

YOUR FIRST 1000 COPIES

THE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO MARKETING
YOUR BOOK

TIM GRAHL



STORY GRID



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Story Grid Publishing LLC
223 Egremont Plain Road, PMB 191
Egremont, MA 01230

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For

All the writers finding their audience.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Shawn Coyne</i>	vii
<i>Introduction to the Second Edition</i>	xi
PART I	
FUNDAMENTALS	
What is Marketing?	3
What is an Author Platform?	7
Fans and Influencers	9
Tools and Blueprints	11
Systems	15
The Connection System	17
PART II	
PERMISSION	
The Best Tool	23
Email Service Provider	27
What's in It for Me?	29
The First Three Emails	33
How to Get Email Subscribers	45
PART III	
CONTENT	
The Goal of Content	53
Sourcing and Identifying	55
Cornerstone Content	61
Modalities	69
Schedule and Routine	73
Can I Share Too Much?	77
What Works for You?	79
PART IV	
OUTREACH	
The Mindset	83
Five Steps to Outreach	87
Processing the Response	97

Leveraging Opportunities	101
Ask for Referrals	105
Connecting with Authors	109
Hierarchy of the Ask	113
Keep it Going	117

PART V

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Where We Stand	121
Lost? Start Here	125
Litmus Tests	129
The Mindset of Selling	135
What's Next?	139
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	143
<i>About the Author</i>	147

FOREWORD BY SHAWN COYNE

If not for *Your First 1000 Copies*, my life's work would have been just another writing advice book. Just one more on a big pile of also-rans that aspiring writers and intrigued professional scribes buy on a lark... read a bit of...and then quietly forget.

Here's what happened to *The Story Grid* instead.

In the summer of 2014, I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. I was in the last stages of editing the book that took me twenty-five years to write. But as a book publishing professional myself, I knew the deep truth. I was finishing the easy part of the venture. The light I was seeing was the oncoming train of the marketing and publicity of all of my labor.

While I felt confident in my story analysis and editing methodology, I knew bupkis about how to market a book without a big five publishing company's budget.

So, I did what anyone would do. I went to Amazon.com and typed "online book marketing" in the search box. The only title that appealed to me was *Your First 1000 Copies*.

Why?

Because I'm a great big believer in breaking down big problems into smaller ones. The big marketing insight of my career was called "The 10,000 Reader Rule¹" which has since become the benchmark for a

modern publisher's promotional responsibilities. You're not done promoting until 10,000 people legitimately interested in the subject give a book an earnest try. Pretty simple stuff. But what I didn't know was how to actually reach 10,000 all by myself.

The best way to 10,000, I reasoned, was to begin with 1,000. Simple as that.

I bought the book immediately. I'd never met this guy, Tim Grahl, during my decades in publishing, but I figured the online book marketing world was so new that it would be weird if I actually knew him. I certainly knew the old ways of book marketing weren't working. I needed to seek help from someone who'd done the work online, who'd done it with scientific precision, and who'd done it alone. After all, I would have to do it alone myself. Best to listen to someone who'd had success that way too. I didn't really care about Tim Grahl the person as long as the information in the book made sense.

It did.

What I liked about the book, besides the fact that it was so nonsense about doing this, and then this, and then this, with no repetitive verbiage, was also this Grahl guy offered free consultations.

I picked a half-hour on his schedule and called him on the appointed day and hour. As I mentioned, I'd never met him. He didn't have any idea who I was, and we just talked about how to best sell books for about an hour or so. He suggested I check out his website and let me know that he was going to put together an online course that walked people step-by-step through the tasks of setting up a website, building a promotional list of fans, and building an asset to sell my book from day one.

I bought his course a couple of weeks later and followed every single piece of advice he offered. I registered www.storygrid.com and posted two chapters a week from my book for free beginning on September 19, 2014 up until its publication day in 2015. In that time, I built up a list of 3,000 people interested in what I was doing, and the book did quite well right out of the gate.

As I write this in 2020, *The Story Grid* book has sold over 100,000 copies in its first five years of publication and it has spawned podcasts,

seminars, online courses and a growing tribe of certified Story Grid editors who apply the methodology to stories written around the world.

It's an extraordinarily rewarding enterprise for me and my business partner, who I secretly vetted as a human being while working with him on his first novel, *The Threshing*. I'd had some bad experiences with business partners before and I needed to make sure this guy was the real deal. He is.

I'm now thrilled that Tim Grahl has decided to publish the second edition of *Your First 1000 Copies* inside the Story Grid Universe. It will probably become our biggest seller.

My plan to get him to run and market the business while I continue to goof around in my story lab, while also getting him to bring his bestselling book into the publishing house as added value for all Story Gridders, is now complete!

Shawn Coyne

1. <https://stevenpressfield.com/2015/11/the-10000-reader-rule/>

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

When I published the first edition of *Your First 1000 Copies* seven years ago, I wasn't sure what to expect. At the time, I had been working with authors for several years and felt ready to put everything I had learned into written form. So much of the marketing advice for authors swirling around the world was disjointed and unhelpful. My goal was to put together a simple framework for authors that would allow them to understand the foundations of book marketing and find success.

A few weeks before the book came out, I was chatting with my buddy Lucas about the project and he asked what the title of the book was.

"*Your First 1000 Copies*," I said.

Lucas nodded thoughtfully and then said, "Well, I hope you sell at least a thousand of them."

The color drained from my face. I hadn't even thought of that! What if I had to rename the second edition of the book *Your First 623 Copies* because that's all I ever sold of it? This is the problem with releasing a book about book marketing. If it doesn't sell well, that's not a good sign!

I applied my own advice, and thankfully, I quickly sold a thousand copies. By the end of the first year, I sold ten thousand copies, and now it's north of fifty thousand.

I'm so pleased my book has been able to help so many authors, but

I recently sat down to peruse the book for the first time in several years and realized it could use some updating. The publishing world continues through its upheaval, and authors are often tossed around in the process.

I now have over a decade's experience working with authors to help them build their platforms, connect with readers, and sell more books. I've launched dozens of *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post* bestsellers. I've helped authors build their platforms from scratch. I've worked with authors who are launching their eighth bestseller. I've worked across all the genres—fiction and nonfiction, self-help and memoir, fantasy, and romance. I've even worked with an author writing post-apocalyptic Amish science fiction.

Since the book was first released, I've gotten to see how the ideas work out in the world without my direct support. At first, I was nervous about this, but of course, I shouldn't have been. Authors are a savvy bunch, and as you put the ideas into practice and shared your results with me, I learned more and more.

I believe the reason *Your First 1000 Copies* continues to sell and get great reviews is because of two things.

First, it's based on working with hundreds of authors. Many of the book marketing books available are based on a single author's experience, working on his or her own platform and titles. Everything inside this book comes from working with hundreds of authors over a decade. It's not just my theory or a one-off success story. It's based on seeing the process work over and over across genres and platforms.

Second, it's based on a simple framework. Tactics come and go. The newest, hottest social media platform is constantly changing. New opportunities and tools are popping up constantly. It can get overwhelming *fast*. However, if you have a framework for how to think about book marketing, it's much easier to make decisions about what to do and how to spend your time.

In this second edition, the basic fundamentals of the framework haven't changed. That's the whole point of focusing on the fundamentals! However, in the places where I give specific advice, I've updated the information to reflect what I've learned in the last seven years as I've continued working with authors.

I've also laid the book out a bit differently.

You're going to follow along as I help two authors, John and Amy.

John has been dreaming about writing for years. It started when he was a kid. He was obsessed with classic science fiction novels. He dipped into fantasy and thrillers and mystery from time to time, but he always came back to his first love of science fiction.

Somewhere in his twenties, he started trying to write. He's started and stopped several times over the years. He's done NaNoWriMo every couple of years. He's worked on his craft.

He's in his late thirties now. His kids are older, and his career is stable. As a New Year's resolution, he decided to start taking it seriously.

A little over a year later, he's finally got a manuscript he's excited to release. He thought about trying to get a publisher but, after looking into it, decided to publish it himself. He's gone through the process of getting feedback from early readers. He's invested in a good editor. He's put some money into a professional book cover. But now that it's time to publish, he has no idea how to give the book its best chance.

Amy has a two-decade track record in the business world as a consultant. Ten years ago, she got her first publishing deal. The book did well. It wasn't a major bestseller, but over the first year, she managed to sell about twenty thousand copies. The book has now sold almost one hundred thousand copies. A few years later she published her second book. It did pretty well but not as good as her first one.

Since publishing her first book, she's transitioned from consulting full time to a variety of activities. She speaks a couple of dozen times a year, sells a few training packages, and has a small team to help her manage everything.

She's gotten a good publishing deal on her third book, and she really wants to make this a success.

She has her own blog that has a pretty good readership. She also has a good following on social media. Over the years she's become friendly with lots of influencers with big online followings.

Her next book comes out in a year, but she's unsure how to get ready for it.

These two authors are a combination of the hundreds of authors

I've worked with. They're going to ask the questions I'm asked most often, and as they work through their own book marketing decisions and issues, you'll get to learn alongside them.

My goal for this book is the same as it was seven years ago. I want to help you cut through the noise and clutter of bad and confusing advice so you can build something that will support your writing career and give your books the best shot at finding an audience.

Let's get started.

PART I

FUNDAMENTALS

WHAT IS MARKETING?

Most of the authors I speak with loathe the idea of marketing. When they hear the word, they immediately think of their author friends begging people on social media to buy a copy of their book, or a sleazy car salesman trying to talk somebody into doing something that's not in their best interest.

Honestly, though, I think the biggest thing that bothers writers is that marketing wasn't part of "the dream." When you pictured yourself writing the Great American Novel or finally publishing your memoir, you weren't dreaming of tweaking your website, managing social media, or running launch campaigns.

I get it. Marketing is not *the thing*. It's not why you got into the writing gig in the first place. Even as a guy who's been a book marketing professional for over a decade, I realize it's not the thing.

Even so, it's a necessary part of our author journey if we want to be successful at writing and publishing books. Even if we get a traditional publisher for our book, which is becoming harder and harder to do, they require us to do our own marketing. In fact, we will need a giant section of our book proposal to cover what we are going to do for marketing. More than one author has told me that when they sat down with a publisher, they were asked about their marketing platform before they were asked about the book they wanted to publish.

Then, of course, if we go the indie or self-publishing route, we know for certain the entire marketing onus is on us.

So, what can we do? How do we as writers enter into this marketing maelstrom and find success without losing our soul—or even worse, our writing time—in the process?

Amy already understands marketing is a part of an author's job. This is her third book and even though she's not totally sure what she should be doing, she's not afraid of the marketing.

John, on the other hand, is kind of frustrated that he even has to think about this.

"I've wanted to be an author for years," he said. "I thought publishing the book was the finish line. Now everyone is telling me I'm just getting started. So now what? Do I have to go online and start figuring out how to write sales copy, run ad campaigns, and beg people to buy my book? That's not what I want to do. I feel like it cheapens this thing I've worked so hard to create."

"I get it, John, and I agree," I said. "I don't want you to cheapen this thing you've put so much of yourself into. But what you described isn't marketing. At least not the way I teach marketing."

The first step for many authors is to change how we view marketing in the first place. We think of marketing as stealthily duping people into spending money they don't have on things they don't want or need.

If you look up the definition of marketing, it's not much help either. Here's the one from dictionary.com:

"The total of activities involved in the transfer of goods from the producer or seller to the consumer or buyer, including advertising, shipping, storing and selling.¹"

Now, I know those words are in English, but I honestly have no idea what that is supposed to mean. It certainly isn't a good description of what I've seen successful authors doing for the past decade.

Early on as I worked with more and more authors, it became pretty clear that I needed to come up with a better definition—one that better reflected the truth about what I saw my author clients doing to build their audience and sell a lot of books.

After looking at the common themes of all the authors I had worked with, I realized pretty quickly that marketing isn't about

tricking people or begging people to buy your book. It's simply two things.

My definition of marketing is this:

1. The act of building long-lasting connections with people and then
2. A focus on being relentlessly helpful and adding value to their lives.

That's it. If you do those two things over a big enough scale and a long enough timeline, you will find success. Every author who is successfully building their platform and selling a lot of books is doing those two things.

Once I explained this to John, he seemed to relax a bit.

"That version of marketing doesn't sound too bad," he said.

"And I'm going to make you a promise," I said. "Everything we do together will fall under that definition of marketing. Every tactic and idea I give you for marketing will simply guide you on the path of connecting with people and then being as helpful as possible to them. Deal?"

"Deal," he said.

"Great. But before we dive too deep, I want to walk you through a few basic ideas that will help you along the way."

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1. Marketing | Definition of Marketing. (n.d.). Retrieved September 03, 2020, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/marketing>

WHAT IS AN AUTHOR PLATFORM?

I was back on the phone with Amy and she was telling me how her publisher kept asking about her author platform.

“I’m not even sure what they’re talking about,” she admitted. “I have a website and social media, and I travel to speak a lot. Is that what they’re asking about?”

As we begin the journey of publishing our book, it won’t take us long to come across this idea of a *platform*. Everyone involved in the process of publishing our book is interested in our author platform. If we meet with an agent, they will want to know about our platform. Often, publishers will ask about our platform before they want to hear about our book.

Unfortunately, this idea of a platform can get misconstrued pretty quickly. If we ask a dozen different writers and people in publishing to describe an author platform, we will probably get a dozen different answers.

Some will talk about the website and blog. Others will add in social media presence. They’ll talk about an author’s speaking schedule or how they run a successful company.

It confused me for a long time until I realized everyone was just talking in code.

It’s like this. If we meet someone and are really curious how much

money they make, we probably won't directly ask, "So Bob, how much do you pull down each year?" Instead, we will start asking questions *around* the real question. We may ask what Bob does for a living, what his title is, how long he's been doing that job, and so on. We may even ask where he lives or bring up the topic of cars to find out what he's driving.

This is exactly what is happening to Amy.

"Why do you think they are asking about your author platform?" I asked. "Do they really care about your website or social media?"

"I'm not sure," she said.

"Okay, let me ask it a different way. If you were a famous television host and could promote the book to your millions of viewers, would they care about your website?"

"Probably not."

"Right. What do they *actually* care about?"

"How many books I can sell," she said.

"Exactly!" I replied.

Whenever the question of our author platform comes up, the real question behind it is simply:

How many books can we sell?

Our platform is the method by which we will sell books. Numbers like blog readers, social media connections, and speaking gigs are all just evidence, or indicators, of how many books we can sell.

Our author platform is how we plan to get people to buy our books. Whether it's running a panel at every Comic-Con, having a million Twitter followers, or hand-selling copies of our book in Times Square, New York City, it doesn't matter.

My argument is that the most effective and efficient way to build an author platform is to do it online.

All the tools we need to accomplish this are at our fingertips, and an online platform allows us to do the work from the comfort of our home or a local coffee shop.

This book is about building an author platform—a way to sell our books—that supports our entire writing career and grows over time.

FANS AND INFLUENCERS

As we begin this process of building an author platform, it's helpful to have two groups of people in mind.

The first group is our fans.

Fans are people who will buy a copy of our book. These are the people we have a direct connection with. (I'll show you how to do this shortly.) Whether it's our sister, a coworker, social media followers, blog readers, email subscribers, or our barista, it doesn't matter. If they will head down to their local bookstore or pull up Amazon on their mobile and purchase a copy of our book, they're a fan.

Influencers, on the other hand, are people who will get *other* people to buy our book. These are the bloggers, podcasters, TV producers, other authors with platforms, book club pickers, *New York Book Review* editors, etc. These people influence the buying decision of people we do not already have a direct connection to.

It's important at this point that we think broadly when it comes to these topics. Often when I talk about influencers, writer's minds immediately jump to a certain type of influencer—another author in their space or a popular YouTube reviewer.

It's important that we stay at a high level, though, in order to keep our options open.

A fan is anyone who will buy a copy of our book. An influencer is anyone who can get *other people* to buy a copy of our book.

TOOLS AND BLUEPRINTS

My phone rang. I looked at the screen and it was John. We didn't have a call scheduled so I was a bit worried when I answered

"I'm freaking out," he said.

"Okay, what happened?"

"I read in one of the forums I'm on about an author selling a bunch of books on Twitter. I realized I don't know anything about Twitter. I mean, I have an account and put stuff up there sometimes, but I don't know anything about book marketing on Twitter. So I searched for things like 'how to sell books on Twitter' and 'book marketing on Twitter.'"

"Uh-oh," I said, but John didn't hear me. He kept going.

"I opened several tabs in my internet browser with articles. 'How to Promote Books on Twitter,' '8 Twitter Resources for Authors,' and a bunch of others. Then I saw something about Twitter hashtags for authors, and I clicked on that and started reading about all the ways I should be tagging and hashing and @ing on Twitter.

"When I finally looked up and took a breath, I had spent two hours of my life down this hole. And I realized if I were to start doing even half of what I just read, being an author on Twitter would be its own part-time job."

John finally stopped to breathe and then added, “I don’t think I can do this.”

At this point, John has fallen into the most common of all the traps when it comes to authors and book marketing. Let me illustrate the problem with a story about woodworking.

A few years ago my wife, Candace, and I bought a new home. One of the best features of the home was a spacious kitchen. To fill out the kitchen, Candace asked if I could build her an island to go in the center. It would give us space to prepare food on top and extra storage underneath.

When it comes to woodworking, I know enough to not lop off a finger with the power tools, but I’m far from an expert. So, what is the first thing I did?

Did I immediately go out to my shed, pull out my tools and some random lengths of wood and start trying to piece something together? No, the first thing we did was search for plans and blueprints on how to build a kitchen island. Candace and I searched around, found something she liked that I felt comfortable building, and then we downloaded it.

Once I had the plan, and only then, could I actually know what materials and tools I needed, along with the process for how to use them properly to build a kitchen island.

What we see here is that first we must have a plan or blueprint of what we are trying to build. Only then can we set out to build the thing. Even more so, a good plan informs us what tools and materials we need to get started.

The same goes for our book marketing.

Twitter is merely a tool, much like our website, email list, Facebook groups, blog, podcast, YouTube channel, Amazon advertising, or anything else we can do to build our author platform. The problem comes when we start with the tools instead of a plan.

Book marketing becomes extremely overwhelming if we look at all the tools available to us. Just like we would be overwhelmed if we’ve never done woodworking before and the first thing we did was walk into the tool department at our local hardware store.

I’m going to push this analogy a little further now.

Imagine that, as part of my plans to build a kitchen island, I need to nail two boards together. Of course, the proper tool for the job is a hammer. But what if, instead, I reached into my toolbox and grabbed a screwdriver. I could bang on that nail as hard as I want with a screwdriver, and I may make a little progress, but I'll mostly be frustrated.

The following chapters of this book will give you the plan, blueprint, and framework for your author platform. We're going to move step-by-step through the three problems every author must solve in order to successfully market our books.

Then we're going to look at the attributes of the tools we'll need to solve the problems—what they're good for and not so good for—and then we'll look at the best tools for the job.

Figuring out Twitter is one of the *last* decisions John should be worrying about. He doesn't even have a blueprint for what he's trying to build yet. That's where we have to start.

SYSTEMS

When I get home every day, the first thing I do is empty my pockets. I take my keys and wallet out of my pockets and put them in a little silver dish that sits on the chest of drawers just inside our front door.

You've probably got something similar where you live. Maybe it's a drawer for your keys or a hook where you hang your purse. Whatever it is, we do it the same way every time.

What's the point of this? Why would we make this a habit?

We do this so that the next morning we don't waste precious time looking for our keys, wallet or purse. We can just grab them and head out the door.

Over a decade ago I hired Josh Kaufman, bestselling author of *The Personal MBA* and *How to Fight a Hydra*, as a business coach. The first thing he taught me about was systems.

He asked about the systems in my business and how I was using them to stay organized and get things done. I didn't fully understand the question. When I thought of systems, I thought of bureaucracy, assembly lines and thick training manuals. Why did I need systems? I was a two-man business.

Josh explained that a system is *anything you do repeatedly to get predictable results*. I put my keys in the same place every day (do

repeatedly) when I get home so I can find them the next morning when it's time to head to the office (predictable result).

If we start thinking through our life, we'll realize we already have lots of these systems in play. We drive to work the same way every day. We have bills that automatically get paid. We sort the laundry the same way or use the same script on sales calls or get up to write at the same time every day.

Whatever these activities are for you, you've created a system—something you do over and over to get predictable results.

In this book I'm laying out a system for book marketing. We've already defined marketing as creating long-lasting connections and then being relentlessly helpful and adding value to people's lives. Now we need a system that we can do over and over that will predictably get us that result.

THE CONNECTION SYSTEM

“I don’t know about this,” Amy said. “I mean, I know marketing is important, but it seems a bit weird to think about systematizing something like long-lasting connections with people.”

“Yeah,” I said. “I agree. It does sound weird. However, the truth is, you probably already do this in your life.”

Whether it’s our church, poker buddies, online forums, softball team, gym, book club, or work, we already have something in place where we automatically meet and connect with new people.

The goal of this book is to give us that same system for our book marketing. We need a plan—a blueprint—we can follow to make this automatic and inevitable.

I realized this early on when I started working with authors. During the first several years, I did a lot of random stuff. I would take any job working with an author. I played the role of publicist, web guy, social media marketer, Amazon review getter, book tour planner, and just about anything else that had to do with putting a book out into the world.

Along the way I got to see behind the scenes of how authors worked and built their platforms. I worked with authors who had huge followings that they had been cultivating for years. I also studied

popular authors to understand what they were doing to build their audience.

I focused on authors who had long-term success without being some sort of existing celebrity. If you were already a movie star, you didn't count. If you came out with a single book that took off and sold a million copies through no fault of your own, you also didn't count.

I focused on the authors who were building their fan base and finding success over a long period of time.

As I did this, I saw that the authors who were finding success were solving three basic problems:

1. How do I get people to know I exist?
2. How do I connect with people so they know I'm a good fit for them?
3. How do I stay in contact with people over a long period of time so they will buy my books?

Successful authors were focused on solving these three problems. Once you dig into them a bit, it becomes clear what is going on here.

The first thing you have to do is get people to know you exist. It's hard for them to buy anything from you if they've never heard of you. As Cory Doctorow said (paraphrasing the publisher Tim O'Reilly), "Obscurity is hard to monetize."

But knowing you exist isn't enough. If I'm a huge science fiction nerd and I hear a random name of an author but have no idea what they write, I'm unlikely to purchase their book.

We need a way to signal to people, once they've heard of us, that we're a good fit for them. That they should pay attention to us and what we do.

But, again, this isn't quite enough. If people find out we exist and then decide we are a good fit for them, how are we going to let them know about our current book? And not just our current book, but our next one and our next one and our next one?

We need a way to stay in contact with people long term—some way to get their attention (Hey! Look!) and drive action (Go buy this book! No, wait, buy *two* copies and give one to a friend!).

Out of these problems, I developed the Connection System as a simple way to look at the problem of book marketing and give us a blueprint and system to reach our goals.

The Connection System is made up of three things.

1. Outreach: A way to move people from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist.
2. Content: A way for people to know we're a good fit for them.
3. Permission: A way to stay in contact with people long term that allows us to get their attention and drive action.

It's important to remember that we only need one way to solve each of these problems, but we do have to solve all three.

I've seen so many authors driving themselves crazy by creating content for YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, their blog, their podcast, and on and on. They're growing their platform, but it's killing them. It's impossible to do all of this without it becoming a full-time job (with some staff!).

I've also seen authors who have started a blog, posted regularly for six months or a year, and then complained that nobody was reading it.

In the first example, the author is trying to do too many things. In the second example, the author is creating content—and maybe they even have permission working for them—but they aren't doing any outreach. This is like cutting off one leg of a three-legged stool. It's going to fall over.

The authors I have worked with who have experienced the greatest success over the longest period do two things:

1. They do a few things really well for a long time. They don't chase all the newest fads or spread themselves too thin. They pick and they focus and they keep going.
2. They have a plan to solve all three problems. The handful of things they are doing are attacking all three of the problems outlined in the Connection System.

After I explained all of this to Amy, I ended by making a promise.

“If you solve these three problems, you will find success for your books. If you fulfill all three components of the Connection System, you will build an author platform that reliably and predictably sells books.”

PART II

PERMISSION

THE BEST TOOL

The promise of the Connection System is to build a long-lasting author platform that gives us direct access to fans and influencers in a way that sells a lot of books.

In order to build our Connection System, we need a way to stay in contact with people long term. And not in just any, but in a way that 1) gets their attention and 2) drives action.

Just because we have a way to reach out to someone does not mean anything unless we can actually *snapping fingers* get them to turn their attention to us and then *do something*.

This is where the permission portion of the Connection System comes into play.

Both John and Amy need a tool that will allow them to stay in contact with their fans over a period of *years* in a way that, whenever they need to, they can get their fans' attention and then get them to take an action (such as buying a book).

But what is the best tool for this job?

I spoke with John about this and he threw out the idea of using Facebook. He already has almost a thousand friends on Facebook, and he's an active member of several groups around the topics of writing and science fiction. He also tries to be active on the other social media

platforms, like Instagram and Twitter, but is pretty demoralized by his follower counts and can't seem to figure out how to increase his followers.

Amy, on the other hand, has been active on LinkedIn for years. She has a ton of business connections there and even puts content out through their channels pretty regularly.

She also started an email list when her first book came out but admittedly hasn't done much to grow it. There's a box on the bottom of her website that says, "Sign up for my updates," but she has only a couple hundred subscribers and it's been over a year since she sent anything out to them.

I ended up having similar conversations with both John and Amy, mainly because this is one of the biggest sticking points many authors have when it comes to building an author platform.

"Social media—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.—are horrible tools for permission," I said. "There is this myth that if you get enough followers, you will be able to sell a lot of books. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.

Then I talked them through the reasons.

First of all, they have terrible engagement rates. You can look at the most recent stats¹ and see that engagement with posts on these various platforms is usually in the low single digits or even lower. And often, the platforms count things such as likes and comments as engagement, which means nobody actually clicks on a link and lands on our website or book page.

Second, many of these platforms have a history of artificially lowering post visibility in order to encourage us to buy their advertising to get in front of our fans².

Third, and most importantly, when we grow our connection with our fans on these platforms, *we do not own the connection*. We can't decide to download our list of fans and go to some other platform. *None* of the social media platforms allow this.

Then I broke the news to both of them.

"Email is still the best tool for permission," I said.

I realize it seems counterintuitive. Email seems old, and millions of people are using so many other great tools.

But the data is on my side. The lowest industry-wide engagement rate with email varies but is always solidly in the double digits. Along with that, people value email far more than social media, and it is still the most widely used online communication platform³.

Even if the stats on engagement were the same between social media and email, I would still recommend email for one very important reason.

With email we own the connection to our fans. Every single person who signs up for our email list gives us their direct contact information—their email address. This means at any time, if we are unhappy with our email service provider (ESP), we can download our list and go somewhere else.

“The best tool for permission is email,” I said. “Your number one, most important goal for building a direct connection with your fans is to build an email list. This enables you to communicate with your fans whenever you want so you can get their attention and drive action.”

Both John and Amy were surprised, though Amy took it better. She kind of already knew this since she is solidly in the business world.

“I use email for everything at work,” she said. “I see how it could be more effective than social media.”

John argued a bit with me, though.

“All my writer friends are on Facebook,” he said. “I’ve connected with all these hard-core science fiction readers in the groups. Even if email is better, I enjoy being on Facebook.”

“I’m not saying you’re not allowed to be on Facebook,” I replied. “I’m just saying it’s not marketing. Do it for fun, sure. Maybe you even pick up a handful of new readers. But if you really want to build a connection with thousands of fans that will help you for the next decade in your career, the data is pretty clear. You need an email list.”

John paused. I heard him sigh on the other end of the line.

“Fine,” he relented, “but I have no idea how to set up one of those.”

“No problem,” I responded. “I’ll walk you through it.”

1. To see links to the most recent engagements rates on social media, visit storygrid.com/1000.

2. If you want to read more about how social media manipulates content to encourage advertising, I have links at storygrid.com/1000.
3. I have the data sources for all of this at storygrid.com/1000.

EMAIL SERVICE PROVIDER

Amy was already familiar with what an Email Service Provider (ESP) is, but John had no idea where to start.

“Can I just BCC everyone in an email? Is that how I send out an email to people?”

“That may work for a couple dozen people, but we’re going to pretty quickly get you up to having hundreds and then thousands of people on your email list. If you try to BCC everyone, your email will get shut down pretty quickly plus you’ll be breaking the law.”¹

“Instead, you’re going to sign up for an ESP. You know how you get emails from places you’ve shopped online or newsletters you’ve signed up for?”

“Sure,” John replied.

“All of them use an ESP to send emails to their customers and subscribers.”

I went on to explain that an ESP is a service we sign up for that specifically helps us build an email list of subscribers. Once we have subscribers, we send them emails in a way that makes sure they get delivered and seen.

A *lot* of these services are out there, but I had John sign up for the one I recommend.²

Amy already had her email list set up, and once I got John up and running, the natural next question arose. They both asked it.

“How do I get people to subscribe to my email list?”

1. Links to more information on the laws around email marketing are at storygrid.com/1000.
2. You can see which service I currently recommend and a walkthrough on how to set it up at storygrid.com/1000.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

To explain this, I started by asking John and Amy to give me examples of email newsletters they signed up for and enjoy receiving.

“I get emails from several science fiction authors,” John said. “I also get emails from websites that run book deals and some places that talk about how to publish my books.”

“I get a ton of these emails,” Amy said. “A lot of them are from services I use in my business, but I also get daily emails with news updates and deals on shopping. I also signed up to get notifications whenever a band I like is coming to town or an author I like is coming out with a new book.”

“Great,” I said. “Now why did you sign up for these lists?”

“Well,” John said, “some of them I’m not sure how I got on their list. I must have bought something from them. But the other ones I like getting their emails. A couple of the authors were giving away free previews of their new book, so I wanted to see what they were up to. The book deals are because I wanted to buy books that were on sale.”

“Same with me,” Amy said. “I like getting the content. It keeps me up to date with industry news so I don’t have to go searching for it.”

“Right, now think about your answers,” I said. “You signed up for these email lists for *you*. You were getting something out of it —

receiving deals, updates on your favorite authors and bands, daily news briefings. Every time you signed up for an email list you were asking yourself, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

This is where both Amy and John needed to start.

Remember, if we go back to our definition of marketing, our goal is always to be relentlessly helpful and add value to people’s lives. When we encourage people to sign up for our email list, we have to make sure it’s in their best interest to do so. We have to give them something compelling in return for adding another email to their inbox.

Two overarching principles for getting people to sign up for our email list are: 1) make a specific, compelling offer and 2) expose people to the offer multiple times.

This is why Amy’s email signup at the bottom of her website wasn’t working very well. Besides the fact that it was buried at the bottom, all it said was, “Sign up for my updates.” That’s not compelling to anyone.

Instead, we have to give a reason why someone should hand over their email address.

There are several ways to invite people to join our email list, but one works better than any of them.

A promise to send them something *now*. In other words, offer to give them something right away when they join our email list.



Here’s a template for you:

Sign up and I will immediately send you _____.

Examples:

Sign up and I will immediately send you five sci-fi novels you need to read but have never heard of.

Sign up and I will immediately send you the action-packed first three chapters of my new novel.

Sign up and I will immediately send you three interviews with world-class leaders about their productivity hacks.



By giving someone something *now*, we will trigger them to take action right away, and that's what we want. Immediate action.

Most of all, we have to answer the WIIFM—What's in it for me? This is the only way to get people to join our email list.

THE FIRST THREE EMAILS

At this point, John and Amy had an ESP set up and running. Amy had to login and update several things since she hadn't used it in a while. John had signed up for his and gotten it set up.

They both had figured out their new WIIFM. John had put together a list of the Top 100 Sci-fi Novels of All Time and turned it into a PDF. Amy, on the other hand, recorded three videos that taught the fundamentals of the ideas in her book.

They had both updated their websites.¹ John added an email signup form to his homepage and the sidebar of his website. Amy updated the email signup forms on her website from "Sign up for my updates" to "Sign up and I will immediately send you a three-part video series on increasing your profitability in 30 days." She also moved the signup form from the bottom of her website to the top, so it's front and center.

If getting people on their email lists is their number one goal, it should be the number one thing people see when they come to their websites.

Now they need to make sure everyone who signs up for their email list starts getting emails right away.

First of all, they need to follow through on their promises. People

who sign up for John's email list need to get the PDF, and subscribers to Amy's need to get the video series.

How should they do this?

Inside ESPs, you can send two different types of emails (sometimes they are called different things, but the same basic principle applies):

- **Broadcast** — You send these emails one time and everyone on your list gets a copy. If I send an email on Friday at 1:00 p.m., everyone who has signed up for my email list before that gets a copy. Anyone who signs up after that time, won't ever see the email.
- **Automated** — These emails are triggered in some way. You write them and put them in your ESP, and they automatically go out depending on some kind of action by the subscriber. This is a great tool! You can write an email once and use it over and over.

In Amy's and John's situations, they need to set up automatic emails to be sent out whenever someone new subscribes.

I recommended each of them send three emails to new subscribers. Here are the templates I sent them to get them started.

Email #1: Send immediately when someone signs up.

The goal of this email is to deliver on the WIIFM promise we used to get people to sign up for our email list. Did we promise a PDF, video or other download? If so, make sure our new subscriber gets it right after signing up! This is a great way to establish the initial connection and get them ready for email number two.



Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thanks for signing up for my email newsletter! As promised, here is the [PDF, Video, etc.] titled [Download Title] that you can access for free:

<http://linktothedownload.com>

You've made a great choice trusting me with your email address. I'll always respect your privacy and never share it with anyone. Also, I'm going to continue sending you great [content, stories, resources] to help you [lose weight, find more great reads, etc.].

Thanks for reading!
[YOUR NAME]



Here is what John set up for his subscribers:

Hi and thanks for signing up for my email newsletter! As promised, here is the "Top 100 Sci-fi Novels of All Time" that you can access for free:

<http://johnswebsite.com/100novels.pdf>

You've made a great choice trusting me with your email address. I'll always respect your privacy and never share it with anyone. Also, I'm going to continue sending you great info about sci-fi novels and movies you don't want to miss. It's going to be a lot fun!

Thanks for reading!
John



Amy took a slightly different tack:

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thanks for joining my newsletter that is all about helping you build best business practices!

When you signed up, I promised to send you a three-part video series.

[Click here for part one in that series.](#)

I'm really excited to have you join me on this journey and I will continue with part 2 in the series in a couple of days.

See you then!

Amy



Both of these are a great personalization of my template. Each of them hits the key points while making it more their own.

Let's look at the next email.

Email #2: Send two days after someone signs up.

The goal of this email is to introduce ourselves, the story behind our writing, and give our new fan a few places they can find out more about us online.

Make sure we're presenting our story in this email and being personable. It's not an email from our PR department. We want to share our love for writing and books.



Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thanks again for signing up for my newsletter! In the last email, I sent you the [PDF, Video, etc.] titled [download title]. If you haven't already checked it out, make sure you don't miss it:

<http://linktothedownload.com>



[Fiction Example:]

My goal with this email newsletter is to share with you sneak peeks at my upcoming stories, favorite books I'm reading, and basically anything fun I find on my adventure as a writer. To get started, if you don't know much about me, here are a couple of places where you can connect with me and find out more:

- My website — this has my bio, latest book projects and blog
- Facebook — connect with me! This is where I put all the great stuff that doesn't make it into the email list or blog.
- [ARTICLE TITLE] — a short review of my latest book [or an interview with me or a piece I wrote for this blog]



[Nonfiction Example:]

My goal with this email newsletter is to help you [sell more books, lose more weight, be a better public speaker, etc.]. Every [month, week, “so often”], I'm going to send out new content that will help you be successful. To get started, here are a couple of things I think you'll like:

- My website — this has my bio, latest book projects and blog
- Facebook — connect with me! This is where I put all the great stuff that doesn't make it into the email list or blog.
- [ARTICLE TITLE] — A short review of my latest book [or an interview with me or a piece I wrote for this blog]



Until next time!
[YOUR NAME]



At this stage, John didn't want to send people back to his website because he didn't have a lot up there yet. He also didn't have any reviews of his books to share because he didn't have a book out yet.

This is what he ended up putting together:



Hi and thanks again for signing up for my newsletter! In the last email I sent you the “Top 100 Sci-fi Novels of All Time.” If you haven't already checked it out, make sure you don't miss it:

<http://johnswebsite.com/100novels.pdf>

My goal with this email newsletter is to share with you the best in sci-fi novels and movies. I also want to share with you my own books when they are ready for you to see!

To get started, if you don't know much about me, here are a couple of places where you can connect with me and find out more:

- Instagram — I post regular pictures and reviews of the books and movies I'm reading.
- Facebook — connect with me! This is where I put all the great stuff that doesn't make it into the email list or blog.

Thanks so much!

John



Amy had to take a different approach too. She decided her second email would be just a link to the second video. Then she would send an extra email with the third video and links to more information about herself.



Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thanks again for joining my newsletter. In case you missed it, here's a link to part 1 of my three-part video series.

Make sure you check that out before moving on to:

[Click here for part 2 in the series.](#)

Enjoy! See you in a couple days.

Amy



Sent two days after the previous email:

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thanks again for signing up for my newsletter!

In case you missed them, here are [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) in my free video series.

Make sure you watch both of those before moving on to:

[Click here for the third and final video.](#)

My goal with this email newsletter is to help you build better business practices. Every two weeks, I'm going to send out new content that will help you be successful. To get started, here are a couple of things I think you'll like:

- My website — this has my bio, latest book projects and blog
- LinkedIn — connect with me! This is where I put all the great stuff that doesn't make it into the email list or blog.
- [ARTICLE TITLE] — A recent interview with me I think you'll enjoy

Until next time!

Amy



Email #3: Send two days after last email.

The goal of this email is to invite our subscribers to purchase our books.

In all of the emails we send to our list, we want to look for opportunities to reference—and link to—our books. However, in our welcome series, it's a must!

The two rules of thumb are to 1) make our latest title top priority and 2) reference our backlist.

We've laid the groundwork with free content and information about who we are and why we write. Now is the time to make sure new subscribers know they can purchase something!



Hi [FIRST NAME],

A few days ago you signed up for my newsletter and made a great choice trusting me with your email address.

I'm going to continue sending you great content over the coming months, but first, I want to make sure you know about my latest projects!

Recently I released [BOOK TITLE] and it's about [BOOK SUMMARY]. It's gotten a lot of great reviews like:

[BLURBS]

If you've enjoyed my other content, I know you'll love this. You can pick up a copy of [BOOK TITLE] at [LINKS TO ONLINE STORES].

In addition, I've also written [NUMBER] other books that you might enjoy. They are:

[LIST OF BOOKS AND LINKS TO BUY]

Thanks again for being a part of my newsletter. I'm looking forward to having you on board!

Until next time,
[YOUR NAME]



I had to help John write something completely different for his final email. He doesn't have any books out yet. Instead, he put up a "Coming Soon" page on his website outlining the book he is currently working on. He put up a short description, tentative cover design, and a publish date. Then he set up this email:



A few days ago, you signed up for my newsletter and made a great choice trusting me with your email address.

I'm going to continue sending you great content over the coming months, but first, I want to make sure you know about my latest project!

Later this year, I'm releasing my very first title, *The Empire's Last War*.

[Click here to see the cover and description.](#)

Thanks again for being a part of my newsletter. I'm looking forward to having you on board!

Until next time,
John



Since Amy has a backlist to promote, she stayed pretty close to the template.



Hi [FIRST NAME],

A few days ago, you signed up for my newsletter and made a great choice trusting me with your email address.

I'm going to continue sending you great content over the coming months, but first, I want to make sure you know about my latest projects!

If you've enjoyed my other content, you should pick up copies of my two previous books:

- *The 1-Week Business Plan: Revolutionize Your Business and Bottom-Line in 5 Short Days.*

- *The Productive Businesswoman: How Women Can Leverage Their Greatest Strengths to Get More Done Every Day.*

Thanks again for being a part of my newsletter. I'm looking forward to having you on board!

Until next time,
Amy



At this point, John and Amy have made huge progress toward permission. However, they've only done the easy stuff so far.

Now it's time for the hard part.

How do they actually get people to sign up for their email list?

1. If you need help setting up your author website, I have walkthroughs available at storygrid.com/1000.

HOW TO GET EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

When it came time to start growing the email list, Amy was in the best position. She already had traffic to her website and had a decent social media following.

Simply moving her newsletter signup from the bottom of her website to the top and then changing her signup message to focus on WIIFM, her daily email subscribers went up by a multiple of five overnight.

The main thing I told her to do was start converting her social media followers to newsletter subscribers. As we've already seen, social media followers don't convert well to book buyers.

She started posting weekly on all social media channels and inviting people to join her email list to get the three-video series. It's working well and is moving her fans to a tool that is more likely to get their attention and drive action.

The other simple change I had Amy make to her routine was to start adding a slide to the end of her live talks and presentations inviting the audience to join her email list. Viewers always ask for a copy of her slides after a talk, so now she puts up a simple URL where people can go to put in their email address. She set up a separate automatic email series to send them the slides instead of the three-part video series.

Amy already has a lot of places where people know her, so the goal became to think creatively about ways to get those people to join her email list. Since that is now the number one goal, every time she is in front of groups of people, she has a clear method to get those people on her email list.

John, however, was in a very different situation.

He had set up his email list and put it on his website, but nobody was going to his website yet. So far he had three subscribers—him, his wife, and one random person who had signed up.

“If nobody knows me, how am I going to build an email list?”

“Is that true though?” I asked.

“Is what true?”

“That nobody knows you? People know you, right?”

“Well, yeah, my friends and family.”

“Right. What about your Facebook friends? How many do you have there?”

“Almost a thousand.”

“Are they on your email list?”

“No. I thought this was a thing where I put a signup on my website and start getting people to sign up.”

John was falling into the common trap that many of us fall into when we start building an author platform online. We use it as a way to stay disconnected from the people “out there.”

The truth is, we need to think of every person we connect to online as a real flesh and blood person.

“The first goal for your email list is to get at least a hundred people signed up,” I said. “With that many Facebook friends, I bet you can get closer to two hundred and fifty just from them.”

“How do I do that?”

“Simple,” I say. “Sit down on your couch, turn on reruns of your favorite show, and start going through your list of friends, one by one, and invite them to join your email list.”

When we are starting out, it’s important to personally and individually invite at least the first one hundred people to our email list. This does a couple of things for us.

First, it gets us over the fear of asking people to join our email list.

It's easy to throw up a signup form on our blog, but that creates a lot of distance between us and the subscriber. When we personally message our college friend and invite them to our email list, it forces us to think about our subscribers as people. Once we do it a couple hundred times, we get over the fear of the invite.

Second, it gives us a personal connection to our initial fan base. As our list grows to a thousand, then five thousand, then ten thousand and then fifty thousand subscribers, it's impossible to maintain a relationship with that many people. However, we will always have that initial connection to the first batch of people we personally invited onto our list. That's important as the list size grows.

This is what I had John do.

Send a personal message to every friend and follower on his social media platforms. Also, I suggested he go through his contact list on his mobile and directly text message his friends. I had him send this message:



Hi [FIRST NAME], I'm starting up an email newsletter where I share my favorite sci-fi novels and movies. I think you'll really like it. Can I add you to the list? If so, just let me know the best email address for you. If not, no worries. Thanks!



John was wary but agreed to give it a try. He sat on his couch with the television on and copied and pasted the message one at a time to his friends, followers, and contacts.

He was surprised at the number of people who not only gave him permission but were excited to hear from him and joined the list. At the end of the first night, he already had over seventy-five subscribers. It took him a few nights to get through everyone, but by the time he finished he had over three hundred email subscribers!

Three hundred subscribers is meaningful! He'll start seeing

movement when he emails that many people. They'll take action—read his blog post, download his PDF, *buy his book*—when he asks them to.

Finally, I went to both John's and Amy's websites and took a look.

John had a pretty simple website he had built on one of the many DIY website builders, but he didn't have email signups anywhere on his website.

"Remember how we talked about your email list being your most important thing?" I asked.

"Yeah, of course," John said.

"If I visited your website, would I be able to tell that your email list is your number one goal?"

There was a long pause.

The way I see it, our website's main purpose is to get people to subscribe to our email list. Yes, we will have our about page, all of our books listed, our blog maybe, how to contact us, etc. But if our most important author platform asset is our email list, our website should constantly, on every page, be inviting people to join our email list.

"So what do I do?" John asked.

"Put a signup form on every page of your website and include your What's In It For Me offer," I said.

"Got it," he said. "I'll do it today."

When I talked to Amy, I pulled up her website and took a look. She was better off than John. She had added an email list signup on the sidebar of her blog and moved the original signup from the bottom of her homepage to the top.

The biggest problem I saw was the invitation above the form. It still said, "Sign up for my updates."

"Amy!" I said, "You did all that work creating that video series. Now you've got to tell people about it."

"Oh! Right!" she said. "I was going to update it and forgot. I'll change it to 'Sign up now and I'll immediately send you a three-part video series on how to increase your company's profitability in thirty days.'"

"Perfect!" I said.

A couple of weeks later I checked in with Amy and John and they were both thrilled with their progress. Amy's subscribers were going up

faster than ever, and John had gone from zero subscribers to three hundred in a few days.

They both asked the same question next though.

“We’re getting all these subscribers now. What do we email them about?”

Great question. That’s where we have to talk about content.

PART III

CONTENT

THE GOAL OF CONTENT

We are now stepping into the second part of the Connection System —Content.

In the first edition of this book, I said authors need to create content and spread it freely and widely. However, I failed to address *why* this is so important.

Content is the bridge between outreach and permission.

Outreach lets people know you exist.

Permission allows you to stay connected long term and get their attention to drive action.

Content lets people know you are right for them.

I love fantasy and science fiction. I read zero romance.

If a friend of mine tells me about a new author they love, the first thing I'm going to do is search for the author to find her website and books. If the first cover of a book I see is a muscle-bound man holding a scantily clad woman, I'll know pretty quickly this book isn't for me. However, if I check the author's social media profiles and she is posting about her favorite three science fiction books of the year, I know I'm in the right spot.

The first thing content does is signal to people whether we are a good fit for them. Our content allows readers to find out who we are and what we are about.

The second thing content does is provide opportunities to engage with people. If we appear for an interview on a podcast, we share content to introduce ourselves to the listeners (outreach). Plus, this becomes something we can share with our existing fan base (permission).

Creating content on a regular schedule and sharing it widely and freely gives people the bridge to move from hearing about us for the first time to becoming a fan, and it allows our existing fans to stay engaged with us.

SOURCING AND IDENTIFYING

I spoke with both John and Amy about the goal of content and asked what their plans were.

Amy was already posting regular blog posts on her own website and LinkedIn. Creating content wasn't the problem. It was knowing how best to use it. (We'll get to this shortly.)

John was having a different struggle.

"I'm already putting a ton of my writing time and creativity into writing my books," he said. "I've tried to blog before or put stuff on social media regularly, but I always run out of stuff to say. How do I come up with stuff to talk about, and how do I find the time to do it?"

Let's tackle the initial question: What do I talk about?

My favorite quote about content comes from Hugh MacLeod, bestselling author of *Ignore Everybody* and *Evil Plans*. His advice: "Treat it like an adventure — an adventure worth sharing."¹ That is the best attitude to bring to our content. Treat our life and progress as a writer as an adventure and then share that adventure with our fans.

Here's the secret. If we're an author, we're already on an adventure. We're reading and researching new content and books. We're traveling to interesting places and meeting interesting people. We're making new discoveries that change the way we see the world. Even if we never leave our home or town, we're creating entire new worlds in our heads

and expressing them with our writing. All we have to do is tap into that journey and share the experience. Readers want to join in our adventure. Give them one (or many), and they'll love us forever.

Derek Sivers, creator of CD Baby and the bestselling author of *Anything You Want*, does this by sharing what he is reading. He is a self-proclaimed learning addict. Reading loads of books is one of the main ways he learns. When he reads a new book, he takes lots of notes. When he first adopted this practice, he would organize his notes in text documents that he kept on his computer for easy reference. Later, he decided to post his book notes on his website Sivers.org. Over time, he has published more than a hundred in-depth book reviews that share the insights he learned while reading. His book notes archive is a treasure trove of fantastic content that attracts lots of new visitors to his website and has been a big reason his email list has grown to well over one hundred thousand subscribers.

The magic of Derek's content strategy is its simplicity. He was already creating valuable content for himself. And since he's not the only person on the planet to enjoy learning by reading books, that content is valuable to others. By taking a very small extra step—publishing that content on his website—Derek invited readers into his personal adventure. He allowed them to see what he was reading and discover what he was learning. That shared experience is at the heart of Derek's personal Connection System with his readers.

The founders of Basecamp, a project management software company, decided to share their adventure by blogging what they were learning as they grew their company. When the founders, Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson, published their first book, *Rework*, it quickly became a bestseller. *Rework* consists of an edited collection of their favorite blog posts with their best advice on how to run a business.

Many layers of adventure are at work here. First, they used their blog to share the journey with fans. Next, they leveraged that asset to create a new one, the book, which serves as an adventure for people discovering their ideas for the first time. And what do you think happens after these new readers finish enjoying the book? They start reading the Basecamp blog for more. These different aspects of their

adventure convey an important point. Done well, an adventure offered through content builds a never-ending experience that keeps people engaged with your author platform.

Derek Sivers and the founders of Basecamp have shown us two ways smart authors can tap into content they're already creating during the learning and writing process. This raises the question: What are we already creating that we can use as content to grow our audience? I like to think of this as the special features or extras you get when you buy a movie. Using movie extras as an example, I've come away with two interesting observations.

First, movie extras include content that was either already created or easy to create during the filming process. Deleted scenes and alternate endings are usually added to movie extras for precisely this reason. Additionally, movie extras commonly include content such as actor interviews and director commentary because this content is freely available during the filming process. It just has to be captured.

Second, movie extras are made available for fans. If we hate a movie, we are unlikely to dive into the behind-the-scenes extras. The extras are there for the fans because the fans want more, and smart creators give fans what they want. Fans are the people who ultimately determine the success of a movie. And when they keep their fans happy, their next movie is set up for success too.

What I've noticed is that this same process can be applied to books.

Is our book full of technology and computer jargon that we had to research? Did we do a ride along with the police to get their procedure down? Were we exposed to a new way of doing business that we had never seen before? What did we learn from those experiences that never made it in the book but could be shared as extra content?

Similarly, did we interview professionals for our book? Could we make those interviews available in full? Or could we do a follow-up Q&A with the interviewees?

Also, what got cut from our book that we could make available to fans? Did we remove chapters? Did the original ending change? How about that epilogue we thought about adding but didn't? Or special comments from beta readers that helped us shape the book into its final form?

Generally, what are the byproducts of our writing process? How can we make these available to our fans to let them engage with us and our work on a deeper, more meaningful level? That's the essence of adventure-based content that transforms the casual reader into a lifelong fan who will support our future books.

Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman came up with a great way to think about this in their book *Content Rules*. They explain this theme as a simple idea—re-imagining content. In one form or another, the authors we just met have applied this theme to their content strategies because fresh content is hard to produce. Whether it's written words, speaking events, videos, or anything else, brand new content is a time-consuming and resource-draining endeavor. And let's face it, our writing requires more of us than just producing free content. The *Rework* authors need to run their software business. Derek Sivers needs to focus on the many projects he's involved with. Because their time is limited and precious, they've learned to be creative when it comes to producing and sharing content far and wide. We need to become as imaginative as they are by re-imagining our content in new ways.

There are many ways to begin re-imagining our content. Can that talk we gave at a conference be transcribed and released on our blog? Can we take the interview with the subject matter expert and release it as a podcast episode? Can we share our book research notes or outlines with our email list, inviting them “behind the curtain” of our writing process? The possibilities are truly endless.

I worked with an author a few years ago who employed this content strategy. He had recently written a whitepaper that consisted of eleven main ideas. He used this whitepaper to convert people to the email list on his website. Next, he took the whitepaper and released it on other websites to introduce himself and his ideas to new people.

His re-imagining didn't stop there. He also created thirteen different videos, five to ten minutes in length, based on the content of the whitepaper (eleven main ideas plus an introduction and conclusion), which he released as a series on YouTube. After that, he did a thirteen-part series releasing each of the videos as blog posts for his readers and to increase search engine traffic to his website.

He took one piece of content—a whitepaper he had written—and

turned it into dozens of pieces of content that he could use across many different platforms.

The bottom line of his strategy is exactly what Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman advise. By re-imagining one piece of content, we can create many more pieces of valuable content with very little effort. How can we do that? How can we re-imagine the content we're already producing to create and seize new opportunities to grow our platform?

Now, I know some authors worry about re-imagining their content. We're afraid that doing so will upset our readers. These authors believe readers only want completely new content all the time. Fortunately, that's not true. Our most engaged readers—our fans—want to engage with our content in multiple ways for multiple reasons. Some desire to have the message of our content reinforced. Others want to consume our content in different styles based on differences in their routines. And never forget that no two people are precisely the same when it comes to how they learn best; some learn better by reading whereas others learn better by listening or watching. This doesn't mean we *must* produce content in all of these modalities. However, it's good that we think in this direction so we are always getting the most possible benefit out of the content we create.

And let's not forget the universal impulse of fans to overconsume what they love. Being a big fan of reading myself, I love discovering new authors I like and then diving deep into all of their content. For example, I'll search every podcast episode they've ever been interviewed on. I'll read all of their books. I'll read all of their blog posts. I'll subscribe to their social media feed and email list. I'm a true fan to those authors I enjoy and care about most. Our true fans will show us the same devotion, but only if we have given them the adventure-driven content to do so.

What I find wonderful from these experiences is that I appreciate hearing an author's ideas expressed in new ways. The blog posts will convey them slightly differently than how they are addressed in the podcast episodes. When I read the books, the content is more complete with a better narrative than the blog posts or emails. We all know that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That positive, uplifting

effect is happening when we re-imagine and share our content in different ways.

As I explained this to John, he started to see that creating content wasn't a whole different job. He could start adding it to his schedule without letting it take over his life. But he was still struggling with what to talk about.

"If I think through sharing my adventure," John said, "I could talk about this process of learning how to write and publish a book. That's been quite the journey."

"Well, remember what content is for," I said. "You want to let people know they are in the right place, and it will need to attract the people who will buy your books. If you create content around the process of writing—"

"I'll attract writers," John said.

"Right. I've seen a lot of authors fall into this trap. They build up this great following of writers, but when their book comes out, it doesn't sell because they attracted the wrong fans."

I told John about what happened when my third book, *Running Down a Dream: Your Road Map to Winning Creative Battles* came out. I had built a big audience of writers around the topic of book marketing and the first edition of this book. When I tried to market a book about creativity, it fell flat. A few people bought it, but the sales were much lower than my books about book marketing.

"When we start planning out content," I told John, "we need to make sure it's attracting fans who will buy and read your science fiction titles when they come out."

1. MacLeod, Hugh. "Treat It Like an Adventure — an Adventure Worth Sharing." In *Evil Plans: Having Fun on the Road to World Domination*, 52. New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2011.

CORNERSTONE CONTENT

The problem was, as John started trying to figure out what kind of content to create, he got stuck.

First, I agree that the idea of regularly creating email newsletters, blog posts, social media updates, guest articles, and other forms of content can appear daunting. But if we learn to approach this in the right way, it can become much less overwhelming.

Many writers, especially those from a journalism, academic, or other traditional writing background, have a structured way of creating content. Their system involves identifying something to write (via an article assignment, book deal, etc.) and then putting their head down to research and write it. That approach isn't going to work for us. Instead, we need to flip that around.

We need to find content as we are moving through our life and writing career. Then we share that content with the readers connected to our platform, listen to their responses, analyze their questions, and evolve that feedback into our continued research and writing process. By flipping the approach as we have, we not only benefit from having many more opportunities of producing valuable content for our audience but also enjoy the validation or invalidation of our ideas from our readers. This reader engagement helps us manage and tweak our ideas to create the best possible content.

Randi Epstein is an excellent example of a client of mine who took advantage of this. As she started researching her next book on the science and history of sex hormones and therapy, she used her blog to share the interesting facts and insights she discovered along the way. For example, she had been invited to an embryology lab to witness the process of Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection, the process of injecting a single sperm into an egg. She shared that story on her blog. She also shared great stories from her time interviewing in vitro fertilization doctors at the forefront of scientific advancements in sex hormones. These stories allow her readers to share in her adventure as she's learning amazing new things. They're also the precise content she needs to further grow her community of readers and excite them about her new book before it's even published.

Creating content using this approach does take work, but it's not a second full-time job. At most, the extra level of effort is only 20 percent above what we're doing already. How can that be? Because when we develop content that is adventure-driven, shares stories, mirrors movie extras and, generally, re-imagines great content we've already made, our content takes on the qualities of a shared network where each element overlaps and supports another. This works so well because it drastically reduces the amount of time and energy required from us as well as adding structure and support to our entire platform.

When I began the discussion about content with Amy and John, we started talking about their flagship content.

While they were in different positions—Amy already had content she was producing and John was starting from scratch—I brought them both back to this simple idea.

Chris Guillebeau is the bestselling author of *The Art of Non-Conformity* and *100 Side Hustles*. Those successful books were propelled by Chris's incredibly engaging platform, which rallies at ChrisGuillebeau.com. Chris has long been devoted to writing and publishing high-value content for his readers. However, all the way back at the beginning when he started his website in 2008, he began by publishing two pieces of flagship content. In *A Brief Guide to World Domination*, he describes his view of how the world works and how you

can change it. This is his manifesto—his public declaration of views and beliefs. His flag in the ground. Everything Chris creates points back to this original view of the world that he published.

About a year later, he published *279 Days to Overnight Success*, another great piece of flagship content where he shares exactly how he became a full-time writer in 279 days.

Flagship content is any substantial piece of writing that can stand on its own, conveys a strong set of principles and is created and published in such a way as to encourage rapid sharing. In Chris's case, he made his ebook into an easy-to-read, well-designed PDF that readers could download from his site with one click.

Both pieces have been downloaded and shared hundreds of thousands of times.

Manifestos and other forms of flagship content are so useful because they leave no doubt about what readers will experience if they join the tribe and subscribe to its content. This sets the proper expectations now and for the future. This helps us as well. Writing a manifesto allows us to clearly define who we want to attract to our platform and how we plan on talking to them.

I asked Amy and John if they had produced this flagship content for their platform, and neither of them had. I encouraged them both to write out their manifesto. This will help both them and their readers have a deep understanding of what their platforms are about. It will set expectations for the kind of content that will be shared.

It's important to remember that this doesn't have to be a world-changing, saving-starving-children call-to-arms.

After I talked John through it, he said, "I think I just want to help people fall in love with science fiction. I love it so much, and it's so much deeper and amazing than the big blockbuster movies and popular books."

"That's perfect John," I said. "Let's start there."

I encouraged him to start outlining his manifesto by answering these questions as specifically as possible:

- Who are you talking to?

- How do they currently see the world?
- What are they missing out on?
- What can life be like if they see the world differently?
- Where should people start in making change?

Based on those questions, I encouraged him to write his own manifesto. It doesn't need to be as long or highly produced as Chris's to be effective, though it certainly can be. The important thing is that he outlines his beliefs and goals in the manifesto and makes it easy to access and read.

For Amy, it was easy. She had already thought through all of this when she was writing her books and growing her speaking career. I suggested she answer the questions as well just to make sure she was on the right track. Then I suggested to both that they write out the manifesto and publish it on their websites. It could be a blog post, PDF, or podcast episode. It didn't matter. The point is to clearly lay out the vision of our platform and the kind of content people can expect.

Flagship content serves as the big milestones in your adventure-driven content platform. They are entry points for new readers as well as reflection points for existing readers. This makes flagship content a very special type of evergreen content.

Once we got past the flagship content, I began talking to Amy and John about the ongoing content they are creating.

"I'm exhausted," Amy said. "I'm blogging every other day on both my website and LinkedIn. I feel like I'm on a hamster wheel of creating content, and it never seems to be enough."

While we were on the phone, I pulled up her posts and started scanning through them.

"It looks like you're writing a lot about what's happening in the news," I said as I scrolled.

"Yeah," Amy replied. "I try to stay on top of all the latest trends in my industry."

"This is why you're exhausted," I said. "You're trying to run a news outlet as one person."

She laughed at this.

“How useful is yesterday’s newspaper? How about last week’s newspaper, or the one from a year ago today?” I asked. “Is that information still relevant and valuable? Do you, as a reader, seek out content that is outdated?”

“No, I’m always looking for the new stuff.”

“Sure, when you’re reading the *news* but not when you’re looking for useful information. We need to change your focus because your readers are the same way; they are more interested in relevant, useful content. Think about your first book. Is it still relevant? Should people read it?”

“Sure, I wrote it so it would be relevant for a long time.”

“Exactly,” I said. “You don’t always have to be cranking out fresh content every day; you just have to create content that stays fresh over time. That’s evergreen content.”

The opposite of evergreen content is content with a short shelf life, meaning it goes out of date quickly. If you constantly chase the latest news headline, fad or gossip story, you’re creating content that won’t remain interesting or relevant for very long. Plus, you are trying to compete with newspapers and gossip websites that have staffs of people reporting. Therefore, you’ll need to create a lot of new content very frequently simply to keep up with what’s trending. That approach to content creation is never-ending. That’s not a fun place to be and quickly becomes overwhelming. Instead, focus on creating content that will stand the test of time.

My business coach always reminds me of this important lesson. “When in doubt, create assets,” he says. In this context, an asset is something you create once that brings in value for a long time in the future. And he’s right. Evergreen content is an asset, and a really important one, because it continues to work and deliver value while you sleep.

“That sounds wonderful,” Amy said. “But I’m not sure where to start with this.”

“First of all,” I said, “instead of trying to create a half-dozen pieces of new content every week, you’re going to just do one every two weeks. But instead of cranking them out haphazardly, you’re going to focus

and make it a piece of content that will bring in readers for *years*. It will take less time to create this one piece, but it will give you a return for much longer.”

I told Amy to come up with the top three questions she’s asked by readers, clients, and attendees at her talks. She quickly came up with them. Then I gave her the assignment.

“Write the answer to each of those questions. It needs to be at least a thousand words long and needs to be your definitive article on that topic. Write it assuming people will still be reading it five years from now. Then publish one answer every other week for the next six weeks.”

The truth is, Amy could scale back to doing this just once a month and it would be much easier than cranking out short articles several times a week and get her *way* more traction for her audience.

In-depth content is harder and more time-consuming to create, but it has a much deeper impact on our platform because it lasts longer.

Of course, when I spoke with John, I came at this from a different standpoint. While Amy was already clear on the questions she was answering, it was harder for John to wrap his head around it.

“I’m just talking about classic and new science fiction movies and books,” he said. “I’m not sure what questions I would get.”

So I came at the problems from a different direction.

“Let’s assume you’re talking to someone who just recently got into science fiction and he wants to know where to start,” I said. “What would you tell him?”

At that point, John started rattling off lists of books and movies he identified as his must-read and must-watch selections that span the entire genre. After several minutes I stopped him.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m talking about. What if you started with the ‘Top 100 Sci-fi Novels of All Time’? And then broke them down by different genres, types of characters, best endings, etc. You could do the same thing for movies.”

There was a long pause, then John said, “Okay, I got it.”

What’s great about these lists is they will be useful to readers for years to come and there is an unending supply of things he can write about.

When we're beginning to create content, don't focus on the *quantity* of content. Instead, we should focus on creating content that is *in-depth* and *evergreen*. This will support the growth of our platform for a long time.

MODALITIES

Now that I've helped Amy and John get a sense for the type of content they need to create, we have to figure out exactly what modality they are going to use.

There are an infinite number of ways to put content out into the world, but they all break down into three fundamental categories: text, audio, video.

This is the next decision Amy and John have to make. What form of content will they create?

For Amy, it was easy. She was already used to blogging regularly and she wanted to keep that up. Perfect.

For John, it was a bit harder.

"I want to spend all of my writing time writing my books, and that really takes it out of me creatively. I'm not sure if I want to put all that time into writing a blog."

"I get it," I said. "So we've taken writing off the table, but what about audio or video? Do either of those sound good?"

"I would definitely not feel comfortable in front of a camera, but I think audio would be okay. I like talking about science fiction and could easily record it."

"Great! What if you started a podcast?" I said.

"What's involved in that?" he asked.

I explained what podcasts are—online radio shows—and the basics of what it would take to start one.¹ Then I explained that most podcasts take one of two forms. They are either interview based—John would invite guests on such as authors, bloggers, other podcasters, etc., and interview them—or a show with the same people talking every week.

The advantage to the interview-based podcast is connecting with influencers (we'll cover this more in the next chapter) and the upside of it just being him or him and one other regular co-host is it takes a lot less planning and logistics.

“You know what,” John said. “I know this physics professor at a local university who is a huge science fiction nerd. Every time we get together, we talk about books and movies we love. Plus, because he's so into the science side, he's always talking about the real-world applications and feasibility of the technology in the books. What if we did a podcast where we recorded these conversations? I know I would love them and maybe some other people would too.”

I loved this idea for two reasons.

First, John was excited about it. The great thing about putting things online is you'll find people who are nerds about the same thing you are. If you're excited about it, thousands of other people are bound to be excited about it too.

Second, this is a fun new twist on a science fiction podcast. Yes, they will talk about popular as well as obscure books and movies. But the addition of an actual physics professor discussing the real-world implications of the technology in the stories is a way for John to create content that sets his podcast apart from others.

I told John this and we talked through some more logistics around the podcast. Then I asked him a question.

“What if we applied the idea of re-imagining content to your podcast?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Remember that guy I told you about with the white paper that he turned into blog posts and YouTube videos? What could you do like that?”

John thought for a minute.

“Oh, I could probably get the episodes transcribed and post them on a blog on my website.”

“Yep!” I said.

“Wow! So I *could* start a blog without actually having to write it!”

“Exactly!” I said.

“You know,” John continued, unprompted by me, “I’ve also seen lots of videos on YouTube where it’s just voice-over with pictures. I could probably publish the podcast on YouTube that way too.”

“You’re definitely thinking in the right direction,” I said.

The important thing here is that both Amy and John are clear on both what and how they are creating the content. The final piece is to figure out the *when*.

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1. I link to walkthroughs on starting a podcast at storygrid.com/1000.

SCHEDULE AND ROUTINE

Several years ago, I was hired to work with a first-time author. His book was coming out in nine months, and he needed to leverage his popular public persona into an email list. When I started, he had two subscribers—him and his sister.

Over the eight months that followed, we were able to quickly build up his email list to more than ten thousand subscribers in time to launch his book. We used all the tactics I talk about in the previous chapter along with getting some of his well-known blogger friends to promote him to their followers too. (I'll cover this in the next chapter.)

We successfully launched the book as an instant bestseller. Then my contract ended, and I moved on to other projects.

A couple of years later the author reached out to me, this time about six weeks before his next book was coming out.

“How big is your email list now?” I asked.

“Um, just under eleven thousand,” he said.

I was a bit perplexed. We had grown his email list from two to ten thousand in eight months and somehow he had not even added another thousand in the following two years.

“Okay,” I said. “How often have you been emailing them?”

There was a long pause.

“When was the last time you emailed them?” I asked.

I received a very sheepish answer.

“The last time you emailed them during the book launch.”

This is an all-too-common habit authors fall into. They email a ton when they are running a launch, but then you don’t hear from them in between. This causes a lot of problems. People will mark your emails as spam because they don’t remember signing up for the list, which drops the overall deliverability of your emails. It will also greatly affect the way people engage with your emails. Fewer people will read and interact with them.

Worst of all, it hurts your ability to sell books.

What I love about creating content is it helps you in so many ways. It brings in new people—through outreach—but it also gives you an easy way to stay in contact with your subscribers.

Every time John releases a new podcast episode and transcript, he is going to send a link out to his email list to let them know about it. This will increase the listenership of his podcast while helping him stay engaged with his audience.

Amy will do the same with her blog.

As I discussed this with Amy and John, a common question came up: “How often should I release new content?”

“I heard,” Amy said, “that you shouldn’t email your list more than twice a month so you don’t annoy them.”

John came at it from a different direction.

“I should probably email them at least once a month so they don’t forget about me, right?”

Their answers showed me they were coming at this from the wrong point of view. It’s not about trying not to annoy people or making sure they don’t forget about us. If we go back to our original definition of marketing, we are creating this content and sending it to our subscribers to *add value to their lives*.

The truth is, people have an extremely high threshold for helpful, engaging, and entertaining content.

Right now, I am subscribed to an email list I get every single day. It’s not annoying because it is a wrap-up of the top ten news items I need to know about. It keeps me from having to sift through the news myself. I also am subscribed to a list that emails me at least four times a week

with their new product offerings. This too isn't annoying because I *want* to know about their product offerings.

Plus, at the bottom of every email is a link where I can unsubscribe if I don't want to get emails anymore.

When it comes to creating content and sending it out to your email list, I recommend following a few rules.

First, always focus on making the content helpful and entertaining for your readers. Even launching a book and asking your subscribers to buy your book is helpful to them. You wrote a great book and they'll love reading it! If you're not sure how to do this, start by creating content that *you* like.

Second, create a schedule for *you* not your subscribers. The schedule is more about how often you can create content.

After Amy and I talked about creating evergreen content, she got excited and spent a long weekend writing not three, but six articles that were all at least a thousand words long.

"I'm going to post one every day this week," she said excitedly.

"Okay," I said, "but you told me you wanted to publish a new blog post twice a month. Why don't you stick to that schedule?"

"Well I have them all written. I might as well put them out right?"

"Are you going to be able to stick to this schedule of writing over six thousand words a week just for your blog?"

She paused and then answered, "No."

"Right. So it's amazing that you got so much done this weekend, but it doesn't mean you publish it all at once. It just means you're three months ahead on your content! You can take it easy for a couple of months now and work on other things."

I encourage authors to pick a schedule and stick with it for at least six months. If after six months, Amy is still writing like a fiend, maybe she can bump it up to three or four articles a month.

The point of the schedule is to have something you can stick to long term. Otherwise, you will get frustrated, fall behind, and often stop putting out new content altogether.

I always encourage authors to start slowly and try to bank content. Then, once they get a long-term rhythm going, they can adjust it.

Third, don't worry about people who unsubscribe. No matter how

amazing your content is, every time you send an email to your list, some people will unsubscribe. Also, the bigger your list grows, the more people will unsubscribe.

The first time John sent out a podcast episode to his email list of three hundred people, eleven people unsubscribed.

“It’s so frustrating,” he said. “Do you think it’s because my podcast sucked? Should I have sent something different? Should I email them and see if they’ll re-subscribe?”

“Do you remember what I said content is for?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s to let people know you’re a good fit for them.”

“Right, so when people unsubscribe, it’s actually a good thing. They’re not saying you or your content suck. They’re just deciding you’re not a good fit for them. The whole point of building an email list is to have a direct connection with fans *who will buy your books*. If they’re not interested in you talking about science fiction, they probably won’t be interested in your novels either.”

It’s important that as we build our fan base, we stay connected to them and continue adding value to their lives. We do this by creating new content and sharing it with them regularly. The whole point of creating a schedule is so we stick to it and don’t fall into the trap of going months or years without them hearing from us.

CAN I SHARE TOO MUCH?

A week after Amy had solidified her content plan along with how often she would be emailing her list, she gave me a call.

“I’m worried about something,” she said. “I was telling a colleague about all the changes I’ve been making to my book marketing plan and he asked me if I was worried that I was sharing too much. If I give all this content away for free, why would anyone buy the book?”

“I completely understand that concern,” I said. “Most authors worry about this as they put content out into the world, but I promise you, it’s not a real problem.”

“Really? It just seems like if I went to an author’s website and there was all this free content, I wouldn’t be willing to buy their book.”

I told her about Seth Godin, who has blogged every day for twenty years. Every time he comes out with a new book—he’s written nineteen of them at this point—it becomes an instant bestseller, even though most of the ideas in the books have already been shared on the blog.

When the illustrated book *Go the Fuck to Sleep* was released online as a PDF before it came out, it went viral. The author, Adam Mansbach, and his publisher worked hard to try and stop the spread of the pirated book until they realized it was helping sales, not hurting them.¹

When Max Barry began writing his fourth novel that would become *Machine Man*, he invited all of his fans to join an email list and

he started sending out a new page of the book every day as he wrote it. Everybody who signed up got the entire first draft for free, and when the book was later published, these core readers were the first ones to buy a copy.

In my twelve years of experience working with authors, I've never come across a situation where sharing too much hurt the author. Sharing content freely and widely allows more and more people to be exposed to our work.

The benefits from sharing our content wide and far can be tremendous. Having worked with and studied hundreds of authors, here are a few of the common themes I've observed:

- The authors who give away the most valuable content build their following the fastest.
- Giving away our best work is a direct path to building better connections with readers.
- Making our content widely and freely available is the most consistent, sure-fire way of drawing attention to and building engagement with our platform.

As I shared all of this with Amy, I could tell she was feeling better about it. Her fear of sharing too much was waning.

"However," I said, "there definitely *is* something you should be afraid of."

"Oh no, what's that?"

"Nobody knowing who you are when your book comes out."

I shared with her the quote from Cory Doctorow from the introduction of this book—"Obscurity is hard to monetize."

"Instead of being afraid you will give too much away and nobody will buy your book," I said, "be afraid that when your book comes out, nobody will know who you are and won't buy your book."

"I got it," she said. "I'll keep on sharing my best stuff!"

1. Read more about this story and my thoughts on piracy at storygrid.com/1000.

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

Amy and John have both landed on their content strategies moving forward. Amy is going to scale back the quantity of the blog posts she has been publishing and, instead, focus on creating long-form, evergreen content. Whenever she posts something new, she'll send it out to her email list to drive initial traffic to the content.

John is going a different route. Since he wants to put the majority of his writing effort into his books, he's decided to start a podcast. He's partnering up with a local university professor to start a co-hosted show focused on discussions around science fiction books and movies. He's going to start with two episodes a month but is hoping to go up to weekly episodes if it's going well. Every time he publishes a new episode, he'll put it out as a podcast episode, post the transcript on his blog, and put a video up on YouTube. He'll also email his email list to let them know about the new content.

At this point, I want to back up and look at our blueprint again—the Connection System. The goal of content is to spread freely and widely so people know you are a good fit for them and then invite them to join your email list (permission).

Once we have that goal in mind, we can look in our toolbox and decide what is the right tool for us and our platform. Amy chose

blogging and John chose podcasting. However, those are far from the only tools available.

Chip and Dan Heath are *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling authors of six different books including *Made to Stick* and *Switch*. They do not have a regular blog, podcast, or any other means of regularly putting out content. They are not active on social media. They are self-described digital cavemen.

Even so, they have built a very large email list, which has contributed to their many bestselling book launches. How is this possible? In a word—resources. For each of their three books, they created bonus resources that help readers take the subject matter of the book to a deeper level. These resources—such as podcast episodes, PDF workbooks, audiobooks, and more—are all freely available on their website. But the only way you can access them is to sign up for their email list. Although this strategy doesn't involve putting out content on a schedule, it still fits within the framework of the Connection System because it is rooted in high quality content that motivates readers to give their permission to be contacted about even more excellent content in the future. Chip and Dan simply choose to use book-specific resources as the form of content instead of focusing on creating regular content. This strategy has been tremendously successful for them because that content is extremely helpful to their readers.

I've seen authors give books away to build their email list, develop free video games based on their books, release daily YouTube videos, or blog just once a month.

There is no one right way to do it for everyone, but there is a right way for you. Create content that bridges the gap between your email list and outreach (which we'll start on the next page).

PART IV

OUTREACH

THE MINDSET

We have reached the third and final piece of the Connection System. We've looked at permission—the way we get people's attention and drive action—and content, which we spread freely and widely so people will know we are a good fit for them.

If Amy and John were to stop there, as many authors do, their platform may grow, but it would do so extremely slowly. I've talked with many authors who set up a gorgeous website, sign up for an email list and set it up perfectly, and blog consistently for months or even years, only to be constantly frustrated by how little impact they have.

Without outreach—moving people from not knowing you exist to knowing you exist—everything will go slowly or stall completely.

In order for Amy's and John's work to start gaining real traction, they have to find a way to constantly introduce themselves and their content to new people.

In the seven years since I released the first edition of this book, I have continued working with authors one-on-one, spoken to authors at conferences and workshops, and trained thousands of authors online. Most of them get the permission and content pieces of the Connection System and make quick strides with them.

Outreach is where authors tend to falter.

There are a few reasons for this. First of all, it is the only part of the

Connection System that relies on other people. You can set up your permission and publish your content all by yourself, but outreach requires connecting with influencers—people who can get other people to buy your books—and working together with them.

It also involves rejection. Influencers will ignore you or turn down your proposals, and that hurts. Outreach exposes our work to more people, which means we face more criticism and the potential for negative feedback.

However, outreach is the source of both the greatest increase in book sales for my clients and me, and it's also created some of my best, longest-lasting friendships.

Outreach can take many forms, and we have many tools in our outreach toolbox. We can get interviewed on podcasts, blogs, radio, or television. Our books can be reviewed and recommended in various places. We can speak at live events or be a guest on a digital workshop. Our book could get picked for a reader's group of fifty people.

Any activity that moves people from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist is outreach.

Amy and John reacted in very different ways when I started talking about outreach.

Amy got it immediately. She has been doing outreach regularly on her own without thinking of it that way. She had appeared on a few podcasts and spoken regularly at conferences, so she rarely felt nervous about taking steps in this direction. Also, as a business consultant, it was often easier for her to do outreach because she shares tips and advice in a space that is used to receiving them.

In contrast, John immediately balked at the idea. He spent his adult life working in an office. He had never pitched anyone before, had never been interviewed before, and had never spoken in front of more than a couple dozen of his colleagues.

"I don't want to be annoying," he said. "These influencers are busy, and I don't want to spam their inbox begging them to promote my book. Why would they care about me anyway? I'm just some guy who wrote a self-published book. There's thousands of us!"

"I completely agree," I said.

"You do?"

“Of course! I don’t want you spamming people or begging either. That sounds awful.”

John was taken aback a bit. “So, what do I do?”

“Remember my definition of marketing?”

“Sure. Create long-lasting connections with people and then be relentlessly helpful and add value to their lives.”

“Exactly,” I said. “That applies to outreach too. We’re not going to bug or annoy people. We’re going to figure out how we can help them in the process of doing outreach. And that starts with empathy.”

Empathy is “the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of feelings, thoughts or attitudes of another.”¹

The most important part of that definition is the end: “of another.” Before we ever approach the idea of pitching an influencer on anything, we have to put ourselves in their shoes.

We also have to be careful of the kind of assumptions we make when doing outreach and always assume the best of people. Assumptions can be helpful or harmful. The good ones motivate us to think critically and act with empathy. The bad ones trick us into thinking rashly and acting selfishly. When we start reaching out to influencers, we have to keep our assumptions in check.

- Assume other people are busier than us.
- Assume everyone’s default behavior is to protect his or her time and workload, and that’s okay.
- Assume if they say “no,” it’s for a very good, legitimate reason.
- Assume if they ignore you, it’s for a very good, legitimate reason.

When we move into outreach mode, we must dispatch our right to be offended. We’re not always going to get the answer we want. People will turn us down or just ignore us from time to time. That’s part of how this works; that’s a part of life. When we don’t get a favorable response, we take a breath and move forward. Keep looking for ways to help other people. Success comes through persistence because everything

operates on the law of averages. We simply have to try enough times to produce the results we want.

When we begin reaching out to influencers, we keep the “long-lasting connections with people” part of the marketing definition in our mind.

“You can get everything you want in life if you just help enough other people get what they want in life.” Zig Ziglar, the famous motivational speaker and author, gave that advice throughout his legendary career. This statement exemplifies the idea behind using outreach efforts to *build relationships through empathy*. It’s the most powerful and effective approach possible. It’s also not an overnight solution.

So, before we proceed any further, we must ask ourselves this question: “Do I want to be someone who wrote a book once, or do I want to be someone with a writing career?”

Long-term career plans require long-term thinking. Writers with shortsighted attitudes fail to grasp this model, which is when you see people doing desperate, annoying actions. Thankfully our system of outreach takes the long-term view of creating long-lasting connections.

As I reviewed all of this with John, he started to come around.

“So you’re saying that everything we do in outreach is focused on helping the influencers, not just getting them to do stuff for us.”

“Exactly,” I said. “That’s the only way you can truly be successful anyway.”

“Okay. I don’t see how, but if that’s true, I can do it,” he said. “Where do I start?”

1. *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “empathy (n.),” accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/empathy>.

FIVE STEPS TO OUTREACH

When Amy and I began discussing outreach, she was ready to give herself an A+ and move on.

“I know how to do this. I’m a guest on podcasts regularly and I speak at conferences.”

“Right, that’s great,” I said. “But I can guarantee you’re missing out on some opportunities.”

“What do you mean?”

“Podcasts and conferences are two great tools for outreach. But they aren’t the only ways to accomplish it. If you’re already doing those but aren’t thinking more broadly, you’re going to miss things that come along.”

“Okay,” she said. “I can get on board with that. So how do I find the things that are missing?”

“Let’s back up and start from the beginning,” I said.

I then explained the five steps to outreach: Profile, Locate, Identify, Research, and Pitch.

Let’s go through each one.

I. Profile

Often called “ideal reader” or “persona,” the idea is to become

extremely clear on the type of person who is likely to be interested in reading our book. I encourage authors to come up with three to five different profiles of potential readers and be as detailed as possible. Here are some of the demographics I encourage authors to include: age, education, profession, income, marital status, number of children, where they live, hobbies, television/movies they enjoy, political leanings, and other lifestyle choices such as diet, exercise, clothing, transportation, etc.¹

When possible, think of an actual person you know who is an ideal reader and use them as a model for the demographics. Also, as you work through the three to five personas, try to make them as unique from each other as possible. It doesn't count as a second persona if it is basically a carbon copy of another one with one or two differences.

Once we know who we want to reach with our books, we can move on to the second step.

2. Locate

Where do our ideal readers gather—both in-person and online? What magazines do they read? What other authors do they read? What forums and groups do they belong to? What blogs do they read, and what podcasts do they listen to? What email newsletters do they subscribe to? What types of social media do they use? Which influencers do they follow on those platforms?

We are trying to create a long list of as many potential places to do outreach as possible. Any place where you can reach your potential readers goes on the list².

If you struggle to come up with these places, I encourage you to ask and interview ideal readers you know or can find online. Look for fans of books in your genre and see if you can interview them and ask the above questions. Use search engines extensively for this. Searches such as “podcasts about [your genre]” or “best books in [your genre]” can yield lists of potential outreach opportunities.

The goal in this step is to create as many potential opportunities as possible.

When John got to this step in the process, he ended up giving me a call.

“I can’t find many places that are a perfect fit for my post-apocalyptic, artificial intelligence science fiction novel.”

“Right,” I said. “The number of one hundred percent perfect fit outreach opportunities will be small. You’ll find some, but most of the time you’re going to have to take a shotgun approach.”

“What do you mean?”

I told him about releasing the first edition of this book, *Your First 1000 Copies*.

“I ran through the podcasts that were specifically about author marketing pretty quickly, so I ended up going on any podcast that talked about writing at all. Once I got through those, I appeared on entrepreneur podcasts. I knew a lot of entrepreneurs wanted to write and launch a book, so, even though it was a much smaller percentage of the listenership than the podcasts focused on book marketing, I knew I would still reach potential readers.”

I encouraged John to think more broadly.

“The site or podcast doesn’t have to be about post-apocalyptic, artificial intelligence science fiction specifically. It can be about science fiction more broadly. It can also be about science and you could talk about what you’ve learned by doing the podcast with the university professor.”

“Ah, okay. So the audience doesn’t have to be a perfect fit for my ideal reader.”

“Exactly. You want to find any audience you think will have at least some people who fit your ideal reader.”

“Wow, okay. So that could become a really long list.”

“That’s the idea.”

Now, of course, if John or Amy do find an audience that is the perfect fit for their genre—like book marketing podcasts for me—they would definitely want to focus on those opportunities. However, thinking broadly opens up way more possibilities.

I have been featured on outlets about everything from entrepreneurship and mental health to crocheting enthusiasts. They always lead to more book sales *and* more outreach opportunities.

As we make a list of these possible opportunities, keep them in a rough order from most relevant to least relevant. We also want to get a rough idea of how big the potential audience is for each outlet. It's often hard to pinpoint these numbers as the outlets don't usually make their traffic and download numbers available publicly, but we can look for clues such as the social media following numbers, comments on blog posts, etc., for the outlets.

We don't have to be perfect. We just want to have the biggest, most relevant potential outlets at the top and the smaller, less relevant ones at the bottom.

Now that we have our list of potential outreach opportunities organized, we can move on to step three.

3. Identify

For every potential outlet, someone plays the role of gatekeeper. This is the influencer—a person who can get other people to buy your book.

For the vast majority of outlets on our lists, the gatekeeper will be immediately obvious. It's the podcast host, blogger, Instagram account owner, show producer, magazine editor, newsletter owner, conference organizer, etc. For some outlets, multiple people are in charge or the information is obscured somehow. For instance, if a podcast is particularly popular, the host may delegate finding guests to a producer who isn't named or readily identifiable. You may have to get creative in finding contact points in these rare cases.

However, in most cases, it will be clear who we need to talk to in order to gain access to the influencer's platform.

We will pitch this person in step five. There always will be a gatekeeper we will have to convince to gain access to their platform—if we want to write a guest blog post, speak at the workshop, etc. It's important to find out who this person is at the beginning so we can keep them in mind during step four of the process.

4. Research

This is the most important part of the process and one that will set you apart from the vast majority of people pitching to influencers. This will even set you apart from most of the professional publicists hired by authors to do this on their behalf.

The vast majority of outreach pitches are vague, broad emails that have obviously been copy and pasted over and over to dozens or hundreds of outlets. Many of them even start with “Dear sir/madam” or something similar.

By doing a little research before pitching, you will give yourself a much better chance of success.

During the research phase, we need to do a thorough review of the influencer’s platform to identify the best way to pitch ourselves and/or our book. We want to read the last dozen blog posts or listen to the last few podcast episodes. Then scan back even further to see who has been a guest before, how often they review books, and how they like to interact with books and authors. Look at the past lineup of speakers at a conference and their topics. Subscribe to the email newsletter and pay attention to the content they send you for a few weeks. Scroll through their social media history paying attention to the kind of content they regularly publish. Look for anything specific about books, but also look at the kind of guests they have and the type of content they like to share.

As I talked Amy through this process, she brought up a particularly popular blog where she wanted to have her book mentioned.

“Okay, let’s pull up the blog right now.”

She opened her laptop and navigated to the blog, and we began reviewing the archive of blog posts. Pretty quickly, we saw that over the previous six months the blogger had talked about three different books. On each of those occasions, the blogger included a remote video interview with the author in the blog post about the book.

“This is perfect,” I said. “We now know that whenever he talks about a book, he likes to do an interview along with it. We’ll include that in the pitch.”

We’ll go over crafting the pitch in the next section, but when Amy reached out to the blogger, she included a line that said, “And I saw that you like to do interviews with authors when you post about their books.

I'm more than happy to do this with you and can make my schedule work with yours.”

When the blogger responded, he pointed out that he gets pitches on a daily basis and hers was the first that seemed like she had actually read his blog. He ended up interviewing Amy and recommending her book on his popular blog.

Research accomplishes two other very important tasks in outreach.

First, we often find win-win opportunities. As I promised John, our outreach efforts are going to fit my definition of marketing. When we do research, we often find ways we can help the influencer while promoting our book as well.

The most obvious example is appearing on an interview-based podcast. These podcasts run on having interesting guests, and by us going on the show to discuss our work and our book, we are helping out the podcaster. It's one less slot they have to fill!

However, these opportunities are endless. Every conference organizer is looking for engaging speakers. Every blogger is looking for useful and entertaining content. Every magazine and newspaper has a quota and deadline for content they must hit. By writing an article, being a guest speaker or being available for an interview, we are solving a problem for the influencer.

The second task our research accomplishes is finding out how to make the pitch an easy *yes*. We want to find what the influencer is already doing and see how we can fit ourselves into that. Again, the interview-based podcast is a good example of this, but so is Amy's example above. She found what the blogger was *already doing* (posts with interviews) and offered to be a part of that.

The more we can fit into what the influencer is already doing with their platform, the more likely they are to say yes.

Taking time to research the outlets we want to pitch sets us apart from the vast majority of authors and will help get more influencers to agree to help promote our book. It also allows us to be more helpful in providing content that works best for them. The more we approach it this way (being relentlessly helpful), the more we will not only gain more opportunities to promote our book, but also we will be beloved by the influencer because we are making their life easier.

5. Pitch

Now the time has come to make the pitch. This is where all of the work up until now comes together. We have to send out the actual ask.

In most cases, I try to do this via email. I can usually track down the email address of the person I'm trying to reach on their website. If I can't find an email address, I'll often try messaging them directly on social media. Some outlets have specific instructions on how to reach out to them about being a guest.

The message we send needs to be short and direct. Make it around a half-dozen sentences and easy to read quickly. The longer the email, the more likely it will be ignored.

Here is the template I use with authors.



Hi [INFLUENCER NAME],

The Salutation. This is the easy part.



*My name is [OUR NAME] and I'm the author of [OUR BOOK TITLE].
[SOCIAL PROOF].*

This is where we give a short introduction of ourselves. If we don't have a book out yet, add "the upcoming title" before the book title. Social proof is one way to stand apart. Add something about the outlets where we have been featured, awards we've won with our writing, our bestseller status, or anything else that sets us apart. If we literally have nothing, we will just leave this part off.



*I'm a fan of your [BLOG, PODCAST, NEWSLETTER, ETC.] and
particularly enjoyed [FILL IN WITH YOUR RESEARCH].*

This is where our research shines. Point out something we found during our research that we enjoyed. Perhaps it was a point made in a recent blog post or a useful insight gained from a recent podcast guest. Make it as specific as possible. We want to show they aren't just another name on our PR hit list.

This is our chance to show our human side during the pitch. We can always find something we truly appreciated about their work. Add that here.



I noticed you usually [HOW THEY TALK ABOUT BOOKS OR AUTHORS] and I think I would be a good fit for your [READERS, LISTENERS, ETC.]. [EXPLAIN WHY WE ARE A GOOD FIT].

More research shows through here. This is where we try to align ourselves with what they are already doing. In Amy's example, she might write, "I noticed you usually record video interviews with authors when you write about their books." At the very least, we can say we noticed the influencer is interested in books in our genre.

Then end by explaining how we are a good fit for their audience. We want to let them know we've thought through what we're bringing to the table for their readers and listeners.



*Let me know what you think.
Thanks!
[YOUR NAME]*

Finally, you sign off.



I have used this template for years and it works very well, but it is merely a template. We will need to adjust it to our own outreach as we

make progress. What I want to share here, more than anything else, are the components and length of a typical pitch email.³

Thinking back to our discussion of empathy, with these pitches we put ourselves in the influencer's shoes and consider what they would be looking for. We want to provide something of value for them and their fans. In the process, we will get to move their fans from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist.

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1. You can download the spreadsheet I use for this at storygrid.com/1000.
 2. You can download the spreadsheet I use for outreach at storygrid.com/1000.
 3. I share more examples of pitch emails at storygrid.com/1000.

PROCESSING THE RESPONSE

Once I had Amy go through the first two parts of the process, she gave me a call.

“You were right!” she said. “I thought of so many other places where I can promote my next book. Some of them were even friends of mine I just hadn’t thought of.”

It’s easy for all of us to get stuck in a patterned way of thinking. We get focused on one way of doing something, and it’s hard to break out of it. This is why for outreach the definition is focused on the actual goal—moving people from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist.

When I talked to John next, he was kind of freaking out.

“Okay, I did everything you told me to do,” he said. “But I haven’t heard back from anyone.”

“How many pitches did you send?”

“Three.”

“Great, and how long has it been?”

“Two days. Should I follow up? Do you think they just hate my pitch? What do I do now?”

“This part of outreach is the hardest,” I said. “You’ve done all the work you can do, and you’ve sent the pitches. Now it’s in someone else’s hands. You have to wait and see what happens.”

“Well, there’s only two ways they can respond right?” he asked.

“Actually,” I answered, “there’s three.”

Yes.

This, of course, is the best response. Sometimes I’ve gotten a *yes* within minutes of sending the pitch. If the influencer responds this way, you’re in and you just have to follow through (which we’ll cover shortly).

No.

This is actually the rarest response. The influencer will respond with some version of *no thank you*. They usually let you know the reason, and most of the time it has nothing to do with you or your book.

It’s important to remember our assumptions from earlier in this chapter, (if they say no, it’s for a legitimate reason) and not take it personally. Later in this chapter I’ll show you how to turn a *no* into more opportunities.

No response.

This is the most common response. It’s also the most frustrating. The influencer never replies. At least if they say no, we can cross them off our list and move on with our life.

“I hadn’t even thought of that,” John said. “But it makes sense. People don’t usually like to give bad news, so instead of saying *no* they just don’t respond.”

“Well, it doesn’t automatically mean they would say no. Influencers are busy and get lots of email. Sometimes they miss the email, or they want to come back to it but forget.”

“So what do I do? Should I follow up?”

“Yes,” I said. “Wait seven days and then go back to the original email in your sent folder and click reply. This will put that RE: in the subject line and be more likely to get their attention. Also, it keeps you from retyping your original pitch.

After you click reply, add something like ‘Hey [FIRST NAME], I just wanted to follow up on this ...’ and send it again.”

“Okay, I can do that. What if they don’t reply to that one? How many follow-ups should I send?”

“I recommend at least three, but you can do more. I have a friend who followed up with an influencer every week for six months and finally got a *yes*.”

“I don’t think I can do that,” John said, laughing.

“Yeah, most people—including me—don’t have the stomach for that, but do you think you could do three?”

“Sure, I can do that.”

“So follow up three times and then mark them off your list.”

“Got it, but —” John trailed off.

“You there?”

“Yeah, hold on a sec.”

Silence hung for a few seconds.

“Oh man!” John said. “I was just checking my email as we talked and one of the podcasts I pitched just responded. They want to have me on!”

“That’s great, John!” I said.

Silence again.

“John? You okay?”

“Now I’m nervous. I didn’t actually think about what to do if someone actually said yes. I’ve never been interviewed before. What if I say something stupid or don’t know the answer to a question? And how do I make sure listeners actually buy my book or get on my email list?”

He was starting to freak out a little bit.

“And this email,” John continued, “is asking for stuff like my bio and headshot. Should I already have those?”

“It’s okay, John. You’ll be fine,” I said. “I’ll walk you through all of this.”

LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES

Once we get a *yes* to one of our outreach efforts, everything shifts. We now have an opportunity to access the influencer's fan base and introduce ourselves to them for the first time.

We focus first on being the best guest we can. Whether we are being interviewed on a podcast as John is, writing a guest post, speaking at a conference, participating in a book bundle promotion, or any of the other myriad of ways of doing outreach, we go back to our empathy thought processes.

How can we continue to help the influencer get what they want out of the world?

The first way to do this is to be very conscious of the influencer's time. How can we make sure having us on their platform takes as little of their time as possible?

First, I recommend setting up a media kit. This can be as simple as a page on your website. The goal is to put everything an influencer could possibly need in one place for them to access. This includes your headshots, book cover images, bio, book description, and contact details. You can also include potential interview questions along with links to your website, books, and social media profiles.

Inevitably, we get emails asking for some of these things and when we respond with a link to a media kit on our website that has

everything they need, they will be thrilled and it will make their life much easier.

Additionally, make sure we are prompt with our delivery. If it's an interview, show up ten minutes early. If it's a remote interview, make sure your microphone is working properly. If we are writing a guest post or delivering content for their newsletter, get it done quickly and turn it in before they need it. If we are speaking at a conference, send them the slides early and show up practiced and ready to go. The last thing we want is for them to be waiting on us.

Finally, be the best guest possible. If you write a guest blog post, reply to any comments that come in. If you speak, stay after to answer questions and talk to people in the crowd. We must go out of our way to be the best guest on their platform as possible. We want them to invite us back and refer us to their friends. (More on that shortly.)

I also want to address John's concern about saying something stupid in the interview. This is a concern we will all have no matter what kind of outreach we are doing. We will worry that people hate our blog post or think our talk is stupid.

First of all, remember that everybody in this scenario wants it to go well. We, of course, want it to go well, but so does the influencer. They want us to be a great guest. The readers and listeners want the same thing. In most cases, simply doing our best is plenty. In the rare case that something goes wrong, take a deep breath and move past it. It won't be career ending or overly embarrassing.

I've made mistakes in live talks, not known the answer to questions asked in live interviews, and made just about all the mistakes you can make. I simply take a deep breath, admit what happened, and then move on. If I don't know the answer to a question, I just say I don't know. If I mess up in a talk, I just back up and start where I left off. If we stay calm, so will everyone else.

Now that we have focused on being the best guest we possibly can, we have to think through *our* goals for outreach as well. We aren't just doing all of this work out of the goodness of our hearts. We are hoping the outreach opportunities turn into email subscribers and book buyers for us, but how do we do that?

Thankfully, a lot of the work we've done in early chapters has set us up for success.

In every case of outreach, we will get an opportunity to invite people back to our platform. Most interviews will end with some form of the influencer asking, "So where can people find out more about you?" When we write content for people's blog and newsletters, we can embed an invitation to our email list. If we speak at a workshop or conference, we can reference the free giveaway people get when they sign up for our email list.

Since we already have amazing content on our website that leads to our email list, that's where we should start.

John promotes his podcast along with the email list giveaway he created for the "Top 100 Sci-fi Novels of All Time." Amy promotes her free videos series and invites people to access it through her website.

Many authors who do outreach without having thought through permission and content will give a vague answer like "Check out my books." However, since we have done so much work already to get our Connection System working, we are ready with a clear, compelling invitation.

As we do more outreach and get more opportunities, this will all become easier. The butterflies will subside, and the nervousness will (mostly) go away. Also, since we only have to set up our giveaway and media kit once, it won't require a ton of work every time an opportunity comes our way.

I will say, it's often hard to get things going in the beginning. Sometimes we have to send a dozen or more pitches before hearing our first *yes*. However, I've learned that momentum around outreach works like a flywheel. It's hard to get it started, but once it's rolling, it's much easier to keep it going.

Several years ago I learned a method for turning one opportunity into almost unlimited opportunities. It can even turn those "no" responses from influencers into more opportunities. It's just one simple follow-up question.

ASK FOR REFERRALS

For Amy, getting serious about outreach was straightforward. She already had many of the connections she needed with influencers but just had to get clear on seeing the opportunities and structuring win-wins in different ways. Once she started, things picked up fast for her.

For John, it was a different story. He was brand new to the space, had no previous connections to influencers, and was starting from scratch. When he got that first podcast interview, it seemed like things were going to be easy for him. He set a date with the podcaster for a month in the future and I encouraged him to keep doing outreach in the meantime.

After a couple of weeks, we touched base again and he was feeling pretty down.

“I’ve really been focusing on this,” he said. “I’m sending out at least two pitches every day and haven’t gotten another *yes*. I’ve had a couple of people respond and say no, but the rest just haven’t answered.”

“Yeah, unfortunately that’s often the way it goes in the beginning,” I said. “All of your pitches are to cold leads—nobody knows you or your work—so it’s a numbers game. You just have to keep going and know most of them will be dead ends.”

“Okay. I can do that for now, but how do I start getting warm leads?”

“There’s a really simple way to do this,” I said. “And it can even turn some of those ‘no’ answers into wins as well.”

“Well lay it on me,” he said.

“It’s all about referrals.”

I’ve been in the publishing space for over a decade. In that time I’ve connected with editors, agents, authors, publicists, designers, and people from every part of the industry. If I need a resource or a connection I don’t already have, it’s usually as simple as asking for a referral from someone I already know.

The same works in the author outreach space. The more we meet people and work with them, the easier it is to get introduced to and work with other people.

However, we don’t have to wait for this to happen organically. We can start making it happen right away.

Most of the time, influencers know many other influencers in their space. If someone runs a popular blog in the science fiction space, they also know many other podcasters, bloggers, writers, forum moderators, etc., in the science fiction space.

All we need to do is ask a simple question to gain access to their network.

If an influencer we pitch responds with a *no*, reply with this email:



Hey [FIRST NAME],

Thanks so much for getting back to me! I appreciate you taking the time to respond and I completely understand.

Quick question ... based on what I sent you, could you suggest two to three other [BLOGS, PODCASTS, AUTHORS, ETC.] you think would be a better fit?

Let me know what you think.

Thanks!

[YOUR NAME]



While not everyone will respond to this, some will respond with a handful of names. Now we have our warm leads!

Let's say we reach out to Podcaster A, and he responds and says they are booked up for the next six months so he isn't taking on new guests. First, we add a reminder to our calendar to follow up with him in six months. Second, we send him the email above.

He responds and says that Podcaster B and Podcaster C might be interested in having us as a guest.

Now, we reach out to Podcaster B and use the previous outreach template but with one crucial difference.

This was the opening line of the previous referral email:

*My name is [OUR NAME] and I'm the author of [OUR BOOK TITLE].
[SOCIAL PROOF].*

Now, we write this:

My name is [OUR NAME] and I'm the author of [OUR BOOK TITLE]. I was recently emailing with Podcaster A, and he said you might be interested in talking with me.



Instead of using social proof to get the attention of Podcasters B and C, we use a mutual contact. This turns us from a cold lead—Podcaster B has never heard of us or our work—into a warm lead—we were sent by a mutual acquaintance.

This one small shift will greatly increase the number of *yes* responses we get.

“Every single time an influencer responds with a *no*,” I said to John, “reply and ask them for referrals. Also, do this with every single *yes* you get. After your guest blog post is published, your book bundle

promotion is over or you speak at a conference, follow up with the influencer and ask for referrals.”

“Okay,” John said. “So after I do this interview in a month and he releases it, I follow up and ask for referrals?”

“Exactly. He may give you three names, and since they are warm leads, you will probably get two *yes* answers. Then after you do that outreach, you ask each of them for referrals, which will turn into four *yes* answers.”

John laughed.

“That sounds like exponential growth.”

“It really is. Before long, you will have more opportunities than you can take advantage of, and you can be pickier, focusing on the bigger audiences. Combine this with continuing to do cold outreach with new outlets, and you’ll have that flywheel spinning at hyper speed before long.”

“That sounds pretty amazing,” he said. “Is it really that easy?”

“Not always. Sometimes it moves slower for some authors and faster for others. Plus, since this is the first time you’ve done anything like this, you’ll get better at it over time. But, yes, this is something that will definitely happen if you stick with it.

“As an added bonus, the more outreach you do, the more people will hear about you and the more influencers will start reaching out to you instead of the other way around.”

John laughed again.

“Sounds good to me!”

CONNECTING WITH AUTHORS

I was excited for Amy and John. They were both making progress with their outreach. Although it was going faster for Amy since she was already established in her industry, John was making early progress as well.

I wanted to talk to them about another side to outreach, though, so I got Amy on the phone.

“Remember the first part of our definition of marketing?” I asked.

“Yes of course. Create long-lasting connections with people.”

“Right. The way you’ve been approaching outreach will do that. The podcasters, bloggers, and other authors you’ve met along the way will be people you can stay connected with for a long time. However, another approach to outreach is just as important but much harder to quantify.”

“What’s that?”

I explained to her that one of the most powerful, long-term activities every author should be doing to establish and grow their writing career is to become friends with other authors in their space. One of my favorite things about the publishing world is how collaborative it is. Authors tend to want to help each other succeed and understand they aren’t in competition with each other.

Early on when I began working with authors, I was surprised by how many of them knew each other. Then I started noticing there were circles of these authors. Often six to ten authors knew each other well and helped each other a lot. These circles would overlap with other circles because they would meet other authors along the way.

Then, when one of these authors had a new title come out, all of their circles would activate to help promote the book.

I also noticed, it was hard—not impossible, but hard—for new authors to break into these circles.

One time I had a conversation that really opened my eyes about this with one of these authors. He was a multi-time *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author. I mentioned how I noticed he was friends with several other bestselling authors and that they all helped promote each other's new books. I also mentioned that it seemed like it was hard for new authors to break into their circles.

“That’s because we all became friends when we were nobodies,” he said. “When I started out, I tried to meet as many authors as I could who were writing in my genre or a related one. I didn’t care if they were successful or not. In fact, I tried to connect with the ones who *weren’t* successful yet, but whose writing I respected. I knew they were more likely to return my email or phone call. Then, once I met them, I tried to be the most helpful person I could be to each of them. I would connect them to a source for their book, introduce them to my agent or even help them with their website. They would do the same for me. Now that we’ve all had some success, we continue to help each other, but we also know that new authors who come knocking just want to ride our coattails. Which is fine. I get it, but I don’t trust them the way I trust the ones who were friends with me before I found success when I was a nobody.”

One of the most powerful long-term things we can do for our writing career is to connect with other authors in our space. I often encourage authors to go to conferences where other writers in their genre will be and host meetups. I started doing this years ago. I would attend a conference, pick a bar an easy walking distance from the venue, and tell any author or person in publishing that I would buy their first drink if they showed up at a certain time. Many of the authors

I'm still friends with today I met at these conferences years ago when we were nobodies. Many of them have gone on to start businesses, write bestsellers, host popular podcasts, and so on. However, since we met so early and I was always trying to be helpful, they are still willing to help me out in any way I need.

When I spoke to John about this, he got a bit nervous.

"I guess I could go to some conferences," he said, "but I can't really travel much right now."

"That's fine. You can just do it remotely."

"So what? I just start emailing authors and asking if they want to be friends? Isn't that weird? And won't they see it as just me trying to buddy up to them to get their help? It feels kind of slimy."

"No, I get it. And if you do it just so they'll help out your author career in some way, that *is* slimy. But you have to remember, these are other authors. They write the kinds of books you like to read and write. You're not going into this with any short-term, quid-pro-quo agenda. You're just trying to make friends with people who nerd out about the same things you are a nerd about."

John laughed.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense."

"I encourage you to join some online writers' groups. You can do this via social media and other forums. Get involved in the discussions, ask questions, and be helpful where you can. Now that you know all this marketing stuff, you can help a lot of them with that. Also, look at the books on Amazon that you like that aren't written by big-time A-listers. You can just reach out to them and be straightforward. Say something like, 'Hey, I like your writing and I have this podcast and book. Maybe we can jump on the phone sometime. I'd love to hear about your work.'"

"Oh, that doesn't sound bad. I can do that."

"Right. You're just trying to make new friends, that's all. It's like when you get a new job. You want to get to know people in the office. Sure, it will help your advancement in the company, but it's also nice to be friends with the people you work with. This is the same. You just have to be more purposeful because you won't bump into each other in the break room."

For me, this is the most fulfilling part of the process. When I look back on my decade-plus in the industry, my favorite part is getting to know all the amazing people I've met along the way. Many of them are my dearest friends, and they are also quick to help me when I'm working on a new project.

HIERARCHY OF THE ASK

Amy and I hadn't talked for a couple of months. She was sending me weekly updates with the number of new email subscribers, links to new content, and outlining the status of her outreach efforts. Everything was moving along, and she seemed to be getting a rhythm to it.

Then she gave me a call.

"Something really cool happened," she said. "At least I think it's cool, but I'm not really sure if it will turn into anything."

"Okay," I said. "Lay it on me."

A couple of weeks prior, Amy had been speaking at a conference and, while hanging out in the green room, a very famous actor-turned-entrepreneur came into the room. He was trying to duck the crowds before he went on to speak later in the day so decided to hide out in the green room.

Amy worked up the nerve to start a conversation and they hit it off. He asked about her upcoming book, and Amy gave him one of the early release copies she had with her. She also tucked her business card inside the front flap.

Then, this past weekend, he emailed her thanking her for the book, expressing how much he enjoyed the read, and telling Amy if she ever needed anything to let him know.

“This seems like a really good opportunity,” she said, “but I’m not sure what to do next.”

“Have you looked him up? Does he have any kind of blog or email list?” I asked.

“I did look him up, but I can’t find much. His company has a website and blog, but he isn’t active on it and it doesn’t seem like it gets many readers. He has a personal website, but all it does is link to his social media profiles. There’s no email newsletter or anything.”

“Okay, so there’s a hierarchy of things to ask for,” I said. “With people like him, you usually get only one ask. He’s not a friend you can get to promote every book that comes out.”

“Right,” she said, “and I don’t even know how I would want him to promote the book. He doesn’t have a blog or email newsletter or anything. He has a decent Twitter following, but I know that won’t get me much.”¹

Amy is right. It seems like she has a huge opportunity, but it’s hard to know how to take advantage of it. I’ve run into this problem myself and with my clients many times over the years, and a hierarchy of asks has emerged. Anytime I get an outreach opportunity where the influencer has offered to do “anything we need,” this is the decision process I go through:

1. Email newsletter + personal endorsement. If the influencer has an email newsletter and is willing to give a personal endorsement, this is what I will ask for. As we’ve seen, an email newsletter gets the most engagement of any other form of permission. Also, a personal endorsement from the influencer will sell more books than us promoting our own book directly.
2. Email newsletter. If the influencer isn’t willing to give a personal endorsement or that is too much of an ask, I try to provide content that will go out in the email newsletter. This could be a book excerpt or my book description copy.
3. Blog or podcast + personal endorsement. If the influencer doesn’t have an email newsletter or would rather not give us

- access, the influencer personally endorsing our book in a blog post or podcast episode is the best avenue.
4. Blog or podcast. This method happens most often. This is also the process I walked through earlier in the chapter. The influencer gives us access to write a guest blog post or has us on as a guest for their podcast. This is where we get to share about our book ourselves.
 5. Endorsement only. In many cases, someone is independently famous but does not have direct access to their audience. This is often the case with politicians, movie stars, and other celebrities. This is the situation Amy finds herself in here. The person she met is a well-known personality but doesn't have direct access to his fans. The best thing to do in these cases is to ask for an endorsement of your book (a blurb) that you can use as social proof in the marketing. We can put it on the cover of the book, on our website, on our Amazon book page, etc. This allows us to use the influencer's name to promote our book.
 6. Social media endorsement. This is the last resort. If the above five options are off the table, asking for an influencer to share something through social media is what we can ask for. It's easy for the influencer to do, so it's easy to ask for, but it won't get a lot of traction. However, it's better than nothing.

I walked Amy through this process, and she got it immediately.

"So I ask for a blurb for my the new book," she said.

"Right. Then you have something you can use in all of the marketing you're doing for the book and it will help convert sales."

"That's great," she said. "I think he'd do that."

For most outreach opportunities, what we should ask for is clear. Whenever we get stuck, come back to this hierarchy to make sure you choose the best option.

1. I've got a very telling story about Twitter promotion at storygrid.com/1000.

KEEP IT GOING

As Amy and John continue their outreach activities in the future, it will be important for them to keep their eyes open for interesting opportunities. While John may start with the goal of getting interviewed on podcasts, as he meets more influencers and receives more referrals, he'll get unique opportunities. It's the same for Amy. She will start with speaking opportunities but continue meeting people who have large newsletters or an online business book reader's group.

It's important to remember that anything that moves people from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist is outreach. We're always looking for opportunities to create win-win scenarios with influencers that expose ourselves and our books to their audience while being relentlessly helpful and adding value to their lives.

PART V

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

WHERE WE STAND

John and Amy have come a long way at this point.

Amy has fixed up her website to focus on her email list, and once she added the three-part videos series, a lot more people subscribed to her email list.

She also gained clarity on her content strategy. Instead of being stressed all the time cranking out short, timely blog posts, she's scaled back and focused on creating long-form, in-depth evergreen content. These articles are shared more often, and her readers enjoy the change. It also gives her great content to send to her email list on a regular basis. Finally, her website analytics indicate that she's getting more traffic from search engines as these articles are ranking higher.

Her outreach really started taking off as well. She's widened her view of outreach from speaking at conferences and getting interviewed to anything that puts her in front of new audiences. Once she looked through her current contacts with this new focus, she found opportunities to be featured in newsletters, speak at virtual workshops, and do other things that she was missing before.

These combined efforts are helping her build her email list in anticipation of the launch of her next book. An unexpected bonus is she's seen her sales ranking for her previous two books go up as more people are finding out about her.

Even though John's email list isn't nearly as big and his outreach isn't moving as quickly yet, he's made the biggest gain in progress. When we started talking, he didn't have anything except an almost-finished manuscript. Now, he has set up a small website and started his email list. He's invited his friends, family, and social media connections to join his list and that got him his first few hundred email subscribers.

He also got his university professor on board, and they've recorded their first nine episodes of the podcast. He's released four of them so far. He sent the podcast episodes to his email list and also reached out to some other science fiction podcasters to tell them about the new show. Several of them replied to congratulate him and promised to give it a listen.

While his email list isn't blowing up, not a day goes by that he doesn't get a new subscriber, and one day last week he got thirteen new subscribers in one day without doing anything new. He also went back to the second email in his automated series and added a link to his new podcast so any new subscribers would get introduced to his show.

He was a guest on his first podcast recently and the interview went well. He said once they got started, it was pretty fun and most of his nerves went away. The podcast episode came out, and while there wasn't a huge spike in email subscribers, it was nice to get his first outreach opportunity under his belt.

He followed up with the podcaster and asked for referrals and has already booked an interview with one of the people recommended. He's also continued his cold outreach efforts and secured a guest blog post on a popular science fiction and fantasy blog. A popular YouTube book reviewer is reading an early copy of his book so he can use it in a future episode.

As you can see, the Connection System is working differently for John and Amy, just as it works differently for me and all my clients. It's an organic system more than a mechanical, rigid system.

This system starts feeding itself as well. Outreach moves people from not knowing we exist to knowing we exist, which introduces them to the content that lets them know we are a good fit for them. Then we get permission, which allows us to create a long-lasting connection that gets their attention and drives action. As more people enter each part of

this system, more opportunities start bubbling up, more people get connected to what we are doing, and it gets shared more often out in the world.

This system also takes a bit of work to get going, but once it's rolling, it shouldn't take a huge amount of time.

Amy had to make some changes to her website and start working out how she would do content, but once that was done, all she has to do is keep creating content and do a little bit of outreach every week.

John had a ton of work on the front end. He had to build a website, set up all the email marketing, figure out how to produce a podcast, find a transcription service, and go through the slog of creating his first outreach connections.

However, now that all of that is done, his job turns into recording new podcast episodes and doing a little bit of outreach every month.

Our Connection System shouldn't be a whole new part-time job. It should be a straight-forward process that takes fewer than ten hours a month.

LOST? START HERE

At this point, we've gone through the whole Connection System, but it's a lot. You may be wondering where to start. I can't be there to walk you through your own specific plan, so how do you get started?

If you are stuck with what to do for your author platform, I want to give you a very specific plan to get started.

I am assuming with this plan that you at least have both a website and email list set up. If not, visit storygrid.com/1000 for my step-by-step walkthroughs.

Once you have that up and running, here is how to build your author platform with the Connection System.

Pick a book you have read that is a) in your genre, b) by an author that is active online but not an A-lister, and c) you enjoyed reading. You want to pick a book in your genre so you're attracting the right kind of readers. You are going to try to connect with the author of the book so it's important they are alive and somewhat active online, but not a big time A-list author who probably won't respond. Lastly, you need a book you enjoyed because, as you'll see, the system I'm laying out won't work otherwise.

Now, create and publish an in-depth review of the book. If you're not sure the modality you want to use, I recommend sharing it as a blog

post. This system will work with audio and video as well, but I'll use a blog for this walkthrough.

In the review, you want to include two things.

First is an email signup. This is the same form we created in the permission chapter.

Second, include something promoting your book. Use this template:



If you enjoy books like [THE BOOK WE JUST REVIEWED], you will enjoy my [NEW / UPCOMING] title [THE TITLE OF YOUR LATEST BOOK].



Include a cover image and links to where people can buy your book.

You can put both of these on the sidebar of your blog or at the bottom of the content.

Once you publish the book review and include the email signup form and promotion of our own book, you're going to do three things with the content.

First, send your email list a link to the blog post. Encourage them to read the post and share via social media.

Second, post the link on your social media outlets and tag the author of the book. A Twitter post could use the template:



Check out my review of [TITLE OF THE BOOK] by [@THEAUTHOR]. I really enjoyed this new science fiction title and think you will too. [INCLUDE SOMETHING SPECIFIC ABOUT THE BOOK WE LIKED]. [LINK TO THE REVIEW]



Third, email the author letting them know how much you enjoyed the book. Thank them for writing it and include a link to your review.

At this point, a couple different things, or nothing at all, might happen. In a perfect scenario, the author shares our review with their audience on their social media or newsletter. This will send their fans back to our blog post. Plus, they will be the right kind of fans since they read books in the same genre as our own.

Additionally, in this perfect scenario, the author responds to our email and we strike up a correspondence and friendship based on our choice to be helpful to the author by promoting their book.

Even if the author never responds to our social media or email, we have created new content for our fans that will also be found in search engines and may start bringing in new readers in the future.

I recommend doing this at least once a month. I recommend following this schedule: send an email to your list on the first and third Tuesday every month at 2:00 p.m. in your time zone.¹

The first Tuesday of the month, publish the book review and do everything outlined above including sending it to your email list.

On the third Tuesday of the month, send an author update to your email list. It's important to remember that people on your email list are fans of yours. Each month give them an update on where you are with your latest book project, share links to outreach you've done such as interviews and guest posts, along with books you're currently reading.

Lastly, every week do two outreach activities. This could be as simple as sending pitches, following up on referrals, doing an interview, etc. It's far better to do two things every week than to get really excited because we read this book, spend twenty hours one week doing a ton, and getting burned out. Instead, get into the habit of doing two things a week.

That's it. If you don't know where to start, this is the plan. Also, if we look back over this plan, we will notice two things.

First, it incorporates every part of the Connection System. You're putting out blog posts (content) that will attract the type of readers who will be interested in your books. In each of these blog posts, you're inviting people to join your email list (permission) and buy your books. You're also connecting with the authors of these books (outreach) and

being helpful first while also doing two other outreach activities every week. Finally, you're sending out content twice a month to your fan base to keep them engaged with your work.

Second, all of this will take approximately nine hours a month to do. Writing and publishing the book review will take less than two hours. Posting it on social media and emailing the author is another fifteen minutes. Sending out the first email to your email list with the link to the book review will take fifteen minutes. Writing and sending the second email will take thirty minutes. Finally, doing two outreach activities a week will take about an hour and a half. For each of these activities I rounded up generously on the amount of time it will actually take, and it still only came to nine hours a month.

However, if we do this for a year, we will have:

- 12 new pieces of content on our blog.
- 12 new opportunities to connect with other authors in our space.
- 24 emails filled with interesting content sent to our email list.
- 104 outreach activities completed.

This is how authors start building an author platform that will support their entire writing career. Drip, drip, drip. A little at a time adds up over a long period of time.

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1. There is no magic to this timing, but if I don't offer an exact time, I inevitably get this question. It truly doesn't matter.

LITMUS TESTS

At this phase of the journey it was time for me to stop having regular check-ins with Amy and John and let them work for a while. As a consultant I tend to want to give all my clients more things to do, but for now it was important for them to stick with the plan.

I encouraged them both to keep their schedule of publishing new content, emailing their list, and twice-a-week outreach activities for at least six months. Too many times once the fun and newness of everything wears off after a month or two and we aren't seeing huge results, we want to give up or switch stuff around. However, it takes a while to see how things are working so I schedule calls with both of them six months after they got everything up and running.

With Amy, it was pretty much all good news.

"I love it," she said. "I'm not driving myself crazy trying to churn out tons of content every day, and my readers seem to really enjoy the evergreen content I've been creating. It's also freed me up to do more outreach, which has been working well. I reached out to several of the people I met with the first two books and reconnected with them. Most of them are excited to help me promote the next book."

"That's great," I said. "Let me check on a few things. First, how are your email subscriptions? Is it going up at a pace you're happy with?"

“Yeah. I mean, I always want it to be higher, but it’s been growing a lot faster than it was before.”

“Why do you think that is?”

“It’s hard to tell,” she said. “We’re definitely getting more signups from people who land on the website randomly. I think that’s because I’m giving away the video series instead of just ‘updates.’ But I’ve also seen big spikes when I have a big podcast interview come out or something else in outreach.”

“Great,” I said. “And it sounds like you’re connecting with new influencers pretty regularly?”

“Yeah, your referral strategy has worked great. Like I said, I’ve been reconnecting with people I met several years ago but I’ve also been asking them for referrals and have gotten connected with a lot of new influencers.”

“What about book sales?” I said. “I know your next book isn’t out yet, but have you seen a bump in your backlist?”

“A little,” she said. “But honestly I’ve been so focused on getting people on the email list so I can sell them the new book when it comes out that I haven’t mentioned my first two books much. Is that a bad thing?”

“No, not at all. This question will be way more important once your next book comes out.”

Amy and I talked for a few more minutes and she asked me a few more specific questions, but we ended the call with me encouraging her to keep doing what she’s doing and telling her we’ll check in again in a few months.

Next, I got John on the phone.

“Things are going well,” he said. “People seem to love the podcast. We’re still working out the format and getting better at it, but the reviews are really good.”

“How are your stats looking?” I asked.

“We were stuck for a while around five to six hundred downloads of new episodes. I think this was the people on my email list, a little bit of outreach I did, and then people just randomly finding the show. After month three I started getting frustrated because we kept putting out episodes, but nothing was happening. I definitely started thinking

maybe I needed to quit and try something else, but I had promised you I would do it for at least six months, so I kept going.

“Month four was the game changer. A few interviews I did for other podcasts came out and all the numbers started jumping. And then I think we just hit our stride. Our listeners were telling other people or something, but our numbers immediately jumped to over a thousand downloads every new episode, and now we’ve had a couple of episodes that broke two thousand.”

“That’s great,” I said. “So it sounds like the influencer stuff is working? You feel like you’re getting connected to new ones?”

“Yeah, it comes in waves. It’s like I’ll get two or three *yeses*, and then I go a few weeks when nobody responds. Then all of a sudden, a few more come through. So it’s good, I just have to stick with it. I really try to focus on getting the pitches and follow-ups out and not sweating if they don’t reply.”

“That’s how it tends to work. It seems to be all or nothing. But your mindset on this is perfect. What about book sales? I know you self-published your first novel right before you started the podcast.”

“They’ve been good too. I mean, it’s not selling like crazy or anything, but I didn’t think it would.”

“How many sales so far?”

“I broke three thousand copies last week,” he said.

“Well, considering most books sell two hundred and fifty copies in their first year—even traditionally published ones—three thousand is a great start. Where do you think the sales came from?”

“The first few hundred came from my email list, so mostly my friends and family since my initial subscribers were all people I invited to join the list. From there, I’ve continued to mention it at the end of every podcast episode, and I put a link to it in the transcript I publish on the website and send out to the email list. I’ve also seen a bump whenever I’ve had outreach stuff get published.”

“Okay, well keep going with that. I would make your goal selling ten thousand copies by the one-year anniversary of the book. Think you can do that?”

John took a deep breath.

“I can try,” he said.

“Okay, final question. How’s your email list growth been?”

“That hasn’t been great.”

“How many do you have now?”

“Just over a thousand,” he said.

“Hm,” I said. “That’s pretty low. If I compare that to your book sales and podcast download growth, something is off. Hold on a sec.”

I pulled up John’s website and browsed around. When I landed on his blog that was hosting the transcript of the podcast episodes, I recognized part of the problem.

“You don’t have an email list signup on your blog posts,” I said.

“I don’t?”

I heard John tapping keys as he brought up his website.

“Oh man,” he said. “You’re right. I could have sworn I had an email signup there.”

“I bet those are the pages of your website getting the most traffic but you’re not converting any of the visitors to your email list. Put your signup form at the top of those pages and you’ll definitely get more subscribers.”

“Okay, I’ll get that done today,” he said.

“What about your podcast? Do you tell people about the email list there?”

“No,” John said. “I just record the episode.”

“Okay, make that change too. From now on, at the beginning of the show invite all the listeners to sign up for your email list and tell them about your WIIFM giveaway.”

“I’m shaking my head over here,” John said. “I can’t believe I wasn’t already doing that.”

“No worries. It’s completely normal. Just remember your email list is always your number one goal. Everything should be driving to it.”

“You know, I don’t think I’ve mentioned it in any of the interviews I’ve done either. I’ll start doing that too.”

“There ya go,” I said. “Make those three changes, and I guarantee you’ll start seeing some growth.”

Sure enough, I checked in with John a month later and he had already doubled the subscribers on his email list. It was continuing to grow.

As we work on growing our platform, it's important that we have ways to check we're making progress. I promised at the beginning of this book that if you solve all three of the permission, content, and outreach problems, your platform would grow and your book sales would go up.

However, just because we are taking action doesn't mean we are doing the right things. It's easy to get sucked into book marketing tactics that don't work but we keep doing them anyway.

There is a balance between sticking with something long enough to see if it's working and sticking with something that isn't working.

This is why I have my three litmus test questions that I asked both John and Amy:

- Is our email list growing?
- Are we connecting to new influencers?
- Are we selling books?

If the answer to one of those is no, we need to go back through your Connection System and make sure everything is working. We have to keep the mindset that a part of the system is broken. We and our books aren't broken.

I think of it like an electrical system. If we flip on a light switch and the light doesn't come on, we don't assume it's because we are an idiot and a loser. We also don't assume electricity doesn't work. Instead, we assume something is broken somewhere in the system.

The same applies to the Connection System. John's email list wasn't growing simply because something was off in the system. Once he fixed it, it started working.

Also, as our platform grows, we get better at growing our platform. Book marketing is a learned skill like playing the guitar. We won't be very good at first, but we will get better over time.

Keeping these three litmus test questions in mind allows us to evaluate how we're doing and look for places we can try new things.

THE MINDSET OF SELLING

I love working with authors like Amy and John because I love books. I've always loved books. I was the kid driving my parents crazy because they would take me to the bookstore, buy me a few books, and within a week I was ready to go back for more.

I still read fiction every night before bed and most of my useful education has come from books.

I also think books are the best deal in town. Where else can you get hours of entertainment or in-depth training on a subject for such a low price?

I'm subscribed to the email lists of many of my favorite authors (as fans) and follow a lot of authors on Amazon so I get notified when they publish new books. I'm *excited* to spend the money when they come out with something new.

It's important to remember that our fans feel the same way about us. While we may not have the numbers of Stephen King or Malcolm Gladwell, as our platform grows, we will have our own fans who are excited to buy our new book.

A while back I spoke with an author about three months before his book launched. He has a very large following on his blog as well as a very active email subscriber base. Due to his audience size and its

engagement level, I was curious to know what he was planning to do to launch his book. So I asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’ll probably do a blog post the day it comes out.”

“What about your email list?” I replied.

“I wasn’t planning on sending anything.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to get too salesy.”

That mindset is tragic because it’s misinformed. Should you be concerned about how your audience will interpret your book launch promotions? Absolutely. But the only authors who need to worry about coming across as “salesy” are those who haven’t taken the time to build an authentic Connection System based on value, trust, empathy, and respect. The bestselling authors I work with understand this difference. They understand that the problem is not being too salesy. The problem is lacking enthusiasm about building long-term connections and being relentlessly helpful. Enthusiasm has fueled your platform already. It has energized your message, powered your content and sparked your outreach. Our readers read our writing because they are enthused by our ideas and advice. So, when it comes time to launch our book, we need to show the same level of enthusiasm. If we don’t, why should readers get excited themselves?

A few years ago I spoke at a conference that ended with a Q&A. I’ve come to love Q&As over the years, and with my experience, I rarely get a question I don’t already have an answer for.

But this time I was stumped. Here’s the question:

“If you look back over all the successful authors you’ve worked with, what one common thread ran through all of them?”

I opened my mouth to answer but then hesitated. I wanted to say, “an email list,” but then I thought of the handful of authors I worked with who released successful books without an email list. I quickly went through all the tactics I recommend and with each of them I could think of an exception.

I don’t remember how I ended up answering that question, but it wasn’t until a week later that I realized the right answer. What I wish I had said is this:

“The common thread that runs through all of the successful authors I’ve worked with is they actually believe it’s a good thing for readers to buy their books.”

I fundamentally believe that the more people read more books, the better this world will be. Whether you write erotica, science fiction, self-help or business books, you’re creating experiences that will add to people’s lives.

Many authors don’t actually believe this. Deep down they’re so worried and scared of how their work will be received that they can’t bring themselves to enthusiastically promote their book. They want to be the author who has sold a lot of copies but don’t want anyone to actually read the books.

When I’ve worked with these authors, I can give them all the systems and tools and tactics, but when it comes time to invite people to buy a copy of their book, they stop short and the results are always disappointing.

What we do as creators and writers makes the world a better place. The more people who listen to our podcast, read our book, watch our videos, download our novellas, and, yes, buy our books, the better off this world will be.

So we need to do whatever it takes—go into the woods and meditate, pray, journal, talk to a therapist—to realize that inviting people to buy our books is a *good* thing.

Once we have this mindset in place, everything gets easier. We automatically start selling our books every time we are interviewed, send an email, write a blog post, so on.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As I end this book, I'm excited for you.

I want to share an excerpt from my book *Running Down a Dream*:



One of the things I realized early on about myself is that I'm a pessimist.

Not a glass-half-empty sort of pessimist. I'm more of an at-some-point-the-glass-will-get-knocked-over pessimist. I wasn't the friend you called when you wanted to get excited about something. I was the friend your spouse wanted you to call to talk you out of something.

This was especially true when it came to my own dreams and projects.

I had a hard time getting excited about anything because all I could see were the potholes and the probable, eventual failure of whatever I was trying to work on.

[...]

I was working with [my author client] Gene Kim as he finished up his book *The Phoenix Project*. We were having one of our weekly calls and he was throwing out all kinds of ideas to get the book ready for the launch.

I kept dragging his big ideas back down to earth with my logical pessimism.

Finally, he got frustrated with me and said, “Okay, Tim, if I could wave a magic wand and get everything I want, here’s what it would look like.”

For the next couple of minutes, he described the perfect scenario.

If everything fell into place perfectly.

If everybody did exactly what they were supposed to do.

If all of the systems worked with no bugs.

Then, he said the words that changed my life. “How close can we get to that?”

What Gene believed was that if you shoot as high as possible, you may not hit the target, but you’ll get much closer to it than you would being obsessed with the micro goals.



Let me wave a magic wand on your behalf.

Imagine five years from now you’re about to start writing your next book. Maybe it’s the third book in your trilogy or the next in a series of business books you’re writing.

Before you write the first word, you already know you’re not just going to sell one thousand copies of this book. You’ll be able to sell ten thousand in the first three months.

You know this because you have an email list of over twenty thousand fans you’ve built up. You’ve also connected with dozens of influencers that you know will help promote your next book.

You also know this because the previous book you published sold ten thousand copies in the first year, and you’re set up to have much more success with the next one because your platform has grown so much since then.

Best of all, you’re an actual, successful writer.

Sure, your book probably won’t debut at #1 on *The New York Times* bestseller list, and it may not be stocked cover-out in every major bookstore.

But you’ve put the work in and built your Connection System that

has grown a platform of readers who support all of the work you put out into the world.

This is what's possible for authors today. This is what's possible for *you*.

I can't wait to see how you do it!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Grahl is the author of *Running Down a Dream*, *Your First 1000 Copies*, *Book Launch Blueprint*, and *The Threshing*. For over a decade he has worked with top authors and creatives including Daniel H. Pink, Barbara Corcoran, Hugh MacLeod, Hugh Howey, Chip and Dan Heath, and many more. He now runs Story Grid Universe and Story Grid Publishing with his partner Shawn Coyne. See more of Tim's work at runningdownadream.com.

