

Small Business Building for Writers

By. Tiffany Colter, www.WritingCareerCoach.com

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Most writers don't see themselves as small business owners but nearly every successful writer realizes eventually that is exactly what they are. As writers the book, article or website is our product, but we are far more than a person who puts words on paper. We are also marketers, business planners, accountants, production managers...in short, we are a business.

Many writers chafe at the idea of being viewed as nothing more than a person who slings words for pay. We want to envision ourselves as some mysterious recluse who pounds out dynamic prose and is celebrated at book signings.

The reality is nearly anyone can write a book these days. With the advent of subsidy publishing houses and the large number of POD publishers, the face of writing has changed dramatically over the last 20-25 years. These changes have required authors to make changes as well. We no longer can use exclusivity as a marketing style. We **MUST** show the relevance of our writing and convince potential readers why they want to part with their hard earned money to read what we have to say.

Publishers continue to earn money by selling books so, with the rising number of books available, the publisher wants to have as many of their products [your books] out there at a time as possible. That requires them to focus on a couple of blockbusters and

leave the other authors to take up the slack for their own marketing. Just like in any industry, the authors who have proven their ability to sell books [ROI] will get the biggest chunk of the meager marketing dollars. We can scream “Unfair” or “How will I get a market if you don’t give me marketing dollars” but it won’t change anything. In fact, many writers like me find this as a liberating trend rather than stifling.

So, how does a lowly writer compete against these mighty giants? They compete very well. The individual writer is nimble enough to, with the power of their brain and a cash advance, create their own marketing campaigns that can cause them to be the publishing houses next star. This, however, requires a few things: Craft, Platform and Story.

I can’t take credit for this three-legged stool. In fact, it was Chip MacGregor, Literary agent, who first introduced me to this idea. I already knew of the need for Craft and Platform, but I was missing the third. Many writers focus on the craft aspect, which is important. No amount of marketing dollars or buzz can make up for a truly horrible storyline that is poorly written. What writers fail to consider is how to develop platform.

First, it is important to get in front of people and begin to establish yourself as a writer. When I was starting out I wrote lots of free articles for local papers that had a wide reach. This experience led to me getting some articles in national magazines. Then it led to me writing articles on assignment for local papers. Each of those bylines helps increase my name recognition while giving me practice in the industry. This was essentially building my “platform” as it pertained to editors and agents. It also helped me develop my craft and familiarity dealing with editors and deadlines.

A business has players. As writers it is important to remember the different parts we must play-and also recognize when it is time to pass them along to a new player [an employee or assistant]. I go in to much more detail on this topic in *“Writing and Business: A Guide to Freelance Writers”* but let’s look at a quick sketch here.

Marketing

You need a clear marketing plan to build up your writing. In fact, marketing is crucial to the success of your business. Many agents and editors are requesting this along with your first three chapters when you submit. So what are your marketing plans? What are your marketing goals? Find out what your target publisher would like to see and then start working to that goal. This means finding out who your target reader is. This is the person who is MOST likely to read your book. If you say “Men and Women age 18-60” you will not be taken seriously. While you may appeal to individuals within the broad group you need to focus on a SPECIFIC demographic. I tend to appear to

women 18-45 who enjoy stories with strong heroines. I think about the kinds of TV programs my target reader would watch as well as their other characteristics. This helps me know where I will FIND them when I am trying to REACH them to sell my books.

Accounting

You need to keep track of your spending and your earnings. This is where your accounting side comes in. Determine what percentage of earnings will go to each area of your business. Don't simply plan on spending money whenever it comes in. Create a specific plan so you know when a check arrives what part is payroll [your earnings] what part goes to development [building websites, etc.] and what part goes to marketing. Otherwise you'll simply be shifting money back and forth from personal checking to business. When you do that, you can cause problems down the line. Establish a reasonable business practice now so that you can have a successful habit as you become increasingly successful.

Product Development

This is writing books and stories. What would you like to write? Determine the kinds of writing you'd like to do and how prolific you'd like to be. Then GO FOR IT! For me this is not only Suspense/Thrillers but also teaching products through my Writing Career Coaching program. I must determine how much time I spend on developing fiction and how much time I spend writing blogs and articles of interest to writers. Since I do teaching and speaking part of my product development includes webinars and seminars. I must always be aware of deadlines and target dates for my business plan so that I am developing my products at regular intervals.

You may be focusing on writing a novel right now. Then when do you want to have it done? Use that as the basis of your timeline. Take in to account the need for writing a rough draft, editing, sending it to a critique group, revising, putting together a proposal and sending off queries or sample chapters. You also need to determine when you'll start on the next novel and how you will build the platform. Product development, like business development, is about more than "write one book, then another". It must encompass all the products that will be associated with your name.

Long Term planning

This is the side of you that is simply a dreamer. Dream big. Decide where you'd like to be and chart a course to get there. Don't limit yourself to what you think you can do now. You are early in your journey. Once you stop living in self-limiting thoughts you open yourself up to the opportunities that have been passing you by. This shouldn't consume your every thought, but a clear sense of where you want to go should guide your planning and marketing today. That is why it is important that you do it now and then revisit the topic a few times a year.

This is only a sampling of the things a writer needs to consider when putting together their writing business. The key is to realize that you do run a business-and treat it that way. For more free resources on this topic read my blog at www.WritingCareerCoach.com. You can also get information by signing up for my coaching program or by purchasing "Writing and Business: A Guide to Freelance Writers."

About the author:



Author Bio: Tiffany Colter is a passionate freelance writer whose credits include national magazines, local papers, E-zines and blogs. Topics have ranged from reporting on-assignment about local businesses to national trends in the writing market. She can speak as readily on overcoming challenges by faith as she can reaching a target market through platform development.

Every month more than 40 pieces authored by Tiffany appear online or in print. She speaks regularly to Writers groups & Business Owners as well as individuals.

The Writing Career Coach Program was born out of her desire to provide affordable options to aspiring writers.

Tiffany has a degree in Political Science from the University of Toledo where she graduated Summa cum Laude from the Honors College. She is fluent in three languages, writes suspense-thrillers and reads business books as readily as she does a novel.

You can learn more about how to build your writing business, whether one article or a series of novels, by visiting Tiffany's blog at <http://WritingCareerCoach.blogspot.com>

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