Ever wondered how authors get tons of reviews the first week of their launch while you’re writing groveling emails to your family and friends, asking them to please, please, please read your book and write a review? The answer is that authors who get reviews provide free ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies) to avid readers. Avid readers are folks who dig your writing and want to know when your next book’s coming out. Or, they may be readers who enjoy books just like yours and who are willing to take a chance on an unknown. Avid readers are also folks who know how the game is played. They know it’s super important for authors to get reviews on Amazon, Goodreads, and other online platforms such as Kobo, iBooks, and Barnes & Noble’s Nook. In this post I’m going to share four ways to get ARCs into the hands of avid readers.

Strategy

First, however, let’s talk strategy. Here’s the way I see it.

* Find readers
* Send out ARCs
* Send reminders to reviewers
* Gather feedback and do last minute revisions
* Publish to Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, or other online bookstores.

No matter how carefully you’ve edited your book, there will always be typos. Readers will spot those. Essentially, you’re giving away ARCs so that you won’t embarrass yourself by having these errors pointed out post-publication. You’re also giving these away so that you can get email addresses develop a group of people who want to read advance copies of future books.

Book Review Targeter

One of my favorite pieces of software is Debbie Drum’s Book Review Targeter (<https://debbiedrum.lpages.co/brt-two/>). This software lets you search for books like yours, thus allowing you to identify readers who might like the kind of book you’ve written.

The software is versatile. The easiest way to use it is to enter keywords such as “historical fiction” or “women’s fiction” or “thriller” or “spiritual” or “diet.” You can also enter specific authors or ISBNs.

A list of books pops up. You’ll see how many reviews each book has garnered. Look for those with a lot of reviews and find books that match the theme and content of yours. For instance, if you see a thriller set in World War II and that’s the kind of book you’ve written, then you know readers are likely to enjoy yours, too.

Book Review Targeter is an online service that won’t take up room on your hard drive, but there’s a lot of backend work to keep up with changes Amazon makes. Hence, the software costs $197 with a $47 maintenance fee. If you only plan to write one book, this might not be worth it. However, if you plan to write many books and write them across multiple genres, then the app gives you a shot at finding avid readers who go the next step and post Amazon reviews.

The only drawback is that you’ll still have work to do. First off, you’ll need to wait until BRT emails you and tells you it has finished your search. At that point the dashboard will show the books you’ve selected. Expand each book, and you’ll see a list of blogs that have reviewed the book. You can message reviewers and offer them an ARC or contact them via LibraryThing, Goodreads, their website, or wherever they posted the review.

You’ll also see the number of stars the reviewer has given the book. With the “Pro” version of the software, you can sort for reviewers who leave 4- and 5-star reviews. Debbie’s excellent training walks you through the steps. You’ll want to remain in compliance with Amazon’s legalities, meaning that the reviewer must add a sentence like this. “I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.”

BRT is particularly useful if you’re writing in a not-so-popular genre, something that might have a niche readership such as “steampunk.” If you’re writing in one of the genres that are wildly popular these days (romance or fantasy), then one of the apps below should streamline the process.

BookFunnel

BookFunnel ([https://bookfunnel.com](https://bookfunnel.com/))is designed to deliver ARCs and “reader magnets,” those short stories or novellas that can get readers excited about your fiction. Here’s what BookFunnel says about its services:

Whether it’s delivering your reader magnet, sending out advanced copies of your book, handing out ebooks at a conference, or fulfilling your digital sales to readers, BookFunnel does it all.

Because readers are using many different devices to read books, BookFunnel automates the process of creating files for every reading device. To upload a new ebook, you’ll need at least one book file (EPUB, MOBI, or PDF) and your book’s cover image in JPEG format.

If you have both a MOBI and EPUB of your book, you can upload both. If you only have one file format, BookFunnel will automatically generate the other. Meaning, if you provide an EPUB file only, BookFunnel will compile a MOBI from your EPUB. If you provide a MOBI file only, BookFunnel will compile an EPUB file from your MOBI. (A MOBI file is the format Amazon creates when you upload a Word file.)

Once you’ve uploaded your files and checked to ensure they’re readable, BookFunnel is ready to distribute your books. Now, here’s where you must make a decision. Do you want to gather email addresses or not?

If you’re a beginning author and just want to send your book out to beta readers who can give you feedback on it, then you’ll want to use BookFunnel’s $20/year plan. That will give you 500 downloads per month, which, I would think, would be plenty.

However, if your goal is to use Twitter or Facebook to promote your book, then you’ll definitely want to collect email addresses. Without email addresses, you won’t be able to contact readers and remind them to post a review. For their $100/year plan, you’ll be able to offer 5,000 downloads per month and have multiple pen names and books. Most important, you’ll grab email addresses. BookFunnel will automatically send those addresses to Mailchimp and many other email service providers.

Booksprout

Here’s a service I learned about last week, but I think it might be even better than those I’ve already mentioned. Booksprout (<https://booksprout.co/>) has a built-in list of 40,000 avid readers who are willing and eager to review new books.

Your first step is to create a free account and upload an ARC. You’ll also create a profile and a blurb for your book. Once you’ve made your book discoverable, you can see if it’s attracting reader interest. If not, then maybe you need to change the cover or book description.

Typos? Little mistakes your buyers ding you for in reviews? Booksprout’s readers like to point these out in private feedback before your book is even published! You can fix them before your Amazon readers catch them.

Have a helpful reviewer? Send them a thank you or invite them to your ARC team. Have a bad reviewer? Block them immediately, for any reason. With its automated system, ARC reviewers receive an email sequence to let them know when a new ARC is available and remind them when reviews are due or even past due!

What I especially like about Booksprout is that they have a couple of other neat tools. If you’re publishing with KDP, you can download a tool to your browser that allows you the check sales (<https://datasprout.co/>). From the Booksprout dashboard you can also find keywords for Amazon ads (<https://booksprout.co/publisher/tool/amazon-keyword-tool>).

Did you know more readers are actually reading books on their phones these days? Amazing, but true. Booksprout seems uniquely positioned to take advantage in the change of readers’ habits. They have an app that allows readers to download to Apple, Android, or Kindle Fire.

I’m starting with their free plan. I want to see how hard or easy it is to upload books. However, I expect that once I get my feet wet, I might want to upgrade to their $10/month plan. That would allow me to get 50 ARC reviews. For $20/month, I could get unlimited numbers of reviews.

For authors who plan to crank out books in popular genres, such as romance or fantasy, I would think Booksprout could do a lot to help build a career.

Having a Strategic Plan

Although many authors shrink from giving books away for free, in fact, in the big, bad world of New York publishing, the Big Five publishers make it their business to send out plenty of free books. They send them to newspaper and magazine editors with the goal of “getting the word out.” Independent authors must adopt the same mindset. Of course, your goal is not just to endlessly write books and distribute them for free. But, if you have no following, how are you going to entice people to want to read your books?

Sending out ARCs needs to be part of an author’s marketing plan. Just sending them out won’t be enough. In a subsequent post, I’ll talk about some of the elements of a marketing plan and about how you can put one together for yourself.