

Developing an Internet Presence: The Author's Website

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This is the second in a set of six articles based on the things I learned during my first year as a published author. The articles will outline a few of the things authors should consider in order to gain an Internet presence. I have a background in public relations and several years experience in project management and promotions in higher education. My experience has been in the area of campaign development, press releases, advertisement, graphic design, and event planning. Marketing my book took me into unknown territory, but being one who loves a challenge and is something of a risk taker, I embraced the opportunity. But even I had to admit that as my debut novel SILENCED CRY was about to be released in April 2007, I was a bit apprehensive. My hope is that in sharing my experiences with you, you'll find some useful solutions to your marketing questions.

The Author's Website

An average visit to a web page is 60 seconds or less. That's your competition; time and why it is so critical to make sure that your site, particularly your home page, is visually pleasing and easy to navigate. Your website is your persona to the world. It should reflect your writing style, your genre, and carry a consistent theme throughout each page. It should be informative and entertaining. All the links must work and each page should have a link that navigates back to each of the other pages especially the home page.

The first thing to consider is your domain name. It can be purchased ahead of time to make sure you are able to secure the name you want. Purchase a domain name that identifies you. Make it short and easy to remember and identifiable.

Web design: Websites don't have to cost a lot of money; in fact there are several free programs available. Unfortunately, these have limited capabilities but they can be just as effective in drawing in attention if done correctly. If you don't feel comfortable developing your site, it's worth the money to have someone's help or let them do it for you. Check with your local college or university. Students studying web design are on top of the latest techniques and would welcome the experience to put on their resume and extra cash and it will be easy on your pocketbook.

You'll want a site that looks clean and professional. Consider the layout. Will you display your menu across the top or on either margin? How many columns will you require? Whatever style you choose, you must use it throughout the site for visual consistency. Use only two easy to read fonts such as Arial, Times New Roman, or Verdana. Use the same font, font size, and color throughout the site for your text. The second font can be used for all the page titles and menu options.

Select an appropriate color scheme that reflects your writing. Develop a theme and run it through the entire site. Avoid using flashing or distracting images/borders/ or loud music that will divert the visitor's attention from your writing. Nothing will turn viewers away faster than a site that is hard on the eyes and ears. Select the pictures you plan to use on your site and make sure they're saved as JPGs.

Once you have decided on the layout and scheme, you're ready to enter the information and start building your website. What should you include? A good start will include your book cover, author photo, bio, excerpt, reviews, events, book trailer, and reader comments. Additional pages can always be added as ideas come to you.

Choosing a server. The selection is endless and their services vary as much as the costs. Again, if you don't know what to purchase, ask someone you trust to help you. Start with an economy plan that allows you to secure the site and your domain name for a year or two. It is feasible to obtain all a basis start up services for under 0. Initially you won't need the amount of space the larger options offer. You'll want to purchase the least expensive offer available to track traffic to your site. Take advantage of every free feature your server offers to help keep your site visible.

Once you have built and launched the site, you need to draw readers to it. Insert as many tags (key words) as possible within the code section of your site and install a web crawler to make your site accessible on search engines such as Google. Include your URL on EVERYTHING, e-mail signature lines, bookmarks, letterhead, blog signatures, articles, bios, flyers, post cards, etc. Cross promote your site. Set up a section on your site to list other authors' links in return for them listing your link on theirs. Update your site and blog on a regular basis--at least once or twice a week, the more the better. Then promote that new article or feature on your blog posts.

Check to see what type of traffic information is available from your server. My server allows me to generate all types of reports. One report shows me a list of "referrals." This indicates to me where readers are finding the link to my website. Let's say if you click on my website from ABC

authors' forum, the report will show the name of that forum. Why's that important? Because it shows which sites are active and that its members are interested. Therefore, those are the sites in which I'm going to continue to promote my work.

To give you an idea of the type of information I have available, from the day I launched my site on March 12, 2007 through January 11, 2008 (reports are always a day behind) my website's stats reflect:

9,040 visitors

7,184 unique visitors (new)

16,808 pages viewed

30,541 hits

Viewed by visitors from 82 countries

The home page was viewed 3,313 times, average time 00:49, 1.35% of stay

The posting of last week's article, "The Public Author," generated 335 of those visitors within seven days. The key is to not only continue to post and blog, but make sure your posts and articles lead the readers back to your website.

Other things to remember:

- It's not enough to get people to land on your site, make it entertaining; make it interactive. When you plan your site, consider creating 5-10 pages and as stated earlier, make sure each page includes links to all the others pages on your site so visitors don't get "stuck" on one page and leave.

- There are a few key words to remember as your site evolves and you have more to offer visitors. One is "Sign-up." Do you have a newsletter? Even if it's free, make it worth the visitor's time to sign-up on the first visit or you may lose them. A newsletter will be a constant reminder about you, your site, and your book.

- Don't be shy about asking people to "Buy." Set up a separate page with the links to all the online bookstores that sell your book. If your book is available on Amazon, sign up with Amazon Associates (free) and place their logo on your site. It will take the visitor directly to your page on Amazon and if you have enough referrals from your site, you could earn a small referral fee.

- Do you have anything "Free" to offer like bookmarks, signed nameplates, or other products promoting your book(s)? Who doesn't like getting something for nothing?

One final word; have fun designing your website. But remember it's your first step toward obtaining an Internet presence. Get them there and get them to stay!

The next article: Book Trailers

Marta Stephens is a crime/mystery author of [SILENCED CRY](#)

About the Author

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