



How to sell a book on Substack

An author's guide





Bookstack

There's nothing that drives book sales like email. It's a direct line of connection to your most passionate supporters and, for many authors, Substack is the most **efficient** and **powerful** way to promote their upcoming and published books.

In this guide you'll learn:

- How to promote a new book from preorders to beyond the launch
- How to promote existing books
- How to grow your audience as you go
- How to pitch your Substack to agents and publishers



Preorders

Be loud and clear with your book announcement. You might be tempted to just include the announcement of your new post as an intro or footer in one of your regular posts. When you first make the announcement, we recommend creating a stand alone post. Be bold about the fact that you're launching a book—don't bury the lede! For inspiration, see announcement posts from [Gabrielle Blair](#), [Virginia Sole Smith](#), [Yung Pueblo](#), and [Freddie DeBoer](#).

Encourage orders with custom buttons. Include a link to pre-order your book above the fold using a custom button. Nik Sharma [used custom buttons with a Q&A for readers](#) so they had the full details on how to pre-order. [Learn more about buttons.](#)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `niksharma.substack.com/p/save-a-little-space-for-me-on-your`. The page header includes the Substack logo, the title "The Flavor Files", a "Subscribe" button, and navigation icons. The main content area features a section titled "Now for Some Book Q + A" with the following text:

When does the book come out, and is it available everywhere?

The book will be published on October 24, 2023, worldwide.

Why pre-order?

October might seem a bit far away to pre-order a book, but here's the thing, they're extremely important. Pre-orders are super helpful for authors because it helps support us and your local indie bookstores. In this age of unpredictable internet algorithms, pre-orders are extremely important. It also acts as a gauge for success; early preorders help give a book more visibility, bookstores can stock up properly, and publishers know how much to print. If you pre-order and share the book with your friends, more people will see and learn about it. If that isn't good enough a reason to convince you, think of it like this, you'll receive your copy of **Veg-Table** as soon as it comes out! It's an extra-special treat in the mail. If you do pre-order, **please save your receipts** because I'll be doing some fun things with you once you receive your copies. Use the Pre-Order button below, and it will give you a list of options to choose from. If you use Amazon, they have a **new follow feature** to stay updated with your favorite authors that you can check out.

At the bottom of the text is a prominent orange button labeled "Pre-Order Veg-Table".



Preorders

Tell your readers *why this is important*. Remind subscribers why preorders are important. Giulia Scarpaleggia tells readers, “preorders are the best way to support an author and help a book succeed.” Additionally, she thanks them for being some of her most dedicated fans. [Read the announcement post](#). Picture book author Adam Rex [got creative with his post about preorders](#), sharing a little of what readers could expect from the book. Finance writer Ben Le Fort [told subscribers](#) that if every single one of them preorders, they’d make his first major book a bestseller. Sharon Blackie [shared a detailed story of why her publisher means so much to her](#), alongside her book announcement.

Get strategic. Consider:

- **Telling your paid readers first.** Alison Roman [announced](#) her book tour to paid subscribers first, allowing her most dedicated fans to get access. She [sold out three cities](#) and the next day she invited free subscribers and followers on social media.
- **Sharing special discounts.** Taylor Lorenz [offers subscribers](#) 25% off preorders for one day only. Ben Le Fort [offered readers’ subscription discounts of up to 60% for friends and family members preordering](#), or preordering three copies.
- **Use video.** Maggie Smith shares a more [personal message](#) following the unboxing of her book and encourages subscribers via video to preorders. [Learn more about video on Substack](#).
- **Keep reminding about preorders.** Freddie deBoer shares the link to preorder his forthcoming book [at the top of every new post](#)

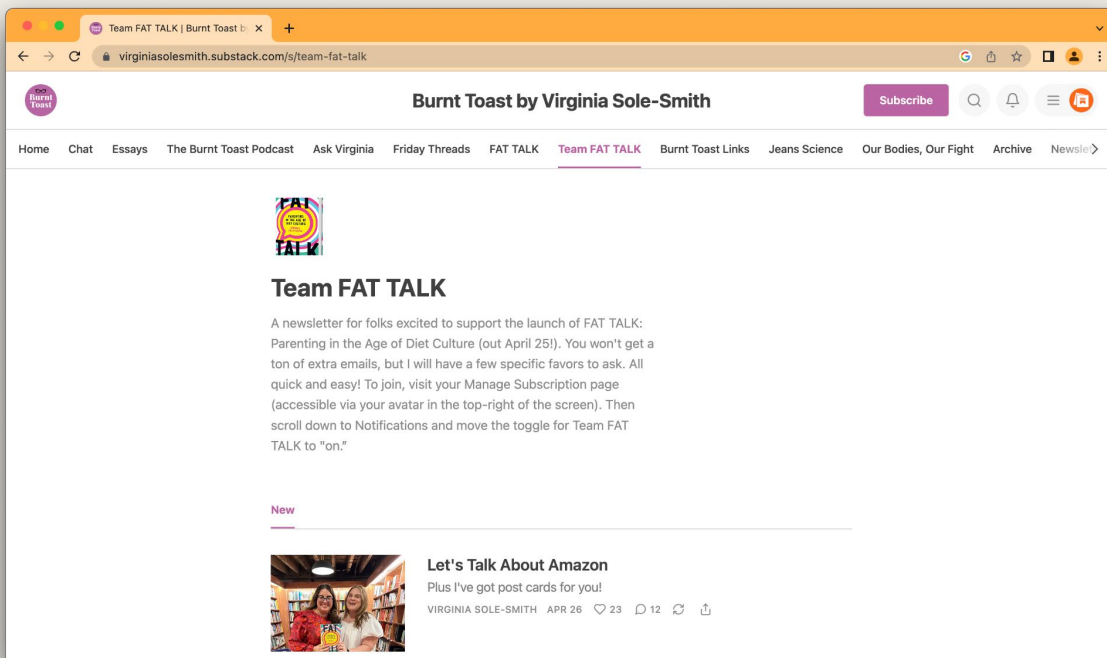


Launch

Build up to launch day. Continue to build momentum up to launch day with behind-the-scenes moments, posts sharing your feelings about publication, and cover reveals.

Celebrate publication week. For her publication date post, Lerato Umah-Shaylor shared [a custom button for readers to buy the book](#). Authors can offer early and behind-the-scenes access to readers and incentivize them with special deals. Authors [Gabrielle Blair](#), [Heather Havrilesky](#), [Virginia Sole Smith](#), and [Rebecca Makkai](#) use Substack to drive sales for their books. [Virginia also created a special section](#) on her Substack, so that she could get really detailed on the book news for superfans. [Virginia's book subsequently became a New York Times Bestseller](#), and said:

“There is no doubt in my mind that this happened because of Burnt Toast. You preordered, you regular ordered, you library-requested, you left reviews, you talked the book up on social media and in your group texts, you did this.”





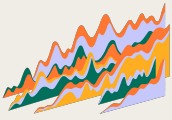
Launch

Go deeper with readers. Beyond launch week, authors start book clubs, run AMAs and invite readers to meet them on your book tour.

Celebrate milestones. Maggie Smith sent out a [Substack post](#) when her book became a New York Times bestseller. Chris Cillizza [shared a note](#) when he was featured in the media.

Don't forget to promote your Substack as part of your book launch too. Add your Substack url (your.substack.com) to your author page. [Visit our brand assets and resources](#) for more information.

Read more: [How to promote your book on Substack](#)

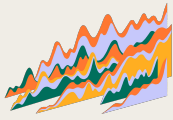


Ongoing promotion

Here are some ways writers can promote books after launch and continue to drive book sales on autopilot.

Add your books to your profile. Your Substack profile is a simple way to share all your social handles, web-profile presences, and books, all in one place. [Update your profile.](#)

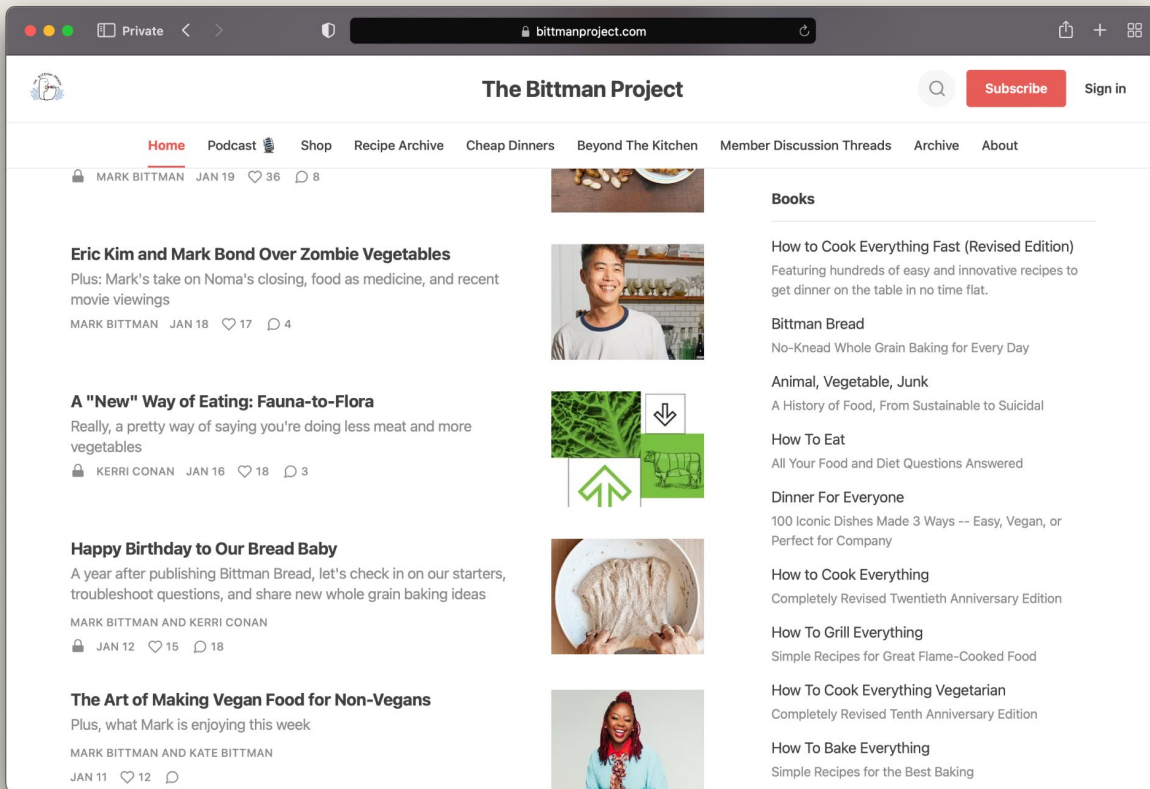
The screenshot shows a web browser window at substack.com. The left sidebar contains navigation links: Inbox, Notes, Chat, Explore, Notifications, Profile, and a 'New note' button. The main content area displays the profile for Luke Burgis, who is verified. His bio identifies him as the author of 'Wanting: The Power of Mimetic Desire in Everyday Life.' Below the bio are social media links for Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and a website. A featured book, 'Anti-Mimetic' by Luke Burgis, is highlighted with a 'Subscribe' button. The 'Reads' section lists four publications: Bismarck Brief (Paid subscriber), The Commonplace (Founding member), Default Wisdom (Paid subscriber), and The Intrinsic Perspective (Paid subscriber). A 'Get app' button is located in the bottom right corner.

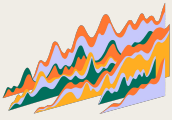


Ongoing promotion

List books as permanent links on your Substack homepage.

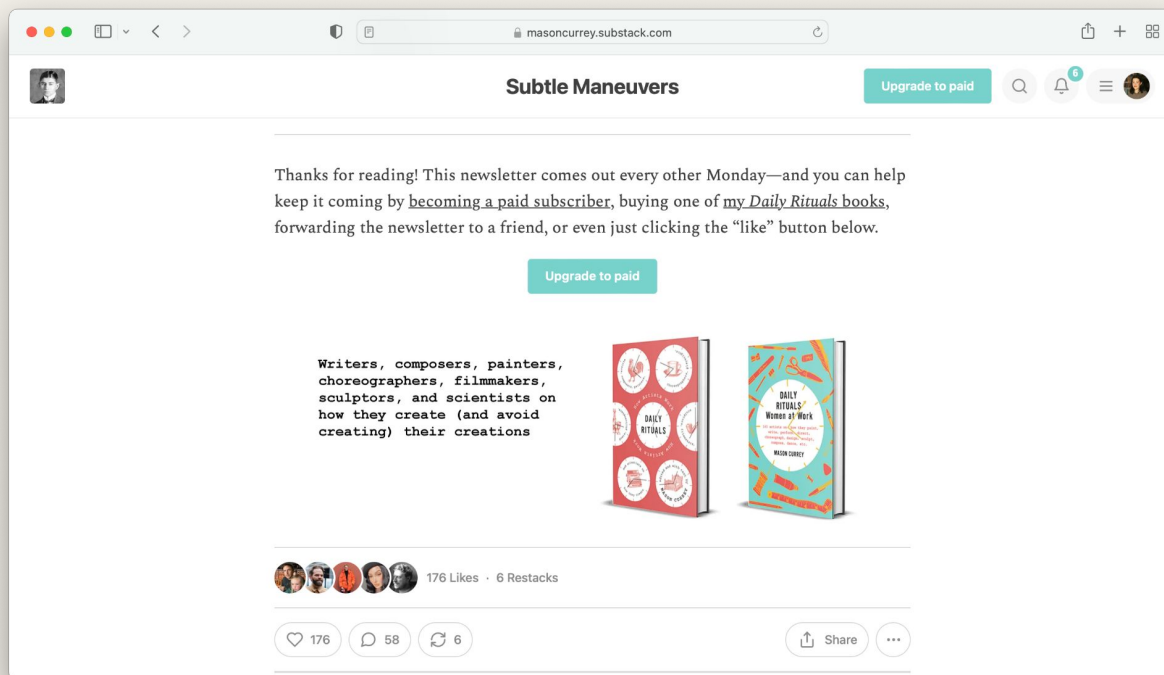
Cookbook author Mark Bittman promotes his books on the [homepage](#) of his Substack, The Bittman Project. [Update your homepage links.](#)





Ongoing promotion

Headers and footers. Writers can create headers and footers for all emails, which can be bespoke for free and paid subscribers ([head to Settings, Publication Details, Email banner, header, and footer settings](#)). Mason Currey created a custom banner displaying his books, which he adds to the bottom of all his posts.





Create a growth loop with your audience

Include your Substack on your “About the author” page in the finished book: we are seeing more art departments checking in on using the Substack logo alongside their personal URL for back pages of the published book. This is a great way to bring new readers to your newsletter.

Share the ongoing journey. Katy Hessel [updated subscribers on the US-leg of her publishing journey](#), to drum up preorders and interest after a successful UK launch—at the same time inviting those wishing to see US book tour details to upgrade to paid.

Invite subscribers to endorse your book: Virginia Sole Smith invited her Substack subscribers to endorse her new book, which she shared in Notes

Virginia also regularly mentioned her Substack [in interviews in the media and on podcasts about her book](#). This creates a loop of growth which allows your Substack to grow while your book sales do, and vice versa.



Create a growth loop with your audience

Here are some other ways to make full use of the Substack network to increase your growth through your book launch and beyond.

Write blurbs and recommendations to other authors. Authors can make use of [Recommendations](#) to help grow their publication as part of the Substack network. Writers who make a recommendation are 3x more likely to receive one. What's more, you can turn any recommendation written about your publication as a blurb for your book or an endorsement on your welcome page. Read: [How to set up endorsements on your welcome page.](#)

Guest post or interview with other Substack writers: [Maggie Smith answered Older's interview questionnaire](#), while Rebecca Makkai was [interviewed by Substack writer](#) Janet Ratcliffe for Beyond about her book.

Notes. [Substack Notes](#) is a space where you can publish short-form posts and share ideas with other writers and readers on Substack. In its early days, some writers are already seeing subscriber growth from Notes. Visit [A guide to growth and collaboration on Substack Notes.](#)



Pitch your Substack audience to agents & publishers

In December 2020, cookbook writer Caroline Chambers started her newsletter [after being rejected by traditional publishers for not having enough “social reach.”](#) In April 2023 [her book of the same name sold](#) after demonstrating an email list of more than 60,000 subscribers on Substack.

Caroline’s story isn’t the only example of Substack writers getting a book deal because of the audience they’ve cultivated here—Morning Person’s [Leslie Stephens](#) and Valorie Clark of Unruly Figures both [credit their book deals to their Substacks.](#)

If you’re speaking to potential agents and publishers, make sure to highlight your audience, and how engaged they are, on Substack by including engagement metrics such as open rates and free and paid subscriber numbers.

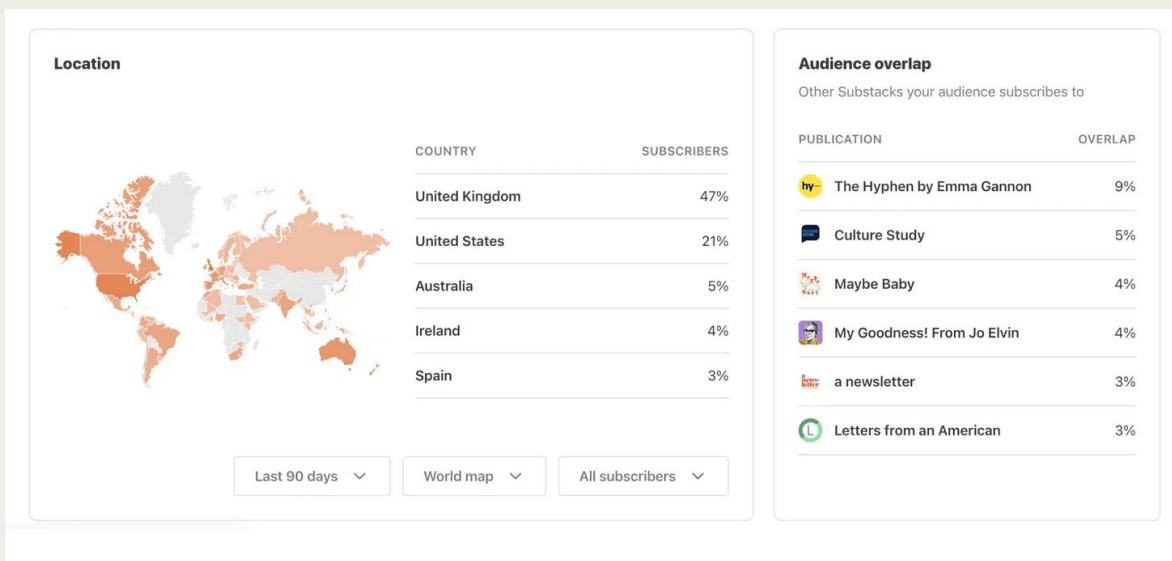
Remember to make clear that on Substack audience size isn’t the most important metric. When your open rates are 50% or more, you know that you have a very engaged and captive subscriber base, which is essential for book sales. (Comparatively, social media posts which may reach only 1-3% of your follower base.)



Pitch your Substack audience to agents & publishers

You can also share where they are in the world your readers are using the [Audience insights](#) tab in Stats. Toggle between where subscribers are located around the world by country and by states in the United States. You can also sort the data by all subscribers or paid subscribers and time—last 30 days, last 60 days, or all time. You can sort the same data in your subscriber dashboard to send targeted emails. For example, send an email to all USA based subscribers about an upcoming book tour.

The insights also display audience overlap with other publications to help writers spot opportunities for collaboration.

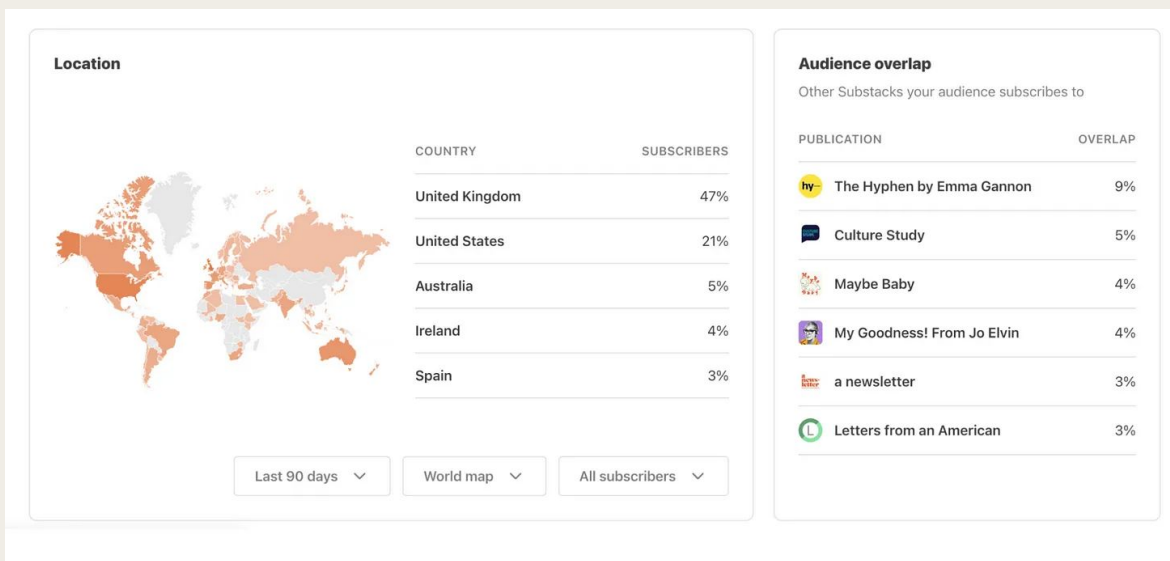




Pitch your Substack audience to agents & publishers

You can also share where they are in the world your readers are using the [Audience insights](#) tab in Stats. Toggle between where subscribers are located around the world by country and by states in the United States. You can also sort the data by all subscribers or paid subscribers and time—last 30 days, last 60 days, or all time. You can sort the same data in your subscriber dashboard to send targeted emails. For example, send an email to all USA based subscribers about an upcoming book tour.

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—writer Maggie Smith, on hitting #3 on the NYT bestsellers list

“I can say this now without a doubt: We did this. Whether you preordered the book, requested it from your library, came to an event with friends, bought a copy or two or three for people you love, or just helped spread the word—thank you. I hadn’t even allowed myself to dream of this, but here we are.”

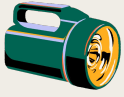


Maggie Smith

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Reads

A guide to great writing happening on Substack, plus the home of "The Active Voice", a podcast by Substack co-founder and writer Hamish McKenzie.

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