

## Ten Tips You Should Know Before Promoting Your Book On The Web

When it comes time to build a website (or have one built for you) to promote your first or latest book, here are ten things you should know that will increase your website traffic and make you more memorable in your reader's mind.

### How Will Viewers Find You?

**1. Name your site simply and logically.** As a designer, I tend to notice things that other people don't. For example, during a Superbowl game, I watched one of those million-dollar-plus commercials for a seemingly interesting product whose name I can no longer remember (strike one). What I do remember is that their web page address (the 'www' name) had three or four names jammed together with 20 to 30 letters in it (strike two), and the name had nothing whatsoever to do with the product they were selling (strike three). Since I could not remember the company name or the site name, I have never been to their site, and more than likely, a lot of other people who may have stopped by, didn't. I wonder if they are still in business? So keep it simple and logical.

**2. Make sure to use strong key words and meta description.** These words, obscured from the reader's view on your pages, are one of many components search engines use to help viewers find you. Without them, your pages could be lost in oblivion. When deciding on the words you'll use, think like the searcher; what are you looking for and why? What words are they likely to type in for their search? Perhaps more important is the meta description, also posted behind the scenes. This may be your one-shot chance at having new viewers click and stop by. Talk about needing a hook! In both cases you are extremely limited to how many words you can use. Each search engine varies, but you may have as few as ten to twenty words in which to tell about your site. Make sure you use those words to their utmost.

**3. Add non-writing elements.** One of the first questions I ask my clients is "*what else do you do besides write?*" They are usually surprised by that question. In talking, I explain I'm looking for something they can offer that will bring new viewers into their pages *even if they aren't looking for a book.* Why? Because I know that the author's friends, family, and fans will find his or her site regardless, but the goal of having pages is to *increase* sales and *increase* readership. To do that, I need to bring in unsuspecting viewers, the more the better. On my own site, I have back-door pages about antique pottery, children's writing, and a home schooling message board. These pages bring in new viewers who are then exposed, via my excellent use of design and function, to my other services. There is no wrong or right answer here, but the larger the audience, the better.

**4. Web pages are circular.** Think for a moment about some of the websites you've visited. How did you find them? You may have used a search engine, but there are others ways as well. You may have heard it advertised on the television or radio. You may have seen it in the newspaper or on a flyer. Perhaps you found it in a book you were reading or

in an email. Anything and everything you do should point to your website, which in turn points back to everything else you do. In addition, make sure your email has a signature line – info after your name that includes your website and book title.

**5. Add links, web rings, and more.** It's not so much that you want links to others on your site, as much as, you want links to you on theirs, thus many site owners have taken to trading links. Why? Because some search engines, via a secretly guarded electronic process, will move you higher up on their search pages based on how many times it finds you mentioned on the web. Let me clarify. The more popular the search engine robot thinks you are, the more it thinks others will want to find you and the higher up on its pages you will be. Depending on what a searcher uses for their criteria, there could be 100,000 sites posted or more, and since no one searches through all 100,000, the higher up in the search, the more likely you will be found. Another way to add links is through the use of web rings. Web rings are designed for groups of people with a similar purpose or vision who are then linked together in a virtual ring via the web thanks to WebRing.com. Joining with other like-minded individuals will bring in more viewers and give you yet one more link out there in cyberspace. And, don't forget bulletin boards, newsgroups, and chat rooms. If any of these cross your path, remember to mention your website either within your signature line, site profile, or posted message.

### **Why will viewers visit your site?**

**6. Information and connection will bring in viewers.** We all live busy lives and few of us take time to web surf without reason. Your website viewers will either have heard about you, your book, or particularly in the case of non-fiction, your topic, and want to know more. They are on a mission searching for something, and your job is to figure out what that something might be and provide it. Readers are also looking for connection. They feel the author is someone special, and they want to feel as if they know him or her better. Looking at your picture, reading your biography, and walking through pages you've helped to create, gives them a sense of connection. Give them a taste of what they want and you will keep your viewers happy. Remember to provide plenty of content. Search engines LOVE content, however, keep like topics on their own pages and try to avoid mixing topics as this just confuses search engines.

**7. Encourage them to return.** If you want your viewers to know about your *next* forthcoming book, future events, or other timely happenings you've yet to plan, you'll want your viewers stopping back from time to time. Once they've read your excerpts and biography, what else on your pages will make them curious enough to stop back? Like the books you write and the hooks that keep readers turning the pages, you don't want to lose the viewers you've managed to glean. Post dates when new information will be arriving, offer a give-a-way...anything you can think of. There is no one answer here, so be true to your personality. Be innovative or mysterious, but keep them coming back. While they are there, collect their email. You can use this to send out a newsletter or announcements of your next work, upcoming signings, or other events or information you want to share.

## **What will they find when they get there?**

**8. Use your web real estate wisely.** Real estate? On a web page? Definitely! Most authors know that appearing in a newspaper on the front page and *above the fold*, is THE place to be. Web pages also have a 'fold,' per say, or a prime viewing area, which is whatever appears in the reader's viewable screen without scrolling up or down. There are three things a designer can't control that determine what your viewer will see: 1) the viewer's monitor size and resolution; 2) the viewer's browser preferences, which may enlarge the text or add an extruding menu bar across the top or down the right side; and 3) the viewer's computer capabilities, which may prevent him or her from being able to access special enhancements. The goal in any web page is to make sure your viewer will see, no matter what their configuration, the most important links, photos, or information you want them to have. Like a book buyer in a store, you have about 30 seconds to capture the viewer's attention. If the page doesn't load properly, or if the information they want can't be found, they may never return to your site.

**9. Create with quality design.** A website is commercial art. Used advantageously, your viewer will see exactly what you want him or her to see and will view the pages of your site you want them to view. We've all been to sites that were so filled with flashing images and illuminated links that we simply were overwhelmed with information and quite possibly tried somewhere else instead. Just as likely, you've been to a site that reminded you of a third grader's art work. Before designing your site, look around both at other sites, but at print ads and magazines as well. Watch how they guide your eyes with pictures, text, and white space, and add similar elements to your own pages.

**10. Make navigating your site easy.** Whether you are creating your own pages, or paying a designer to do so, make sure they are quick and easy to navigate. This means being able to find and understand any menus or links; it also means that those links will work correctly and find their true home, not an error page. You may want picturesque menus at the top or left-hand side where they are easy to find, but don't forget to add them at the bottom too where, after viewing a long page of text, a reader can choose a new topic without scrolling all the way back to the top. In addition, use newer technologies sparingly. Not everyone has a new computer. There's nothing worse than finding exactly what I need and discovering that either a special plug in is needed that I'm now expected to download and install, or that some element of this technology is not working properly with my system and I'm now forced to find another way in or just give up. Fancy Flash movies may make a dramatic opening to your site, but if your viewer doesn't want to wait for it to download, you may lose them. When in doubt, talk to a quality designer for advice.

Use these techniques on your pages and your viewers will be happier and their numbers will increase which in turn should increase your popularity and sales. Happy surfing!

*Jamie has been building websites since 1996 when having a web page meant jagged black text on a brightly colored, hard-to-read background. Sighting web pages as the next best thing since Pong, the early innovation of video games, Jamie specializes in*

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