Authors: Create an Internet Identity

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Quick! Go to Google and conduct a vanity search. If you don't know what this means, it's simple. Type your name in the search bar and hit enter. See how many direct hits to your site (or anything that pertains to you) come up. A few years ago, I did this and was quite depressed to see that I was nowhere to be found. In the internet world, I simply did not exist.

Since then, I have learned a few tricks of the trade, and I am now deeply entrenched in the most popular search engines. What does this mean? It means that anyone, anywhere, can view information about my books and me. What this means to *you* is that if references to you and your work don't show up in the **first 10 pages**—as the majority of each page—you have a lot of work to do.

Your job as a published author is to "get known."

The fact is, the more your name is out there in cyberspace and the more people who read about your exciting action-packed thriller or suspenseful murder mystery and the more people who see your name pop up when they search for 'Canadian mystery authors' or 'American romance novels', then the more potential customers you have reached. People buy more of what they know, what they frequently see. This is branding. Online, it is known as creating an internet identity.

This is how you create an internet identity:

The first and most important tool you will need is a **domain name**. This is a MUST! Go to NameSecure.com, GoDaddy.com or any other domain registry service and register a domain name. For authors, you should select your pen name or your book title, keeping the domain name as short as possible. Choose .com or .ca over other domain extensions.

You will need a **host**, a place to store your web site. You can purchase web-hosting packages from a variety of sources, or you can use free web spaces that may come with existing internet accounts. If you use a free space, then you will definitely need to buy a domain name. With NameSecure.com, you can then forward the domain name to the free web space. It keeps things looking professional. You'll have www.yoursitename.com versus a clunky looking http://websitehost/yoursitename. Avoid hosting programs that come with distracting ads all over your site.

You will then need to build a **web site**. You can choose to hire someone but that is costly, or build one yourself using a program like FrontPage, or you can use an existing provider like Squarespace. Many people are using blog-based layouts like Blogger, Wordpress, etc. There are advantages to using these sites, most of which you won't see. These types of sites will be crawled more frequently by search engine spiders, so your site will be recognized as having fresh new content. For authors who aren't too techy, go with

Blogger; it's fairly easy to set up and with their added Pages feature you can add pages and make it look like a professional site.

Once you have a web site, then you need to submit your site to **search engines and directories**. There are a variety of tools and downloads that will assist you in submitting your site, such as Web CEO, or you can submit manually. I recommend that you submit once every three to six months for the first two years to make sure you get listed. Don't do this too often or SE's may consider it Spam. To submit manually, go to a search engine's site and look for "Add URL" or "Submit your site" on their home page. Keep in mind that it can take months before your site shows up, and then most likely it will be many pages in. List your site in directories like DMOZ and search for other web site directories, especially ones particular to your book's theme.

To increase page rank, make sure you **swap links** with other authors or add yours to sites that pertain to writing. You want more *in*bound links (links leading TO your site) than outbound ones.

Add a **Resources page** with links you've researched, links that other authors will find valuable. People will come back to your site because they know you have this information. Inform and entertain—that should be your goal for your website.

Blog frequently. Set up a blog on your site or linked to your site, plus join 1-2 group blogs and post something at least once a month. You can cross-post (post the same content) to another blog, but try to change the title and first and last paragraphs slightly, so you aren't penalized for spamming. Make sure you add lots of links back to your site and your book's Amazon sales page. Dig deep when you blog and don't just write sales copy. Think of your readers/visitors. What would interest them? What would keep them coming back for more?

Twitter is a very useful marketing tool for finding readers, reviewers and blog hosts, and for getting the word out about your books. Search Twitter for 'kindle suggestions,' 'kobo suggestions,' etc and connect with readers by asking them what kinds of genres they read.

Facebook and MySpace can be used to promote your books. Update your status at least once a week, post to the bulletin board (use HTML), leave a comment on someone else's page with your link. Look to build genuine relationships with readers, other authors, reviewers, film directors and more. That is far more valuable than a blatant ad selling your book.

Leave comments on other people's sites and blogs, and comment on news stories. Many will allow you to add your web site URL; sometimes you have to use HTML for the link to be active.

Set up **Google Alerts** for your author name and book titles so you can look for people talking about your keywords, author name and book titles. Then when you receive the

report, you can go directly to that site and comment on the post, leaving your URL, of course.

One of the best ways to establish a web presence is to **write Press Releases**. A press release is a news article or announcement, usually averaging 400 words, that should be sent out two and a half weeks to one month prior to any event if you're emailing, faxing or mailing them as it takes time for the release to be picked up by other media sources. For online releases, send them out a few days before an event. Press releases can be written by professional companies or by the writer themselves, and you can send one out weekly if you have something newsworthy to promote. Releases should be sent to local media sources (fax them to TV, radio, newspapers and magazines), and to PR feeds online.

I highly recommend 24-7PressRelease.com. This is the company I use almost exclusively. Their rates are affordable, they have a more personal approach and they are extremely generous in cases of emergency. 24-7PressRelease.com has even sponsored some of my projects over the years. With their high attention to customer satisfaction and great customer service, they are the crème de la crème of online PR services. There are also a number of free press release services that you can submit your news release to. Press-World.com, Free-Press-Release.com, TheOpenPress.com and more. Your releases will get picked up by hundreds of RSS feeds and distributed internationally.

October to December is usually the busiest season for anyone wishing to promote their books. This is the time to schedule book signings at bookstores, readings at libraries and cafes, and it's also the time to fork out advertising dollars. Books don't sell themselves! Well, not unless you're Michael Crichton, Stephen King or J.K. Rowling. For the rest of us, we have to rely on smooth selling styles, setting up tables in our local bookstores, and finding unique and cost effective ways to advertise our books online and off. Affordable advertising can be difficult to come by for a self-published author. But there *are* ways around it. There is one thing you can do that will help to bring attention to you and your books. And that is to create an "internet identity."

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*Cheryl Kaye Tardif is a Canadian mystery author that Booklist describes as "a big hit…a name to reckon with". Tardif has written numerous bestselling titles, including: **Children of the Fog**, a terrifying paranormal thriller, **The River**, an action-packed technothriller; **Divine Intervention**, a scorching psychic suspense, and **Whale Song**, an emotionally heart-wrenching mystery.*

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