

Book Marketing Best Practices

By Carla King

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY

If you have a well-written book, congratulations! You have an advantage, and it's easier than ever to connect with your readers. Not finished with your book yet? It is never too early to connect and build relationships with readers and influencers to build your author platform.

I've put together this article to introduce you to marketing best practices, creating a strong author platform using your website, weblog and the most popular social media platforms. You'll become familiar with tools and services you need, and you'll learn enough about the topic to intelligently hire out help if you need it.

CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS & TRUE FANS

We've all heard the maxim, "it's who you know" and it's true that your friends, family, and co-workers are your biggest fans and your most reliable advocates. So the more "friends" you have, the more fans you have to help you promote your book. Unfortunately, a lot of authors start relationships with readers and influencers the day their book is launched. Don't be one of those authors who enter the virtual party shouting, "Buy my book!"

Cultivate relationships early. Attend conferences in your area of expertise and attend writing and publishing conferences, too. Find places where you might contribute to a conversation or offer help. Online forums are great places to start, especially if you write to a niche market. Offer assistance, have conversations, read other's stories and become a part of the community. As in any social situation, it may feel awkward at first, but you'll find places to make real connections.

If you haven't read Kevin Kelly's *1000 True Fans* blog post, check it out, it's very encouraging. Kelly founded *Wired Magazine* (along with a number of other successful businesses), and he proved that artists can make a decent living with the support of only 1000 true fans. These are the fans who buy all your books, attend every reading, listen to every podcast, watch every video interview, read every article and who just love what you do. Attend to the care and feeding of these fans, he says, and you've got it made. This means connecting with them via e-mail, social media and in person. Best practices for using these tools are provided later in this article.

BUILD YOUR BRAND

Your book title might rock, but your author name is your strongest brand. Back in 2000 I grabbed a domain name that matched the title of my story (which became a book) and built a website. Then I built a website for the next book, and then the next one. In 2004, as I was building my fourth website, I realized that if I continued in this manner I'd drive myself insane. Miraculously, my author name was still available so I consolidated all my media under CarlaKing.com, forwarding the book websites to their corresponding sub-pages under my central website.

It may be difficult to reserve your name these days, but you may already have a "handle" that you use. My adventure travel handle is missadventuring, but if my name were taken, I could have used carlaking-author or carlaking-writer.

Other elements of your brand include colours, typography, images, graphics, logos and even tag lines. Get serious about marketing and study branding principles to create your own recognizable look.

CONTENT MARKETING & WRITING FOR FREE

Now that you are an author you can afford to write for free. Consider that every piece of content you contribute is publicity that generates book sales. Identify parts of your manuscript that might become articles or stories, photographic layouts or other short pieces. Offer free articles to magazines,

newspapers and websites in your area of expertise in exchange for a linked blurb about you and your book. I often contribute articles on motorcycle gear, on destinations, and on topics like tips for women traveling solo. This is called “content marketing.”

Content marketing can activate a reciprocity impulse in others. When your book is ready you have a better chance of getting reviewed, mentioned and supported by those you’ve supported. Building relationships online is just like building relationships in real life. As in any business relationship, be professional and reliable.

Other than magazines and websites on your topic, there are many websites that host articles and stories and market their best contributors. Examples are Examiner.com and HowTo.com. Always cross-post on your own website and social publishing sites.

Guest blogging is also an excellent content marketing strategy. A web search can help identify the important bloggers to cultivate relationships with, and you can even arrange your own blog tour when your book is published.

DEVELOP A WEBSITE AND BLOG

Your author website is “you-central” and the cornerstone of your marketing and promotion efforts. All of your social media profiles need to link back to your site and your blog. This is done by using consistent metadata or keywords.

Ideally, your blog and your website are one and the same. Many authors test the waters with a free Blogger, Typepad or Wordpress blog, but here’s the problem — you don’t own or control your content. What you need is a “self-hosted” blog and website, and WordPress is the most popular platform.

So where do you start? One popular company that provides affordable hosting is GoDaddy. They offer basic “managed WordPress hosting”. With managed WordPress hosting you get automatic backups so you never lose your data. Once you sign up, you’ll choose from a selection of simple themes. Just click and start building or hire someone to help you for surprisingly little money.

You only need a few pages to start with; for example, a home page, about page, books page and a contact page. Your home page is important, but research has shown that the about page is the most popular page on most sites. Readers want to see your face and learn what makes you tick. Write it in the first person and talk with the reader. Do a little web research to find out more about what makes a great *author about* page.

It’s also important to include an e-mail newsletter sign-up form in your sidebar (upper right- hand side, please!), plus links to all the social media sites you’re actively using. As I mentioned above, I like MailChimp because it’s easy to use and free up to your first 2000 e-mail subscribers.

On your books page, consider embedding a widget that allows your readers to preview your book. Also, make it easy for readers to follow you with one click by embedding social media “like” and “follow” buttons on your pages.

SOCIAL MEDIA: CHOOSE IT AND USE IT

Today’s readers use social media to recommend books and connect with other readers. Today’s authors cultivate relationships with bloggers, especially curators whose voices rise above the noise.

Ideally, you’ll start marketing and promoting yourself via your website and social media long before your book is available. Twitter and Facebook are popular with many authors because they’re easy to use, enjoy large audiences, and provide one-click connectivity to and from many other social media sites. LinkedIn, another popular social site, can help you to reach large groups of professionals in particular industries. Pinterest and Instagram sites are great social visual tools. Google owns Google+ and YouTube and so when you post there you enjoy better visibility in the Google search engine.

Authors often worry about which social media platform to use. I recommend registering for all of them, and deciding later: Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, Gmail addresses and other sites that you discover. Create keyword-rich profiles that point to your website at the very least, and experiment with each one over time to see which you prefer.

Twitter is an excellent news commentary and sharing platform providing up-to-the-second information on everything from a concert to a conference, from a war to a sports event. There are a lot of journalists on Twitter, so you have an opportunity to stand out as an expert or a person of interest and get in the news. Connect with and follow other Twitter users as well as sort your tweets by topic or interest using a tool like TweetDeck or HootSuite.

Facebook separates personal pages from groups, business and author pages, virtual events, book pages and other kinds of pages. If you're starting from scratch, you'll need a personal page first, then an author page. These pages are linked so that Facebook knows who owns what pages. You can use your Facebook author page to post updates on your writing, alert followers to sales, freebies, interviews and articles, solicit beta readers and run contests. Facebook also makes it easy to embed a button to place on your website so that your readers can "like" your page and see your posts in their Facebook newsfeed. You can also manage Facebook posts using a tool like HootSuite.

Google+ has emerged as a very popular place for writers because it displays long posts so nicely. Because of that, G+ can be used as a blogging platform. (Still, I wouldn't recommend replacing your blog with a series of G+ posts. Instead, create a short post with a teaser to your new blog post.) Once you add someone to a circle, you can target your posts to show up on the newsfeeds of that circle.

Pinterest is a virtual bulletin board that lets you share links by "pinning" an image on one of your boards. (Make sure you place an image on every page of your website and each blog post, so readers can share via Pinterest.)

Tumblr is a hosted blog tool for visual content. If you're an author of visual books, note that a significant number of authors have been discovered on this site.

Instagram is a mobile app that lets you post and respond to photos.

LinkedIn is an important platform to use to reach influencers used for making business connections so your profile should be as well written as a resume. Groups in LinkedIn can be very profitable places for you to spend your time. Every group has a discussions tab where you can start or contribute to a conversation. Use the promotions tab to post information about your seminars, book press releases, awards and information about articles you have written.

Many people use YouTube to search for video content much as they use retail sites to search for products. Video, especially a short, concise, entertaining, and well-made video, is an excellent marketing tool.

Visual content gets great results with readers. Studies show that you'll get 80% more engagement on an image posted in Facebook than a text post, and over 50% more clicks on Twitter. So use images to create interest in your posts and also consider incorporating visual elements like infographics or even just inspirational quotes. The online Canva design tool makes creating images very easy.

Your mobile device with a built-in camera is your best bet for keeping in real-time contact with your friends, family, and readers. Make sure to add images and infographics on your web pages so that people can share them easily using one of the Pinterest browser buttons.

SOCIAL PUBLISHING & BETA PUBLISHING

Social publishing allows you to start early, sharing your stories and drafts with a community of other readers and writers. This helps to attract beta readers, improve your writing, and discover your markets. When you pre-publish stories or even entire books you can get valuable feedback on your writing before you publish.

Two popular social publishing sites are Wattpad and Scribd, but there are many fan fiction, romance, and niche publishing sites, too. You can also beta publish “socially” and even get paid for it using online stores like Gumroad, Selz, and Leanpub, which also have incorporated social media features so you and your fans can easily share. These sites let you sell or give your book away to beta readers, notify them of updates and test your book before you set up formal distribution to online retailers. The benefits are many, not the least of which is that you get readers’ e-mail addresses. (Direct e-mail marketing with a service like MailChimp is the best use of your marketing time and budget.)

FOLLOW THE SOCIAL MEDIA RULE OF THIRDS

The social media rule of thirds is simply this: One-third of the time you promote your book or business; another third goes to supporting similar authors or businesses; and another third of the time you want just to be yourself, posting things unrelated to your business, but related to you as an individual.

For example, because I’m an expert in a very narrow niche — women’s adventure motorcycling — I give lots of advice and encouragement to other women who want to motorcycle (and to the men who love us!). But I also share my interests in writing, publishing, gardening, yoga, travel, and my family.

It turns out that a lot of people who share those interests also like travel and motorcycling or know someone who does. They have helped me sell books, connected me with editors who pay me to write articles, and secured highly-paid speaking engagements at conferences, one of the most profitable places I’ve found to sell my travel stories. I’ve even started giving lectures and selling books on writing and self-publishing to the adventure crowd — they have a lot of stories to tell!

Best yet is the number of people I’ve met who live around the world and have become actual true, in-person friends.

JOIN FORUMS & GROUPS

Forums and groups are great places to get attention because they’re focused and interactive. You can become a star by sharing what you know, especially if you’re an expert, as long as you don’t step on the group leader’s authority. In groups, you can test ideas for blog entries, articles, publicity and invite people to connect with you on social media.

LinkedIn is a great place for professional groups. Yahoo and Google both host groups and communities. Meetup is one of the hottest networking communities going today perhaps because it’s focused on real-world meetings. You might even create your own group.

Forums are especially fun because they’re so focused on a single topic or activity. I’m a member of two different motorcycle adventure travel forums, a women in motorcycling forum, and a couple of forums related to single makes and models of motorcycle. We ask and answer questions about gear and destinations, troubleshoot problems for each other, share ideas and experiences, jokes, accomplishments, and failures.

Visiting these groups and forums doesn’t seem like work to me. They’re natural extensions of the activities I love and the people I meet there often become friends. I hope that you’ll find the same rewards in your endeavours to connect.

JOIN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES & ORGANIZATIONS

Many writers work in isolation and getting out into the larger community can provide you with an energizing boost. You’ll meet peers, editors, reviewers and publishers, all while keeping up with changes in the industry, new technologies, services, and sales and distribution channels.

Meetup.com has a lot of writing, reading and social groups for authors and groups in business and social niches. The Independent Book Publishers Association (IPBA) is a great organization with lots of information and perks. Every year I try to get to at least one writing conference.

USE E-MAIL MARKETING SERVICES & RSS FEEDS

Your mailing list is the foundation of all marketing and promotion efforts. You can even begin building this in advance of setting up a formal website or blog. There are many e-mail marketing service providers. MailChimp is free for up to 2000 e-mail addresses. Like AWeber, Constant Contact, Vertical Response and many others, MailChimp will manage your e-mail contacts, provide customizable templates for e-mail newsletters, track open and click-rates, automatically handle subscribes and unsubscribes, and provide analytics. They make it very easy to create and embed a signup widget (an HTML snippet) on your website and blog posts too.

To encourage visitors to sign-up for your e-mail news, entice them with an ethical bribe: free information, booklets, and stories. An automation or auto-responder feature can handle this for you, sending your prepared e-mail (or series of e-mails) when they enrol. Providing complimentary information and stories asserts your professionalism, demonstrates your creativity, builds relationships and inspires reciprocity. Visitors to your website will expect to find a sign-up form in the upper right-hand side of your web page.

Some authors shrug off e-mail newsletters because they offer an RSS feed on their site. Go ahead and use an RSS feed (Feedburner is a good one). The important distinction I want to make is that RSS is not an e-mail address collection tool, it's a notification system that some of your site visitors will use to stay up-to-date with your blog posts via e-mail or an RSS reader.

The people who have subscribed to your e-mail newsletter want to get to know you so reward them with more personal content than you publish in your other social sites. As a writer, you are uniquely equipped with the talent and skill to write great e-mail newsletters.

HIRE OUT PUBLICITY

For the indie author, affordable professional publicity is tough to find, and it's often difficult to justify or measure the return on investment. There are no guarantees which publication, blog, radio, or TV show will run with a review of an author's book or who will interview the author as an expert. An alternative to a traditional publicist is a virtual assistant who might help you set up, monitor and maintain your social media presence, draft blog posts, implement SEO (search engine optimization) and even organise blog tours.

After interviewing a pro, request a detailed plan that includes the specific projects that will be part of the job, the timeline for delivering on these projects, what you as the author are expected to provide and the process by which your helper will keep you updated on the progress of your campaign. And, be sure to ask for references.

You should also develop a comprehensive online media kit that includes high-quality author photos and book covers. Also include bios of various word counts, bite-sized and lengthy, along with links to interviews, book reviews, articles about you, links to articles written by you, a link to your events calendar and your contact information.

DISTRIBUTE PRESS RELEASES

Many press release distribution services promise distribution to national and international media outlets for less than £500, which sounds very attractive. But press releases have to be well-written, topical (automotive, gardening, etc.) or timely (tied to a major news event or holiday), to get noticed by busy journalists, and there's no guarantee it will be picked up.

Look for a service that will provide a targeted media list based on keywords and who will also help you write a great press release and provide you with a monthly newswire service.

Think creatively. You might hire a magazine editor or well-known personality in the field you're writing about to send e-mails to their contacts. The e-mail can have all the same information as a press release but crafted as a personal note. For example, I hired a retired motorcycle magazine editor to send out an e-mail to her peers about my book on motorcycle adventure travel. Because they knew her, many editors clicked on her e-mail and, as a result, news of my book was included in major motorcycle magazines around the world, with many asking for review copies.

GOODREADS

Since Goodreads was acquired by Amazon, there's a lot of great linking and visibility there. Goodreads is the largest social network for readers so you want to be there too when readers discuss and recommend books. Goodreads offers pages for authors so you can increase visibility, but they do recommend that you become active in the reading community before you start telling people about your book.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PASSIVE MARKETING

Remember that old yellow pages jingle, "Let your fingers do the walking?" Today your readers' fingers are walking the internet to find books.

What you need to do as an independent author is to create a list of metadata (titles, descriptions, keywords, alt tags, and such), "seeding" your website and social media sites with words and terms that will be gathered by search engines and display your book in readers' search results. Metadata is a great passive marketing technique.

KEEP MARKETING!

The marketing cycle for an independent publisher is longer than a traditionally published author who gets a boost at book release time and perhaps for up to a year after release. As an indie author you're never backlisted. You can promote your book in many different ways for many years.

If you reach a dead end with one social media site, move on to another. If you stop having fun, go elsewhere! There are limitless places online and around the world to connect with readers and many authors have found creative ways to reach them.

Connect with other authors to find out what they're doing. The indie author community is especially generous with lots of sharing online and in-person. The techniques shared here are best practices for marketing using common tools and methods, but your limitless creativity will take you as far as you want to go. Good luck!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Carla King is an adventure travel author and technology journalist who has been self-publishing since 1994. She founded the Self-Pub Boot Camp series of books and workshops to help authors make good publishing decisions in 2010. In 2016 she founded Author Friendly, a do-it-for-you service so that you can concentrate on writing. She also runs Misadventures Media, a small press that publishes adventure travel books.