▶ 7 Secrets for Amazing Author Websites

By Thomas Umstattd Jr.

Most author websites fail to sell enough books to reimburse the author for the cost of building the website. The reason is because most authors don't know the following seven secrets.

Secret #1: People Don't Care About You.

This is a painful truth. People care about themselves. They care about you to the degree that you can make their lives more enjoyable. This is the hardest secret for many authors to grasp. Most authors want their websites to be all about them.

The result?

Each author's website looks pretty much the same. They all have the same pages: About, Books, Contact, and Store. They also don't get much traffic. Even best-selling authors often get few visitors because they don't know the secret that makes websites successful.

The secret? Provide value.

Your website has to help the visitor in some way. Answer the question "What is in this site for me?" for your visitors. As an author you need to face the reality that no one wants to come to your websites to see photos of your children. For anyone to visit your website, it has to be the most interesting thing on the entire Internet… for that person at that time.

How you can provide value depends on your book. For nonfiction books, providing supplementary materials for the book such as fact sheets, tips, and guides often works well. A good blog on the topic can also get a ton of traffic.

For fiction books, podcasts can often work well. Think of your website as the bonus features on a DVD. What do you like to see on a DVD? Deleted scenes? Character backgrounds? Character photos? Think about copying movie websites instead of other author websites.

Secret #2: Be Remarkable.

Seth Godin has an interesting definition of "remarkable." He says that for something to be remarkable, it must be worth making a remark about. Is your author website remarkable? Do people start talking about it on Twitter and Facebook after they visit?

There are many ways to be remarkable and one good way to be unremarkable. To be unremarkable, all you need to do is be normal, fit in, and copy other authors.

To be remarkable, you need to be different, edgy, or unique. A website can be remarkably bad or remarkably annoying. You want your website to be remarkably helpful, funny, or insightful. How is your book remarkable? Expand on that for your website.

At Author Tech Tips, our goal is to be remarkably helpful. We want authors to be so pleased with our site that they tweet a link to their Twitter followers and share a link with their Facebook friends. We measure success in tweets, not in comments or hits.

Secret #3: Have an Audience for Your Website.

Who is your website for? Many authors think their websites are for themselves. This thinking is a shortcut to obscurity. Successful websites are for their readers, not their owners. So, who are your readers?

Knowing who you are not targeting is the key to thrilling the people you actually want to reach. If you are writing romance, don't try to target men. Remember, for anyone to visit your website, it must be the most interesting thing on the entire Internet. You won't become that interesting by trying to please a big group of people. But you can thrill a few. Focus!

Even when you slice the Internet super thin you still get a huge number of people. By naming this site Author Tech Tips we turn off 99% of potential visitors. But this site would be a failure if it were just Tech Tips. There is simply too much competition for tech websites out there.

Secret #4: Have a Mission for Your Website.

Most authors I have talked with have no idea what they want their website to accomplish. They also have no idea if their current website is effective or not.

Successful websites have one clear goal. To help my clients pick a goal I ask them the following questions:

- What does the ideal visitor outcome look like?
- What do you want people to do after visiting your site?
- Why do you have a website? Guilt is a bad reason to start a website.
- What do you want your website to accomplish?

If the goal of your website is to:

- *sell books* — then you had better have a big shiny "buy now" button somewhere on the homepage.
- *build your platform* — you had better have a very prominent subscribe form for people to get email updates.
- *increase the number of visitors* — you had better have some remarkable content and some "share" buttons where people can easily share your site on Twitter and Facebook.
- *connect with readers* — you had better have a way for people to leave comments.

You can have secondary goals, but if you don't know where you're going you will never get there.

Secret #5: Integrate Social Bookmarking and Social Media.

Okay, so now you have a remarkable website that provides value to a specific target of readers you can thrill. Now you want to make it as easy as possible for them to share your website with one another.

The best way to do this is to integrate social media into your website. Buttons like "Share on Facebook" and "Share on Twitter" are key to growing your traffic. If your website is run on WordPress, there are some great plugins that will do this automatically. I use Sociable among other plugins for my clients.

Secret #6: Integrate a Blog.

Websites with blogs built in get 55% more traffic than websites with no blog.

They get more traffic because blogs posts are more likely to be shared on social networks than static content. Blogs also boost your rankings on Google. Each blog post is a chance to get Google points to rank high in

▶ News You Can Use

The following is a selection of articles, resources, and information to help you CREATE, PRODUCE, and MARKET your books.
Visit the SLPA website at *www.stlouispublishers.org* to find the live links!

CREATE

Writing Dazzling Dialogue
By Lee Masterson, October, 2012
"Dialogue is one of the most important tools at a writer's disposal. It should represent, but not mimic real speech. And it should impart vital information."
http://www.fictionfactor.com/articles/dialogue.html

PRODUCE

How to Find a Book Illustrator
By Joanna Penn, August 13th, 2011
"You have decided to self-publish your completed manuscript and have decided on a company to print your book. Great! But you still have to make a critical decision, the artwork."
http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2011/08/13/how-to-find-an-illustrator-for-your-book/

MARKET

The Back Story on Marketing Fiction
By Eagar, October 25th, 2012
"A survey of 21,000 book shoppers by the Codex Group revealed that the #1 way to attract people to a fiction author's website is to offer exclusive unpublished writings…"
http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/there-are-no-rules/the-back-story-on-marketing-fiction 📖

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searches. Think of it as a lottery ticket. The more blog posts you write the bigger chance you have of hitting it big.

You want your blog integrated into your website. This means the address is on yourdomain.com, not blogger.com or wordpress.com. Why? When you blog on Blogger, you give all your Google points to Blogger and get nothing in return. Blogging is a big time investment and it is foolish to spend all that time working for some other site. My company, Umstattd Media, specializes in building websites with integrated blogs for authors.

Secret #7: Focus on Content Over Design.
A pitfall many authors fall into is that they keep redesigning their websites instead of adding value to them.

When they first get their website, it is the most beautiful site on the web. Like the mother of a newborn, they can't see the flaws and only see the beauty. After a while, they begin to get tired of the design and start to nit-pick. After a couple of years, they hate it and want to start over. They forget that their visitors don't spend hours looking at their sites like they do. Their visitors don't notice the subtle "problems" of their site.

Most author websites look just fine. The problem is there is nothing to see.

Think of the design as a picture frame and the content (blog posts, articles, podcasts) as the picture. My recommendation is to spend ten times more time and money creating a good picture (the content) rather than a good frame (the design).

Creating a valuable and remarkable content takes time and effort. It takes months and even years to rank well on Google, so don't let how your site looks distract you from making it excellent.

This is not to say that design is unimportant. You want your site to look professional. But once you get a professional look, stop fiddling and start writing. Your site is either professional or it's not. You don't get bonus points for being extra pretty online.

What do you think? What are author websites that you like? Do they incorporate these secrets?

Thomas Umstattd Jr. is the CEO of Castle Media Group, (http://www.castlemediagroup.com) the parent company of Author Media. You can follow him on Twitter @ThomasUmstattd. He loves helping people use technology to change the world. To view the original post: http://www.authormedia.com/2010/11/30/7-secrets-for-amazing-author-websites/. 📖

▶ What's Ahead: Holiday Party and Networking "Blitz-en", 12/12/12

At the SLPA's December meeting, we'll take the fun and fast-paced concept of "speed dating" and turn it into a great way to meet fellow authors and other publishing pros. This is your opportunity to get to know other authors and publishing people in a way that you might not otherwise. Be sure to bring along business cards, flyers, and book samples. We will give you tips on how to get the most out this networking blitz, while you are munching on holiday treats, and checking out the door prizes. 📖

▶ The SLPA Mission

The St. Louis Publishers Association empowers authors and publishers to create and market quality products and books. A nationally recognized organization, the SLPA provides educational, informational resources on publishing. Through its monthly meetings, the organization provides networking opportunities for people involved in all aspects of the publishing industry. 📖

▶ SLPA Meetings

SLPA meets on the second Wednesday of the month:
   Brentwood Community Center
   2505 S. Brentwood Blvd., Room 101
   Brentwood, MO 63144
   (Enter through the door closest to the flagpole)

Doors open for networking at 6:30pm and meeting begins at 7pm. The formal meeting concludes at about 8:30pm with networking continuing after the meeting.

Our regular meetings are free to members. Guests – $10 at the door, cash or check only. 📖

▶ Questions about SLPA?

Contact Membership Chair:
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