

An Author Website: what it should be and DO

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/an-author-website-what-it-should-be-and-do/>

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An author website, or platform, is becoming more common - and more important than ever before.

But what should it look like?

What is an author's website actually supposed to *do*?

Many writers who contact me about their work have a website that does more harm than good. Really. More harm than if they simply didn't have a website at all.

(If the website is scattered, has no helpful information, and is riddled with spelling and grammar mistakes - this will hurt your writing career. This is your calling card. No one will call you if you come off as a crazy person.)

Artwork by Jonny Lindner.

When I click to a writer's website I expect to find certain things - and even if you don't know it

consciously, so do you. If I am unable to tell that the website is for a writer, then there's something wrong. If I have to search and click all over the website to find any mention of a latest book, or a book that's in progress, there is something wrong.

You'd be surprised at how often this happens with author websites.

What You'll Get Here:

- Why agents expect you to have a platform.
- 4 things an author website must have.
- What exactly "branding" is and how to bring that to your website.
- An Author Website Case Study: breaking down what works.

What Agents Want from your Platform

Platform is a buzzword for author promotion via the internet, and specifically through your website. Many people tend to use the words *website* and *platform* without making a clear distinction (myself included), but there is a difference. A website is just a website. A platform is your website, your social media presence, it's how many people follow you, subscribe to you and buy from you (if you are already published).

The question most agents (and some editors) ask me is, "Do you have a platform?" They don't ask if I have a website. They ask about a platform. This is an important distinction. What they really want to know is whether or not I have *readers* – any humans who actually read what I write online.

If you don't have a platform for the work you're pitching, that isn't a deal breaker. But it is a good thing to have because it shows business professionals that you understand something about how to make your love of writing into a business. It isn't enough to write. You need readers.

A platform isn't a blog. *A blog is part of your platform*, or probably should be. If you have a blog, it means that you are writing for your readers on a very regular basis.

NOTE: When you query agents and your email has piqued their interest, they will google your name and see what crops up. Make sure your author website appears on the first page of results.

Author Website Must-Haves: 4 things

A platform is built by having a presence in social media and being able to send people to your website. But it can't just be "a website." It has to have certain functions.

1. Provide a way for people to contact you.
2. Make it possible for people to subscribe to your emails.
3. Blog.
4. You need to make it easy for people to buy your book or books.

The Importance of Being... Available.

Unless you're already famous, you need to make yourself available to people. Providing your phone number on a website is a thing of the past (unless it is a private-access only site). But your website should definitely include your email address or a contact form so that people can send you a note.

There have been a few times when I wanted to contact an author about an interview, only to find that there was no way to reach them without first contacting their attorney or agent. Why would you ever do that? It shouldn't be a problem for someone to leave a comment or send a thank you.

I can think of no quicker way to push people away than to invite readers to, "Have your people call my people." (Seriously.)

We write stories, folks. Do I really need to send fanmail to your lawyer?

It's perfectly alright to suggest that publishing professionals contact your agent, but not your readers and certainly not book reviewers and bloggers. That's ridiculous. Make it easy for people to reach you. If you don't like people or are just too busy, hire an assistant. ([Even Ken Follet answers messages on social media.](#))

Be Subscribable!

Don't feel that you need to blog twice a week or even weekly. But make it possible for readers to get important updates about what you're doing with your writing. Some authors offer two types of subscriptions on their site:

- About book releases, promotionals and freebies.
- About the author's personal anecdotes, rants and raves.

You don't have to do that if you don't want to or just don't feel comfortable doing it - but it's something to consider, especially if you write for kids. You need a way for parents, teachers and librarians to keep track of what you're writing, where you're reading, etc.

Just Blog It.

It's true that many writers are shy. If you want to get the attention of readers, you need to overcome that. It just takes practice, like everything else you do as a writer. If I can overcome my shyness enough to attend book fairs and conferences, I know you can sit yourself down to do a little blogging!

You can even do it in your favorite sweats. No one will know.

You need to make it easy – I MEAN REALLY EASY – for people to actually buy your book or books.

It's amazing to me how often I see author websites that make it very difficult or even nearly impossible to purchase a book. If it isn't possible, ok. But if it IS possible - if you have something that can be purchased and read - then make it easy for people, not hard.

Post a large, ugly, easy-to-see [Buy Here](#) button along with the book cover. Include back-cover copy so people know what the book is about.

Don't shove your books into the sidebar, or at the bottom of a long scrolling page, and certainly don't make readers have to click through three-webpages to reach a Buy Button. Place your books along the top of the Books Page - heck, there's no reason you shouldn't place them on the Homepage. Make the books clickable without having to scroll down or hunt-and-peck all over your website. People don't have the patience or the time to scour the internet for that button. (Do *you* have time for that?)

If you don't yet have a book on the market, that's a different story - but **have a visual that clearly indicates, "I'm a writer and I will be published soon."**

This concept alone is really important: the site should look like the site of a writer, even if you're not yet published but are looking to do that. And this is ultimately about branding - so let's talk about that.

So... what about branding?

This is another buzzword that applies to any kind of business. You need a **brand** – **which ultimately just means an easily recognizable way for a stranger to know and understand what it is you have to offer, at a glance.**

It means that someone who has never heard or seen anything of you before can know in 3 seconds what you're about and whether or not they're interested in knowing more. **That's Brand: 3 second recognition.**

A Great Example of Author Branding

[Agatha Christie](#). If I drop her name you know exactly what that means. Mystery. Quiet British mystery novels perfect for reading on the train or any time it's raining outside. You might think Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot. You might even think of the actors and actresses who portrayed these characters over the years.

Agatha Christie also wrote non-mystery novels, but not as Agatha Christie. As Mary Westmacott she wrote six novels about life and relationships – sort of romantic novels, but really more books about people. Pre-chic-lit.

Can you have a brand without changing your name?

If asked this question thirty years ago, I would have said, "No way." This isn't really the case anymore. Gone are the days when a rock band could only perform rock music, or a folk musician could only play folk music. (See: Bob Dylan.)

The same is true for writers.

People are much more open-minded about the idea of a creative person branching-out beyond the genre or even the medium where they started. It's no longer strange for a screen actor to take a break from the camera and go on Broadway. (See: Hugh Jackman.)

It's no longer strange for a novelist to switch gears entirely and write an illustrated storybook for kids, or a screenplay or song lyrics. After all, why not?

So the big question in terms of publicity then is this: "If it's socially acceptable to create what you want, how do you establish a brand?"

Especially for writers, this is a major question. How do you successfully sell your work if some of it is for Beginning Readers and some of it is YA Horror? Can that even work?

Yes. Instead of branding the author (you, as a particular kind of inkslinger), brand the different book series that you bring to the market.

What about crossing over genres and age demographics?

Is it possible for a writer of illustrated storybooks to also do adult fiction - and to do both with success? Yes. It absolutely is. [Cornelia Funke](#). [Rick Riordan](#). [Jeannie Birdsall](#). [Angie Sage](#). [Philip Pullman](#). Many, many more.

Author Website: Case Study

If you look at [Laurie R. King's website](#), it's really good. You can easily find what she's planning to release to the market right now. You can *also* very easily find out what her next novel will be next year. You can *also* download projects and you can *also* read her blog, which is current (meaning: her last entry was a few days ago). It's all there.

For those who love her books, this is a great way to make sure you don't miss the next book in a series you're following. But more than that, it's also a fantastic way to feel like you're actually getting to know the author! It's exciting!

(By the way: some writers, especially once they become very successful, spend a lot of money for a fancy website with all the bells and whistles. *Fancy over handy isn't a good decision.* Your website does not need to cost a fortune. It needs to have the right information and various ways for readers to find-out stuff - about you and about your work.)

Subscribers

Not only does King have a way to subscribe to her email newsletter, you can also subscribe to another list to get her blog entries right to your inbox. Having subscribers means you have a way of reaching your readers directly. You can send them a message at any time about anything you want to share with them.

Social Media Buttons

King also makes it easy to find her on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Pinterest and GoodReads. All the icons are listed on the website, on every page. She makes it as easy as possible for people to interact and click.

The Look

Visually, the style of her website reflects a level of classiness that I think matches her classy writing. **The visual style of your website should reflect something about what you have written.**

If you write funny illustrated storybooks, don't go with dark grey as your primary color unless the type of funny you write is dark humor.

“I'm a Writer, not a Blogger.”

I've heard several writers say this to me, and that's fine. To be clear, though: if you are able to write quality stories, you should be able to crank out a blog without so much as a twinge in your pinkie. It doesn't have to be lengthy; it just has to be engaging.

Blogging does not mean selling out and it also doesn't mean you aren't good enough to sell books without a blog. Blogging means you are the type of writer who wants to be as accessible to their readers as possible.

Being a writer is no longer synonymous with being a hermit. Those days are relegated to the past.

When do I need a website?

I get asked this question rather a lot, actually. My answer: Right Now. It doesn't matter if you don't have a book on the market yet. If you plan on releasing a book to the market, then you should already have a website.

Learn from my mistake. I waited far too long to establish a personal website and I'm still scrambling to get it where it should be. (It's a work in progress, but you can [check it out HERE](#).)

You should already be connecting with people through [social media](#). That way, when your first book is released, you can tell a lot of people about it. Right away.

“It's never too late.” We know that to be true. For engaging people through a website? -it's also never too soon.

Keep creating, no matter what.

This entry is part of the series

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