

Touring the World with Virtual Book Tours

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Over the years, authors who wanted to promote their books directly to the public had one main option; they had to physically travel across the country conducting book signings and readings in various bookstores and praying that people would show up. This meant spending money on flights, hotels, transportation and meals. This traditional type of book tour is expensive and very few publishing companies are willing to pay for them. But now, authors have a different method of 'touring the world'—the **virtual book tour**.

Virtual book tours (also known as virtual author tours, guest blogging, blog tours, online book tours or VBTs) are a simple concept. The author "tours" various blogs and sites that pertain to a theme in the book or to writing/publishing in general. This way, you can potentially reach thousands of avid readers each tour day from the privacy of your office or home.

The goal of marketing your book is to expose it to as many people as possible in an exciting, cost-effective and entertaining way. Guest blogging can achieve that goal. Most blogs are archived, so your post becomes permanent and often viral, spreading from site to site. That is *leverage*. You are in essence leveraging your internet presence and duplicating yourself with every VBT stop. Your blog tour is working for you even while you sleep. Try doing that at a bookstore signing!

Virtual author tours really took off in the last three years. They began with a handful of authors posting to other blogs in order to promote their works online. They announced those dates just as they would a bona fide book signing. This kind of author tour is now becoming all the rage. Some bookstores are no longer allowing authors to do book signings. Limited space and time constraints are the common reasons. Plus, it just isn't time efficient and monetarily feasible for most authors to do the physical cross-country bookstore tour. Well, unless you are one of the super authors that get paid the big bucks, like Stephen King or J.K. Rowling.

[Virtual book tour services](#) and [book marketing experts](#) are popping up all over the internet. Authors can now outsource the organization of a VBT. I suggest that you thoroughly check out these companies and ask yourself if the price is worth it. Some services cost thousands of dollars, while some cost less but only post your content to duplicate sites—ones they have set up themselves. The latter is not an advantage to you. You need to have wide coverage and exposure to various sites and audiences. Go where your readers are. Planning a VBT is time-

consuming, but not that difficult. Bloggers are more open to having guests than ever before, so you may find it more worthwhile to take the time to plan your own blog tour. This way you'll have more control over who hosts you. Or you may decide that hiring someone to coordinate the tour is best. Do what's right for you. I choose to do my own because I want to have flexibility in what each site posts and I enjoy the contact with my hosts.

How to organize a virtual book tour:

- **Start planning at least 1 month before** you want to begin, and never before your book is available for sale. I suggest you allow 1 month when planning a 2 week tour and 6 weeks for a 1 month tour. It takes time to get the hosts lined up and on board and you don't want to shortchange yourself.
- **Read everything you can find on virtual book tours.** There are numerous articles online and many books that give great advice. Check out [Steve Weber's *Plug Your Book!*](#) for VBT advice and more, and [John Kremer's *1001 Ways to Market Your Books*](#) for numerous marketing tips.
- **Determine the length of your book tour**—1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month.
- **How many hosts will you need?** 1 a day is best. If you have a radio interview, you could have it scheduled on a day when you have a text post appearing on another blog.
- **Make a list of keywords and phrases** that relate to your book.
- **Search for these terms on Google** and look for any sites that show up on the first page. Sites on the first Google page are the ones that your potential audience will find more easily. Make a note of these sites or save them in your Favorites under a folder marked 'VBT contacts'.
- **Search Technorati as well**, although personally I found this method more time-consuming and confusing. Look for sites that have a high Authority and high number of Fans. Keep in mind that Authority means that people have voted for this blog, but that it doesn't necessarily mean it is the best site for you.
- **Use Alexa to get traffic results.** Some sites or blogs may not rank well on Google or Technorati but may still be a viable host for your VBT.
- **Look at the amount of reader participation.** Do people leave comments? Is the topic of the site 'perfect' for your book? Often lesser known sites and ones without a Google PageRank are little goldmines. You may find that the host will go out of his or her way to advertise

you and your VBT. Don't ignore sites by friends or fellow authors either. One day these sites could score an 8 or 9 on Google.

- **Install and use [Google PageRank](#).** This is a simple tool that allows you to view the Google Rank of sites and blogs, which is Google's interpretation of how important the site is based on the authority of inbound links that lead to the site. Go through your list and check their Google PageRank. List them in order of importance and contact the highest ranking ones first. In the beginning, contact about 25% more hosts than you actually need. Not all will say yes.
- **Write an email that you'll send individually to each potential host.** Let them know what you're doing and what you can supply. I always like to point out the benefits to hosts—more traffic, new visitors, fresh and interesting content, prizes, and a link on my website. What's in it for them? That's what they want to know. Make sure you 'hook' your host, just like you would with a query letter to a publisher.
- **Internet radio and promotional sites that charge small fees** also make wonderful hosts. [ArtistFirst Radio Network](#) and [Passionate Internet Voices Radio](#) are online radio networks that interview authors in exchange for a donation or small fee. For an *a la carte* or membership fee, [Author Island](#) is another excellent site for authors holding a virtual book tour. You can post a book trailer and excerpt, plus advertise your contests and tour.
- **Confirm hosts' dates, topics and ask them to post the night before.** This way you are not waiting all morning for them to post your content. Let them know you'll send them the information 3-5 days before their date. If you send it too early they may lose, misfile or delete it. What will you submit? Each blog or site will usually feature one or a combination of the following: a book cover, a summary or synopsis, an interview, book review, an article that fits the site's theme, a short story, an excerpt, a contest, an audio-cast or a book trailer video.
- **Advertise your VBT via online and media press releases.** It is a great investment, since it's no good doing a virtual book tour if no one knows about it. One leading press release distribution service that I use almost exclusively is [24-7PressRelease.com](#), where you can pay from \$10.00 to \$299.00, depending on your distribution requirements. However, I can attest to the fact that a \$45.00 release is the minimum you'll want and its effectiveness is worth it. Other online services include [PRWeb](#) and [WebWire](#), and don't forget to send releases to the free services too, like [ClickPress.com](#) and [FreePress.com](#). Press releases can be extremely beneficial if written correctly and distributed

extensively to the right audience, and this means submitting them to your local media (newspapers, TV, radio) as well.

- **Publicize your virtual book tour and other events on [BookTour.com](#)**, a free site that connects authors to readers by listing author events and making it easy for readers to set up reminders and track their favorite authors.
- **Promote your VBT on all your websites and blogs** on an events page. Put up a schedule with your hosts' home page URL. I found it more exciting to post a weekly schedule the day before the week began. It prevented people from going to host sites too early and kept them coming back to my website to see where I'd be going next. I promoted the 'mystery', which worked to my advantage since I'm a suspense author. This also gave me 1 extra blog post each week, and therefore new content.

The day before each virtual stop:

- **Send out a reminder to your host and ask them to post that night.** Make sure they have book cover jpgs, your photo and anything else they might need.

The morning of each stop:

- **Confirm that your host has posted your content. Check the site.** Copy the full URL that leads directly to your post. The home page will change and you want your links to always lead to the exact page that the host has created just for your content.
- **Change the home page URL on your schedule to the exact page link.** This is how you really leverage yourself. Now when someone stumbles across your schedule and clicks on the link, they'll be directed to your post, not your host's ever-changing home page.
- **Write an introduction about the day's stop and post it everywhere.** Copy the first paragraph or two of the interview or article and use that for your intro. Post intros to all websites and blogs that you have access to. Don't forget to post to your Amazon blog, [MySpace blog](#) and MySpace bulletin. The latter goes out to all your MySpace friends. Make sure you have some!

Follow-up:

- **Check your host site frequently throughout the day for comments** and answer any questions directly on your host site. Do this every other day afterward for about a week. Offer to write a possible follow-up article, depending on what you posted originally.

- **Assess the success of your virtual book tour.** Set up [TitleZ](#) and/or [Charteous](#) to monitor your book's Amazon sales rank throughout the VBT. You should see some lower ranks (lower is better!) during your blog tour, particularly if you have a contest or incentive that inspires more sales of your book. Be creative and have fun!

Authors are now starting to comprehend the full potential that blog tours have to offer and how they benefit everyone involved. You could sign books at a bookstore for three hours plus driving time and reach a few hundred people yet sell only to a few dozen, or you could organize a VBT and promote to millions of people worldwide. Virtual book tours take time, patience and research, but as I have discovered, they are definitely worthwhile. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. So why not start today? You have the entire world at your fingertips!

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[Cheryl Kaye Tardif](#) is the author of *The River*, *Divine Intervention* and *Whale Song*. Among her peers, she is known for her perseverance and tireless dedication in book promotion. In August 2007, she was the first [Kunati Books](#) author to hold a [virtual book tour](#) with 35 stops. In September 2007, Cheryl spoke about book marketing strategies at the *8th Annual "Express Yourself..."TM Authors' Conference* in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Over the years, she has spoken at other writers' conferences and has appeared on television and radio, and in newspapers and magazines across Canada and the US.

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