

Building a platform part four

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We understand [why we have to build a platform](#), the [big ideas](#), and the [small practices](#). Now we have our content developed (usually by writing a book), we're ready to market.

Remember that authors are responsible for marketing. Whether you're on a small press or a big press, if you want people to read your book, then you'll have to sell it. Let's be clear. I'm not a huge fan of capitalism, so "marketing" makes my skin crawl. I wish that someone else would do all of this for me. Any author would. But, I also felt called into ministry beyond the local church so I needed to get over my pride. Unfortunately, no one is above marketing. I did learn to reframe many steps into spiritual practices though.

So how do you do it? Here are a few suggestions. (Feel free to take these steps, personalize them, and use them for your next book proposal. The publisher is going to want a plan for how you'll market your book. These could help you with your brainstorming.)

Get a decent photo. I know, you're not into glamor shots, but you simply have to have a good picture of your head. Don't grab the fuzzy one someone tagged you in on Facebook. Don't use the one you looked really good in twenty years ago. Don't use the stock Olan Mills photo you had taken for the church directory. Get a professional photo taken. We may never look [this good](#), but we need to try.

Develop a conference description. This is a paragraph that explains (1) what you're going to say and (2) why it's important.

Make posters, post cards, bookmarks and flyers. With the ease and relatively low expense of quality color copying, you can make this stuff yourself. Ask your publisher for a digital copy of your book cover, go to Zazzle, CafePress or Kinko's, and create. I had three posters made—two to post and one I adhered to foam core so that I could use it as a display during book signings. You put them up at your church, a governing body office of your denomination, at local coffeehouses or

bookstores.

Send postcards. This might get costly and digital postcards work as well, but if you can invest a bit, you can send postcards to resource centers and governing bodies. Try to send them to the people who will use them (not necessarily the head-honcho), which means you may send them to a Christian Educator rather than a pastor or to the Assistant to the Bishop rather than to the Bishop.

Use your connections. It's always easier (and probably more effective) to send information to people who are connected to you in some way—no matter how thin the connection might be. That way, you can personalize your email or postcard. For example, I was working with campus ministry, so I sent emails to campus ministers.

There's power in the blog. You might be trying to figure out how to get the information into the hand of media giants, but don't forget your blogger friends. If you have a niche, often a good blog will be as effective as a big media splash, because you will be reaching a particular audience. Also, don't underestimate... sometimes the seminary student blogger can connect with more people than traditional media.

Use your announcement as an opportunity for gratitude. If you hate marketing (as most authors do), make it into a spiritual exercise—an opportunity to thank God and thank others for the impact that they had on your life. For instance, if you grew up in a particular area, you can send a postcard to the committee members in the denominational body and thank them for the time and money that they put into supporting you. You can send news to your friends at your seminary, while remembering the ways they encouraged you to create.

Use your book signings as an opportunity for hospitality. I was a part of a writing group in D.C. Two of the members, [MaryAnn McKibben Dana](#) and [Ruth Everhart](#), have published excellent books, and so they have thrown book parties for each other and hosted tables at Presbytery meetings for signings.

Use book signings to connect with old friends. If you went to seminary, and you have a lot of seminary buddies serving in a particular area, ask them if you can set up a book tour in their church basements, meet with clergy groups, and fill in a pulpit. Then take a week off of work and take a book tour to visit your friends. This will help you become comfortable with your material and give you feedback.

Make a video. If you're an unknown entity in the speaking world, then people might be uncomfortable with inviting you to a conference. While your doing a church basement signings, you can have a video made to put up on YouTube. That way people can get an idea of your style and material.

Have helpful content. You may love to macramé as a spiritual practice, but that may not be what would help the most amount of people. But you could teach something about prayer, art and creativity. If you're a particular gender, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation, you may want to hone your message in order say something to the whole church rather than only talking to a smaller group. For instance, I didn't write my first book to people under the age of forty, but I wrote it to the whole church to encourage intergenerational understanding, while focusing on younger generations.

Ask, knock, seek. I hate doing this... but it's important. If I knew that a particular group was having a conference, I wrote the conference organizer telling him or her that I was available, sending my course description and photo. I usually asked if I could set up a book signing, and they would invite me to teach a workshop. If you know someone who would put your name into the mix, that's even better. Once I did several workshops, then people began asking me to lead keynotes.

Host your own stuff. It's a DIY sort of time. If you want to be on the radio, you can start your own podcast. If you want to speak at a conference, you can start one. It's not always easy, but I helped to host God Complex Radio and the Unconference. And if I can do it, so can you.

There are a thousand other things that I could say about all of this, but hopefully this is enough to get you started. So go, create, and build your networks!