

THE (INDIE) AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO COVERS & BRANDING

KATIE GARLAND

Q: "SO WHAT, ARE YOU GOING TO
TEACH ME HOW TO DIY MY COVERS?"

A: NOT EXACTLY...

OK, THEN WHAT'S THE
POINT OF THE CLASS?

**OK, THEN WHAT'S THE
POINT OF THE CLASS?**

**I WANT YOU TO FEEL CONFIDENT
IN YOUR PUBLISHING JOURNEY.
WHETHER YOU ARE PUBLISHING YOUR FIRST
BOOK OR YOUR HUNDREDTH; YOU'RE HIRING
PROFESSIONALS OR DOING IT ALL YOURSELF,
THERE IS VALUABLE INFO FOR EVERYONE!**

WHAT WE'LL COVER

- Graphic Design Basics
- Book Design Process (both DIY & Commissions)
- Popular Tools
- Developing a Brand
- Hiring Professionals

**GRAPHIC DESIGN 101
FOR AUTHORS**

7 PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Emphasis
 - What is most important? Where are the eyes drawn?
- Contrast
 - Make it easy on the eyes, more accessible
- Balance
 - Don't be off-kilter; arrange elements in a pleasing manner that utilizes all available space - or use off-balance as a statement

7 PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition
 - Cohesion is the goal - reuse elements in a design, use similar colors, fonts, and styles across all materials, use consistent formatting
- Mood
 - Choose elements wisely - they should convey the proper "vibe"
- White space
 - Let your designs BREATHE

7 PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Movement
 - Guide the viewer through the visuals!



THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD COVER

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*DISCLAIMER: THIS CAN BE VERY
SUBJECTIVE, BUT IN GENERAL...
KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:*

THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD COVER

- Strong composition
- Easy-to-read typography
- High contrast
- Consistency (within and across)
- Balance & breathing room
- "Fits the genre"
- Appeals to the target audience
- Personality
- Proper sizing
- Clear/unified message
- Ethically sourced assets
- Appropriate licensing

*PERSONALITY MEANS
MY COVER SHOULD LOOK
SUPER UNIQUE AND LIKE
NOTHING ELSE ON THE
MARKET, RIGHT?*

*PERSONALITY MEANS MY COVER SHOULD
LOOK SUPER UNIQUE AND LIKE NOTHING
ELSE ON THE MARKET, RIGHT?*

WRONG!!!!

*I MEAN, TRENDS HAVE TO
START SOMEWHERE, RIGHT?*

*BUT IF YOUR GOAL IS TO CONSISTENTLY
MAKE MONEY, YOU GOTTA PLAY IT SMART:*

*YOUR COVER NEEDS TO COMMUNICATE TO
READERS EXACTLY WHAT TO EXPECT
WHEN THEY PICK UP YOUR BOOK!*

*HOW DO WE
ACCOMPLISH THIS?
MARKET RESEARCH!*

*MARKET RESEARCH!
HONESTLY, THIS IS YOUR
MOST IMPORTANT JOB
WHEN WRITING YOUR BOOK
>> KNOW YOUR COMPS
>> KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE*

*WHAT SHOULD YOUR COVER LOOK LIKE?
REAL PEOPLE PHOTOS?
VECTOR/ILLUSTRATION?
LANDSCAPES?
OBJECTS?
TYPOGRAPHY-ONLY?
HOW ARE ELEMENTS LAID OUT?
WHAT TYPES OF EFFECTS ARE USED?*

THE EASIEST WAY TO
CHECK FOR TRENDS?
LOOK AT THE
BESTSELLER
PAGES ON
AMAZON.



COVER DESIGN PROCESS

COVER DESIGN PROCESS

- Market research
- Choose an art style
- Source assets
- Determine sizing
- Create the design
- Check design for grayscale & thumbnails size
- Export all formats needed
- Order proofs-recommended
- Publish!

WHAT SHOULD I HAVE NAILED DOWN WHEN HIRING A DESIGNER

- Budget
- Exact Genre
- Comp titles
- Trim size
- Page color + cover finish
- Est. page count
- Character/location details
- Book synopsis
- Art style/vibe
- Examples of things you like

TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR DIY

- For designing:
 - Adobe Photoshop
 - Adobe Illustrator
 - Affinity
 - Canva Pro
 - Adobe Express
 - Procreate
- For stock photos:
 - Depositphotos
 - Adobe Stock (can filter out AI)
 - Arcangel (PREMIUM photography)
 - Bookish Photography
 - Period Images
- For fonts:
 - Creative Market
 - Creative Fabrica
- YouTube: follow some tutorials
- Platform help pages/Templates

PREMADE COVER SHOPPING TIPS

- Consider your book title
- Test it for grayscale
- Vet the designer/company
- Make sure it's sold only once
- Reverse image search
- Check available formats
- Ask designer for stock images used/proof of licensing
- Pay attention to turnaround time
- Find out if there is series continuation potential
- Verify the deliverables
- Get appropriate licensing

COVER DESIGNER SHOPPING TIPS

- Choose a designer who has the style you want in their portfolio (or evidence that they can do it if not)
- Watch turnaround times/ waitlists - you may need to hire them early on!
- Find out their process
- Be vigilant about contracts & payment methods
- Check their Gen AI policies
- Make sure in budget - or find out about payment plans

COVER DESIGNER SHOPPING TIPS

- Check their portfolio against the tips given
- See what extra services they might provide
- Determine the deliverables they provide
- Confirm licensing options
- Ask about policies for changes and series continuations
- Find out where they source their assets / whether you need to provide them
- Look for potential add'tl fees

ARTIST SHOPPING TIPS

- Choose someone in budget!
- Vet them for plagiarism/AI
- Make sure they do the style you want (DO NOT ask them to mimic another artist's style)
- Make sure they offer appropriate licensing now or that it's available to add on later
- Make sure you can have another designer can add typography to the design (when applicable)
- Work with contracts and proper payment methods

*CONSIDER YOUR
PRINTING PROCESS*

*IF YOU USE POD: TEMPER
YOUR EXPECTATIONS
AND SET YOURSELF UP
FOR SUCCESS!*

*POD PROVIDERS HAVE
GENEROUS PRINT
ALLOWANCES*

*INGRAMSPARK: 1/16" (2MM)
AMAZON 1/8" (3.2MM)*

BEST PRACTICES FOR POD COVERS:

- Avoid borders in the design
- Use full-wrap images when possible
- Avoid hard lines along the spine edge
- Use provided templates
- Follow measurements exactly
- Choose colors/finish wisely
- Expect variances
- Plan for the barcode
- Don't forget the bleed
- Use generous margins
- Don't be lazy, keep it looking professional!

BOOK DESIGN 101

CHOICES, CHOICES, CHOICES

- Trim size: why largely your choice, consider staying on-market for your genre
- Page color: cream is often most-preferred for fiction novels; white for nonfiction
- Formats: paperback, hardcover, special
- Finishes/Paper type
- POD/Offset/Digital printers
- Interior Design layout

ELEMENTS OF YOUR BOOKS

- Cover
- Half & Full Title Pages
- Reverse Title Page (copyright page)
- Story!
- Front Matter
- Back Matter
- When applicable: table of contents/index/references

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Audience
 - Accessibility
 - How will it be consumed?
- Print options
- Page count
- Print cost
- Use
 - Will it need to uphold to rough use?
 - Does it need to be compact?
 - How will it be shelved?
 - ISBNs

AVAILABLE TOOLS FOR DIY

- Industry standard: InDesign
- More accessible:
 - Affinity (Adobe alternative)
 - Vellum
 - Atticus
 - Kindle Create
- Writing, less so formatting
 - Microsoft Word
 - Scrivener
- Less recommended:
 - Reedsy
 - Calibre

*DEVELOPING YOUR
AUTHOR BRAND*

**You Wrote the Book,
Now Brand the Biz**

**You Wrote the Book,
Now ~~Brand~~ the Biz**

What do you mean, brand my biz?

If you think of yourself as

“JUST”

an author, think again!

YOU'RE A FULL-BLOWN

~~BUSINESS OWNER~~

unless of course you never **want**
to make money from your books.

**The sooner you treat your
writing as a business...**

(EVEN IF YOU'RE IN THE PRE-PUB STAGE)

**the sooner you set
yourself up for success!**

*notice how I'm not making any "get rich quick" or "guaranteed results" claims...

So what does "branding" look like?

(for authors)

- Clear Genre(s)
- Connected Covers
- Consistent Messaging
- Clever Real Estate
- Memorable Identity

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HOW'S THAT FOR MEMORABLE?

Women's Fiction Contemporary Romance Fantasy Historical

CLEAR GENRE(S)

If you like to genre-hop...

***PEN NAMES ARE
YOUR FRIENDS***

but you can keep it simple

DAVID RANDALL PLUMB

D. R. Plumb

David Rand

Randy Plum

Randall Plum

David R. Plumb

But do I have to use a pen name?

NOPE!

You do YOU!
Just know
the pros/cons

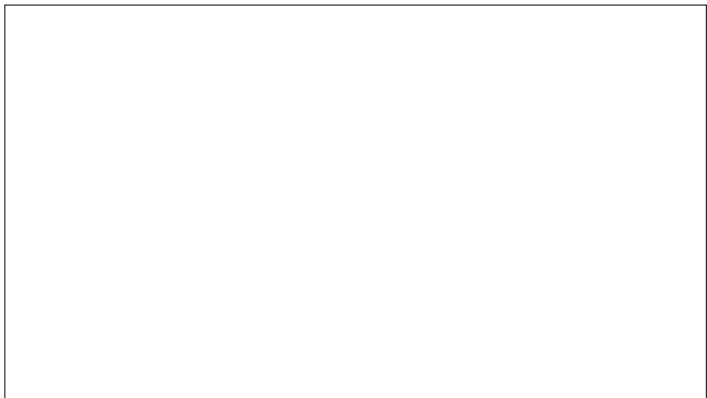


CONNECTED COVERS

Show, not tell!

*COVERS SHOULD DEPICT
FAMILIAL RESEMBLANCE*
genre/audience/series







CONSISTENT MESSAGING



CONSISTENT MESSAGING

If you cover a lot of topics...

*DON'T CONFUSE
YOUR AUDIENCE*

segment wherever possible

*YOUR READERS
SHOULD KNOW
WHAT TO EXPECT
WHEN THEY LOOK
YOU UP ONLINE.*

*IF YOU HAVE DIFFERENT
AUDIENCES, EITHER MAKE IT
EASY TO IDENTIFY THE TOPIC AT
HAND, OR KEEP THEM SEPARATE!*



CLEVER REAL ESTATE

Why would I need more property?

**We're talking DIGITAL real estate
here: think social media, blogs,
websites, newsletters, stores,
advertisements, and more!**





MEMORABLE IDENTITY

Stand your ground
YOUR BRAND SHOULD
BE RECOGNIZABLE
across all platforms

IT CAN STAY SIMPLE!

- Use consistent:
- Fonts
- Colors
- Images
- Pro tips:
- Create brand kits in Canva!
- Even for series!

UPGRADE WHEN YOU CAN

- When it makes financial sense...
- Hire out professional photography
- Commission a full brand identity

RECAP!

- Use basic design principles to guide your DIY covers/graphics or to hire someone legit!
- Stay legal! Be sure to follow all IP/Copyright/Licensing agreements in your journey
- Be mindful of your audience & printing process
- Keep it simple! Start small and be mindful of where you spend your money
- Enjoy the journey!

GET IN TOUCH WITH ME

*PSST, YOU CAN SCAN
THIS TO ADD ME
TO YOUR CONTACTS!*

(Assuming the resolution is good enough!)

