

**Successful Debuts 101 - Avoid Pitfalls and Capitalize on Opportunities**

Saturday, Sept. 10, 2022, 8:00 am

Conference Room III

**Presenter: Rob Samborn**

**Course Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Publishing is a business.
3. Know your genre
4. Publishing roads
5. Pre-release checklist
6. Advance readers
7. Debut groups
8. The writing community
9. Post-release checklist
10. Brand building
11. Social media
12. Marketing
13. Advertising
14. Promotions
15. Rankings and reviews
16. Pitfalls
17. Opportunities
18. This. Is. A. Business.

**BOOK LAUNCH CHECKLIST**

(The following is for publishing with a small- or mid-size press but many of the steps can be applicable to other scenarios.)

Please also note this list is far from exhaustive. It should be considered a guide.

**RIGHT NOW**

1. Remind yourself: This is a business. No matter how you slice it, you and your publisher are marketing and selling a product. Competition is insane. There are more than 33 million titles on Amazon. About 1.5 million books are published each year. Competition includes new books, classic books, books out of your genre, and literally all other types of news and entertainment.
2. Ask yourself: Do you want to publish a book, or do you want to be a professional author?

**LEADING UP TO LAUNCH**

**12+ months before launch**

* Nail down a release date with your publisher.
* Review all possible Amazon categories applicable to your book. Identify the best fits and study the covers and book pages for the bestsellers.
* Read a consistent diet of books in your genre.
* Join NetGalley. Read/review upcoming books in your genre.
* Work with your publisher on a cover. If you’re not happy with other covers your publisher has released, do it yourself. Your cover is the single most important investment when it comes to sales. Designers can be found at 99designs.com, fiverr.com, getcovers.com, upwork.com, envato.com and many other platforms. Expect a full jacket cover to run about $150-$1000. Also expect to get what you pay for. 99designs has a contest option that enables you to submit a brief and then multiple designers submit their designs. Once you select the winning design, you can work with the designer on edits.
* Set up calls with your publisher to discuss marketing and distribution strategy. Work with them on your book description, tagline, etc. Will they be doing paid ads? Talk with them about acquiring trade reviews and author blurbs. Ask them what you can expect and when (and follow-up with them down the road). Also discuss Amazon categories (all ten). Ideally, you want a mix of highly relevant categories and “low competition” categories that will enable you to achieve a higher ranking. Ask when to expect ARCs (digital and physical).
* Ask your publisher about their preorder strategy. While a preorder campaign is great for physical stores (so they will promote and order books in advance), and it’s good for building buzz, it can negatively impact Amazon rankings. This is because Amazon rankings are updated hourly. Therefore, it’s more beneficial to have sales in a shorter period once the book is released. In other words, if you have a three-month presale and sell 100 books in that period, those 100 sales will count toward hourly rankings spread out over three months. In all likelihood, you’d get those 100 sales at any time. If those 100 sales were condensed over a day or two, it would almost certainly lead to a #1 release in some of your categories. (Preorders are also justifiably confusing on Amazon since there’s really no benefit to a reader ordering in advance.) However, in some cases, it does make sense and you can also do a preorder campaign in which you send swag to those who ordered. Note that it may also make sense to have the book on Amazon for preorder, but don’t tell anybody about it. This strategy can be beneficial for other things such as Goodreads and BookBub.
* Once the cover is finished, get 3D images of the print book, as well as mockups of the ebook. There are a number of designers on Fiverr and the sites listed above who will do this. It’s very inexpensive and worth every penny, as you can use these mockups in marketing. (Tip – make sure to get images of different formats at different angles with transparent backgrounds.)
* Join the debut group for your year’s release (usually only available to traditionally published authors).
* Build your website.
* Set up all social media accounts, if you haven’t already. (Facebook (personal and author account), TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn). Follow people so you can build your followers.
* Claim your Google business listing.
* Announce a release date everywhere.
* Consider hiring a publicist or PR firm (note – this may need to happen 18+ months in advance. It can also be very expensive without guaranteed results). However, I recommend at a minimum to contact some to discuss their rates, marketing strategies, etc. Even if you don’t hire them, you may get ideas from them, and it will help you keep your finger on the pulse of the industry.
* Take courses. Even if you’re not self-publishing, it’s a good idea to familiarize yourself with different aspects of the industry.
* Ask your publisher for access to Amazon Author Central (linked to your personal Amazon account). Create your author profile once you have access. Familiarize yourself with Amazon ads (but don’t advertise on Amazon until after release).
* Create a marketing strategy separate from the publisher’s. Think outside the box. Are there specific markets or groups that may be interested in your book? Schedule everything you need to do.
* Build a mailing list. It’s possible to scrape email addresses from accounts. Send your first newsletter, announcing the upcoming release.
* Contact other authors (or influencers) for blurb requests (or have your agent do it, if applicable).
* Submit to applicable contests. (Note – these can get expensive, so consider the ROI.)
* Post on social media (ongoing). Be active within the writing communities. Don’t just post on your own account, but like, share and comment on others.

**9+ months before launch**

* Do a cover reveal. Some people like to wait, but an early reveal makes more sense—why not get the cover into the ether as soon as possible? This will enable you to market early and build buzz. While there may be a temptation to withhold the cover to build buzz, it makes more sense to maximize exposure and brand awareness prior to release.
* Post a countdown.
* Continue posting on social media (ongoing).
* Research and set up book tour (aka blog tour) companies.
* Claim your Goodreads and BookBub pages. Set up your profiles.

**6 months before launch**

* Reach out to bloggers, bookstagrammers, booktokers and influencers for reviews. These can be separate from those your book/blog tour company is working with.
* Consider writing guest blogs.
* Update your website with reviews/blurbs (ongoing).
* Remind your publisher about sending ARCs to trade reviews. Most trade reviews require the book a bare minimum of four months in advance.
* Update your editorial reviews section through Author Central (ongoing).
* Consider NetGalley, BookFunnel, etc.
* Send press releases to local and wide media. Does your publisher do this?
* Set up interviews on podcasts, etc. shortly before your launch, as well as down the road. Sometimes it’s more beneficial to have an interview later.
* Continue posting/engaging on social media.
* Post a countdown.

**3 months before launch**

* Work with your publisher on setting up a Goodreads Giveaway. You can either do printed copies or ebooks. Printed copies will get more entries and more exposure via the giveaway, but they’re much more expensive. You can give away a maximum of 100 copies of either format. Schedule the giveaway to end about two weeks before your release to give people time to read it.
* Consider what you’ll do for your launch event and start planning.
* Consider building a “street team” – a group of friends or family who will spread the word about your book. Ideally, these are people who are very active on social media. Definitely gift them a copy of the book (or reimburse them so it’ll be a verified sale) and more.
* Continue posting on social media (ongoing)
* Post a countdown.

**1 month before launch**

* Ask your publisher to release one format 10 days early. This will enable you to garner sales and reviews prior to the official release so you can hit the ground running.
* Contact all associations (schools, etc.) that you’ve ever been a part of and ask them to post the announcement in their newsletter.
* Contact local stores for sales and signings. (Signings don’t need to happen on launch day. If anything, it may be better after launch, to get a later bump.)
* Post a countdown.

**Two weeks before launch**

* Remind your publisher about releasing a format 10 days early.
* The moment it’s released, contact trusted friends and family to buy it and ask them to leave a review as soon as possible. Ask them to leave reviews on Amazon, Goodreads and BookBub.
* For anyone who has read or is reading an ARC, contact them and ask them to leave reviews on Amazon, Goodreads and BookBub.
* Double check all your social media links and all links on your website.
* Record videos of yourself reading the opening 10-15 minutes and post.
* Remind your street team.
* Post a countdown.

**RELEASE DAY!**



* Blast announcements everywhere – all social media, your newsletter, update your website.
* If your website or social media has “coming soon” or something similar, make sure to update it all.
* Have a live launch event – an interview, live reading, etc.
* Congrats! Enjoy yourself. Have a great meal. You deserve it.

**POST LAUNCH**

* Now the real work begins!
* Ask for reviews from everybody who has purchased it. Yes, you will feel like you’re begging. Yes, it’s critical. Once your book has 40 reviews, Amazon puts it into their recommendation engine. It gets an additional bump at 100 reviews.
* Continue to post on social media.
* Continue to be present.
* Two weeks after launch, re-send your announcement newsletter. There’s a good chance the first one fell into a spam folder.
* If your publisher requires you to do the sales work, continue pitching stores and libraries.
* Consider paid Amazon ads.
* Consider paid Facebook ads.
* Once your book is discounted or free, consider paid BookBub ads (BookBub is only effective for discounted, free or KU books).
* Discuss Kindle Unlimited with your publisher. (Note – there are pros and cons to KU.)
* Update your Amazon page as applicable.
* Don’t forget to continue working on your next book!

Let’s follow each other on social media. Follow me and I’ll follow you back.

**Instagram:** @RobSamborn

**Twitter:** @RobSamborn

**Facebook:** @RobSambornAuthor

**LinkedIn:** rob-samborn

**TikTok:** @RobSamborn

**BookBub:** www.bookbub.com/profile/rob-samborn

Rob Samborn is the author of ***The Prisoner of Paradise*** and the upcoming novella, ***The Swordsman of Venice****,* and novel, ***Painter of the Damned***. He has a three-book print deal with TouchPoint Press and a three-book audiobook deal with Tantor Media. He’s represented by Brower Literary and Management. He’s also a screenwriter with nine features, five of which have been optioned. Originally from New York City, he now makes his home in Denver.

Stay in touch!

author@robsamborn.com

[www.robsamborn.com](http://www.robsamborn.com)