Metadata & Discoverability

Metadata is the information that describes and differentiates your books from the competition. In a world where customers are increasingly adopting a search online first approach, even for in-store purchases, you need to take the health of your metadata seriously.

How Your Metadata Relates to Your Sales Performance

Titles with incomplete or nonspecific metadata generally sell fewer copies and are more likely to be returned. Improving your metadata increases your title's discoverability and is therefore one of the most affordable changes you can make to increase your sales performance.

An interesting parallel in terms of standards can be found in the music industry. Most suppliers require a minimum of genre, track title, artist name and album title. Similarly, within the book industry there is a bare minimum recognized by most distribution channels, which includes ISBN, title, author, price and discount.

Why Metadata Matters

The modern consumer wants to be engaged. Giving a reader an accurate preview of your title's content through its metadata is the key to hooking them to your products. Browsing a book's page mimics the reader walking up and down the rows of shelves in a bookstore or library, picking up a book, scanning the pages, seeking out their favorite contributors, eyeing the art, and selecting the book that interests them the most. When a reader lands at your book's page on the Kindle Store, Amazon website or any other online bookseller, they expect to be able to get a clear idea of what they would be buying almost instantly. Offering prospective customers more information up-front will always lead to more opportunities to convert a casual interest into a life-long customer.

What You Need to Know—Metadata & Discoverability

Metadata and discoverability go hand in hand, especially when it comes to selling content online. Some publishers have begun to explore how metadata can improve the ranking of their books in search results. This practice, called search engine optimization or SEO, is a trending topic in the book industry, and for good reason. SEO is a vital consideration for publishers and authors who want to ensure their books are seen by the most relevant potential customers.

Your account representative will help guide you through the metadata, but some of the basic fields are provided below:

Title Name: Keep this fewer than 80 characters long, including subtitle, so that it's optimized for mobile.

Contributor (s): Be sure to use all the names from the cover or title page (or as many as your publishing platform allows) and be consistent with spellings, middle initials etc.

Contributor Bio: Keep it between 50 and 250 words for each contributor and avoid using external links to blogs or author websites – you don't want to drive potential customers away from buying your book!

Contributor Location: Providing the location of your contributor(s) allows retailers and libraries to identify books written by authors from specific geographic locations.

Series: Alert your readers to other titles in a series by including your series name and number, if applicable.

Description: Describe your book in a conversational tone, in 200 to 600 words, with a bolded opening line and paragraph breaks using HTML markups.

HTML Markup: In your description use [Description] for bold, <i>[Description]</i> for italics and <p>[Description]</p> for paragraph breaks.

Genre: Choose 2 to 3 specific categories for both BISAC and Thema Subjects and if you don't find exactly what you need, supplement with keywords.

Keywords: Choose a minimum of 7 (or as many as you think are relevant) keywords and phrases and incorporate these in the description and contributor biography. You can add these keywords plus others in the keyword field, where they will become hidden online search terms.

Format: Include the most specific description of your binding, such as mass-market paperback or epub eBook and be sure to use one ISBN per format to keep formats distinct.

Review Quotes: Include 2 to 8 positive review quotes from industry sources, publications, and relevant people such as other authors or reputable bloggers.

Audience Code: Make sure your title is merchandised correctly by choosing the appropriate audience code: general/adult, juvenile (ages 0-11), or YA (for ages 12-17), and this should correspond with your genre (that is, use juvenile audience code with juvenile subject codes).

Age & Grade: If you choose a juvenile or YA audience code, pick an age range and/or grade range to target.

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): Its Role in Distribution

ISBN stands for International Standard Book Number meaning it's an internationally recognized identification number like any product number you would find in other products you buy. It provides the underlying identification for a book within all internal catalogues and external services. The modern ISBN is 13 digits long and is structured in 5 parts, each separated by a dash, (like this example: 978-3-16-148410-0).

A full list of all ISBN distributors by country can be found on the International ISBN Agency's website (isbn-international.org/).

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How Books Are Discovered

The internet has opened the floodgates of opportunity for independent publishers through the ability to enable long-tail discovery. Readers are no longer limited by the knowledge or budget of a bookseller, librarian or their finite shelf space. Generally, people use online searches to answer a question, which may or may not be product driven. Typically, online booksellers and book websites return search results based on the following key metadata elements:

- Title name (depending on the site, this may be a full or partial match)
- Author or contributor
- ISBN or EAN (the unique identifier for your books)
- Keywords

Many sophisticated search engines also index (or use as content for search results) the series, subtitle, subject, format (e.g. hardcover or ebook), or even book descriptions. It is therefore necessary to provide as much information as relevant into your Metadata to ensure you get discovered.

Popular online booksellers, include:

- Amazon (Operates in many global markets so price your titles in USD, GBP, Euros & AUD to maximize discoverability)
- Barnes & Noble - US
- Waterstones - UK

- iBooks & print book searches
- Booktopia – Australia
- Wordery – UK & Europe
- The Book Depository (Operates in many key global markets)

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