



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 41, Winter 2011-12

How Strong is Your Platform? - Part I

by Debra Purdy Kong

As most writers know, writing and publishing a book is one thing, but promoting it can be just as daunting. Marketing once involved launch parties, readings, book signings, and print reviews. While these things are still helpful, it is now essential for fiction authors to also create a marketing platform on the Net. By this, I mean building a widespread, long-term, virtual presence identifying yourself as the author of a particular book, series, and/or genre.

These days, agents and traditional publishers want to know if you have a marketing platform. They'll ask how many Twitter and Facebook followers you have. How many hits do you get on your blog? Do you have a website? It's now become crucial for aspiring novelists to launch a platform before pitching manuscripts to editors and agents.

The best places to start are on Twitter and Facebook. Follow like-minded people and begin interacting with others. You'll learn a lot from reading blogs by people who've been writing and marketing a while.

Create a website, or hire someone to do so. Websites are a one-stop, comprehensive way of telling the world who you are personally and professionally. You can post your blog and excerpts from previously published work, create a guest page, and link directly to other networking sites. After publication, you can add reviews, book excerpts, a store, and so forth. These days, you don't even have to know HTML code.

Start a regular 200 to 300 word blog, preferably on topics connected to a theme. The best blogs are interesting, informative, and have little to do with marketing your book. Blogs help create interest in you and what you have to say about your topic. When readers feel connected to you, they're more likely to buy your book.

Other popular sites are Goodreads, Shelfari, Librarything, AuthorsDen, and LinkedIn. Once you're familiar with them, commit to three or four, and then build from there. I've barely touched on the many promotional opportunities on the Net, so a word of caution: find a balance that works for you, or risk burnout and lost writing time. In Part II, we'll discuss how to build on the platform once your book is published.

Debra Purdy Kong is the author of the Casey Holland mystery series published by Touchwood Editions at <http://bit.ly/i983XE>. She invites you to visit her shared blog at <http://writetype.blogspot.com>, and her Facebook fan page at <http://tinyurl.com/6nqn9ds>



From the editor's desk

The Electronic Express is gathering speed. Since I last wrote about e-publishing, the changes have been whistling by authors almost weekly.

I try to keep up with them by following select blogs on Google Reader, so here are my observations:

- Experts are concerned that the old stigmas attached to self-pubbed print books are starting to stick to e-books due to the quantity of poorly prepared and garbage books hitting the market.
- The idea of pricing novels at \$0.99 or free is beginning to backfire. Readers are becoming leery of their quality.
- Both Kobo and Kindle have become publishers, cutting out the traditional publishers. I wonder if we will see Kindle and Kobo selecting authors and books the same way. Hmm!
- The online book builders like [Blurb.com](http://blurb.com) are offering creators the option of converting their books for iPads and iPhones. Imagine—heavily-illustrated books and portfolios in glorious Technicolor® for \$1.99!
- Kindle now allows authors to choose to apply digital rights management or not. Smashwords's books have no DRM.

Debra, who wrote the lead, and I are again presenting on this topic on Saturday, Feb 4 at Shadbolt. Climb aboard the express and join us! (Details—p 2)

Julie H. Ferguson

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Follow me at
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Theme: What Is Your Story About?

By Joyce Gram, Writer and Editor

Only once have I been fired by a writer within minutes of beginning a consultation. I didn't deserve it, really I didn't. All I did was ask, What is your story about? Instead of telling me or, as many writers do, spluttering in confusion, this writer hucked her manuscript across the table and said, "Read it for yourself!"

The problem was that she didn't know what her story was about. Oh, she knew the characters and could tell me the plot, sort of, but she had never found her *theme*. "Plot is what happens. Theme is why," explains children's author Lois Peterson. This writer, despite struggling with her novel for five years, didn't know the *why* of her story.

Award-winning author Terry Bain met with a similar problem early in his writing career. Magazines kept rejecting his stories and people who read them said things he didn't understand, like "I don't get it." Finally, he took one of his stories to a writers' conference, where it was reviewed by a novelist who asked him The Question, What is your story about? Bain couldn't tell him—he spluttered in confusion—and the novelist said, "Find out." Bain realized that his story wasn't really about anything. "It was all over the place. It was about everything. It didn't hang together." He, too, didn't know the why of his story. He hadn't found its theme.

Following his epiphany, Bain defined theme in his article "Theme Is What Unifies Your Story" published in *The Writer Magazine*. "Theme is the container for your story," he wrote. "[It] will attempt to hold all the elements of your story in place. . . . The plot, characters, dialogue, setting, voice and everything else are all shaped by the vessel."

Finding the theme of your story is a quest that may begin at any time: before you write, as you write, and even after you have finished getting the story down. After the writers' conference, Bain unearthed a story he had nearly abandoned, "thinking it pretty boring." After he revised it with theme in mind, it was published and then *re*-published in a collection of prize stories.

Next time: Finding Your Theme.

Terry Bain, "Theme Is What Unifies Your Story," [The Writer Magazine, March 2010](#). (Or [email Joyce](#) for a PDF.)

[Lois Peterson](#) gives the best workshops for writers. No matter the topic, go. Just go.

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Events/Courses for Writers 2012

Jan 9: Port Moody Writers' Groups start their Winter sessions. Critique and support for emerging and established writers. Call 604.469.4561 soon to register for #41120 (Monday evenings); 7-9:30pm. #41121 (Thursday mornings). Both \$83.25. New members welcome for Mondays. Morning and evening sessions end week of March 5/12.

Feb 4: All Aboard the Electronic Express: How to Self-publish Your E-Book with Julie H. Ferguson and Debra Purdy Kong. At Shadbolt Centre for the Arts (Studio 103), 6450 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby. 1-4pm. Course #255965; \$20 or \$15 for seniors. Seats limited—reg open [here](#) or call 604-291-6864.

March 20: Q&As with Julie H. Ferguson, nonfiction author and freelance travel writer, for the [Golden Ears Writers](#) at Maple Ridge Arts Council Theatre, 7-9pm. Everyone welcome.

March: The [Writers' Union of Canada's](#) one-day professional development seminar is well worth attending. Date/topic TBA. Vancouver and other major cities. Watch for it!



Le Camargue, France
August 2011

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The Beacon is published quarterly by Beacon Literary Services and is distributed electronically free of charge to those who are interested. If you do not wish to continue to receive the newsletter, please notify the editor:

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