

AURELIUM PRESS

AUTHOR PLATFORM ACCELERATOR

A step-by-step playbook for building the email list, website, and reader platform your book deserves — before you need any of it.

INSIDE organic list-building steps • the purchased-list question, answered • website + newsletter platform comparisons • social media + reader-community strategy • free platform layer • build sequence + platform audit worksheet

A practical workbook for independent authors

Created by Andrea Lard | Aurelium Press

Companion guide to the Author Provenance + Crowdfunding Launch Kit and the USA Today Bestseller Launch Guide

Copyright + Responsible Use

Copyright © 2026 Aurelium Press. All rights reserved. The purchaser may complete, adapt, and use this guide for their own author brand. The purchaser may not resell, sublicense, share, or redistribute this guide or substantially similar derivatives.

IMPORTANT Platform-building is compounding, not instant. Every tactic in this guide is a real, documented method — but none of them replace the two things that actually make readers stay: a good book and honest communication with the people who read it.

No guarantee

Building a platform takes consistent effort over months, not days. This guide shows you methods other authors have used successfully — it does not guarantee list growth, sales, or reader engagement outcomes. Platform terms, prices, and policies change; confirm current details before relying on any figure in this guide.

How to use this guide

1. Start with Part I — email list building is the foundation everything else supports.
2. Read Part II before you're tempted to buy a list. Know the reasoning going in.
3. Use Parts III and IV to choose a website and newsletter platform that fit your goals and budget.
4. Use Parts V and VI to round out your platform beyond email — social media, reader communities, and the free profiles most authors skip.
5. Use Part VII's sequence and Part VIII's audit worksheet to turn this into a plan, not just a reading list.

Quick-Start Road Map

Phase	Primary Output	Decision
1. List	Reader magnet + landing page + first 100 subscribers	Are you capturing every interested reader, or losing them?
2. Home base	Your website + connected newsletter platform	Do you own your platform, or only rent it from a social app?
3. Reach	Active presence on 1–2 right-fit social platforms	Are you visible where your specific readers already gather?
4. Free layer	Amazon Author Central, Goodreads, BookBub profiles claimed	Are you capturing free discovery tools most competitors skip?
5. Community	Optional Patreon/Discord layer for superfans	Do you have (or want) a superfan tier worth building?
6. Sequence	6-month build calendar underway	Is this becoming a system, or a one-time task list?
OPERATING PRINCIPLE A platform is not a single channel — it's an ecosystem you own (email, website) supported by channels you rent (social media, Amazon, Goodreads). Build the owned layer first.		

Building an Email List of High-Potential Readers

Your email list is the one channel that survives an algorithm change, a platform ban, or a retailer policy shift. It is also dollar-for-dollar the highest-converting channel available to an indie author. Every tactic below builds a list of readers who asked to be there, which is what makes them high-potential in the first place.

The step-by-step process

1. Create a reader magnet: a free short story, novella, deleted chapter, or genre-relevant resource that only appeals to your actual target reader — not a generic giveaway.
2. Build a landing page for it using a dedicated tool (BookFunnel, StoryOrigin, or your own website) rather than a bare social media post.
3. Connect the landing page to a real email service provider from day one — see Part IV — so every signup lands in a list you own.
4. Drive traffic to the landing page through legitimate channels: your existing social following, the back matter of your published books, guest posts, podcast appearances, and paid ads.
5. Join newsletter swaps and group promotions with authors in your genre (via StoryOrigin or similar) to reach warm, relevant readers who already read books like yours.
6. Run a Goodreads or BookFunnel giveaway timed 4–6 weeks before your launch to add engaged readers to your list while it still has the highest discovery value.
7. Segment early: tag subscribers by how they joined and what they've bought, so future emails can be targeted instead of generic.
8. Email consistently — even a simple monthly update outperforms a large, cold, rarely-emailed list.

What "high-potential" looks like in the numbers

Signal	What it tells you
Opted in through a genre-specific reader magnet (not a generic freebie)	Subscriber already reads in this exact genre — highest-quality signal available
Joined through a newsletter swap with a comparable author	Pre-qualified by someone else's audience match
Entered a Goodreads or BookFunnel giveaway	Actively browsing for new books in the moment — high intent
Opened 3+ of the last 5 emails sent	Engaged subscriber — protect this segment's deliverability by pruning the rest

Building the Author's Website

Your website is the one property you fully own — no algorithm, ban, or platform shutdown can take it away. It's also a credibility signal: research from Stanford's Web Credibility Project found that a majority of people judge an organization's credibility based on website design alone, and that first impression decides whether a curious visitor becomes a subscriber or clicks away.

Platform options

Platform	Best for	Typical cost
Author-specific builder (e.g., Tertulia, Zenpage)	Fastest setup; auto-imports books by ISBN; built-in storefront and mailing list capture	Roughly \$8–\$10/month; some free tiers available
Squarespace	Design polish with minimal technical skill required	\$16–\$33/month
Wix	Maximum drag-and-drop creative control, Amazon integration for fiction authors	\$17–\$36/month (free tier exists but is limited and ad-branded)
WordPress.org (self-hosted)	Maximum flexibility and SEO power, especially for authors who blog heavily	Free software; hosting typically \$5–\$25/month; more setup time

Must-have website elements

- ☐ A clear, above-the-fold statement of who the author is and what they write
- ☐ An email signup form connected to a real ESP, not just a contact form
- ☐ A books page with retailer links for every title
- ☐ An author bio and professional photo, consistent with their Amazon and Goodreads profiles
- ☐ A blog or news section, especially valuable for nonfiction authors building topical authority
- ☐ Mobile-responsive design, since most traffic will arrive on a phone

Choosing a Newsletter Platform

The newsletter platform and the website don't have to be the same tool, but they do need to talk to each other. The right choice depends on whether your priority is automation, discovery, or monetization.

Platform	Ownership model	Typical starting cost	Best fit
MailerLite	Full list ownership	Free up to 1,000 subscribers; ~\$10+/month above that	Most indie authors — strong automation at low cost, a solid default starting point
ConvertKit (Kit)	Full list ownership	Free up to 1,000 subscribers; \$25+/month for Creator	Authors running funnels — reader magnets into automated sequences and product sales
Substack	Platform-hosted; limited export/ownership vs. a dedicated ESP	Free to publish; ~10% revenue share on paid subscriptions	Content-first authors who want built-in discovery and don't need marketing automation
Beehiiv	Full list ownership	Free tier; ~\$25+/month at scale	Authors who want growth/referral tools and eventual sponsorship or paid-subscriber revenue
Mailchimp	Full list ownership	Free tier; paid plans scale with list size	Simple, general-purpose sending — being outpaced by author-specific tools but still workable for a first list

THE KEY DIFFERENCE Substack and similar discovery-first platforms trade some ownership and control for built-in audience discovery. A dedicated ESP (MailerLite, ConvertKit, Beehiiv, Mailchimp) gives full list export and ownership but relies entirely on your own promotion to grow.

Decision guide

- Author wants the simplest possible start and values platform-driven discovery over automation: Substack.
- Author wants low cost with strong automation for reader magnets and launch sequences: MailerLite.
- Author sells courses, merchandise, or has a multi-step sales funnel: ConvertKit (Kit).
- Author wants to build toward sponsorship or a monetized newsletter business: Beehiiv.
- Author already has Mailchimp and a small list: no urgent need to switch — revisit once automation needs grow.

Social Media + Reader Communities

Social platforms are rented land — useful for discovery, risky as a sole foundation. The current trend among fiction authors is toward smaller, more engaged micro-communities (a specific trope, subgenre, or fandom) rather than broad reach on every platform.

Where to focus

- Fiction, especially romance/fantasy/YA: TikTok ("BookTok") and Instagram ("Bookstagram") remain the highest-discovery platforms for fiction readers.
- Nonfiction and business authors: LinkedIn and a blog/website with strong SEO tend to outperform short-form video for credibility-driven genres.
- Pick one or two platforms and post consistently rather than spreading thin across five — consistency and community depth outperform breadth for most authors.

Building the superfan layer

A minority of any audience will pay for direct access to a favorite author — commonly cited research puts that figure around 1–5% of an engaged audience. That's the group a Patreon or Discord layer is built for, not the entire readership.

Tool	What it adds
Patreon	Monthly-tier subscription revenue; native Discord integration to grant role-based access by tier; exclusive content, early access, or voting on story direction
Discord server	A persistent community space independent of any single launch — can be free-standing or gated by Patreon tier
Facebook reader group	Lower-effort community option, useful for authors whose readers already live on Facebook

SIZING GUIDANCE Hold off on building a Patreon or Discord if your list is still small or brand new. This layer works best once you have an existing engaged core of readers to invite in — otherwise it becomes an empty room.

The Free Platform Layer Almost Everyone Skips

Before spending on any paid tool, confirm you've claimed these free profiles — they cost nothing but time and are where readers actively research a book before buying.

Platform	Cost	Why it matters
Amazon Author Central	Free	Customizable author page with bio, photo, and book recommendations directly on Amazon, where the buying decision happens
Goodreads Author Program	Free	Claims the author's profile with the official Author badge; unlocks giveaways, an "Ask the Author" feature, and reader engagement tools on the platform tens of millions of readers use to decide what to read next
BookBub Author Profile	Free	Lets readers follow the author directly; a commonly cited figure is that roughly 73% of BookBub readers want an alert when an author they follow releases a new book, making the follower count a real marketing asset

Setup checklist

- ☐ Amazon Author Central claimed, bio written, photo uploaded
- ☐ Goodreads Author Program application submitted and approved (verification typically takes a few business days)
- ☐ BookBub author profile claimed at partners.bookbub.com, bio written, books linked
- ☐ All three profiles use the same author photo and a consistent bio voice
- ☐ Website and newsletter signup link added to all three profiles

Putting It Together: The Platform-Build Sequence

Month	Focus	Key outputs
Month 1	Owned foundation	Website live, ESP connected, reader magnet + landing page built
Month 2	Free layer + first subscribers	Amazon, Goodreads, BookBub profiles claimed; first 100–300 subscribers from existing audience and back matter
Month 3	Cross-promotion	First newsletter swaps and group promos joined; consistent monthly send cadence established
Month 4	Social presence	One or two right-fit social platforms active with a consistent posting rhythm
Month 5	Paid acceleration	First small paid ad test driving traffic to the reader magnet; Goodreads or BookFunnel giveaway run
Month 6	Community layer (if appropriate)	Patreon/Discord evaluated and launched only if there's a genuine engaged core to invite

Your Platform Audit

Use this worksheet to see what you already have in place and where to start.

Book / author brand

Current platform status

Channel	Status (None / Started / Established)	Notes
Email list + ESP		
Website		
Amazon Author Central		
Goodreads Author Program		
BookBub author profile		
Primary social platform		
Reader community (Patreon/Discord/FB group)		

Recommended starting phase (from the Quick-Start Road Map)

First three action items and owners

Where This Fits

A platform built using this guide becomes the foundation for two companion resources: the Author Provenance + Crowdfunding Launch Kit, which needs a warm list to fund a campaign, and the USA Today Bestseller Launch Guide, which needs a reader team and email reach to support a coordinated retail push. Build the platform first — everything else works better on top of it.

KEEP GOING Progress here compounds. A list of 300 engaged readers today is the seed of the list that funds a future campaign or supports a future launch. Revisit your Platform Audit every few months and keep building.

Should You Ever Purchase an Email List?

Short answer: no. Not for author marketing. Here's the direct reasoning, so you have it settled before the temptation shows up in a Friday-afternoon ad for "10,000 verified readers."

HARD STOP Don't purchase, rent, or upload a third-party email list for your author marketing. It doesn't work for building a readership, and it carries real legal and platform risk.

Why it fails, mechanically

- Purchased lists are compiled by data brokers, not opted in by readers — the people on them never asked to hear from this specific author, so open and click rates are typically a small fraction of an organic list's.
- There is no way to verify that a purchased "readers" list is actually interested in your genre; most purchased consumer lists are generic and unvetted.
- Every major email service provider — Mailchimp, Constant Contact, ConvertKit/Kit, HubSpot — explicitly prohibits purchased, rented, or scraped lists in their acceptable use policies and will suspend or permanently ban accounts that upload one.
- High bounce rates and spam complaints from a purchased list damage the sending domain's reputation, which can hurt deliverability for your own legitimate, opted-in subscribers too.

The legal exposure

Law / jurisdiction	What it requires
CAN-SPAM Act (US)	Doesn't ban unsolicited email outright, but requires accurate headers, a physical postal address, no misleading subject lines, and a working opt-out honored within 10 business days. Penalties can run tens of thousands of dollars per violating message.
GDPR (EU)	Requires explicit, opt-in consent before marketing email — purchased lists almost never have valid consent, and penalties can reach 4% of global annual revenue.
CASL (Canada) / CCPA-CPRA (California)	Canada requires opt-in consent in most cases; California gives residents the right to opt out of having their data sold, complicating any purchased list that includes CA contacts.

REAL CONSEQUENCES CAN-SPAM enforcement isn't theoretical: reported FTC settlements include a \$2.95 million fine against Verkada and a \$650,000 fine against Experian, both tied to missing unsubscribe mechanisms and consent failures.

What to do instead

If you're impatient for list growth, put that urgency into faster organic methods instead of a purchased list:

- Paid ads that drive traffic to your reader-magnet landing page (Facebook/Meta or Amazon Ads) — you still pay to grow, but every subscriber opts in.
- Larger, more aggressive newsletter swap and group-promo activity through StoryOrigin — this can add hundreds to thousands of relevant subscribers in weeks.

- A paid BookBub Featured Deal or Goodreads giveaway, both of which build a list of readers who chose to engage with your specific book.
- Co-promotion with other authors in your genre, splitting the cost of a shared reader-magnet promotion.

Sources

Figures such as pricing, platform policies, and benchmark percentages are drawn from multiple publicly available sources current as of 2026 and are ranges, not guarantees. Platform pricing and policies change; verify current terms directly before relying on any figure.

- Mailchimp, Constant Contact, and multiple legal/marketing analyses — purchased list policy, CAN-SPAM, GDPR, CASL, and CCPA/CPRA requirements, and reported FTC enforcement figures.
- StoryOrigin — newsletter swap and reader-magnet mechanics.
- Cybernews, Tertulia/Author Websites, Alpaca Authors, Magnt — author website platform comparisons and pricing, including the Stanford Web Credibility Project citation on design and trust.
- publishing.co.uk, Sequenzy, Storyflow, Narrareach, Mailercloud — newsletter platform comparisons and pricing (MailerLite, ConvertKit/Kit, Substack, Beehiiv, Mailchimp).
- Reedsy, TCK Publishing, ScribeCount, Literature & Latte, Cedar Fort, Written Word Media, Self Publishing School — Amazon Author Central, Goodreads Author Program, and BookBub author profile setup and benefits.
- Pikes Peak Writers, Hashmeta, ScribeCount — social media trends, Patreon/Discord community-building, and superfan conversion benchmarks.