



Digital Branding 101

Revision 1

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Overview

This document provides a brief, targeted overview of digital branding including your digital home, social media, social media content strategy, social engagement, and email.

What Is A Digital Brand?

A digital brand is essentially your brand online. Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, says it this way, “Your brand is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

Also, remember that YOU are the brand; your books are extensions of your brand. There are rare cases when the strength of a book brand rivals that of the author brand (e.g., *The Purpose Driven Life*), but those cases are rare.

Because of this, we don’t recommend elaborate book sites and book-specific social media accounts with each book launch. These tend to create an extra, unnecessary burden on author teams. Pages devoted to book launches, yes, but often you can build those right off of your existing site.

What’s Included in a Digital Brand?

Your digital brand includes your website, blog, social media accounts, and your email list. It can also include what others are saying about you online (whether true or false), fake accounts in your name, and news coverage. Essentially anything and everything said about you online, the good and the bad, contributes to your digital brand.

We recommend the following platforms for your digital brand:

1. A Website and/or blog. This is your home base—territory that you control. It is critical to have your home base on a platform that you have full control over. You want to avoid [digital sharecropping](#) since you never know how the “landlords” will change things up on you.
2. Social media accounts. You can’t do everything, so pick social media platforms that suit your target audience and you. If you do establish a presence on a social media site, plan to be regularly engaged with fans and followers.
3. Goodreads. Avid readers gravitate to Goodreads. For that reason alone, it’s important to have a presence there. In addition, Goodreads is owned by Amazon. [Goodreads Author Program](#)
4. Amazon author page. To have a presence on the largest digital retailer site in the world—well, I think you get the reason why. [Amazon Author Central](#)

What Should My Digital Brand Look Like?

Your digital brand should reflect who you are and your message. Carefully select [colors](#), write bios, and formulate descriptions that reflect your brand well. Consistency is important within a

platform and across platforms. Some authors have created logos to help reflect their brand and establish greater consistency across the spectrum of their platform.

What's in a Number?

The size of someone's social media presence can often garner some attention, but it's the engagement numbers that really matter. Anyone can buy fans and followers from third-part vendors (scammers, would be a better title), but if they are not engaged fans and followers, they can actually hurt you. (e.g., Facebook controls how many people see your posts; if your posts perform poorly, Facebook significantly reduces the number of eyeballs that can see your posts.)

We strongly recommend that you build your social presence organically. It takes longer and is more work, but it's also much more valuable. An author with 1000 fans actively engaged with the content has a stronger platform than an author with 100,000 fans, most of whom are not engaged.

You may want to experiment with promoting your page and/or account, but be sure to limit the geographic area to the U.S. and other developed countries (if you have an international presence). Also, monitor the new fans and followers to ensure that they are actively engaged with you. Some evidence suggests that owners of fake accounts often follow people and like pages in an effort to hide from the policing algorithms.

Content Strategy

As you know, great content wins in the digital world. Content considered valuable to your audience combined with timeliness and business consideration makes that content valuable to your organization as well. This approach is known as the [Triangle of Relevance](#). Essentially, the more you can tie audience-relevant content to an event or occasion, and to a business purpose, the more everyone wins.

A business purpose can be informing people of a great sale price on your book, encouraging people to sign up for your email newsletter, directing people to a pre-order promotion, or simply pointing people to where they can learn more about your book. Since the Internet is a direct-response medium, take advantage of this and provide a call to action with a link as part of your content posts.

Experiment with different types of content and see how your audience responds. Review your post and platform analytics and make adjustments as you go. In social media, images generally do the best for a number of reasons, but don't forget to include a link where people can get more information about your, your books, or whatever it is you're posting about.

Frequency. One of the most frequent questions we get is, “How often should I post content?” That answer depends on three things:

1. How often your audience wants to hear from you. You know you’re posting too much content when you start losing fans and followers and the amount of engagement drops. If you’re too infrequent, engagement can also drop. So make adjustments when you see engagement waning. According to Seth Godin, **regularity** is a key factor.
2. The platform where you’re posting. Twitter followers can tolerate much more content than Facebook fans. However posting too inconsistently and/or too infrequently can be a problem, too. Facebook allows more eyeballs to see posts from pages that post regularly and have strong fan engagement.
3. How often you and/or your team are willing and able to post.

Having said this, we recommend the following starting point:

- Blogging. Minimally once every two weeks.
- Facebook (use a page not a personal account, by the way). Once a day when most of your audience is online (your page analytics will give you this information).
- Twitter. Two to three times a day during peak Twitter usage hours (between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.)

Engagement. “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” ~Aesop

Engagement with those who comment and otherwise interact with your content demonstrates a genuine concern. Even a simple comment “like” can encourage someone to continue to interact and help spread one’s content. Discretion needs to be exercised, of course, as some posts are not worthy of interaction. Things to consider:

- Use a decision tree to help you decide on an appropriate response to challenging comments. Sometimes it’s best to say nothing. Other times a response is needed. You are welcome to use Zondervan’s decision tree, which is based on a very effective model developed by the U.S. Air Force.
- Occasionally reply to comments and tweets. Thank people for retweeting your content. Share/retweet other people’s content as it fits your brand.
- Dealing with haters, abuse, and spam on Facebook. Use keywords in your moderation blocklist (under “Manage Permissions”) to protect your page from comment spam, abusive posts, and haters. This will help keep the garbage off your page without manual intervention. We can provide you with a list of keywords that we use on one of our pages as a starting point.
- Dealing with colorful language on Facebook. Set your profanity blocklist to Medium (under “Manage Permissions”) if you haven’t done so. This will guard against most offensive language without blocking the name of Jesus.

To get an idea of how well you engage with your fans and followers, set up a [Klout account](#) and monitor your Klout score. Although not perfect, Klout does give you an idea of how well you are engaging with your fans and followers relative to others.

What Kind of Content? Share content that is consistent with who you are (your brand) and your message. Share content in various forms from your book(s) and point to the book. Write fresh content that's covered in more detail in your books and point to it. Comment on events in the news that connect to your message and brand in some way.

It's important to keep your content in line with your brand. We've seen some examples of great content being posted by a company but the content had no connection whatsoever to the company's brand; they were attracting the wrong fish with the wrong bait.

Email

Many consider email to be dead or at least in critical condition. Some have been unsuccessfully trying to dig email's grave for years. But the fact is email remains the most effective digital marketing tactic, up to 40 times more effective than Facebook and Twitter combined. [This article](#) captures the sentiment of some on the subject.

You can think of it this way, too. Social media is really [digital sharecropping](#) whereas an email list of engaged people who have raised their hand to receive email communication from you are part of your tribe.

We are so convinced of the effectiveness of this tactic that we continue to invest a great deal of effort into building and nurturing the Zondervan Nonfiction email lists, which now stand at over one-quarter of a million subscribers.

If you are determined to build your email list – which we strongly encourage – and don't have an email marketing system, [MailChimp](#) is an excellent option. For list building tactics, refer to what author Michele Cushatt (<http://michelecushatt.com/>) is doing. Essentially, offer a valuable freemium geared to your target audience (the right bait for the right fish) and offer that freemium to those who sign up.

In any email content strategy, the [Triangle of Relevance](#) applies with value to the subscriber as the number one criterion.