

# Seven Keys to Digital Publishing Success

## Case Studies from Innovative Publishers and Authors

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 INscribe Digital

Every publisher, entrepreneurial author and literary agent is aiming to launch the next bestseller. Many have spent years trying to hit it big by offering the first eBook in a series for free, or an eBook bundle for 99 cents. But after experimenting with various marketing strategies, their eBook sales too often plateau or peter out before achieving the ultimate sales goal. Worse still, few publishers know how to play the kind of long game that keeps sales ticking upward to give a book real staying power.

EBook distributors working with a wide range of content owners and retailers are among those with the broadest view of the strategies that are succeeding. The most technically savvy of these distributors are also innovating new tools with proven ability to extend a publisher's marketing reach over many titles. But in today's fast-moving digital marketplace, it can be hard to find key players who are also willing to share success stories.

At INscribe Digital, we work with a broad base of hundreds of publishers, authors and literary agents, whose successes underscore some basic principles that go a long way in laying the foundation for eBook bestsellers. Allow us to share some of our best insights with you.

## SEVEN KEYS TO DIGITAL PUBLISHING SUCCESS

### 1. Launch with a Long Term Strategy

Publishers need to build long-term strategies not only with their authors, but also with their wise choice of marketing and distribution partners. By planning ahead for the "final mile" of reaching the customer, publishers will be able to make critical decisions that will drive a successful business and marketing plan.

Without integrated planning, marketing tactics often achieve only limited effects, with a particular retailer or particular audience segment. What ultimately drives big sales is a solid focus on how multiple strategies are working together – including cover design, the book description, embedded buy links for related titles, as well as giveaways, retailer and social media promotions — not just leading up to the book launch date, but over the long haul.

## 2. Prepare for Preorders

Offering an eBook for preorder anywhere up to one year before launch can bring a significant sales boost when the title becomes available, particularly if it's part of a popular series.

### INscribe Case In Point

When author **Shiloh Walker** launched *Broken Blade* - the third title in the Fallen Blade paranormal romance series by her alter ego J.C. Daniels – she made the fourth title in the series, *Edged Blade*, available for preorder, even though the book was scheduled for release a year later, in February, 2015. Within one week after *Broken Blade* went on sale, preorders for *Edged Blade* were already higher than the total preorders for *Broken Blade*.

As this example shows, setting up preorder purchase pages for forthcoming books in a series is critical for your long-term sales strategy.

## 3. Leverage the Retailers

Making an eBook available for preorder isn't enough. It is also critical that the eBook comes to a reader's attention, and is easy to purchase, just when the reader most wants it. One effective approach is to include an in-book purchase link to the next title in the series.

**Ink Monster**, an innovative digital publisher specializing in genre fiction series, has taken that method a step further, by ensuring that the purchase links in each eBook are

A purchase link that leads to the reader's favorite bookstore increases the chance of your next sale.

retailer-specific. So if someone is reading a title in iBooks, the embedded purchase link leads to the iBookstore. When Ink Monster published two New Adult romance series in 2014, *Alpha Girl* by Aileen Erin and *Angelbound* by Christina Bauer, the company found that more than 20% of customers who bought the first book in each series immediately preordered the second books in each series!

For many readers, a purchase link that leads to their regular eBookstore makes all the difference.

#### 4. Plan Ahead on Pricing

One of the easiest ways to spur interest in an eBook and to increase sales is to make it available at a special price - or for free - for a short time. However, this strategy does come with risks. Books that have been offered for free, or at some popular low price points, may not be eligible for a Kindle Daily Deal promotion at Amazon, nor other retailer marketing opportunities. Partnering with a good distributor who has strong marketing relationships with retailers is key - many of the best marketing opportunities are not available to authors who use self-publishing solutions.

One effective strategy employed by **Light Messages Publishing** is to offer attractive price reductions for its fiction eBooks, while also avoiding some of the most popular low price points, so that those remain available for marketing opportunities with specific retailers. As a result, Light Messages eBooks have been featured several times as Kindle Daily Deals, despite previous price promotions for such titles as *A Sinner in Paradise*, *The Obsidian Dagger*, and *Autobiography of a Baby Boomer*.

#### 5. Build Buzz with Social Media

Social media alone may not make a bestseller, but you can't bypass Twitter, Facebook and Instagram without missing an important chance

to build the kind of buzz that grabs the attention of retailers and readers.

INscribe Case In Point

Entrepreneurial publisher Georgia McBride of **Swoon Romance** and **Month9Books** is a master of networking and social outreach. She has set herself apart on social media as an expert publisher for young adult genre fans, with Twitter parties, among other strategies. McBride uses social media to announce flash sales, follower-only promotions and information like preorder availability, publication dates and opportunities for fans to preview covers and sample chapters.

When McBride sends out a message about her books, a web of followers retweets and posts them on Facebook, boosting her launch and expanding her sales base. Lissa Woodson, of **Macro Publishing Group**, has also enlisted her authors to promote each other, along with custom eBook bundles. For both entrepreneurs, social media has been crucial to finding and keeping a network of allies to boost their niche businesses.

## 6. Leverage Specialty Marketing Services

Good marketing depends on solid basics: a book that delivers, a great description, and strong reviews. To cultivate early review attention, consider the digital galley service offered by companies like NetGalley. To promote a new release to new readers, try offering the first book on an eBook marketing service like Bookbub.

INscribe Case In Point

Romance author Lorhainne Eckhart does a brilliant job trying services new and old to see which gives her series the most lift, usually timing each promotion to the release of a new title. For example, she promoted *Saved* in BookBub in August 2014, and its sequel *Vanished*, in November 2014. That gave her readers time to read the first two books and place their preorder for Book 3, *Captured*, before it was released later in 2014.

Books that have been offered for free, or at some popular low price points, may not be eligible for a Kindle Daily Deal promotion at Amazon.

## 7. Act on Your Data Points

No matter what your digital marketing strategy, there are many ways it can go wrong. That's why it can come in handy to have a tool that makes it easy to track hundreds of titles on retail sites.

### INscribe Case In Point

**Kensington Publishing** uses the INstore tool to follow the rankings, reviews, and live purchase links for their titles, so that they can target their marketing for titles with four-star reviews. Another way to use INstore is to track disparities in a book's sales rank at the four major digital retailers. When an eBook is highly ranked at Amazon, but not at B&N and Kobo, it may indicate an opportunity for better placement at the other retailers. It may also indicate that the book is really clicking with a particular retailer's customer base, and more targeted marketing around that retailer could really make the eBook pop.

# Ink Monster

from Zero to \$100K in digital sales in one year

Here's an example of how an innovative young digital publishing company called Ink Monster used many of the principles mentioned above to launch its first two fiction series with impressive results. Like all publishers, Ink Monster has a lot of competing demands, yet they have kept a tight focus on what works best for their girl geek readers, and are always refining their tactics. That methodology has led to sales of \$100,000 and more than 250,000 units in their first year of business – which is really just the beginning for this bold new company.



## Step 1: Launch with a Long Term Strategy: Know Your Mission

To make sure they had a clear vision for their publishing program, Ink Monster began by creating a mission statement, before they even had their first finished manuscript.

# “ We’re Publishers

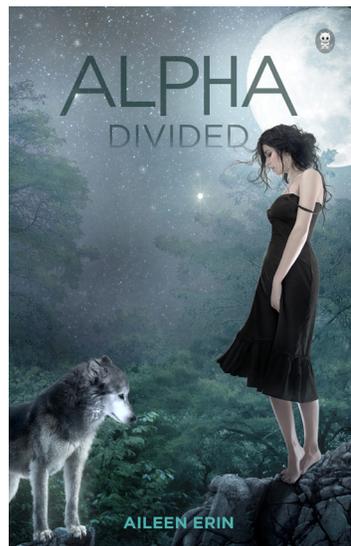
We’re Publishers of New Adult Romance Books in the genres of Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Paranormal and Urban. New Adult means our books have heart-pounding action, unforgettable romance, kick-ass heroines, and some curl-your-toes steamy sex scenes. All our work follows a set of guidelines that make sure you, the reader, get the stories you want when you want them. Check out our Monster Manifesto to find out more.



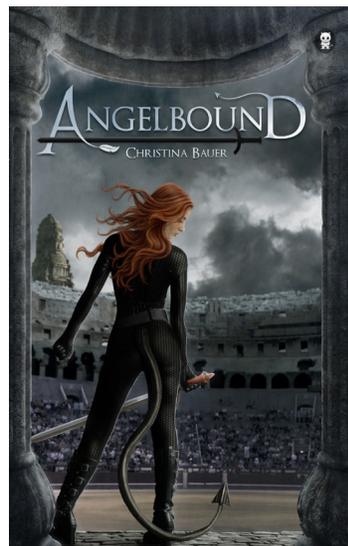
Although a new publisher, Ink Monster had the eye of a big house. A key part of their strategy was working with all their key stakeholders to create a comprehensive strategy across marketing, design and retail. For example, they took the time to create a consistent look and feel for the cover art for their first two series, *Alpha Girl* and *Angelbound*, as you can see.



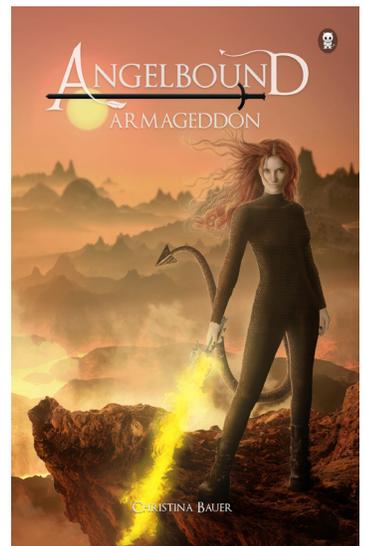
Becoming Alpha



Becoming Alpha



Angelbound



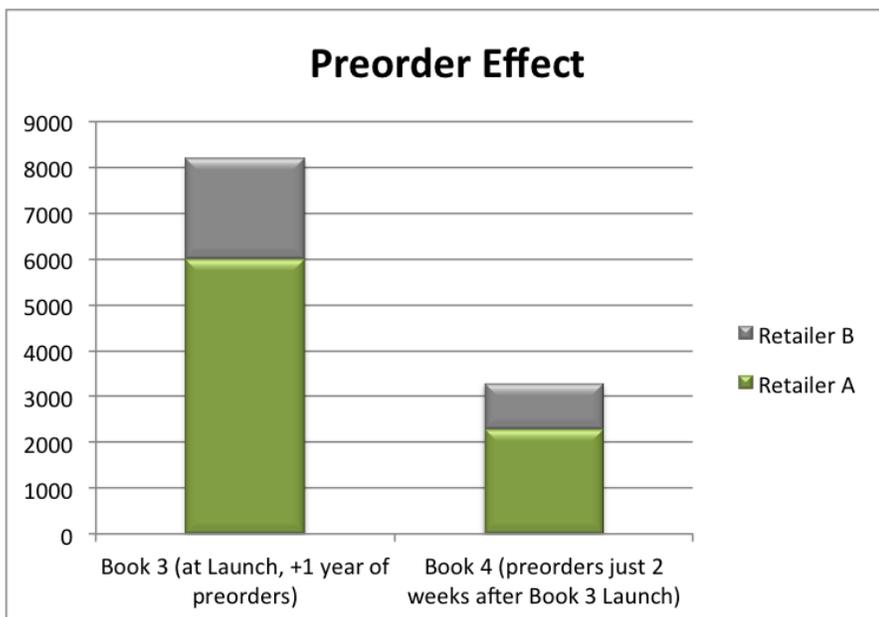
Angelbound

## Step 2: Prepare for Preorders

Since they couldn't release all the titles in the *Alpha Girl* and *Angelbound* series at once, Ink Monster made sure their readers knew where to get the next book as soon as they finished one - by putting a purchase link in the back. That strategy has paid off, with preorders growing exponentially from title to title.

When Ink Monster looked at the sales of both series by retailer, and compared their preorders for Book 2 versus total unit sales of Book 1, they found that the Book 2 preorders equaled a minimum of 20% of total unit sales at Barnes and Noble. **At iBooks, where sales had been incredibly strong, the preorder rate for the second book was 42% of the total sales of the first.**

Here's another example of the power of preorders: When Ink Monster launched the third book in the *Alpha Girl* series in October 2014, they had more than 8,300 preorders. Two weeks later, they had 3,200 preorders for the fourth book, coming in 2015. (See Table below.) If they hadn't had books three and four available for preorder well in advance of publication, these preorders would have been lost.



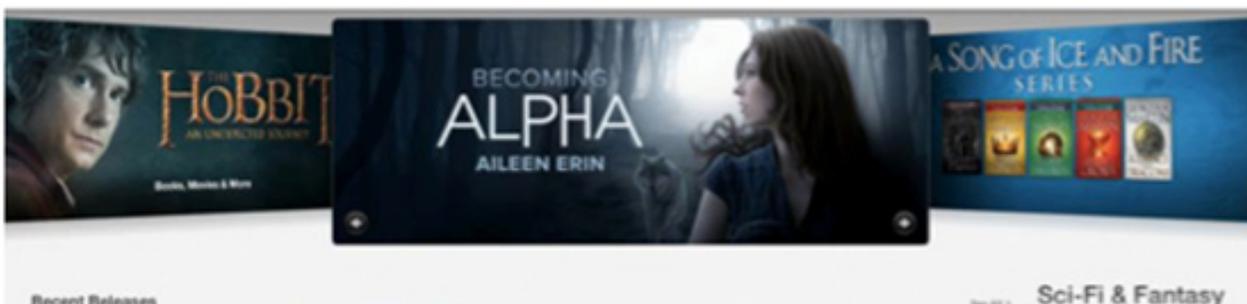
Ink Monster closely tracks the effect of preorders

### Step 3: Leverage the Retailers

Marketing is more than customer outreach. Ink Monster also crafted a multi-stage plan for garnering attention from retailers.

“Retailer outreach was one of the critical factors to our success,” says Christina Bauer, Ink Monster Co-CEO. “We teamed with **INscribe** to come up with a way to leverage our unique mission statement and generate interest across a wide variety of retailers. Our planning combined with INscribe’s contacts and expertise was crucial at this stage of our corporate development.”

Based on this plan, INscribe reached out to retailers with the Ink Monster mission statement and book descriptions three months prior to the launch of the *Alpha Girl* series. A month later, we reached out to retailers again, about preorder placement. One month prior to launch, we reminded retailers about the titles and sent digital galley for the retailers to read. Pitching their *Alpha Girl* and *Angelbound* titles repeatedly turned out to be crucial. Although Ink Monster was a brand new publisher, they won great placement among some very highly esteemed titles on iBooks’ Sci-Fi and Fantasy page, as you can see below.



### Step 4: Plan Ahead on Pricing: Don't Go Free Too Early

Ink Monster played a long game. They submitted their titles to retailers for promotional consideration well in advance of publication, and kept creating opportunities for the retailers to say yes, by ensuring the books had high rankings and reviews before re-soliciting. They also held back some price points for later retail promotions, and didn't give away free

books until titles in the series had been featured as a Kindle Daily Deal, a Kobo Daily Deal and a Nook Daily Find.

“I’ll admit, at first my instinct was to go free early and often,” says Bauer. “Kelly Peterson, our INscribe Client Services Director, talked us down from that ledge. I was so anxious to get units out there, I didn’t think of the marketing opportunities we’d be missing out on. Now, I’m all about the long game. eBooks are so different that way. Print has a short window for a book to hit. But if you play your cards right, you can nurture an eBook along over a period of months or even years. We see launch-style bumps for early books every time we do a retail placement for a book later in the series. Patience is key.”

After offering several great discounts and running their promotional gambit, Ink Monster watched for signs that Book 1 and 2 might slow down. To build the audience for Book 3, they waited until the optimal moment to go free with Book 1. Forty-five days ahead of the Book 3 launch, they made Book 1 free, promoted it with eBook marketing services Bookbub and Fussy Librarian, and garnered more than 161,000 free downloads.

Thanks to the retailer-specific purchase links in the back of the free editions of Book 1, the promotion led to nearly 13,000 paid downloads of Book 2, earning 25% of Ink Monster’s paid sales that month.

## Step 5 & 6: Act on Your Data - Build Your Brand & Social Media Buzz

Ink Monster started out with a clear vision of the smart, techy women they were targeting as their readers. They knew it was a large audience, based on the market research they did:



**Nearly half** of all video gamers are women



**40%** of the Comic Con attendees are women



**1 in 3** technology degrees go to women



**1 in 4** tech workers are women

This knowledge enabled the company to establish clear parameters for their brand. Since smart, techy women like to read romance and sci-fi, and both genres thrive on series, that's how Ink Monster defined their niche.

The company also made sure that it would own the series concepts, so that a reader would never be left in the lurch, waiting forever for the next book. They also created a stream of fun online tidbits called "Always-On Worlding," to keep their readers interested between books.

## **Everything they do is built around the reader.**

### **Step 7: Leverage Marketing Services to Gets Lots of Reviews**

Ink Monster offered free copies of the first two books via the digital galley service NetGalley, and targeted Young Adult and Romance reviewers. The results were astounding.

Less than two weeks after launch, *Becoming Alpha* had 80 Goodreads reviews and 22 Amazon reviews, and *Angelbound* had 60 Goodreads reviews and 19 Amazon reviews. This effort was helped by a reminder to the NetGalley reviewers to post their reviews on the launch day, which included links to the purchase pages for the books at several retail sites to make the process easier for the reviewers.

### **Summary**

Good publishing has long rested on the adage that "failing to plan is planning to fail." It's no different for today's eBooks. Achieving long-term success in digital publishing requires many of the same approaches that created success in physical publishing – great content, fantastic branding, connective marketing strategies that reach customers through great retailer outreach and support.

What is different about digital publishing are the timelines, horizons, strategies and tactics that can be used to

effectively grow sales over time. Selecting the right digital distribution and marketing partner who has a solid grasp on the nuances of each strategy is critical to ensuring that your publishing and marketing plans will be able to achieve strong and consistent levels of success.

## HOW CAN AN EBOOK DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING SPECIALIST LIKE INSCRIBE DIGITAL HELP PUBLISHERS AND AUTHORS?

INscribe Digital is an eBook distribution and marketing services company that has helped hundreds of corporate, university and independent publishers, entrepreneurial authors and agents publish their digital books successfully. This gives us the broadest view of the strategies that are succeeding. INscribe Digital is able to leverage our technical savvy as well, innovating to bring new tools to market with a proven ability to extend a publishers' marketing reach over many titles.

Our strong relationships with retailers and our broad perspective on what's working across the digital marketplace enables us to deliver customized marketing and sales solutions for a wide range of fiction and nonfiction eBooks for adults and children, across various formats and reading devices. INscribe is a Gold Partner to Amazon and an Approved Aggregator for Apple's iBookstore. With our parent company, Isolation Network, we leverage more than a decade of experience in delivering music, books and other digital media assets to leading retailers worldwide.

**Meet us at Digital Book World in NYC January 14-15, 2015 to learn how INscribe Digital can help you drive sales.**

[Learn more about our INstore marketing](#) and analytics tool for tracking eBook rankings, reviews, and live purchase links across your entire publishing list



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