

How to Build & Maintain Your Author Platform

by Jennifer Geist

The hardest part of being an author may not be writing — it can be getting your work into the hands of your readers! Even before you start sending your book out to agents and publishers, you should be hard at work building your author platform.

What is an author platform, and how do you build it? An author platform is bigger than one book; it's the long game. It will be there to leverage for every book you write, or the next project you work on. It's less about marketing a single book, and more about building an audience interested in who you are and what you do.

An author platform can include an email list (a must!), social media profile(s), groups you belong to (like the SLPA), events you attend or speak at, an author website or blog, books you've previously published, a podcast or video blog, and your expertise.

It has become more and more common that authors need to take an active role in promoting themselves and their books, in addition to what the publisher provides. With thousands of books being released *daily* — many of them free or less than \$5 on Amazon — reaching your audience and convincing them to purchase your book is more difficult than ever before.

Where do you start? Much of your author platform will come after you've determined

your target audience and done some market research (which you should be doing anyway before you query agents and publishers or hit the "Publish" button on Amazon).

Authors need at least one to three pieces of a platform to start; the rest of the pieces can grow from those and will be based on the individual author (personality, expertise, community, etc.) and their work (genre, target audience, etc.).

- 1) Authors should be actively writing and evaluating their work — how would you build a platform if you don't know your target audience?
- 2) Authors should create a website (WordPress is easy to use). The website should be simple and attractive and should be branded specifically to you and your books. A clear call to action is a must: purchasing the book, reading an excerpt, or signing up for your email list.
- 3) Authors should start an email list (MailChimp and SumoMe are great tools). Having something to "give away" in exchange for an email signup is useful — a free chapter, a how-to guide, etc.



Jennifer Geist

While some parts of an author platform are not one-size-fits-all, I would argue that an email list is mandatory, though you may utilize it differently based on your individual platform.

The most important thing to remember when starting: don't try to do everything at once! Creating a Twitter, Facebook, blog, website, newsletter, and podcast all at the same time will just leave you burned out. Just like you should create a business plan, you should decide which marketing avenues you want to use and implement them gradually. This can also help you better evaluate what is and isn't working.

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Jennifer Geist is the publisher at Pen & Publish, Inc. and its imprints: Brick Mantel Books, Open Books Press, and Transformation Media Books. With experience in editing, book compositing, photography, graphic and web design, marketing, writing, and more, she manages every book from acquisitions to publication and beyond. Geist received her bachelor's degree in creative writing with a focus in small press publishing through Southeast Missouri State University. She has worked with numerous small presses, and her stories and photos are published in a variety of literary magazines.

Lessons Learned: A Writer's Journey from Baseball Fields to Battlefields

by Alan Spector

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."

In that regard, in 2006, when I was developing the manuscript of my first book, I was at a family gathering and asked a would-be author cousin how her book was progressing.

She excitedly reported she was working closely with her agent and editors at the publisher toward a final draft. In return, she asked me how I was doing on my early draft and what kind of feedback I had received. "Feedback?"

(Lessons continued on page 2)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- FEB 8: ALAN SPECTOR:
LESSONS LEARNED: A WRITER'S JOURNEY
FROM BASEBALL FIELDS TO BATTLEFIELDS
- MAR 8: TBA
- APR 12: JILL FARMER:
AUTHOR JOURNEY

(Lessons continued from page 1)

She was incredulous, “You mean you haven’t shared your work with others yet? When are you going to get out of your cave?”

I immediately knew what she meant, and added “get out of my cave” to my list of things I was learning about being an author. Sure, I had interviewed people for my book and done a lot of research away from the confines of my computer, but I was enjoying the actual writing process so much I hadn’t reached out to others to get any critical feedback.

My next steps were to 1) join a local writer critique group, 2) register for a couple of writers’ conferences, and 3) develop a list of willing beta readers – the first of which was my wife, who is now the more-than-willing first-reader on all of my manuscripts and is ecstatic when she gets to wield her red editing pen.

My list of lessons learned continues to grow, and First Lady Roosevelt was right. I’ve been learning from others’ mistakes – because I’m out of my cave. And I’ve been making plenty of my own. Here are but a few of the lessons that I’ll be glad to share with you in more detail at the SLPA meeting on February 8:

- Don’t quit your day job... unless you already have.
- Grow thick skin... rejection is inevitable.
- Everyone will have an idea for your next book... and some of them are good.
- Self-published? Tolerate Amazon... but market to direct sales.

I also look forward to hearing what you’ve learned from your mistakes and those of others – oh, and from successes as well. If you’re like me, you’ve had both. I hope to see you and learn from each other on February 8.

Bulletin Board

- Join **Xu Fangfang** on January 14 for a talk on her father, pioneering Chinese artist Xu Beihong, who integrated Chinese and Western painting and mentored generations of Chinese artists. Beihong’s story is captured in his daughter’s recently published book, ***Galloping Horses: Artist Xu Beihong and His Family in Mao’s China***, which describes how his family and legacy survived the turbulence of Mao’s ever-changing policies, which dictated the direction of art and music from 1949 through the devastating ten-year Cultural Revolution. Fangfang’s talk will take place at the Thornhill Branch of the St. Louis County Library at 2:00pm and will be followed by a book signing. For more information, visit beihongchinaarts.com.
- SLPA member **Georgie Herz** has recently published her rhyming picture book, ***Jess Likes to Jump***, which introduces new words to children with illustrations of jumping, running, bouncing, and generally staying fit and active, all in a manner which opens up opportunities for dialogue about race and gender. For more information, email Georgie at: georgene@att.net.
- SLPA member and Past President **Bob Baker** just published ***The Improv Comedy Musician: The Ultimate Guide to Playing Music with an Improv Group***. He co-wrote the book with Laura Hall, the longtime pianist and music director of the TV show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* This new resource explores the important role that music and musicians play within live improv performances. Read more and buy the book at ImprovSTL.com.
- Veteran author and book coach **Bobbi Linkemer** is on a streak! She has published nine books on writing since 2007, and her tenth book, ***Write Your Book Now! A Handbook for Writers, Authors, and Self-Publishers***, is due to be published in early 2017. Keep an eye out for this new book and find more resources at writeanonfictionbook.com.
- SLPA member **Gary Kodner** and his son Oliver Kodner recently published ***St. Louis Uniforms and Logos: An Illustrated History***, a 120-page hardback coffee-table book that illustrates the evolution of “one of the most iconic logos and uniforms in all of sports.” Read more and buy the book at stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stl/cardinals-nation/uniforms-logos.jsp.

EVENTS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2017

- our TBD summer national speaker workshop
- April and November STLCC Meramec workshops
 - monthly meetings at THE HEIGHTS
 - Gateway Con
 - Writers in the Park
 - St. Louis Small Press Expo
 - St. Louis Indie Book Fair
- Missouri Writers Guild Annual Conference
- August Vendor Showcase

THE BOOK CORNER

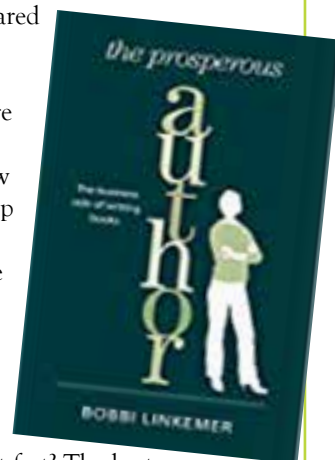
The Prosperous Author: The Business Side of Writing Books

by Bobbi Linkemer

You have decided to become a full-time author, an entrepreneur – the person who wears all the hats – author, business manager, and director of marketing. If you aren’t quite prepared

for these multiple roles, where do you begin? How do you keep all those balls in the air? What do you need to know, and how can

you learn it fast? The best place to start is right here! Read more and order the book now at <https://www.amazon.com//dp/B01IRUMXW2>.



MEMBERSHIP
\$60 in 2017

SLPA Meets on the Second Wednesday of the Month

RICHMOND HEIGHTS
COMMUNITY CENTER (THE HEIGHTS)
The Argus Room
8001 Dale Ave.

Richmond Heights, MO, 63117
(Child care available at The Heights)

Doors open for networking at 6:30pm
Program begins at 7pm

The meeting concludes around 8:30pm
Networking until 9pm

Regular meetings are free to members.
Guests: \$10 at the door.



SLPA NEWS & VIEWS
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Designer: Cathy Wood
Webmaster: Kevin Ericson

