

# YOUR AUTHOR BUSINESS PLAN

Joanna Penn



## Author Brand and Comparison Authors

Now we're going to get into author brand and comparison authors.

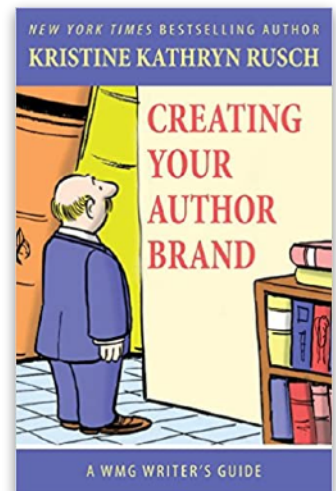
This is the thing that will get you to really think because branding is tough.

I know this because I've revisited mine many times over the years, particularly JF Penn. I think Joanna Penn and The Creative Penn has remained pretty stable over the last decade in that I've always wanted to empower authors with information and I just share what I learned along the way, but JF Penn has been difficult for me. I still think that. As we go through, I'll share with you, for each series, you almost have to revisit this again.

A book that I recommend here, [Creating your Author Brand](#) by Kristine Kathryn Rusch. I've also done an interview with Kris on this.

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2018/08/20/branding-for-authors-with-kristine-kathryn-rusch/>

That is a really good book specifically on author branding. Of course, there are tons of books on branding, but this is more specifically around the author brand.



I think you have to start somewhere. So when I started out, it was very much ARKANE Stone of Fire was like Dan Brown, but over the years, I've revisited it and come up with other things that make up a JF Penn brand as such.

**Brand is really the promise to the reader** and what you are going to provide with this brand. You will need to upskill to learn and change over time and that's okay.

I don't want to overwhelm you with this section. I want you to **have a think about your own brand or brands or series and figure out what works for you, but also to know and understand that you will probably change things as you go forward.** And that's fine too.



Let's talk about Joanna Penn first. This is an obviously a nonfiction brand. We're going to look at the feelings, the colors, the words.

**What impression do you leave with the customer?**

**What impression do you *want* to give the customer?**

**What promise do you give the reader or the visitor?**

For me, for The Creative Penn, for Joanna Penn, this was always from the beginning about empowerment. It was about positive thinking, independence, freedom, and lots of smiling. I hope you know that if I'm having a down day, I don't share it on The Creative Penn usually. I know I've had a few moments during the pandemic stuff when I've shared some difficulties, but generally I try and stay on the side of positivity and upbeat and empowerment and all of that kind of thing.

I use primary colors. I don't do pastels, so my colors are red and white and other brighter colors. Bold statements that go through the website and the podcast. So those are some of my nonfiction words and feelings. As we go through, I'm just going to share mine and hope that it gives you some ideas.

If you work with a graphic designer or any form of designer, you might be able to get a brand manual done. This is an example of brand work that my graphic designer (and book cover designer) [JD Smith Design](#) did. That's the lovely Jane.

We did this after the fact, but of course you can get this done before you do anything so that you keep things consistent over time. Now I definitely have not kept things consistent over time and if I had got a design palette

done like this with fonts and colors earlier, then that might have helped, but we do have one now.

You can see here, it is very much a predominance of red, white, and primary colors. The fonts are used in the brand management over time, again, not entirely necessary at the beginning, but this can help, especially if you're doing any licensing in the future.



Let's get into comparison authors. This is really useful to do before you launch or afterwards with a book. One of the reasons I like doing a Keynote or PowerPoint is that — obviously your business plan can be on a word document or some kind of linear text — but if you use Keynote to do your plan, you can actually put in screenshots of book covers.

These are some of my comparison authors in the author space for Joanna Penn. You can see that **generally nonfiction covers are very text heavy and it's very clear from the text what we are talking about.**

These are some of the authors who I target. These are some of the books. You can use these for cover ideas, you can use them for ad targeting,

which we'll get into later on in the marketing section, but it's very important to go into — obviously Amazon's easy, but Apple or Kobo or wherever you are — and do your research.



Copy and paste the covers into something like this and have a look at them. What do they have in common? So it's quite interesting because it used to be when I started out that the white cover with text on was predominant. (Think early Malcolm Gladwell). Now it has moved into a background color thing.

I particularly like Adam Croft there. It's very bold. The indie author mindset. David Gaughran strangers to super fans, also very clear. So you can get some different ideas from

these.

Obviously I've been doing my books for over a decade, so I'm keeping with my own branding along the way.

Then you're going to think about the **categories and the subcategories** that you sit in in the various stores. Again, Amazon is very easy to do the research in, and these are pretty much where I sit for my nonfiction. You can again, find these by going in to the store and finding the book, and then having a look at where the books you are targeting sit, where you might fit.



My main thing is to fit under Reference /Writing research and publishing guides, and then publishing and books.

Authorship. Pretty much all my books fit in that category, but there are some other places, for example, reference writing research and publishing; guides on the nonfiction publishing and books, editing, for example, all of those places are places I can fit. Writing skills.

Then under business and money, entrepreneurship and small business. Marketing, obviously I have a book on marketing. I think I've also targeted entrepreneurship as well. Then Kindle books, business and money, business life, and time management, personal success, motivation and self improvement. There's also a creativity sub category. There are lots of different places.

**You need to do the research for your author brand, and it is very useful to do this periodically as well because new categories appear over time.**

Let's get into JFPenn for my fiction.

The feelings I want to give are escape, freedom, adventure, thrill, excitement, fast paced.

I do use me smiling. I didn't used to, I used to have a more brooding thing, and then I just thought no way, this is about having fun. Escape is fun.

So, I'm changing my branding up to have a more smiley picture, but it is much darker colors and you can see there in the background, architecture.



My main website is [www.JFPenn.com](http://www.JFPenn.com)

I also have [www.BooksAndTravel.page](http://www.BooksAndTravel.page) and the podcast, Books and Travel again, mostly darker color palette

compared to The Creative Penn.

I also have a brand guide mainly for covers. This is actually really good because if over time you do change designers, then having the fonts and the colors is really useful to make sure you get some consistency.

You can see this is by series and my different series have different fonts, but my author name is mainly consistent.

Certainly the font is consistent across the books.

**Different series will often have different looks and feels**, but it's good to have some consistency.

If you are independently published, you can control that. One of the issues I see with traditionally published authors is that as they move publishers, the publishers want a different design. It means that they're not very coherent across an author brand, especially if they move in the middle of a series, but we have control over that.

Talking about comparison authors for JF Penn, for me, it differs by series. If you're looking at traditionally published authors versus indie or self published authors, and you can refine these over time by testing them out with ads.

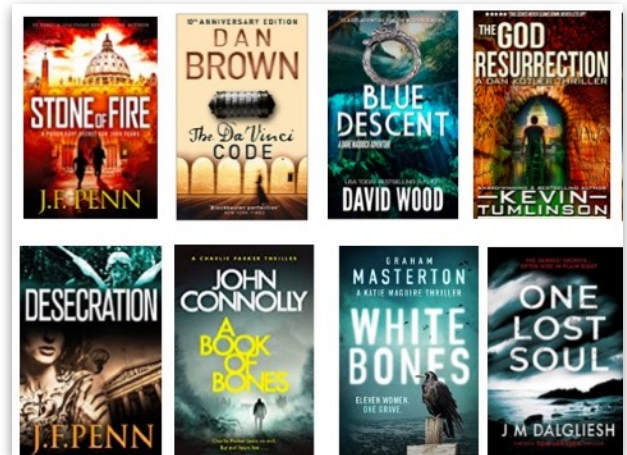
For example, Stone of Fire, the closest in the traditionally published world is Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code. That is the feeling that you get with the books. but actually what I have found is it's much better to do advertising

against indie authors. And these are some of the authors I advertise against, several of whom are my friends. David Wood, Kevin Tumlinson, Ernest Dempsey. and then also Christopher Cartwright and RD Shaw.

These are some examples of books that I use in my targeting. You can see from the pictures that they all have a similar look about them.

My London Crime Thriller series is quite different. I've got some different authors here and again, a mix of traditionally published books indie, although I'm not quite sure, actually these might all be traditionally published.

As I record this, I'm struggling with getting my targeting with Desecration right. Perhaps we can even see from the covers here, I'm thinking of re-covering the trilogy again, to not have a figure on it. It seems quite common to not have a figure on these darker crime books. We shall see. I'm still figuring this out.

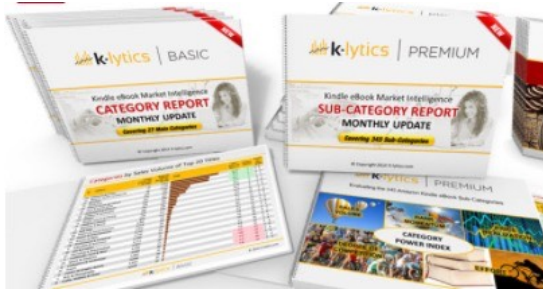


This is because I'm doing my comparison author research a lot later than I should have done, especially with that series. That was a very experimental series. It's totally cross-genre and difficult to place. I'm still working this out and that's part of why doing these business plans is a good idea because you can actually go.' Oh, do you know what, when I think about it, I can't figure out where this fits.' and that tells you something in itself.

Where are the different categories and subcategories, which will differ by series? For me, literature and fiction / action adventure is my main category for the ARKANE books. I do often put it in, travel adventure fiction, women's adventure, men's adventure. also conspiracy thrillers. Crime thrillers. And, also action adventure fantasy is my Mapwalker series.

**Different series will have different categories and subcategories.**

If you are struggling with your category research, I highly recommend the K-lytics reports. [www.TheCreativePenn.com/genre](http://www.TheCreativePenn.com/genre)



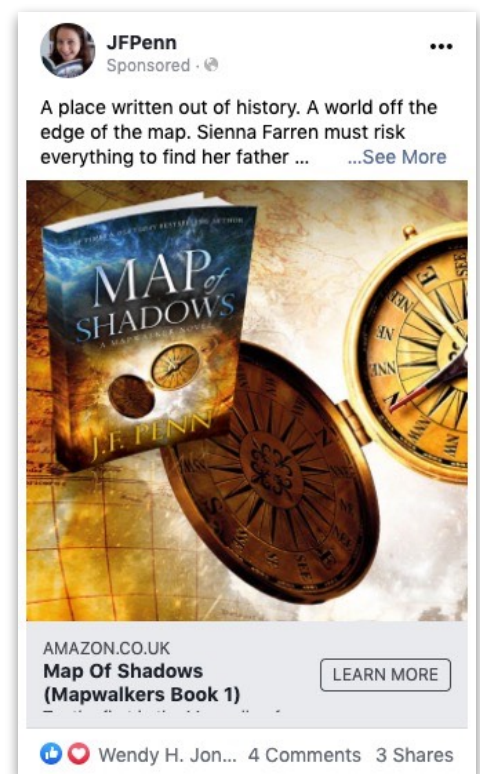
You can see there, they have lots of reports but for some of the major categories of books, you can also get their data downloads every month. That is a free webinar that I did in April, 2020. You can watch/listen to the replay: <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2020/05/08/book-marketing-mastering-amazon-data-to-sell-more-books-with-alex-newton-from-k-lytics/>

I am an affiliate of K-lytics. I use those reports myself. I think they're brilliant. Alex is a total self-confessed data geek. He loves all this stuff. I don't particularly like it, so I much prefer buying a report when I need to.

The other thing is to **consider a customer avatar** over time, which will help with positioning.

This is something that I didn't really understand for a while, but then doing Facebook ads has actually helped me figure this out because you can target different people. So here's an example, women over 40 who like Kindle fantasy books and cartography or maps or national geographic, like my Mapwalker fantasy adventure series.

This is a particular customer avatar for a particular series. You can figure out what your customer avatar is. There are ways that you can narrow that down, particularly on Facebook. The advertising is great and we'll come back to that in the marketing section. But I think this is probably why I like Facebook advertising the most for fiction, because **it's much easier to think about the cross genre feelings and interests** that people have that might go into people liking your book.



So people are picking up Map of Shadows just based on the cover. It's got the word map in, it's got a picture of a compass and a background of a globe there. So if you like these kinds of things, if these things are catnip to you, then you are going to check out the book. So that is something I very much enjoy.

You can't do that kind of targeting on any other ad platform. So that's just a little extra tip for your positioning of your book. This is the type of stuff I'm working on as I figure out how to target the books.



**What are the feelings, words, images, colors, that associate with your author brand?**

This might be by author name. It might be per series.

**Who are your comparison authors or the comparison books?** Do these differ by series and they probably will. Are you listing aspirational traditionally published big name authors and/or indies who are doing well? It's really important to think about the indie authors who are doing well in your niche, because they will be much easier to advertise against, and also just much more granular in terms of advertising.

**What categories and subcategories are your books in?**

Does this need refining? When was the last time you looked at them?

When you've been doing it for a while, like I have, you really need to go in and re-investigate where you have put your books and decide whether or not you want to change that up.

There's so much to think about here, and I don't want you to get overwhelmed. I want you to just go through this once, start thinking about the questions and then maybe just brainstorm and then spend some time researching.

This is something, as I said, that I'm still researching, but now when I do each new book, I'm going to think about this beforehand, because it would be much easier to do it beforehand than afterwards!