

# Fixing Problems with Amazon Listings

Isn't it irritating to look at one of your books on Amazon.com and see incorrect, misleading, or just plain missing information? You bet it is! Almost every client I've worked with is unhappy about how their books are presented on Amazon. It's not that Amazon is the most important book-selling outlet in the world (it isn't) — but it sure is the most visible. Publishers and their staffs see these listings, as well as authors and their families, customers, reviewers, and trade buyers.

Last month, I conducted an online bookstore display campaign for a client (see the tutorial on page 7), asking high-traffic web sites to feature her book. Here's the response I received from one helpful webmaster:

We earn money by referring the potential book-buyer to Amazon. The problem is that the Amazon listing [for your book] has no book jacket or reviews attached to it. This undermines the credibility of the book in the eye of the potential purchaser. We would love to link to the book. We will also do it in on the first page of our site if you can organize for the jacket and reviews to appear on Amazon. As soon as this is done please send us an e-mail and we'll put the book on our site.

Clearly, my client had a problem. I told her I would fix her Amazon listing, but when I tried to access the same tools I've used in the past to correct Amazon problems, they no longer worked. I spent almost 3 hours trying to find new instructions on how to overhaul an Amazon page. This time, I made detailed notes to share with you. These instructions should be good until the next time Amazon moves the info.

## 1. Correcting Typos & Errors

Let's start with the easy stuff. Certain basic information about your book can be altered using the "*Correct errors and omissions in this list-*

*ing*" link at the bottom of every Amazon book page. You'll be asked to log into Amazon using your e-mail address and password. Then you can change any of the following items:

Title  
Author  
Languages  
Binding  
Number of Pages  
Publication Date  
Format/Edition

If you want to correct something other than these seven items, e-mail your corrections to [book-typos@amazon.com](mailto:book-typos@amazon.com), and include the ISBN number and book title in your e-mail message.

I have no idea how Amazon polices these changes. I've made corrections to many listings of books by different publishers, and those corrections have appeared within days without any verification. Maybe they only investigate if a correction is challenged? It's impossible for them to fact check against a hard copy of the book, since they don't stock the vast majority of books listed at the site.

## 2. Improving the Artwork

Upgrading your Amazon book jacket image is another task you can do automatically, without asking permission. You must send the new image via File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and that requires software such as Fetch (for Apple computers) or WS\_FTP (for PCs). Here's the information for logging into Amazon's FTP server:

**address:** ftp.amazon.com  
**user id:** catalog  
**password:** muchstuff

If the user id and password don't work for you, you'll have to contact [image-fix@amazon.com](mailto:image-fix@amazon.com) and request assistance. Here are Amazon's guidelines for preparing your cover art:

- TIF or JPG format
- 72 pixels/inch resolution

- 648 pixels on the longest side (9 inches at 72 dpi)
- RGB color mode
- 8 bits/channel
- PC or Mac format
- File must be named by the ten digit ISBN (no dashes needed), i.e.: 0471105805.jpg
- Image should be full-front view of cover, no borders
- Overwrites should include ".new" after the ISBN in the file name, i.e. 0471105805.new.tif; 0471161756.new.jpg

Let me add a few suggestions of my own. Scan and re-touch your covers at high resolution (300 or 600 dpi) and get them just right before saving low-res, 72 dpi versions for Amazon. Despite the instructions, I always put a 2-pixel border around the image before saving it as a JPG file. Many other sites use Amazon's cover art, and you never know what background color the artwork will be pulled into. Having a clear, solid border embedded in the image helps it stand out.

At one time you had to send e-mail to Amazon telling them you've uploaded cover art, but that no longer applies. If your new cover art doesn't appear in 3 days, contact [image-fix@amazon.com](mailto:image-fix@amazon.com) and ask for help.

## 3. Improving the Text

Major improvements to the descriptive copy about your book can be made through Amazon's "Book Content Update Form." As of today, the easiest way to get to this form is through the following link: <http://www.amazon.com/publishers>. Look for "Content Form" in the navigational runner on the left side of the page. This "Bookseller Services" page has most of the instructions contained in this article. However, it is impossible to find this page by searching through Amazon's help files — you've got to know the exact URL to get to this page.

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*(Fixing, continued from page 4.)*

It's best to carefully prepare your Amazon content in advance, rather than making it up or keyboarding it on the fly. You're less likely to make typos or say things you'll regret later. Here's a list of the content that Amazon lets you install:

- **Description** (up to 1,000 words or 8,000 characters)
- **Publisher's comments** (up to 1,000 words or 8,000 characters)
- **Author comments** (up to 250 words or 2,000 characters)
- **Author bio(s)** (up to 500 words or 4,000 characters)
- **Table of contents** — Please list each item in the table of contents on a line by itself. Remove page numbers, leader dots, and other typographic elements. (Up to 1,000 words or 8,000 characters)
- **Inside-flap copy** (up to 1,000 words or 8,000 characters)
- **Fair-use citations from reviews** (up to 20 words per review)
- **Excerpt/first chapter** (not to exceed one chapter)

You don't have to observe Amazon's content categories exactly. Use this gift of free space strategically, to put forward the best possible frame of reference for your book. Many other sites may duplicate or link to your Amazon listing. It's worth putting a fair amount of thought into how you use this space.

For example, consider the "Publisher's Comments" section. What consumer cares about what the publisher thinks of the book? This is a good area to use stimulating trade sales copy, such as soliciting inquiries from foreign rights buyers, or mentioning that the book makes an excellent premium for fundraising, and you can include contact information for the rights department.

Amazon gives you a huge amount of room for a table of contents — more than is usually required. Annotate your chapter titles with a short sentence describing the content in each chapter. Amazon gives you two sections to talk about the book: description and flap copy. That's a lot of

room to play with and shouldn't include any author bio since you have two other sections for author info. A good use for the Author Comments section is to specifically thank Amazon buyers, and also counter any misleading or negative reader reviews of the book.

One special point to consider in preparing Amazon copy is that you need to be clever using language to describe physical characteristics of a book. Most jacket copy is written with the assumption that someone is holding the book while reading it. On Amazon, you can't hold the book. So you need to communicate using words such as: large, heavy, weighty, luxurious, brightly colored, sewn binding, textured paper, impeccable design, etc. One book I worked on recently had a trim size of 4" x 9" — which means little to a consumer. The book was about cats, and when the publisher objected to my calling it "narrow," I put on my thinking cap and came up with "leggy trim size" — something expressive that dovetails with the feline theme.

In the section of the form for quoting reviews, note the words "Fair Use." This language is no doubt the result of a legal skirmish between Amazon and certain media outlets. It is against the law to reprint entire reviews without permission from the copyright holder, and Amazon bears liability even if publishers are the ones who upload the reviews. So don't go over 20 words or you're in jeopardy of having your whole page rejected and damaging your relationship with "Earth's Biggest Bookseller." Don't forget to update your Amazon page periodically with the best quotes pulled from reviews.

Finally, you can install a short excerpt from the book at Amazon.com. Many people use the first chapter. That's great for fiction, but the first chapter of non-fiction books is often historical or organizational and, frankly, lacks punch. You might choose a more meaty excerpt that tackles a major problem or issue for readers, demonstrating both the benefits of the book to readers and the author's writing style.

~ About ~

## Patron Saint Productions

Patron Saint Productions is a publishing consultancy specializing in online marketing strategy, campaigns, and training. It was founded by Steve O'Keefe, a 20-year book publishing veteran who has launched online marketing campaigns for more than 1,000 books and dozens of publishers.

### Web Site:

<http://www.patronsaintpr.com>  
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## Time To Book Fall Campaigns

Time is running out to book online marketing campaigns for your fall releases. Patron Saint Productions provides the following services, all designed to light a fire under a book during the month of publication. Ask about discounts for series promotions.

### New Book Launch

A comprehensive campaign including a media component (e-mail news releases), excerpt distribution, discussion group postings, and online bookstore displays. Price: \$2750.

### Chat Tour or Online Seminar

All the services of the New Book Launch Campaign, plus a week-long author chat tour or online seminar. Price: \$5500.

### Web Site Promotion

Includes directory registration, writing meta tags, linkage campaign, e-mail news releases, discussion group postings, and site-of-the-day submissions. Price \$2750 + registration fees.

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