

Using BKLNK to Adjust Categories on A SELF-PUBLISHED Book

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If you are selling your books on the 'Zon', the book categories you choose are important. But figuring out what categories to use is hard to do. Until now.

I DISCOVER THE IMPORTANCE OF CATEGORIES

Perhaps I am a slow learner. I am, after all, a new author. Well, writer of books. "Author" might be above my pay grade – for now. My books, like many new (and now lots of established authors), are available on the "Zon". (The "Zon" is that "Big River" place that has that smiling face on all of their boxes.)

As I have published my books, and started book marketing, I started using advice from many areas. In particular, those lessons and help that is available on the FaceBook "[20Booksto50K](#)" group (strongly recommended for self-published authors). I have learned that book categories on the "Zon" are an important factor to help a book to be found. If you have a Science Fiction book, for instance, then you want it to be on the Science Fiction pages. You will soon notice that there are lots of sub-categories for SF. So you want your book to also be on those sub-category pages.

When you create a book listing on the Zon via KDP, you can add it to two categories. But there are many sub-categories for each main book genre.

Which two to pick? What categories are best for your book? The Zon only allows you to pick two when you set up your book's details.

So you pick two, and hope for the best. Sure would be nice to be in more categories, though.

And then you notice that other books in your genre have sales rankings for more than two categories. How did they do that?

One day I found out that a book could have more than two categories. A book can have up to **10** categories. That was great news! Maybe putting my book in more than two categories would help with the book's visibility – and sales.

So, I spent some time figuring out the best categories for my "The Forgotten Winchester" book.

And I discovered that it was hard and very time-consuming to manually figure out what categories to add.

I'll share the process with you – and show you the 'hard' way, and then the 'easy' way. Either way takes some work and thought. The 'hard way' just takes *more* work and time.

FINDING CATEGORIES ON ZON THE HARD WAY

Here's the problem. I needed to find the best categories for my book.

I figured that I could dig around the Zon site manually to figure out the official Zon category names.

Here's how to do that.

- Get to the Zon ebooks or books page. Then click on Best Sellers link. Then look at the category names on the left side.
- Click on one of those categories. That will get you another page with another list of the sub-categories in the category you clicked.
- Write those sub-category names down under the main category name.
- Now, repeat the process for all of the categories you see on the left side. Keep drilling down until you get to the last category. Write down all of the sub-category names.
- Now, go back to the beginning category page. And do it again for the next sub-category on the list. Write it down. Drill down some more. Write it down.

And keep on doing that.

Keep track of the 'genealogy' of each subcategory – its parent, the possible child categories – takes some time. There was lots of switching back and forth from the Zon page to my text editor where I kept typing in each sub-category as I found it.

But, I persevered.

And eventually, I figured out a list of all the categories for my genre. And I also discovered that many hours have passed.

I tried that manual process. It was not fun. And it was not a good use of my time.

I figured that there must be a better (and easier – and faster) way to figure out the categories for my book. Or any book.

THE BETTER AND FASTER WAY TO FIGURE OUT CATEGORIES

The Zon has an API (Application Program Interface) to query the Zon to get details of a book. You have to be a Zon affiliate to get access to the API.

And your affiliate has to have sales that result from using the affiliate code. (That becomes important, as described later.)

But one of the pieces of information that you can get is all the category information for a book. A program can access the Zon API, and get book information – including all the categories – for any book by providing the book's ASIN (or ISBN-10) number.

Your program has to be a bit smart on how it processes that data. The returned data has to be 'de-geekified'.

But, I am a web programmer. And, after a bit of analysis of the results, and some programming effort, I was able to decode the mysterious Zon API and get the category results in a format that was useful.

I could enter an ASIN/ISBN-10 number, and the program would return a properly formatted list of the categories assigned to that book – from the parent category of 'Kindle Books' or 'Books' down to the final sub-category.

That was great information to get from the Zon. I could figure out all the categories used by *any* book in my genre.

I just needed a way to easily do that via a web page. So I created the BKLNK site (<https://www.bklnk.com>). It originally was a place to process Universal Book Links, and then I added the ability to automatically add country-specific Zon Affiliate codes. So my BKLNK site was a good place to put the page that would find a book's categories.

So it was easy – well, theoretically it was easy; it took a bit of work to write, debug, and test the program that would decode the categories into a readable format – to 'ask' the API for all categories for a book. And display them on the screen in the correct format. And to make it easy to copy that data for analysis.

But I got it done. The CATFIND page on the BKLNK site can figure out all of the categories used by a book.

In just seconds. Not hours, as it might take with the manual way.

CATFIND FINDS CATEGORIES

So the CATFIND process got added to the BKLNK site. All you do is enter the ASIN/ISBN-10 number of any book (not just your book), and you get all the categories assigned to that book.

That made the process of figuring out categories a bit easier. Just enter the ASIN number for books in your genre, and then write down the categories for that book. And then do it again (and again!) for other books.

Still a lot of work, although a bit easier.

But not easy enough!

Then I noticed that the Top 100 page for any category used the category number in the Zon URL.

Hmmm.

I knew, via the CATFIND page, the category ID number for any category. I could use that to build a URL that would take you to that category's Top 100 page. That might be useful information.

For instance, the Top 100 page might help you figure out the best cover to put on your book. The covers of books in any genre have some basic designs. Science Fiction books often have a spaceship or something 'outer-spacey' on the cover. Post-Apocalyptic books have damaged cities and a person with a weapon. Romance books have two characters in some sort of romantic pose. Even the fonts used for the book title are similar in a genre. Etc.

So, looking at the Top 100 books in a category can help with your book cover.

But there was something else that the Top 100 page showed me. *The books*. And each book had a link to that book's page. And the link had the book's ASIN/ISBN-10 number.

What if I could figure out all of the ASIN numbers for the Top 100 book list in a category? That could be done with a bit of clever 'web scraping'. That's what the googles do. They look at a web page and extract information.

I could do that. I could 'scrape' the Top 100 page for a genre and get a list of all of the ASIN numbers on that page.

Then I could manually do a CATFIND of each book to figure out the categories those books used.

I figured that if I could use the categories used by the Top 100 books in a category to figure out which categories my book should have.

But, I thought, why do all of that manually? Why not make a page that would CATFIND the Top 100 books?

And then sort all of those categories into a list showing the number of times each category was used by the Top 100 books. I figured that the most ‘popular’ categories used by the Top 100 books in my book’s genre would be great to use for my book.

I CAN CATALIZE !

Thus was born the CATALIZE page of my BKLNK site. That page provides great information about the best categories for a book. Here’s what CATALIZE does.

- Find the Top 100 page for a category of a book.
- Look at the top 25 books on that page and CATFIND each of them.
- Keep track of all categories used for each book, and the number of times they were used for all of the books.
- Put that into an easily copied list on the CATALIZE results page.

So now the CATALIZE page is available for anyone to use on the BKLNK site. And, I decided to make the BKLNK site entirely free. (Partly because it was too much trouble to do all of the work to ‘monetize’ the site. But you can donate any amount to help support the costs of the site.)

USING CATFIND TO CATALIZE TO THE BEST CATEGORIES

So the point of all of this is to help me (and you) figure out the best – most popular - categories for your book. Those categories should be the same as the categories used by the Top 100 Best Sellers in your genre. Here’s how I did it.

- I used the new CATFIND and CATALIZE tools on my BKLNK site to help with the categories for my “The Forgotten Winchester” book. You can do the same process to find the best categories for your book.
- I started with the ASIN number of a popular Western genre book. I stuck that number into the CATFIND page on the BKLNK site. That gave me 5 categories.
- I did the CATALIZE for each of those categories, one at a time. Each time, I copied the CATALIZE results – the categories used by 25 of the Top 100 books in that category – into a spreadsheet.
- I repeated that for each of the 5 categories for the book that I had CATFIND’d. That got me a spreadsheet of the most popular categories for the books in that Top 100 list for all the categories used by that book.
- And I found several categories that would be useful for my book. Along with a couple of categories that I hadn’t thought of.
- I repeated the CATFIND / CATALIZE process for a few other popular Western books. And added that to my spreadsheet.

That only took a few minutes. It was much faster than doing it manually.

The next part of the process took a bit more time. And some thought as I analyzed things.

I did some sorting of the results. I sorted by the category name. Since I had CATALIZE’d several books, there were some duplicate category names. I filtered them down to unique categories, and updated the count for each category.

Then some more sorting. I marked the most popular categories. And a few others that I hadn’t thought of. I figured that if the successful books had those categories, maybe they would be good categories to use for my book.

The result, which did take a little bit of time, but certainly not as long as doing it all manually, was some new categories that I could add to my book. Maybe those additional categories would help with the visibility – and sales – of my book.

I figured it couldn't hurt.

ASKING THE ZON TO ADD MY NEW CATEGORIES

So, I got ready to send my list of 10 categories to the Zon. Some of them I had already used, but there were a few new ones.

I used the Author Central support link to start (this one: <https://authorcentral.amazon.com/gp/help/contact-us> after you sign in with your Zon author credentials). Once I got to the contact form (after choosing the support subject), I entered a nice note to the support people. I included the title of the book, the ASIN number (for the eBook), and a list of categories I wanted to use.

The category list was formatted just like they wanted – and just like the CATFIND/CATALIZE results showed. Using the exact format of the categories is important when you send it to the Zon.

I sent out the message to the Zon.

In the case of my “The Forgotten Winchester” book, I sent off the request on a Tuesday evening.

By the next morning, I got a nice reply from the Zon. They had changed the categories as I had requested. It mentioned that it might take up to 72 hours for the new categories to be seen on my book's product page.

So I will use CATFIND on my book's ASIN number to verify the new categories are in place. And wait and see how that will affect sales of the book. (Having the proper categories is not the only thing that sells a book, but it is important.)

A LIMITATION OF CATFIND

Remember when I mentioned that the BKLNK site used the Zon API to get the data it finds? And that you had to be a Zon Affiliate to get access to the API?

Yes, that's true.

But I was a Zon Affiliate - have been for many years. Not that I make a whole lot of money at it. My typical monthly affiliate revenue is about US\$50.00. Which is nice to have – they give it to me as a Zon credit. I sometimes actually get to use that credit.

More often, my wife gets to use the credit. I sometimes order some cherry or lemon-lime Jelly Bellies. Or other odds and ends. But those were things that I would have ordered anyway, so the affiliate revenue is a nice thing to have.

But the thing about the Zon API is that they only give access to the API *if you have affiliate revenue*. Anyone can sign up as an affiliate. And then you can get access to the API. But you have to have a certain amount of sales via that affiliate code within 90 days, or you get dropped. (And you have to be a programmer to use the API.)

I was OK on those requirements. I had affiliate revenue. And I knew how to program and use the API.

But, the API is Zon country store specific. You have to be an active (sales-generating) affiliate *in each Zon country store* to 'API' that country store.

Right now, I've got the US store covered with enough affiliate sales that BKLNK can access the US store API.

I've got affiliate links for other Zon country stores, but they aren't active enough yet to use their API.

Which is why the BKLNK site can only grab data from the US store. But I think that the category information BKLNK provides from the US store might be helpful for other country stores.

In the meantime, I'm trying to build up the affiliate revenue for other countries. The BKLNK UBLs that others might use can help with that. It's a slow process. (Chicken, meet egg. And vice-versa.)

But I'm working on it.

WILL IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Back to the category analysis.

Will those extra categories I added to my book help with the visibility – and sales – of “The Forgotten Winchester”?

Too early to tell as I write this. It takes a couple days for the Zon to get the categories changed. Although in my case with “The Forgotten Winchester”, it was done within 24 hours.

And having the right categories is only part of the whole book marketing thing.

But I can use BKLNK's CATFIND page to see (and verify) when the categories have been updated. And I have the other four books to CATFIND / CATALIZE.

The BKLNK site is useful to me. The CATFIND and CATALIZE tools are useful to me. And I think that these features will be useful to other self-published authors.

- I've got a BKLNK UBL set up that is easy to use – just add the ASIN or ISBN-10 number to the URL.
- The BKLNK UBL will also add my affiliate code for each Zon country store.
- The BKLNK site keeps track of the countries of the person that uses the UBL.
- CATFIND allows me to look at all of the categories for my (or any) book.
- CATALIZE allows me to figure out the best categories for my (or any) book.

The entire BKLNK site is free for anyone to use. Anyone can sign up. (And I don't use their emails for anything – I hate spam as much as the next guy.) Anyone can get their own affiliate revenue if they want.

Anyone can use BKLNK to figure out the best categories for their books. Just use the process described above to save you some (*a lot of*) time.

FINDING READERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

A side benefit for signing up at BKLNK and adding your books is that each use of the BKLNK UBL keeps track of which Zon country store 'belongs' to the person clicking on that UBL.

That has provided some interesting information for me.

I'm based in the US, so figured that most of my potential readers would also be in the US. But the BKLNK data for my books has indicated some other potential country markets.

Maybe those countries would be good 'targets' for some country-based advertising.

Interesting thought. I can use the BKLNK UBL stats to find countries that click on my UBL. And then target those countries with advertising.

Add the categories name analysis I did can be used as targeting help for the ads.

WILL BKLNK'S CATFIND and CATALIZE TOOLS BE USEFUL FOR YOU?

If you are a self-published author, you have to market your book. Unless you are already a best-selling author. But even the best-seller authors need to market their books.

The more information you can gather to help with that marketing will help that book's marketing effort. And, hopefully, book sales.

So, BKLNK gives me (and you) some useful marketing information via the click tracking by country. CATFIND and CATALIZE add to that useful information to help me figure out the best categories for my books.

It's another tool you can use to help market your book.

BKLNK is all free, of course. I have no plans to charge for any or the entire site. (Although there is a donate button if you want to help out. And some links to the books I wrote.)

All of BKLNK is available to any self-published author. *Free.*

The more information that is available to the self-published author, the better their marketing efforts will be. CATFIND and CATALIZE can be a useful tool for you.

Because, as one of my favorite FaceBook author groups ("[20Booksto50K](#)") says: "A rising tide lifts all boats".

I hope that BKLNK and the CATFIND/CATALIZE tools can be a small part of that 'rising tide'.

Richard Hellewell – the BKLNK Guy
Somewhere opposite Mutiny Bay, WA

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<https://www.RichardHellewell.com> author site)

<https://www.BKLNK.com> (the BKLNK site)

Book Sites

"The Forgotten Winchester" – <https://www.TheForgottenWinchester.com>

"Light Blink" – a urban fantasy trilogy – <https://www.LightBlink.com>

ADDENDUM

SPREADSHEET HINTS from the BKLNK GUY

You can copy the CATAZLIZE results and past them into a spreadsheet. Then use that spreadsheet to analyze the best categories for your book. You still have to do some deciding on your own, but using a spreadsheet will make things a bit easier.

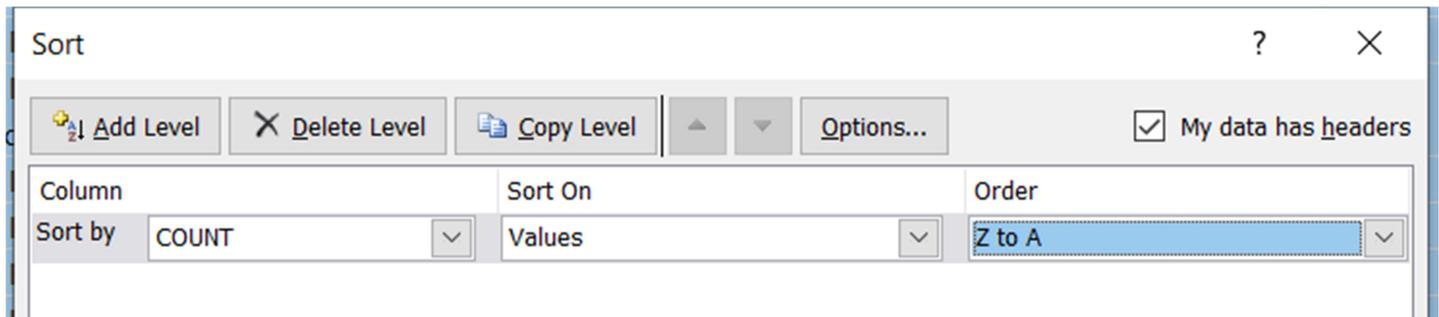
Here's how I do the spreadsheet parts.

1. Create two blank spreadsheet files – one for ebooks, and the other for paperbacks. If your spreadsheet program allows it, create one spreadsheet with one 'page' for each.
2. On the first row, make these headings in columns A – D:
 - a) CATALIZE data
 - b) RANK
 - c) CATEGORY
 - d) KEEP FLAG
3. Copy the CATALIZE results, and paste it into cell A2. That will put rows of data in that column.
4. In cell B2, enter this formula: **=LEFT(A2,(FIND(":",A2,1)-1))** – adjust for whichever spreadsheet program you use. This will give you the 'rank' for each item, extracted from the source data in column A.
5. In cell C2, enter this formula: **=MID(A2,FIND(":",A2)+1,256)**– adjusting the formula syntax as needed. This extracts the category name from the source data in column A.
6. Copy cells B2 and C2 to the rows underneath row 2 in column B, for all entries in column A. Adjust the columns widths as needed. You should now have the extracted data in columns B and C that match the values from column A. Those formulas are going to be handy for the next part.
7. If you want, use CATALIZE to get the results from another category for your book. Paste those results into a blank cell in column A below the existing ones.
8. Copy the formulas from column B and C as needed to get full data in columns B and C.
9. Save your spreadsheet (saving often is good).

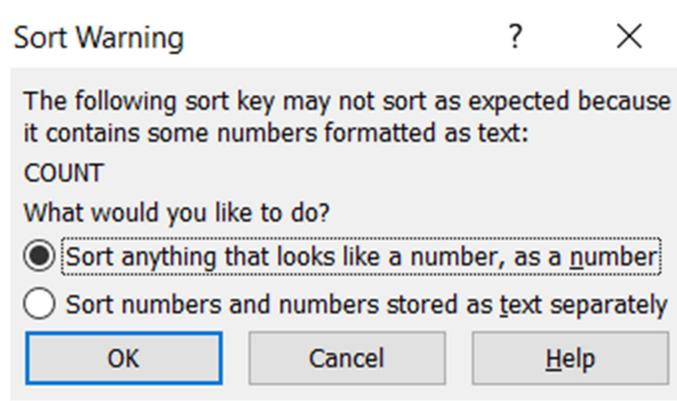
Now you can sort by RANK for all of the categories – if you have done the CATALIZE cut/paste for more than one CATALIZE result. You do this by highlighting the entire spreadsheet, then use the 'Data', 'Sort' command. In Excel, you want to make sure that you:

- Sort by the COUNT column
- Change the Order to "Z to A" (so that the sort will show highest COUNT to lowest)
- Click on the "My data has headers" to exclude the first column heading row (row 1)

See this screenshot from my version of Excel (it's old, because I'm too cheap upgrade it). Adjust for the spreadsheet program or version you use. Ask the googles/bings/ducks for help on sorting if needed.



Once you have specified the sort like the above, click the OK button. You might see a message like this:



That's because the COUNT column contains numerals that are 'text'. We want to sort on those 'texty' numbers, so click OK. Now all the categories will be sorted by the COUNT column, with the most often-used categories on top. If you have done multiple category CATALIZES, all of the data from all of the CATALIZES will be sorted.

I use the KEEP FLAG column D to put an 'x' for the categories I think might be most useful. Remember that you can have up to 10 categories, so you probably don't want to have more than 10 rows with an 'x'.

Then I will sort by the KEEP FLAG column to keep the 'keepers' on top. Keep tweaking the list until you are satisfied with the results.

Once I decide on the final 10 categories I need, I then create an email to the Zon (instructions are above), and copy the 10 entries from column C. They are formatted the way that the Zon likes to get them in those emails.

I add some text to the message, something like:

Please change/adjust the categories for my book "[Book Title]", ASIN/ISBN10 number [number], to the following categories [add the categories copied from column C]. Thanks!

With any luck, you'll get a quick response from the Zon when it's done. Wait a day, and then use CATFINDER on your book to see the newly-changed categories.

Hope this helps! You can always use the contact form on the BKLNK site to ask questions. Or to just say “Huzzah!” if the BKLNK tools are useful to you.

Richard – the BKLNK guy.