



## Local Library Supports Independent Authors Seeking to Promote & Market their Work

Through Mid-Continent Public Library's Square One Small Business Services, independent authors like Darlene Deluca learn strategies and skills for marketing and promoting their books

By Uduak Grace Thomas, Rupu Gupta, & Rebecca Norlander

**Kansas City, MO** – Kansas City local Darlene Deluca regularly relies on support from Mid-Continent Public Library's (MCPL) Square One Small Business Services. As an independent author, Deluca said building a relationship with a local library is advantageous for lesser-known authors who want to get their name out and increase their readership.

Deluca writes contemporary romance novels, and women's fiction in general. Many of her books deal with women's relationships and friendships. Book fairs "are a great way to get in front of people who you know are readers," she said. "You can be on Facebook, and you can be on all the social media sites. But what's great about being in connection with a library is you know you are getting to readers."

But libraries do much more than connect authors and readers, according to Deluca. They are a particularly valuable resource for independent authors who are often working with tight budgets to get their books published. Independent authors often handle marketing and promotion of their books – essentially the same responsibilities as any other entrepreneur – on top of the demands of the creative writing process. Deluca says library staff understand that authors are small business owners and are willing to support them.

This is true at MCPL. The library's Square One Small Business Services program offers a comprehensive suite of online resources that are intended to help entrepreneurs learn basic skills that they need. This includes tools to help them build a cohesive business plan as well as tutorials to create reports and perform analyses. Also available are videos that teach people how to start specific kinds of ventures such as an event planning business, an Etsy shop, or a daycare. The library also provides access to online versions of various business and technology publications. In addition, the library offers mentoring to help guide small business owners.

Deluca learned about the Square One program directly from Mid-Continent. She first got involved after hearing a fellow writer talk about a fair for local authors at the library. Since then, Deluca has participated in several classes that teach important skills that are key to running a successful business. She noticed a clear difference from when she was marketing her writing on her own versus when she did so with guidance from the library. She described MCPL staff's individualized approach and personal attention as critical for helping her learn skills such as how to effectively advertise her work on Facebook.

That personal touch and access to expert help when she needed it was an important differentiator between Square One and other small business resources. Although the content that library staff were teaching was not new, the structure of the Square One program and the approach to teaching were extremely valuable. “Depending on how you learn and how you absorb things, it's just so much more effective to have a real person there,” she said. “Sitting and listening to a podcast or trying to read some instructions online, it just doesn't work for me.”

A key benefit of MCPL's entrepreneurship services, and similar programs in many other libraries, is that it is free. Given the MCPL's reputation, small businesses can trust that the information they get is accurate and that the classes will be worth their time. Additionally, Deluca highlighted the value of opportunities to meet with other local entrepreneurs who use Square One services and learn from their experiences and challenges.

Prior to COVID-19 related closures, Deluca participated in 4-5 events per year – including many at the library. At these events, she talked about her books and connected with people who like to read. It created a level of rapport that has been critical for independent authors like her. These networking opportunities with readers and other entrepreneurs were an unfortunate casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdown, Deluca has tried to replicate the in-person experience using social media but notes that it is not the same as meeting face to face.

Deluca has continued to learn how to develop and use Facebook ads. Although she is not an expert, after training, Deluca says she is more confident about using social media ads and now incorporates them in her marketing strategy. She sees the social media website's user base as an opportunity to grow her readership through targeted advertising.

Furthermore, she intends to continue participating in MCPL's classes and reaching out to the library for support with building her business. She is also interested in learning more about how technology can support her marketing efforts and hopes that the library will offer more classes in this regard. For example, she would like to attend a class focused on the technical aspects of creating videos.

MCPL has been a boon for Deluca, but she notes that not every budding entrepreneur has access to the kind of support she has gotten. Her advice to other entrepreneurs is to seek out networking opportunities with local groups of authors as well as programs and services offered by their local library. “If you can find a place like the library where you can find experts [to]work with to just sift through all the information that's out there. If you can really hone in...on a small community like the readers at the library...it's very helpful,” she said.



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