



**Websites for Authors:
How to Sell More Books and Build Your Fanbase**

Introduction

Once you've finished your first book—be it self-published or through a publisher—it's critical that you build an online presence, ideally before the book is even released. Just because a book has a landing page on Amazon, iTunes, and Barnes & Noble does not mean that you shouldn't build an individual website to promote yourself and your books. In fact, the presence of landing pages on these different channels can make your marketing efforts confusing. You need one central place to drive all your traffic and make it easy for interested readers to purchase the eBook that's right for their device of choice.

An author website gives you the flexibility to brand yourself, highlight your best work, acquire more fans, and convert them into customers. With free platforms like WordPress that require no HTML/CSS knowledge, and with freelancers on demand, it's easier than ever to build a site.

In this guide, we'll cover:

1. Why an author needs a website
2. What content the website should contain
3. How the content should be organized
4. How to make your site more visible with search engine optimization

Section 1 Why authors need websites

An author's website should be the central location to which she directs traffic. It's not enough to rely on scattered online retailers. Here's why:

You get to be curator

A personal website—outside the confines of Amazon and other e-retailers—gives you greater control of what you want an audience to see first when they google your name. You can present the best of your writing—including essays, short stories, blog posts, and any other pieces that are not available on Amazon or clearly visible in search engine results. Your website will be the heart of your books, your message, and you as an author.

You're in control

When you have a big book release coming up, you can make your launch the central focus of your website. When you have a gap in between projects, you can switch emphasis to your blog posts or current appearances.

Only the best reviews

Writing is one of the most subjective art forms. You're going to get a lot of reviews, good

and bad. For better or worse, the negative comments are just as immortalized as the positive (assuming they don't have objectionable content) and notoriously unfiltered. An author website can mitigate damage from these forums by controlling the displayed reviews.

Imagine this: a talented, successful author has produced volumes of high-quality, well-reviewed books but does not have her own website. Unfortunately, she has poor reviews from the first book she published. Without a website, the first page people might be directed to when they search her name is Amazon—where she has no control over which reviews are displayed for each book. If she had her own website, however, she can cull the best of her books' reviews from the most credible sources to make a positive, powerful first impression.

Reinvention

If you are only known for one genre—Young Adult, for example—but are looking to transition into another genre with your latest book, your own website lets you draw in previously established fans but highlight the new you. Without an author website, however, a fan looking for one of your books on an e-retailer would likely browse within the genre with which he associates you. World-famous for the YA *Harry Potter* series, JK Rowling recently transitioned into adult literature with *The Casual Vacancy*. Her [website](#) lets the author promote her new novel in a way that her Amazon author page would not.

All retailers, one location

Readers have different devices and needs, but a centralized collection of links to your e-retailers makes the path from visiting the site to purchasing your eBook direct and easy. Search engines on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and iTunes are not always straightforward, especially for new books by first-time authors. If your book's title is similar to those of more popular books, searches will be even less successful.

Networking

A website is an extension of your business card and can say a lot more about you than a piece of cardboard. When you do hand out business cards at events, you'll want to direct new contacts to a website that immediately jogs their memories and provides a quick way for them to contact you. Another crucial reason to have a centralized website? It's hard to neatly fit an Amazon url on a business card.

Credibility

A website also allows you to frame yourself in a way that appeals to your target audience. Neat, professional design goes a long way in establishing credibility.

Furthermore, a website allows you to link to any articles, essays, or blogs posts you've published on your field of expertise.

Accessibility

Just because your website is your public profile does not mean it needs to be impersonal. Friendly notes to visitors, providing easy ways for visitors to contact you,

and sharing occasional personal details help establish a stronger relationship between you and your fanbase.

Community

Simple tools like [Survey Monkey](#) and [Olark](#) will help you to find out what your community is thinking—and comments can become valuable discussion groups where your fans can interact with you and each other. Choosing the right variety of tools and deploying them wisely, from the expected ability to leave thoughts on a blog post to the more innovative use of striking up a direct chat through Olark, will help your website engage and capture the visitors who might stop by.

Capture subscribers

A central website gives you something that landing pages on retailers do not: the ability to capture email addresses for your newsletter. Email marketing is a key way to engage and retain an audience. If a visitor signs up for your newsletter before leaving your site, you can increase the chances that he revisits your site by sending thoughtful weekly or monthly newsletters.

Discoverability

A website will make you and your books more “discoverable,” or easier to find. Websites let you add keywords that tell search engines about the content. If you add the keyword “romance novel,” your website has a higher chance of turning up when someone googles the phrase.

Finally, publishing companies always look at an author’s Website—and if you’re thinking of publishing a book through traditional channels, your Website will be doing a lot of the digital talking for you. Make sure it communicates the right message.

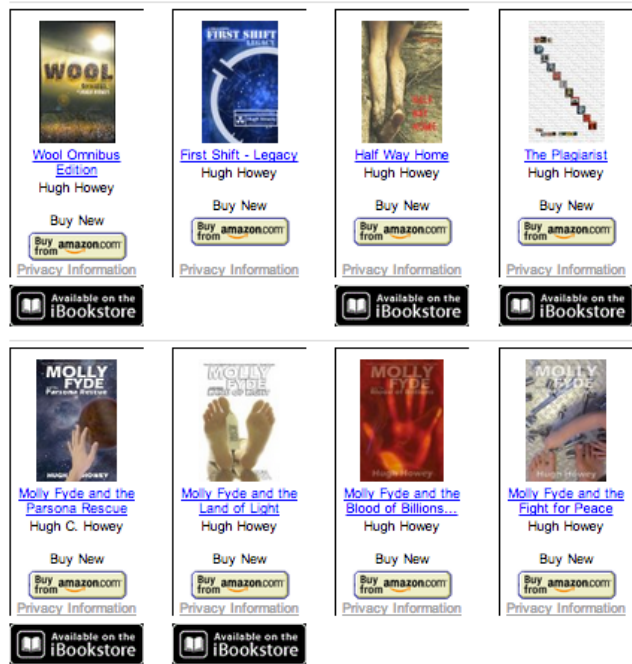
Section 2

What to put on an author website

Retailer links

The primary purpose of your website is to market and sell your books. Links to where visitors can purchase your books should be prominent and easily recognizable. Ideally, you should have your book available for download to Amazon’s Kindle, Barnes & Noble’s Nook, and Apple’s iPad/iPhone as well as available for online reading.

A note about displaying prices: Unless you are directly selling eBooks on your website (see below) or running a price promotion, it is not necessary to include the price of your eBook. E-retailers might discount the price of your book for competitive purposes and the price displayed on your website might not match the promotional price (of which you might not even be aware).



Above: a screenshot from author Hugh Howey’s “Books” page.
 Below: a screenshot from JD Messinger’s homepage



11 DAYS IN MAY

#2 HOT NEW RELEASE
**#8 Best Seller in Spirituality,
 Religion & Personal Transformation**
#90 in Top 100 for all books

Purchase now in eBook and Hardcover.
 Or read online anywhere with **VOOK**






Book preview

Let your readers preview the first chapter or two of your book, an excerpt that ends with a cliffhanger, or one piece of advice offered in the book (in the case of business and how-to books). You can capture email addresses in exchange for an exclusive preview by emailing a document upon signup or providing a link in the signup confirmation window.

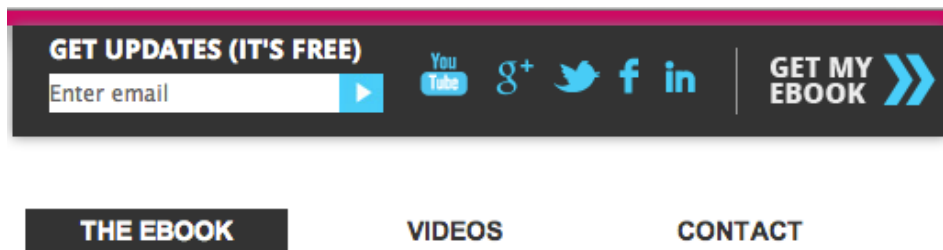
Video preview

A new trend is releasing a video preview of your book, in which you address your audience directly to tell them more. This is entirely optional and works best for books in which you are the voice (versus your protagonist) or for children's books. This should not replace traditional book previews, but it can be a nice way to connect with potential customers and convey the style of your book. A video preview doesn't have to be expensive: using simple screen capture technology like [UStream](#), you can send direct video blog messages to your fans, giving them access to your thoughts, unfiltered.

Newsletter signup form

No matter how great a website, most visitors will likely pass through and not do anything. This holds true for authors and online retailers alike. Even if you can't get visitors to buy your book or click on a link to view it on Amazon, you can increase the odds that they'll return by capturing their email address.

A form or link to the newsletter signup should be featured prominently on your website, preferably at the top. Most visitors won't actively seek out the signup form, so don't hide it in a footer or an overly crowded sidebar.



Above: a close-up of the upper righthand corner of Manoush Zomorodi's website for *Camera Ready*.

Links to social media

These should also be prominent on the site. Again, most visitors to your site aren't initially interested in checking out your Twitter feed. But once they see that familiar icon, they're more likely to click.

Book reviews

Cull the best of your reviews from the internet and put them on display. You can dedicate a whole page to them, or simply include single-sentence excerpts throughout the site. Including one powerful sentence on the top half of your homepage is ideal.

Press

A lot of this will go hand-in-hand with reviews, but if you've been profiled on industry websites or featured in magazines, let your fans know by including screenshots or scans of the piece and links to the original source. Increased exposure lends you greater credibility.

Author biography

Use this page to tell your readers something more about yourself: where you live, if you have another profession, how you started writing, what you're currently working on, etc. This is also a great page to include a message to your fans; while you're promoting yourself, you need to show interest in your visitors.

Author news

Sell yourself as if you were selling your best friend, so don't hesitate to share your accomplishments, including recent rave reviews, book award nominations, a record ranking on the charts, and upcoming projects. Also inform visitors of upcoming appearances and travel plans (you never know who may want to book you for an event).

Comments and contact info

Put a form on your the "Contact" page that lets visitors send comments directly to you. Take advantage of how easy it is to get feedback from your fans; in the past, only the most motivated of fans would go through the hassle of sending mail to your publisher. Today, you're able to hear from a wider range of people, stay connected to your fanbase, and increase the chance of getting a few gems of inspiration as comments. Again, this is a great place to include a note to your visitors.

Blog

If you blog (and not every author needs to), keep it separate from your homepage. The blog should reflect the style of the rest of the page, but the posts should not distract from the page's main purpose: to sell your books.

Section 3

How to organize the website

"Above the fold"

The most compelling part of the website, the part that moves readers to learn more about and purchase your eBook, needs to be positioned "above the fold," the top half of the website that a visitor sees when it first loads. The best content for the center of the page is your most recent release, a note to your visitors, a video preview of your book, or a powerful piece of news.

What else needs to stand out most

The main goal is to convert visitors to customers, so links to the major retailers should be obvious, preferably on the upper right sidebar where visitors' eyes often move first after the center. While each book should have its own page with the cover, description, reviews, and availability, the homepage should also feature a few titles.

“Call to action”

The website should compel readers to purchase your book, so make the links or buttons to e-retailers clear.

Header

If you’re including a header, it should be the main navigation bar for your website.* It absolutely must include links to pages for the Books, Author Bio, and Contact pages. The following should also be included if applicable: Blog, Newsletter, Events, Press and/or Reviews.

*Note: the alternative to a header is a sidebar navigation, although this is generally less intuitive to most visitors.

Footer

Unlike the header, a footer at the bottom of your page is not necessary if you don’t plan on having several pages on your website. Footers are best for “Contact,” “About,” and “Frequently Asked Questions” (the first two are reiterations of the main navigation content).

Design

The design is important because it reflects you as an author and the genre of your books, but it should not take precedent over solid content. When designing the site, make sure design aspects appeal to your target audience, including layout, colors, font, and graphics.

What to avoid

Avoid lengthy flash introductions; you run the risk of losing your visitor before he even gets to the main page. And large blocks of flash throughout your website alienate a visitor browsing on an iPhone or iPad—especially if he also uses that device as an e-reader. Don’t over-clutter the website; it buries the most important information on your homepage and makes the navigation less clear. Don’t let your website fall out of date. If you’ve hired someone to build your website for you, make sure they show you how to change content yourself.

Our favorite pages

Check out the Appendix for our favorite author websites for both established and new authors. Below, we’ve included a screenshot of Manoush Zomorodi’s website, a perfect example of some of the features discussed above: a video preview of the eBook, an intuitive lead capture form, social media links, e-retailer links, and her best reviews from credible sources.

Camera Ready

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR BEST SELF AND IDEAS ON AIR OR ONLINE

[Tweet #Camera](#)



Watch a trailer for Camera Ready



BUY CAMERA READY FOR YOUR E-READER OR TABLET

[amazon.com](#)

[BARNES&NOBLE](#)

Available on the [iBookstore](#)

Get ready for your close-up. Deliver a powerful message on video with *Camera Ready*, the new multimedia eBook by journalist and former BBC reporter Manoush Zomorodi. Learn how to present your best self and ideas, conduct effective on-air interviews, know what to wear, and calm your fears by watching 20 videos with proven tips and techniques, plus interviews with video experts from industries including broadcast journalism, retail, non-profits, PR, and education. With *Camera Ready*, Manoush will help you prepare for and enjoy the spotlight.

REVIEWS



ELIOT SPITZER
 Host, *Viewpoint*
 on Current TV

"Where was this book when I needed it? How I wish I was able to read and absorb the practical advice and deeper wisdom in this book before I began doing television nearly 20 years ago."



PAT KIERNAN
 Anchor, NY1

"Manoush has come up with the perfect format for these lessons. The core of the lessons is typical words on a page, but just when you get to a spot where you want to see the theory applied to reality, a video pops up. Her style is conversational and contemporary, both on the page and on camera."



JOSHUA SPANIER Head
 of Media
 Google

"Manoush gives you the information on how to connect with your audience through the lens...and rise above the chatter."

Section 4 How to make it discoverable

A website allows for increased discoverability through Search Engine Optimization (SEO)—taking steps to make your website more visible in online searches. In an author's case, the searches would likely be your name, your books, their reviews, and

phrases like “top fiction novels,” “best business advice,” etc.

Inbound links

The best way to optimize discoverability is to have inbound links (links from other websites to your website), the number one way to increase search-engine visibility. The best ways for authors to build inbound links are guest blogging, writing positive reviews of other authors (in hopes that they share the content on their sites), reach out to relevant blogs for press when you have interesting news.

Website description

You or your web designer can add a one-sentence description that summarizes your website and is displayed under its link in search engine results.

Metatags and keywords

You or your web designer should also add keywords that describe your books and website. Try to imagine what your target audience would google when looking for their next read. If you’re building your own site with WordPress, they provide easy instructions for adding descriptions in metadata. [Search Engine Watch](#) provides a general description of the terms listed above.

Conclusion

Now that you have the website, what are the next steps?

Social media

Make sure you have robust social media platforms, the most important of which are Twitter and Facebook. Both are opportunities to further engage your fans and drive traffic to your website and e-retailers.

Email marketing

Email marketing—the sending of commercial messages—is another way to promote your books, engage your audience, and increase the chance that subscribers will return to your site, all of which lead to increased sales. Start emailing subscribers right away, even if your book is yet to be released. Vook’s [“Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors”](#) dives into all the details of setting up your email marketing program.

Consider blogging

If you have the time, blogging is a great way to build retain current fans and acquire new ones. Blogging about author news, industry updates, and current events allows you more opportunities to get your writing on other blogs (thereby increasing exposure and inbound links). Industry updates and writing advice are an excellent part of “content strategy” as well, the releasing of informative articles that will get picked up by other authors and industry professionals.

Appendix Websites we like

As of November 2012, Vook has identified websites that best exemplify the key points in this paper.

Warren Adler: <http://www.warrenadler.com/>

Check out the slideshow of Adler's book covers and notice how the website reflects his cover design. He also does a great job of integrating positive reviews throughout the site.

Kenneth C. Davis: <http://dontknowmuch.com/>

Davis' site reflects the fun, quirky style of his *Don't Know Much About* series, right down to the font and colors. The CTA to purchase his latest book is strong. And he finds an interesting way of engaging readers: a trivia question that the visitor must click through to find out the answer (it relates to one of his books).

Thomas L. Friedman: <http://www.thomasfriedman.com/>

New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman takes an unusual but compelling design approach: above the top navigation bar are covers of his books that direct visitors to each book's individual landing page (with links to purchase the eBook online, of course). He also has a link with his *New York Times* articles and videos of TV appearances.

Hugh Howey: <http://www.hughhowey.com/>

A wildly successful self-published author, Howey runs an engaging website powered by WordPress. The homepage reads like a blog but includes essential links to retailers and social media. His "Books" page is static and displays each book cover with retailer links below.

EL James: <http://www.eljamesauthor.com/>

She is known for her provocative *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy, and her website matches the dark and alluring style of her books. However, her headshot and greeting on the homepage are warm and personable. Her "Contact" and "FAQ" pages are great.

JD Messinger: <http://www.jdmessinger.com/>

Messinger does a great job of advertising his debut book's success on the charts, and his links to retailers really pop. Note how he captures email addresses in exchange for an exclusive preview of his book.

JK Rowling: <http://www.jkrowling.com/>

Note how the author focuses on her content and design around her latest book, *The Casual Vacancy*, as she makes the transition from YA to Adult Literature.

R.S. Vern: <http://middlingindustries.com/>

A quirky book can call for an unconventional website. Vern uses her website to tell visitors more about the characters—the main appeal of her books—and direct visitors to a video preview that conveys the unusual style of the book.

Manoush Zomorodi: <http://manoushz.com/>

The branding consisting behind Manoush's personal website and the page dedicated to her eBook are superb.