book Awards.

Carolyn refined marketing skills she learned as a journalist with *The Salt Lake Tribune*), as a publicist in New York where she was hired as an account executive by Eleanor Lambert Co that developed the 10 Best Dressed List and handled accounts like Christian Dior, and with marketing she did for her multi award-winning fiction and poetry—genres some say are the hardest of all to promote. She has appeared on TV and hundreds of radio stations nationwide and is also a commercial actor.

Carolyn is the recipient of the California Legislature's Woman of the Year in Arts and Entertainment Award, the Book Publicists of Southern California's Irwin Award and her community's Character and Ethics Award for her work promoting tolerance with her writing. She was also named to Pasadena Weekly's list of fourteen women of "San Gabriel Valley women who make life happen." She was given her community's Diamond Award for Achievement in the Arts and was an instructor for UCLA Extension's world-renown Writers' Program for nearly a decade.

Carolyn loves to travel. She has visited nearly 100 countries with her husband, author of [What Foreigners Need to Know About America from A to Z](http://amzn.to/ForeignersAmericaUS) (http://amzn.to/ForeignersAmericaUS) now translated and publishing in China and Ukraine and recommended by the Fulbright Scholars program. She has studied writing at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom; Herzen University in St. Petersburg, Russia; and Charles University, Prague. She admits to carrying a pen and journal wherever she goes and is even keen on old fashioned diagramming..

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"Careers that are not fed die as readily as any living organism given no sustenance." ~ CHJ