

Social Media Starters for Authors

A Guide to Creating an Effective, World Class Web Presence

Online communities like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn are empowering people to connect on a personal level like never before. This simple guide will show you how to establish a world class web presence designed to help you find and connect with your readers.

by Don Lafferty

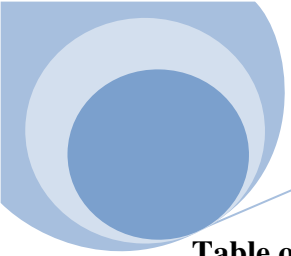
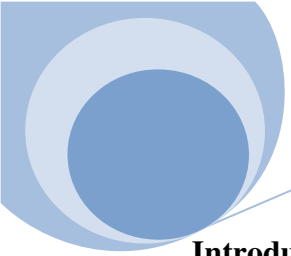


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Introduction: Why Am I Here?

Before you can craft an effective social media presence and strategy, it’s important to first understand your objectives; the reason you’re putting yourself out there.

Since this document is addressed to authors, I’ll assume you’ve already got a book or a deal, and that your primary objective is to sell more books.

The underlying objectives of your social media strategy are exactly the same as with any traditional marketing or strategy; **selling more books requires capturing the attention of consumers and booksellers who are unfamiliar with you or your book.**

In sales-speak, this is called “business development”.

In a social media context, business development for an author yields a few different types of “incoming business development leads”.

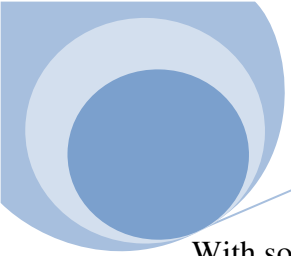
Incoming Sales Lead	Why
Consumers	Readers who buy books
Bookseller	Businesses and people who buy and sell books. e.g., Bookstores
Authors in Similar Markets	Community Owners / Gatekeepers
Connectors / Media	People who make their living talking about authors and books. e.g., Journalists, bloggers, other media

These basic groups represent your target connections in various media-consuming communities, just as they do in traditional marketing strategies. Based on the content of your book, it’s possible to identify more focused market segments as your online community grows.

Your activities on the Internet should be designed to **identify** these target connections, **engage** them appropriately and **convert** them accordingly:

Target Connection	Conversion
Book Buyer	Buy your book and tell friends about your book
Bookseller	Stock and recommend your book
Authors in similar markets	Recommend your book to their readers and connectors
Connectors / Media	Review your book or provide publicity for you and your book

If you’ve done your homework upfront, and understand the market for your book, affecting these conversions will have a logical downstream positive impact on your overall objective to sell more books.



With some experience and tools, you'll soon be able to experiment with tactics, measure the results and refine your activities to achieve a more effective work processes. The results of your activities will be measurable in several ways:

- Community growth – increased connections in outpost communities like Facebook and Twitter
- Shares – incidences of others sharing your content with new contacts
- Mentions – incidences of others mentioning your name
- Direct contacts – comments to your blog, direct email or phone contact
- Increased Website/Blog traffic

As your tactics yield positive results in each of these areas, combined with easy, effective methods for your target readers to purchase your books, you'll be well on your way to meeting the overall objective of increasing book sales.

A basic but robust Internet presence combined with simple, disciplined work processes designed to keep that presence relevant and engaging, will give you the structure required to create effective tactics designed to achieve the strategic objectives which will ultimately result in increased book sales.

It starts with a blog on your website. This is your home base; the place where you'll bring your target connections to convert them according to your business development objectives.

But before you can go any further, you need to consider your personal Author Branding Strategy.

Personal Branding Who do you want people to find when they finally meet you on the Internet?

Some authors have a strong sense of their personal brand and they'll understand right off what this means. Some will need guidance from their trusted advisors. If you're not sure, a meeting with the marketing person and publicist at your publisher will help give you the direction you need to get started. For a fee, you can engage the help of a professional branding strategist who will guide you through everything from messaging, to web design, to your visual image and interview coaching.

Social media *is social*, so don't be standoffish as you build your Internet presence. Be prepared to include headshots that actually show what you look like, not what you looked like when you were twenty pounds lighter or had a full head of pre-gray hair. People see through that stuff in a Web 2.0 world and it'll hurt more than it'll help.

The social media savvy people you're going to meet as you build community will be able to sniff out a fake pretty quickly, so be genuine within the guidelines of your branding strategy and don't be a product – be yourself.

Documentation

Setting up your platform will require a handful of passwords, backup email addresses, secret questions and other important bits of information. It's easy to think you won't forget this stuff until the time comes when something goes haywire and you need it, so I recommend you keep a dedicated, bound notebook with all this information. Even if you forget the page where you wrote it, you'll know everything is in that book.

Image Hosting

In the process of building your Internet presence you'll have plenty of occasions to use pictures. Most platforms allow you to upload your pictures directly, but wherever you can, I recommend uploading your pictures to a free third party site like **Photobucket** or **Flickr** where the picture will be available for use in a variety of web-based applications.

When you upload a picture to one of these services you have the ability to "tag" the picture with relevant terms that can then be picked up by **Google** in a search.

Here's the advantage: if you upload a picture of yourself on a discussion panel with a group of other authors, and tag the photo with every author's name, the name of the convention, the terms "author" and "author panel", then use the picture in an article on your blog, your blog article is attached to that image, and an image search for any one of those authors or the other terms used to tag the picture is going to yield your blog article in the search results.

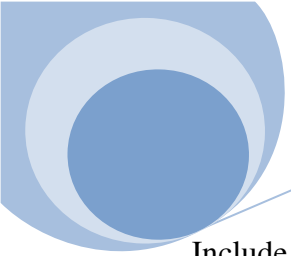
Building Your Presence

Home Base

Your website, blog or Facebook fan page should be designed to showcase your author brand. This is your only Internet property that isn't an outpost and will serve as your home base, so be sure to include everything that feeds your platform, framed in the context of the personal branding strategy.

I recommend a hosted **Wordpress** blog. Browse to <http://wordpress.org> for easy-to-follow instructions on getting started, or pick up a copy of *Wordpress for Dummies*, still the definitive resource for getting started.

The best online resource for bloggers, even experienced bloggers, is Darren Rowse's **ProBlogger**, where you'll find a tremendous trove of excellent how-to information for all types of blogging objectives.



Include pictures on the static sections of your blog *and* in your articles. Pictures break up blocky chunks of copy, add visual interest and provide an emotional and contextual reference to the material.

While the cost of a hosted blog is fairly reasonable – less than \$200 a year – that may be tough for some, so Wordpress offers a 100% free option over at <http://wordpress.com>. This version is less flexible than its hosted cousin, and if Wordpress ever goes away, so will your blog, but it's a reasonable alternative until you can afford to host your own website. Once you eventually *do* have a hosted site, you'll be able to easily import everything you've written on the free platform.

Blog setup checklist

Register a domain name
Host your domain
Install the latest version of Wordpress software. Instructions are at http://wordpress.org
Select a theme. This will be the look of your page.
Create an "About Me" page.
Create a "Schedule" page if appropriate.
Create a "Media" or "Press Kit" page. Provide headshots, bios and book cover artwork.

Set up Your Outposts

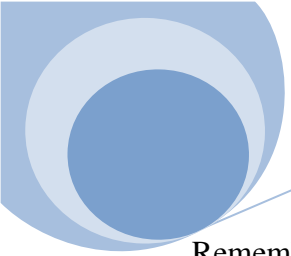
Your brand is established back at your website, blog or Facebook fan page, where your ultimate objective is to convert a casually interested visitor to a loyal reader, a trusted colleague or an evangelist. Each of the following communities have their own attractions to the members you'll find there.

Your goal in each of these places is to establish a branded presence designed to lure target community members back to your website where your brand and your work are showcased.

Facebook <http://facebook.com>

Create a Facebook account for yourself, and then immediately create an Author Page for your writer-self. I know this feels weird to most people, but a page is able to have an unlimited number of connections, while a regular Facebook account is limited to 5000. This may not seem like an important issue when you're first getting started, but when your number of connections start to bump up against the 5K limit, you'll spend an inordinate amount of time trying to "move" your Facebook connections over to your page.

You can use your book cover as your profile photo while you're in launch mode, but the real juice in social networking comes from personal connection, so until your community is growing and vibrant, I recommend using a close-up headshot.



Remember, you're in a conversation, not a monologue and you want your fans to feel like the stuff they say matters. You also want to give others the opportunity to engage with the rest of your community. Conduct all of your writing business, brand building, platform building and other outward messaging through your author page.

Facebook has over 900 million registered users worldwide, and is the #2 method people use to share content on the Internet (email is #1), so take the time to become familiar with the tools available inside this community.

Facebook provides utilities for creating event pages, blogging and photo albums. Facebook also provides useful tracking tools for fan pages, and a tremendously effective pay-for advertising program that you can use to promote your page, event or website.

When loading up your profile, be sure to include a link back to your website or blog, and an email address where people can *reliably* reach you.

If for some reason you're not ready or able to bite off a website or a blog, a Facebook Author Page will suffice until you can.

Twitter <http://twitter.com>

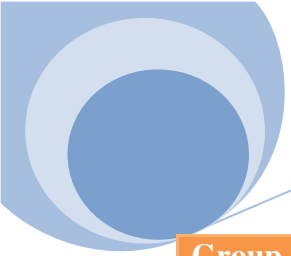
Set up a Twitter account *under your own name*. Just as with your Facebook page, you can use your book cover as your profile photo while you're in launch mode, but until your community is growing and vibrant, I recommend using a close-up headshot, with a Twitter background that's in sync your branding strategy.

You can find plenty of resources out there that'll guide you through the process of designing a best-in-class Twitter background.

Create a 160 character bio that clearly conveys what you're all about, and include a link back to your website, blog or Facebook fan page.

Before you start following *anybody*, choose an application to streamline the management of your Twitter account. I recommend [Hootsuite](#) or [TweetDeck](#), free tools that enable you to create categories into which you can slot the people you follow on Twitter.

For example, if your book is a thriller novel with a male law enforcement officer protagonist racing against an imminent zombie apocalypse, your groups may start out something like this:



Group	Logic
Thriller Authors	Thriller authors with communities you can engage
Thriller readers	People who've demonstrated an interest reading thriller novels
Zombie Culture	Anybody associated with the book in zombie pop culture
Book review bloggers	Bloggers to whom you can send ARCs for review
Publishers	You can observe to see how other publishers promote their books
Booksellers	Build rapport so when your book launches, they know you
Watching	Catch-all category for watching contacts until you categorize them

As your groups take shape, you'll become more effective at identifying and engaging target connections. By employing tactics designed to capture the attention and imagination of these target connections, you'll create community, build buzz and convert casual visitors to loyal customers.

YouTube <http://youtube.com>

YouTube is the second most trafficked search engine on the Internet, second only to Google. Even if you haven't produced a book trailer, it's prudent to have a presence in the YouTube community where you can connect with other YouTube members.

You'll find the same types of connections in this community as you would in any other online social network: consumers, colleagues and connectors. Subscribe to their YouTube channels, invite them to be your friend and "favorite" (that's a verb) their videos.

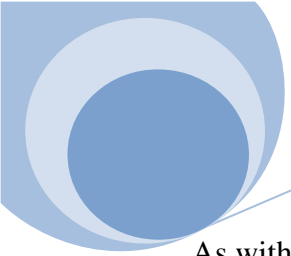
Find and favorite the book trailers of the other authors in your space and connect with everybody who's commented on *their* book trailers. Those are your readers.

You can produce a simple video of *you* talking about your book, the genesis behind your story, your process as a writer, your life as a writer or book reviews. Keep it positive, keep it under 3 minutes, and conclude by inviting viewers to connect with you on your blog, on Twitter and on Facebook.

Edit your YouTube profile to unify the visual themes of your website and Twitter backgrounds in accordance with your branding strategy, and be sure to include a link back to your website, blog or Facebook fan page.

LinkedIn <http://linkedin.com>

LinkedIn used to be considered an online resume on steroids, now it's one of the most active, business-oriented communities on the Internet, and an absolute necessity for authors of both fiction and nonfiction.



As with your other profiles, include a close-up headshot and fill your profile with anything and everything that will help people find *you* in a search. The LinkedIn community is business-oriented, but a novelist can still develop excellent connections here.

This community is 100% searchable within its own walls, so once your profile is tight, search for groups, subgroups, discussions, and news where your three types of target connections reside. Answering questions and participating in discussions gives you the opportunity to showcase your material and thought leadership in bite-sized bits, providing an effective forum to get the attention of target connections.

Create your own LinkedIn group based on the interests of your target readership. Once you establish the group, you can float research queries, start discussions about other authors or books in your space and prequalify potential business opportunities using more detailed tactics.

LinkedIn Applications provide another layer of interaction and information sharing that you can customize depending on your needs. You can connect your Wordpress blog to your LinkedIn account so when someone is checking out your public profile, they can see your most recent blog post. Again, this showcases your core material prompting your target connections to visit your home base where you do business.

Goodreads <http://goodreads.com>

Goodreads is a ‘social cataloging’ or ‘bookshelf’ community. The site enables people to register books to create their library catalogs and reading lists.

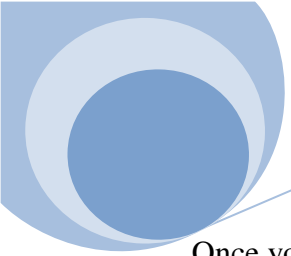
Once you establish an account you can claim your author page to take advantage of the benefits of the *Goodreads Author Program*, which enables a published or soon-to-be published author the ability to have a verified author home page in the Goodreads community with a picture and a bio just like any other social network.

Once you’ve established your account, you can create blog posts, publicize upcoming events, share book excerpts and post video book trailers.

The *Goodreads Book Giveaway* program enables you to get your book out there before publication date and build buzz through reviews. The publisher or person who enters your book in the program is responsible for the book’s distribution. Any discussion regarding the title will then appear on the book’s page, as well as any reviews the giveaway might prompt.

LibraryThing <http://librarything.com>

LibraryThing is a ‘social cataloging’ or ‘bookshelf’ community. The site enables people to register books to create their library catalogs and reading lists.



Once you're a member, you can request to become a LibraryThing Author by emailing them at info@librarything.com with your username. Then add your photo to your author page, a link back to your home page, and lots of other information about yourself in the "Common Knowledge" section. LibraryThing also gives you the opportunity to add links leading to interviews and reviews outside the LT community, but remember, the idea is to have visitors click back to your home base, so don't provide an abundance of choices to click out from your profile, or you risk losing the attention of your visitor.

The LibraryThing Early Reviewers program enables you to get your book out there before publication date and build buzz via reviews. The book giveaways are organized on a monthly basis, with the new book list added near the beginning of every month. Each book is posted along with a corresponding flag representing the countries the publisher is willing to ship to. Once the winning names have been chosen, LibraryThing provides your publisher with the names and address of the winners so that the books may be sent out.

Catalog your personal book collection, keep reading lists, post book reviews, and chat to other users who have the same books. Add your readings and other events to LibraryThing Local and they'll show up on your author page.

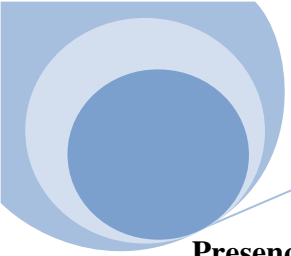
Sign up to participate in an Author Chat and their monthly newsletter.

The LibraryThing "Zeitgeist" provides a dashboard of excellent information to help you find the most active members and influencers in this community. You can browse the entire database by searching titles, authors, or tags generated by users as they enter books into their libraries.

Google and Google +

If you don't have a Google account, create one. If you already have a Google account, be sure to tighten up your [Google Profile](#). You'll have the ability to include pictures, videos and links to all your other Internet outposts, so be sure to enter and check them off here:

Link	Status
Website	
Blog	
Facebook	
Twitter	
YouTube	
LinkedIn	
Plaxo	
Goodreads	
LibraryThing	



Presence Management

Now that you’ve got a world class Web Presence backed by a well-conceived strategy, it’s time to develop work processes that enable you to maximize the time you spend working it.

This is known as Presence Management. This is also where the notorious social media time suck can kill you if you don’t plan your work properly.

It’s hard for me to speak directly to your personal presence management and related work processes, since yours will be very specific to your books, markets and objectives, so start by creating two to-do lists; a daily and a weekly. For broader maintenance issues, like adjusting blog structure and design, adding photo albums and other big-picture stuff you can create a checklist that you revisit every 3-6 months.

Your daily checklist might look like this:

Respond to blog comments
Send emails to thank people who've commented on my blog
Update Facebook Status
Respond to Facebook comments/friend requests/messages
Update LinkedIn Status
Respond to LinkedIn connection requests/messages
Respond to Twitter @ replies
Respond to Twitter direct messages
Tweet out an interesting blog post by a target connection (mentioning them with an @ reply)
Leave a comment on 1 other blog

Your weekly checklist might look like this:

Change Facebook profile picture
Write 2-3 blog articles for later posting
Leave Wall Comments for 10 Facebook connections (then go back to your own wall and delete the notifications)
Find and join 2 pertinent Facebook groups and leave comments with links back to my blog
Do a Twitter search of 5 key terms to find 100 new people to follow
@ reply the top authors in my genre on Twitter
Post a question on LinkedIn including a link to a deeper article back at my blog

As you engage in these types of activities – social activities – you’ll generate additional interaction requiring your personal follow up. Don’t let this stuff fall through the cracks. These are business development “leads” and should be treated with great care. Every one of these interactions is an opportunity for you to convert a casually interested connection to a loyal

reader, a trusted colleague, or an evangelist who will extend your reach *and* your network. It's also an opportunity to damage your reputation if mishandled, so consider how you'd want to be treated, and conduct yourself accordingly.

Time Management

Everybody's heard how Facebook and Twitter can suck hours away from writing time in the blink of an eye, so when scheduling community-building and business development activities, it's important to enter the process with a grasp of the time you've got available to invest, and then stick to it. The sheer number of beneficial connections you'll find is staggering, and one more click will always lead to another, and another, and another, so at the end of your allotted time, set it aside. There will be even more opportunity waiting for you when you get back to it.

If you're doing things right, it won't be long before you'll need some tactical help to manage the mushrooming number of tasks on your daily to-do list.

This is the time when many authors enlist the help of a family member or some other trusted assistant who can engage in tactics and tasks designed to support the author's community-building and business development objectives.

An assistant can also handle FAQs, standard outward messaging, and tasks related to news and events, enabling the author to jump in whenever they want to add something that provides value to the community or a splash of the author's personality.

An assistant with a well defined set of guidelines and work instructions will know when the author should get personally involved in a piece of communication, and can simply forward these tasks as they happen, or batch them for daily or weekly delivery.

Conclusion

Make no mistake; this is only the tip of the social media iceberg. Every community and topic covered in this guide has a plethora of additional tools, tactics and community-specific nuances that will help you achieve even greater levels of effectiveness with your strategies and tactics.

As you establish your presence and observe the conduct of other community members, you'll be able to expand and tailor your own activities in each of these Internet outposts to meet the needs of your individual strategies, successfully enticing visitors back to your home page.

The Web is brimming with experts, tools and tactics that can sometimes overwhelm and confuse the uninitiated, so incorporate these building blocks into the foundation of your Web presence, watch carefully to see the way others do it, engage, and be social.

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