



PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT

Create a Presence That Builds Your Influence and Your Income Potential

Abstract: For experts, growing the reach of one's platform is critical to monetizing knowledge—whether that monetization happens through a book, consulting services, speaking, information products, or some combination of these offerings. This white paper explores how to unlock growth opportunities and book sales by **developing a powerful platform**.

Intro: Everyone's talking about how much you need a platform. But what exactly is it? And why is it important for authors? More importantly, how do you go about building one?

To better understand the platform concept, picture a sturdy wooden board elevated by risers—a stage—illuminated by lights and mic'd to a sound system. Now imagine a speaker preparing to address a large crowd of people. The speaker steps up onto the platform and begins to speak. As the speaker's voice carries through the throngs of people in the audience, the message begins to resonate. The audience listens. A bond forms.

The platform helps the speaker stand out, share a message, and connect with a receptive audience. And this is the same purpose as the author's platform: to provide *visibility* and a means for *connecting* with an audience. The platform is the author's bridge to a conversation and a relationship with an audience. It provides you with an opportunity for sharing ideas and creating community around valuable content, expert knowledge, and a differentiated experience.

"What will be published in the future will have less to do with what bookstores carry and more to do with what readers tell each other about new books." —Seth Godin

Today the need for an author platform could not be more real. It's due to a powerful reality in publishing: with more than 3,000,000 books published each year (more than 8,000 books each day), our industry contends with severe product oversupply and challenging under-demand. When considering the importance of a platform, it doesn't matter whether books are published traditionally or not—just as it doesn't matter whether *you* publish traditionally or not. All authors, regardless of how they publish or how exceptional their ideas may be, are fighting for readers' attention.



As an author, having a strong idea and an ability to express it in a creative and compelling fashion is critical. But it's rarely enough on its own. For audiences to connect long enough to listen and share with each other (audience word of mouth is paramount), they need to find common ground, a bond with the human behind the message. In other words, they need to link their thoughts and their lives to yours in some way. To do this, audiences look at your credentials and experience; they assess your message, look for images of you, watch your videos, and get validation from others in their social networks. They talk to each other about you.

For every author, the goal is to find ways to engage an audience and inspire conversations. To gain *influence*. Great platforms help make this possible, and they also make monetization and income-generation much easier.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR PLATFORM

Building a powerful platform requires research, focus, creativity, and resources. And time. Just like the path to becoming an authority, developing your platform won't happen overnight. Work to create your platform by following these steps.

STEP 1: START WITH AN AUDIT

Construction of your platform begins with an audit of your current state of affairs. You'll need to take a hard look at the totality of your author brand. The audit is no small task and should involve a fair amount of due diligence, objectivity, and testing. The end result of this evaluation is the establishment of the platform baseline—the “You Are Here” icon on the platform development map.

Action Steps:

- Evaluate your subject area, expertise, education, and experience.
- Look at your online presence, branding, market positioning, and messaging.
- Know who your target audience is and what existing key relationships or strategic partnerships you can leverage to expand your reach.
- Understand the competitive landscape and who the leaders are in your area.

STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR DESTINATION

Next you need to figure out where you want to go with your platform and your brand. This should be congruent with the results of your market evaluation. If you want to become a bestselling author, you'll need to choose a subject that resonates with a broad audience. Well-packaged, strong books about diet, health, sex, or money, for example, have the potential to sell a lot of books.



On the other hand, if your message is centered on the treatment of a rare amphibian cancer, and you're passionate about it, you might scale back your expectations. There is always an audience for a particular message. And while it may be elusive, a platform is one way to access your audience and aggregate it. So while there's nothing wrong with being the leader of a small, passionate community, just know that some messages aren't meant for all listeners.

Action Steps:

- Know your priorities—do you want to serve a niche audience and grow it slowly over time? Or serve a broader audience and try to set yourself up for a shot at a bestseller list?
- Recognize your needs—do you have the time, talent and resources to realistically do it on your own? Or would it be worthwhile to enlist talented support to help you?
- Make your platform a priority—your platform is an investment in you. Commit to building it out for at least a few years until you are established. Then reassess and look for ways to grow.

STEP 3: CARVE YOUR PATH AND GROW YOUR INFLUENCE

Your platform is your greatest opportunity to spread your ideas and influence and capture more business opportunities. So once you know where you are and have a clear sense of where you want to go, determine the benchmarks and milestones you need to hit to get there. These will vary a lot from case to case.

You'll likely need a combination of strategies over time, and you might need to a team to help you. Ultimately, much will depend on your level of commitment. Remember, you're positioning yourself as the expert, and meeting the expectations of your audience is essential.

Action Steps:

- Create a high-impact web presence, including a website with downloads and audience-capture tools.
- Get published in a national magazine to boost your publication credits.
- If you enjoy presenting, you might explore speaking to a number of organizations, pursuing keynote opportunities and contributing to online events like webinars.
- You may want to add some teaching credentials and professional development to your bio.
- Engage more proactively in social media, blog often, and network with professionals whose messages complement yours.

STEP 4: EXECUTE OVER THE LONG TERM



A final note on platform development: You're never finished. Once you've done the heavy lifting of building a platform, you must continually engage with your audience and find ways to resonate with them, or risk losing your hard-earned fan base to the next compelling voice vying for their attention.

Action Steps:

- Seek ways to innovate and stay on the cutting edge in terms of technology and trends in your subject area.
- Continue to provide value and serve your audience, whether it's through information, entertainment, or sharing of noteworthy content from others.
- Always look for ways to give people a reason to remember your name—and share your platform with others.

STEP 5: PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

The value of your platform as a means of elevating brand awareness cannot be understated. For success to happen in the publishing world, you must appear as a compelling author brand. A well-built, well-maintained platform is the key to establishing your expertise, sharing your ideas, and translating mind share into growth opportunities.

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