How to Sell YA Novels in a Saturated, Self-Publishing Market

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You'd think selling YA novels would be easy, given it's one of the most popular categories. But young adult novel's popularity also makes it one of the hardest to stand out. It's saturated.

While this category is specifically meant to be written for ages 13-18, you'll find plenty of adults much older than that enjoying the stories, which broadens the audience amount significantly..

Which means the sea of these books is large and your book might just be the cute, shiny little fish swimming in the whale's shadow…if you don't learn how to sell your YA novel, that is.

Let's be that whale.

Understanding Why People Buy the Books They Do

When you learn *why* readers buy, you can use that to inform your young adult book marketing tactics. And we all have methods to our buying.

Think about your own habits. Do you buy wildly different books that range many genres, or is there a trend to your buying habits?

If you're like most readers, there's a trend. You can define these trends for your book to make the next section significantly easier, so record these somewhere.

Category:

This is one of the firsts and usually changes with age. Categories are the age range and narrative type in writing. The narrative styles can be summed up with fiction or nonfiction, while categories typically go from children's to middle grade, then young adult, new adult, and adult.

Most of the time, if you're writing fiction, you would group category with genre and leave out the narrative type because that's obvious.

Here are a couple examples:

- Children's fantasy

- Middle grade historical
- Young adult romance

In your case, the category is Young Adult if it's for ages 13-18. And no, if your main character is 18 and romantically involved with a 25-year-old in your story, it's not YA (it's not even appropriate but that's a topic for another blog post). The category has more to do with the age the book's content is for, not the age of the characters.

Most readers stick to a couple of these and rarely sway. You'll need this for your methods to sell that we'll outline below.

Genre & subgenre:

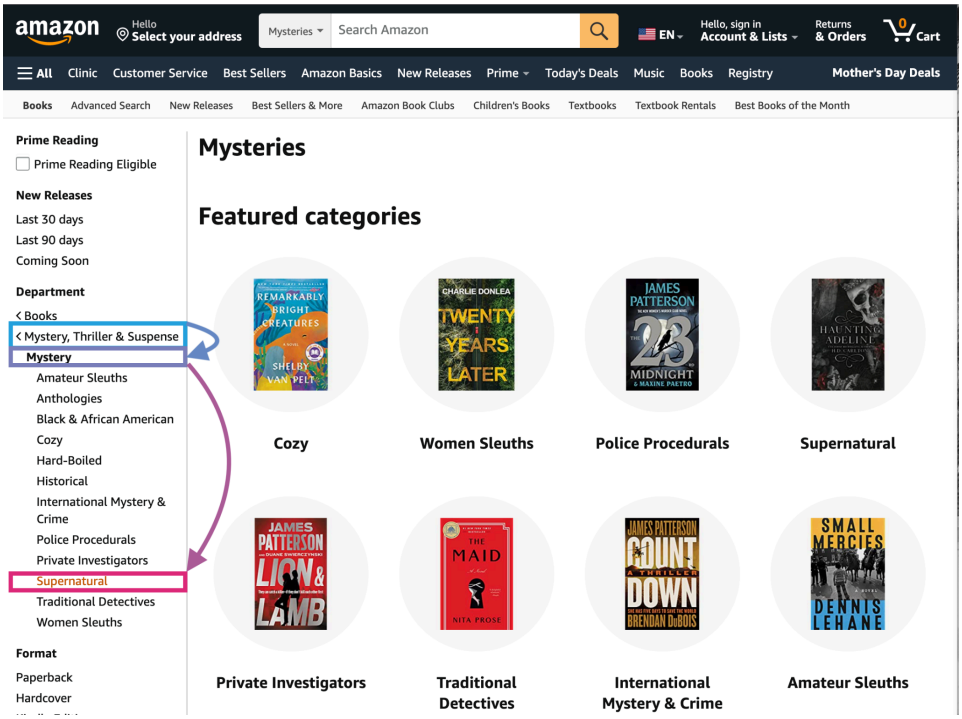
When it comes to genre, readers are loyal. While they might stray from time to time, most readers find a genre they love and stick with it.

Fantasy readers can often do sci-fi as well, but are more likely to pick a fantasy specific subgenre to devour (like urban or epic).

The more you can describe not only your genre, but subgenre, the more YA novels you'll sell.

Is it a steampunk fantasy novel? Or is it a steampunk epic fantasy adventure comedy? Or is it a steampunk horror fantasy romance? Be specific!

If you need help brainstorming subgenres, head to Amazon and do a search. Search books and click on a genre from the list, and you'll see the most popular subgenres listed beneath that one in the sidebar.



Setting:

Oftentimes, your setting is what dictates your subgenre. But it doesn't always. You can have a historical romance set in an up-and-coming city and that's much different than a historical romance set in the countryside.

But, readers of rural settings typically like staying in those settings no matter the timeline.

That's why there are so many farmer boy romance novels out there.

There's also the detail about what type of world the story is set in.

- Is it our world as it is now?
- Is it a portal story where there's a method to get from our world to another?
- Is it our world but set in the distant future?
- Is it a world similar to ours but fictitious?
- Is it a completely made up world that's nothing like our own (common in fantasy and many sci-fis).

That detail can make or break the book sale for many readers.

Characters & potential of conflict:

There are two things most readers look for when deciding whether or not to buy a new book—especially when trying to sell more young adult books:

The voice of the main character/narrative and the potential of conflict within the story.

Basically, who will I be on this journey with and what type of interactions will I be experiencing?

It's kind of like when you're invited to a party but you're picky and need to know whose it is and who else will be there. Will you be vibing in the corner with the cat or will you need to punch someone? It matters.

Most importantly though, is the way the character interacts with others and the story. It's not just plot, but something I call the *potential of conflict*. You don't have to outright tell your audience what the conflicts are because that would be giving away the best parts.

Instead, you tell (or show) them enough about the characters and plot to create a *potential of conflict* in the reader's mind.

Here's an some example of what this would look like written out:

Missy is a straight-A, top student who's dedicated her life to school. When she's assigned a lab partner for the biggest project of the semester—the one that dictates 50% of her final grade—the high hopes she had for her future vanish when she learns who it is. None other than Kimberly Krank, the bottom scorer in her entire class who doesn't care about anything or anybody.

Ultimately, the book's description and synopsis is essentially this. Write multiple descriptions like this for your main character and others that you can use as a guide to create your young adult marketing materials below.

Tropes:

There are a ton of tropes out there, especially in romance. These are nothing more than common setups, character dynamics, and plot structures that readers love and look for.

Some examples are:

- Enemies to lovers in romance
- The chosen one
- Orphaned main character
- Forbidden love
- Fake dating and fall in love
- The reluctant hero
- Character gets amnesia
- Found family

If your story doesn't have a trope, don't worry. What you'll want to pay attention to most then is the subgenre, characters, and potential of conflict.

Putting it all together to sell YA novels:

Knowing what these elements are for your book will make marketing your book significantly easier. Because next, we're making the materials you'll use to market and sell more copies.

Instead of giving you all the regurgitated channels where you can promote your YA novel, we're specifically covering what materials you can make and what those will be *about* in order to capture the right audience to buy.

How to Sell YA Novels Consistently with the Right Promotional Materials

If you actually did the above steps, this will be easy. If not, then you'll have a hard time making any promotion materials outside of the overdone book mockup image.

1. Publish Correctly on Amazon

If you don't set your book up correctly, you're shooting yourself in the foot. The basics also require all of the above information because the genres and subgenres you list your book in will help get it in front of the right people.

Even your book description should include the elements from the previous section.

Overall, pay extra attention to these elements when self-publishing your book:

- Title (note any tropes to help increase search traffic)
- Subtitle, if you have one
- Quality, genre/subgenre specific book cover
- Categories
- Keywords

2. Choose Your Channel

By channel, we mean social media, email, blog, and which platform among those options. There's a lot of options out there, but you'll end up finding that a mix of a very small few will bring you the most results.

Here are the channel options:

- Social media
- Email marketing
- Blog (organic)
- Youtube

Within each of these is a platform and types of content you'd need to make consistently.

The key with any of these is consistency. So make sure when choosing your platform, that you're keeping in mind both your audience *and* whether or not you actually find any joy in creating the content necessary.

- **Social Media:** Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter
    - Content types for all vary from images, text, and videos

- **Email Marketing:** Pick an email provider, create lead magnets (freebies connected to your book), and utilize emails to sell books
- **Blog:** Medium, personal website, promoting on Pinterest
- **Youtube**: long-form video

3. Create Effective Marketing Materials

Now is what you've probably been waiting for. The type of content you make will change some of this advice, but at its core, you'll still use the information you filled out in the first section.

You'll use that information to make content *about* the elements you've identified as the reason your readers will buy.

Above, you chose a channel. Some channels allow for multiple types of content, like social media. I'm going to cover content types, how to make them, and how to use the information above to make marketing material that actually works.

Graphics with Text:

You can use these on any social media, but if you post on Instagram, do a carousel of them or the algorithm won't show it as much.

To make these, go to Canva, it's free and super easy to use.

Go to "Create a design" and choose the platform or size. Square is good for these (the "Instagram Post" option).

There are a couple ways you can make these: using quotes from inside the book, describing aspects of the story, or using a telling one-liner. In any case, you'll use the information above and pick a background image that showcases those elements, along with fitting fonts that add to the mood of your story. You can get background images that are free to use on stock sites like Pexels and Unsplash.

Below is an example of a steampunk horror VS a steampunk romance:





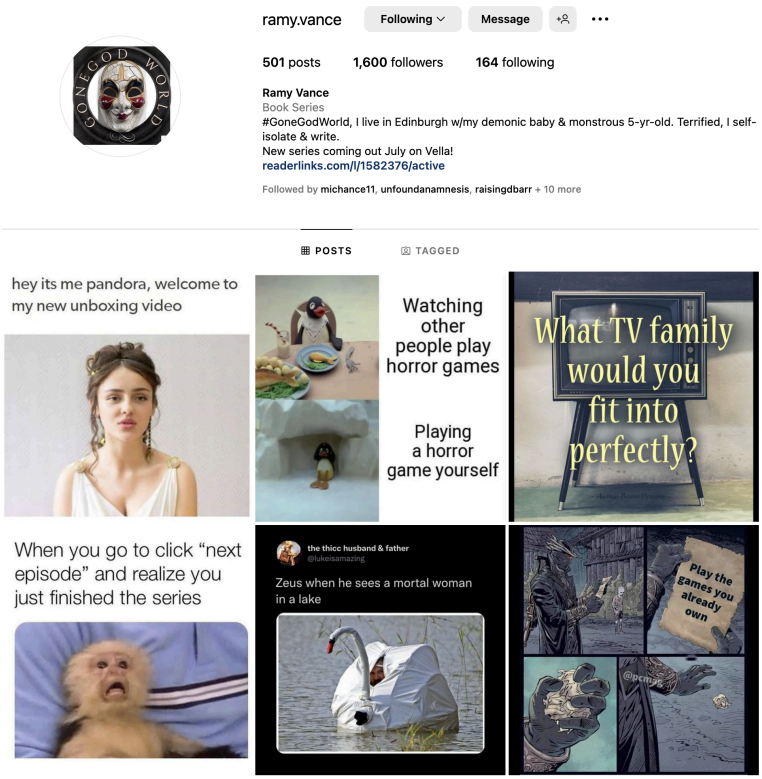
These were created using the free version and adjusting one of the photo's opacity, but you can make them even better if you pay for their pro version for additional photo editing features.

Memes:

Memes can work, but not many do them well. You have to take current and trending memes and make them applicable to your character and stories.

The key with these is being able to show the potential of conflict to give potential buyers a sense of what they'll get. The reason they're hard to make work, though, is that people will care less if they're not familiar with the characters or situations referenced.

Instead, you can post memes that are related to your book's genre in order to attract the right audience. Ramy Vance does this with mythology memes because his books contain those types of characters.



Videos - Short Form:

Short form video is taking over the internet thanks to TikTok and then other platforms adopting it. It's even more popular among young adults. Aka: your audience!

Specifically, selling books has become much easier thanks to TikTok, with a subsegment of its audience calling themselves BookTok.

With this, you'll want to keep your genre and subgenre in mind and take a look at what other people are doing that's going viral.

I made a video about how to do this and specify it to your genre because what works for you will vary greatly.

[you can embed this on here, it's solid: https://youtu.be/ZvdZg5eepsw]

Videos - Long Form:

Youtube is a platform for long-form content where you can sell your books, and there are two primary ways authors are doing this:

1. By giving writing advice and talking about the process
2. By reviewing books via "Booktube"

Either way can work, but this is definitely a long-term strategy that may or may not pay off. If you truly enjoy talking about and teaching the writing process, that angle can work well. You'll have more competition now, but there's still room to grow.

If you'd rather take the book-reviewer route, you'll want to have fun with that process too, knowing that it's also fairly saturated. That never means you can't "make it," it just means that you'll want a strategy and to understand some SEO (search engine optimization) so your videos are searchable.

Either way, you'll need to promote your content elsewhere—that's where short form video comes into play. Take these longer videos and splice them to post on TikTok or Instagram reels.

Written:

Blog posts and emails can actually sell quite a bit if you know how to set it all up. The topics you write about should, in some way, be related to your books. You can write about the writing process, about your genre, or about bigger concepts you explore in your fiction, like the themes, settings, or other elements.

For example, if many themes in your writing revolve around the found-family trope, writing blog posts about what it's like to do that, how to go about it, and general information involving the real-life experience of it can help you sell copies.

Those who like to read that stuff may want to experience it through your fiction.

Just remember that if you blog, you should also create lead magnets (it can even be a free chapter or two from your book) in order to grow your email list so you can sell your books later.

Selling YA books isn't much more complicated than selling any other product. You just have to know your audience and understand what they're *actually* buying when they get a new book.

Try these tactics and remember that consistency more than anything else will lead to book sales.