Hello. This is Thomas Umstattd Jr. The talk you’re about to hear was given at the Roaring Lambs Writers Conference in Dallas, Texas. If you have any questions, we would love to answer them. Just go to AuthorMedia.com and click on the big “Schedule Consultation” button for your free fifteen-minute consultation.

Today we’re going to talk about the secrets of amazing author websites. If you’ve ever heard me speak before you know normally I share a couple of stories at the beginning of my talks. In this talk we’re going to do it a little bit differently. We have two fictitious people, Frank and Susan, who are going to be our example authors and we’re going to weave their stories throughout this talk. Frank is going to be our ‘C’ student and Susan is going to be our ‘A’ student. She’s going to be doing things right.

I’m going to be sharing a series of secrets and in those secrets are a bunch of dos and don’ts based off of my experience of working with author websites for over five years.

[00:59] Secret #1: Design Around Marketing Goals

The number one secret of amazing author websites is to design around marketing goals. This is not what Frank did. Frank built a website and his website was the typical “home,” “about,” “books,” “contact,” and maybe some sort of “goodies” or “freebies” page. He spent a lot of money on it and he spent a lot of effort on it. After a year, he looked at his numbers of visitors to his website and he realized that no one was visiting his website even though it was beautiful, even though it was gorgeous.

This leads us into our first don’t, which is don’t focus on design over content. When was the last time someone recommended that you visit a web page or a website? Probably happened this morning on Facebook. You got an email from someone saying, “You’ve got to visit this page” or “Here’s a funny article.” But when was the last time someone said, “You’ve got to visit this website; it’s beautiful.” Hardly ever happens. And yet when we build websites, that’s all we think about is how beautiful can we make the website when in reality that is not what our visitors care about.

Simple is better than fancy and beautiful doesn’t sell. You don’t what to shop for a website like you shop for a dress to take to the banquet. You don’t want to be the only one at the banquet wearing that dress, you don’t want someone else wearing your dress. That’s the wrong thinking.

The poster child of this is Randy Ingermanson, the author of Writing Fiction for Dummies. Many of you are familiar with him. This is what his website used to look like. Anybody here think this
is an attractive looking website? This is the website that made thousands of dollars every month and got tens of thousands of visitors every month. Why? Because he focused on content.

If you google “how to write a novel” Randy ranks number one. He got tired of me using him as my poster child and he had us redesign his website. This is what the new website looks like. You’d think this new website is amazingly better than the old website, but in reality it’s improved his sales by 10-20%. So he saw an improvement, but not a significant improvement.

If you have to have only one of two things, content or beauty, you’ve got to have content. A lot of authors treat their website like a painting and they spend all of their time, energy, and money on the frame and ignore the painting itself. The painting is the content, the value your website provides.

Susan does it differently. She starts with a mission for her website, which leads us into our first do. Have a mission for your website. You want to set SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Time-oriented.

The typical goal for an author website is to “build my platform.” Often when I talk with authors they come to me and they hire us to build their website because they want to build their platform. The problem of that as a goal is that it’s not a SMART goal. It’s not specific. That could mean anything. It’s not measurable. How could you know you’ve accomplished building your platform? You talk to Dave Ramsey who has perhaps the biggest platform of any Christian author and he’s still trying to build his platform. It’s not achievable because you can never get there, you can never have the perfect platform. It’s not realistic and it’s not time-oriented.

A better goal would be “I want to build my email subscriber base to 2,000 people by the end of 2014.” Now it’s time-oriented, now it’s measurable, now we can keep score. And if that’s the goal of your website then now you know how to design the website. You probably want a subscribe box very prominently placed up above the fold and a reason for people to subscribe.

You want to know what success looks like, so question for you: What is the primary purpose of every published author website? Come on, you can say it. Sell books! There’s nothing wrong with selling books. Your books don’t help anyone if no one buys them.

So what’s the purpose of an unpublished author website? To sell books! Well, how do I sell a book that I don’t already have? You want to start selling the book that’s not out yet by getting people to follow you on Facebook, to connect with you on Twitter, or to subscribe to your email newsletter.

One of the things we do with some of our clients is we put together a sales funnel. If any of you are in business, you’ve probably seen something like this. You have strangers at the top and the ideal outcome at the bottom.

The first step for someone to connect to your website is to turn them from a stranger to a website visitor. Then maybe the next step is to get them to download a goody or subscribe to your blog.
Each one of these requires more commitment. You’re building more trust. This is the key to an effective website.

A lot of people treat their website like trying to get married. They go to a singles bar and go up to the first single person and say, “Will you marry me?”

“No. Weird.”

And so they go on to the next person, “Will you marry me? If I ask a thousand people surely I’ll get one of them to say yes.” That’s what a lot of advertising looks like today.

With a website you can do better. You can go out on that first date and say, “I don’t want you to buy my book; I just want you to read this 500 word blog post.” It’s less commitment. It’s just coffee. It’s not until the third date that you say that you’re out on parole. Let them get to know that you have a good heart before you let out all of the dirty laundry.

The other nice thing about putting together a funnel like this is that you can see—“Hmm…We have a lot of people downloading the goody but very few subscribing to the blog. Maybe we should make it easier to subscribe to the blog.” Once you keep score it allows you to make your website better and better. It allows you to improve your website and ultimately have a better website. Measurement is key.

Authors hate this. Most authors have a liberal arts background and the idea of science and numbers just makes them kind of itch all over and hate the world and life in general. “Ugh. I already have to do this for accounting. You mean I have to do this for my website?” I’m afraid to say, “Yes you do.” Find a nerdy person, someone who likes numbers to help you with this, or a company to help you with this. Keeping score is key.

Fiction websites are not the same as nonfiction websites and a lot of conferences when you get the obligatory marketing talk they treat fiction and nonfiction the same way. They give you all these tips that work really great for nonfiction and all the novelists are like, “I write Amish romance; how exactly am I going to speak about that?” There’s not a huge speaking circuit of people who write or people who want to hear from authors who write Amish novels.

Are there any novelists in the room? How many people write stories? Wow. So most of you are nonfiction. Anyone write fiction in general like short stories or something like that? Who here writes nonfiction? Wow. Wow! Normally it’s about fifty-fifty. I’ll keep the fiction stuff short. I will still talk about fiction, don’t worry.

The goal for a nonfiction website is to sell the first book. You can very easily blog your book as you go. I’ve seen this work time and time again. In fact I was just talking with someone in the break earlier. She was writing a story and the topic of the story is diamonds don’t beg. She’s going to be interviewing forty different people who are diamonds and sharing their stories. I’m like, “You shouldn’t do forty people; you should interview four hundred people. Post them every day to your blog for a year and then pick the forty best to go into your book.”

This is how New York Times bestsellers like Stuff Christians Like became overnight successes by unpublished authors. The guy who wrote Stuff Christians Like wrote a million words on his blog.
and he picked the fifty thousand best to go into his book. He knew he had a winner because it had been tested with science. He knew they got comments. He knew they got links on Twitter and Facebook and that people buzzed about the book. It was a guaranteed success.

What you have often is your opinion versus your editor’s opinion on what works and both of you are blind because neither of you are the readers you’re trying to reach. So it has to do with who has a stronger personality or who has better arguments when you could use science. I’m all about bringing science into the liberal arts. I know it’s making you uncomfortable, but trust me. It’s for your own good.

Now fiction’s a little bit different. No one’s going to buy your novel because they like your blog. The tone is very different and a lot of novelists want to write their story piece by piece. But that doesn’t really work. Novels are sequential. You have to surrender to the story to enjoy the story and people don’t read blog posts, they skim blog posts. Which is perfect for nonfiction because people don’t read nonfiction; they skim nonfiction. But it doesn’t work at all for a story.

Also, when you’re first getting started is when you have the fewest number of subscribers. As your subscribers grow they have to go back and find that old post and it just doesn’t work.

Serialized stories were incredibly popular two hundred years ago and even fifty years ago. I believe they’re coming back, but they’re not going to be on blogs. I’ve seen it tried many times and I’ve never seen it work.

So the question is what do you do? I recommend that you focus your website and your blog on selling the second book. You’ll still need it before your first book comes up.

Traditional publishers aren’t going to go with an author who has no web presence. One of the first things publishers do after they like your manuscript is google the author’s name to see if anything comes up. A lot of publishers, if nothing comes up for the author’s name, just toss the manuscript. Too much work, they don’t rank on Google, getting them up to speed is too much effort, we don’t have the budget, we’ll go with these other authors who do rank on Google. So they’re looking for a financial commitment to your platform. They’re looking for a presence on the web.

Ultimately the power of a fiction website is selling the second book. What do I mean?

Well, let’s say you’re writing a series of books. Your publisher has no idea who bought book number one. So let’s say you’re writing a trilogy and five thousand people bought book number one. Your publisher doesn’t know the names of a single one of those people. I’ve been on the phone with marketing guys with publishing houses on behalf of our clients and it blows my mind as a man from the business world and from the tech world.

Apple knows exactly who bought all of their iPhones. So when Mother’s Day comes around they send every single one of those people an invitation to buy their mom an iPad for Mother’s Day. It’s very effective marketing. They’re a little out of touch to what people’s budgets are for Mother’s Day presents, but they know who those people are and they are able to make that ask.
When your second book in your trilogy comes out, your publisher can’t tell anyone who bought the first book, “Hey, book number two is out.” They depend on the bookstores for that, but the bookstores also don’t have that information with the exception of Amazon and Barnes and Noble online.

Jeff Bezos actually shared the secret for why Amazon is winning. He said, “If we focus on our customers and everyone else focuses on us, we win.” That’s exactly what’s happening. They’re doing revolutionary things that people thought were crazy, like allowing customers to leave negative reviews on products on the store. That was super controversial. We forget the riots that manufacturers had. They were like, “How dare you.” And Amazon’s like, “Look. If the handle on your oven melts after a year’s worth of use, that’s not a review problem, that’s a manufacturing problem. And you’d rather about know about it now when it happens to the first few people then after a thousand people all have a warranty return.”

So what you want to do is after your first book have a call to action. Say, “Want to know about subsequent book? Sign up for the newsletter. Come to authorname.com/subscribe or authorname.com,” and have a big subscribe box very prominently listed there in your website.

If someone has finished your first book, the likelihood of them wanting to read your second book is really high. This is the lowest hanging fruit. I remember being sad when I finished the last *Lord of the Rings* book because all of my favorite characters had died. There was no more of them that I could experience. Your readers have that same experience. They fall in love with your characters, they fall in love with your world. Invite them to know when the world gets continued.

Next do: Use call to action buttons. A great book on web design that you don’t need to read, but I would like you to read the title, is *Don’t Make Me Think*. Good websites do the thinking for the visitors. You shouldn’t have to think to figure out what to do when you visit a website.

Here’s a random author website that’s pretty typical of author websites. What are you supposed to do when you come to this website? You know what you’re all doing right now? You’re all thinking. That’s exactly what you don’t want to happen with the website. Well, maybe if I click on the book covers I can buy the book. So you go to click on the book cover, nothing happens.

So here’s another do: Every time you have a book cover your visitors need to be able to click on that book to buy that book. I want you to imagine a little old lady clicking on that Ron Howard book trying to buy it and it not working and she’s like, “This website’s broken!” It’s not broken. It’s just poorly designed.

Here’s Roaring Lambs. What do you do when you’re supposed to come here? Visually it’s hard to figure out. You have to do a lot of thinking. Now to be fair, if you were to scroll down a little bit there’s a really good call to action button below the fold. But it would get more registrations for the website if you put that above the fold and made this image here clickable to sign up for the website. Those things make the website easier to use.
Here’s my very favorite website for illustrating this point. If you all use Dropbox, Dropbox is a magical folder on your computer that you can share with other people. You have an editor, I put my book in that folder, share the folder with my editor, I save the book, the new version is on my editor’s computer, he makes a change or she makes a change, and her version’s on my computer. No emailing back and forth. No wondering who’s got the most recent version and that’s what this video tells you. And then at the end it’s like oh by the way it’s free.

This is their homepage. What are you supposed to do on this website? Download Dropbox, right? Author websites that are like this will be more effective than author websites that are like this. Can you see the difference?

Almost all of them look like this with lots and lots of text on the home page. Does anybody read paragraphs on the homepage of a website? None of us read that text and yet we all have that text because we think our visitors are much more interested in our websites than we are in the websites of others. The reality is people don’t read paragraphs on homepages and so you don’t want to have paragraphs. Notice there are no paragraphs on this webpage.

Here’s Author Media. Here’s our website. We tried to follow our own advice and you have a big button that says “Website Pricing.” That’s the number one question that authors ask. We aren’t for everyone. We make professional author websites for authors who are either already a professional or very much on that path. We’re too expensive for a lot of authors who are still in the hobby stage. So we’re very up front with our pricing because we don’t have the manpower to easily let people down that we’re too expensive. The other button we have is “Schedule Consultation.” Those are the two big things we want. There’s very little paragraph text. Then we have some subsequent buttons down below.

The next do is use Google Analytics to track site visits. Back in the olden days when I first was building websites as a kid, tracking visitors was really difficult. What people had back in the nineties were these little hit counters. Do you remember those? Every time someone would visit the website that number would go up.

The problem with that is a lot of visitors on the internet now aren’t human. There are armies of robots that surf the web. Have you ever had to type in those squiggly letters? You ever wonder why you have to type in those squiggly letters? The website is trying to create a humans-only zone. It’s kind of like the Cantina on Tatooine in Star Wars. “No droids allowed here. We don’t accept their kind.” Sorry. The nerdness just comes out from time to time.

Those robots inflate that number. People talk about hits when one website page view from a human could generate a dozen page views from robots. There were expensive programs that were ten thousand dollars a year or ten thousand dollars a month for tracking visitors and Google bought one of those companies, took that software that was ten thousand dollars a year, and made it free and rebranded it as Google Analytics.

Google Analytics compared to hit counter is the difference between comparing a brand new Ford F1-50 and a bicycle. The only similarity is that they both have wheels. Google Analytics is still free and has been free for fifteen years and they’re going to continue to keep it free because it
helps supports their ads. When you buy ads alongside of the Google search page, Google Analytics lets you know how many people clicked on those ads. So it helps them make their money.

You want to measure. You want to do it for science.

[18:50] Secret #2: No One Cares About You

Secret number two: No one cares about you. Sorry these secrets are so discouraging, but it’s better to find out now then five thousand dollars from now. So what’s the take-away? The take-away is don’t focus on the author over the reader. You want to write with a reader-focus, not a me-focus.

If you’ve ever heard me speak, this is a continuing theme in all of my talks. It’s not just good for social media, it’s also good for websites. You have to serve others.

If I could paraphrase something that Jesus said, He says, “You know the authors in this world lord it over their readers and flaunt their popularity over those who read them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be an author among you must be a servant.”

The only words I changed in this passage are the bolded words. I changed ‘leader’ to ‘author,’ and ‘follower’ to ‘reader.’ And yet that’s exactly what you’re doing as an author. If you write fiction you are leading someone into a new world, into a whole new way of thinking. If you’re writing nonfiction, you’re leading them into new ideas and trying to change their thinking in some way or encourage them in some way. That is an act of leadership.

Did you know that in the gospel of John there is no communion? There’s no bread and there’s no wine. What did John think was so important that he shared that part, when Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” instead of the bread and the wine? It was this: the washing of the feet of the disciples. This is what Jesus said in John to go do. Now He did both, but this John felt was so important he shared it at the exclusion of the bread and the wine. It’s not just good marketing, it’s also good.

So don’t hide your contact information. You’re like how’s that connected? You want to serve the people who are building your website or who are visiting your website. That means allowing yourself to be asked questions.

C. S. Lewis is the perfect example of this. He spent hours every day responding to letters that he would receive from readers all over the world. And it changed his writing.

Everyone’s first book for almost every author is autobiographical. Whether it’s fiction or nonfiction they’re telling their own story. What separates good authors from great authors is that great authors learn to tell our story.
That’s exactly what we see with C. S. Lewis. His first book is a *Pilgrim’s Regress*. It’s literally his story told in the model of pilgrim’s progress and it’s a terrible book. I speak at the C. S. Lewis Conference and they’re like, “Yeah, read that one last.” It’s not very good. But as he started getting letters from readers he started telling our story and his writing got better and better.

A lot of people are afraid that if they put their contact information on the internet the boogie man is going to come and find them. There’s a lot of fear mongering back in the nineties that the boogie man is out there and if you use your real name he’s going to find you. I hate to tell you this, but I could find your address, your cell phone number, and every previous address and cell phone number of every single one of you on the internet in about three minutes. It would cost me a little bit of money, but it’s all there already. So the boogie man can find it if he wants to and the boogie man is typically creditors. They’re the ones who are paying for that information and they’ll chase you all around because that information is available online.

Maybe you don’t want to put your home phone number because you don’t want the phone calls to come in at midnight from Australia or somewhere. But if the *New York Times* wants to quote you because you’re the expert and the journalist has a deadline in two hours, he needs to be able to get you on the phone right then. Making him jump through hoops to get a hold of you is not the way to do it. You don’t have a servant’s mindset.

One way to get around that is to get a Google Voice number for free at voice.google.com. It’s a special phone number that you can have redirect to your phone number during certain hours of the day and go straight to voicemail during other hours of the day, or go straight to voicemail the whole time. Google will actually send you a text message or an email with the text of the voicemail or at least Google’s best version of the text of the voicemail. It’s funny to read how Google interprets other people’s language. It doesn’t do a very good job every time.

Ultimately, though, what you want to do is provide value. You don’t want to be a cyber bum. Begging people to come to your website doesn’t work. People have to want to come to your website. The only reason anyone would visit your website is if it is the most interesting thing on the entire internet for that person at that time. If there’s anything more interesting they’re going to go there instead. So you’ve got to focus and provide goodies. You want to give people a reason to come back to your website because it takes multiple touches to sell.

Here are some ideas for fiction websites. The best approach for a fiction website is to think of it like the special features on a DVD. Any of you buy DVDs? Any of you still have DVD players, don’t do it all on Netflix? There’s a “Special Features” on the back. What do you like to see as special features for the story? Something that goes along the story. These things can be very effective for your website.

The first is character art. If you write a novel there’s a certain percentage of the population that draws the stories that they read. It’s how they process the story. If you’re already a published novelist chances are there are drawings of your characters, drawings of your scenes hidden away in the sketchbooks of your readers. Invite them to send you copies of their pictures. Post them on your blog. They get excited. It’s like, “Oh my gosh. So and so author posted my picture on her
“Seven Secrets of Amazing Author Websites

blog.” And then suddenly everyone else is sending in their drawings. It’s free content for you. It’s great for fantasy, sci-fi. If you have a monster in your story, everyone’s going to want to draw the monster different. But it’s also for the other characters that you have.

Deleted scenes. Any of you who are writing a story, did your big bad mean editor make you cut a scene or cut a chapter? Sometimes your readers might want to read that. So I imagine you could get the deleted scenes if you subscribed to the newsletter to find out when book number two comes out. Now I have a reason to visit your website and a reason to subscribe to your newsletter. Just make sure those deleted scenes are well edited and interesting.

Same with short stories with your characters. I was talking with a lady in Canada and she had taken two characters from her story and wrote a special Christmas short story with those two. It was like two minor characters, Christmas romance, two or three thousand words long, and gave it away for free to anyone who subscribed to her newsletter in December. Brilliant! She grew her list by thousands of new subscribers very easily and it gave people something to get excited about.

You share author’s commentary or making a documentary, talking about what inspired you to make the book.

Some authors will interview their characters. If you have interesting characters sometimes they may even have their own blog post. They’re written in their own voice. If you have a snarky or a character who’s full of life, put that character into your blog. Let them answer reader questions. This can be really fun. These are just some of the ideas I posted in a blog post, Ten Ways Proven to Draw Readers to Your Novel’s Websites. We won’t go into this too much more, but these are the sorts of things that we have on our blog. Tips and advice like this.

You want to provide exclusive content. If everything on your website I can find somewhere else, I have no reason to visit your website. If someone comes to you and says, “Hey, will you post this blog book tour that I’m doing? I’m posting it to twenty-five other blogs,” Google’s going to see that and assume that twenty-four of you plagiarized one of you and will penalize you in the search algorithm. So you never want to be a part of a copy-and-paste blog book tour. If someone wants to be on your website, you’ve got to get them to give you unique information or exclusive information.

[26:58] **Secret #3: Integrate a Blog**

Integrate a blog is secret number three. We don’t have research for authors, but we do have research for businesses. Business websites with blogs get how much more traffic do you think than business websites without blogs? The answer is 55%. More than any other factor, a blog boosts traffic. And we’ve seen even more than that. When we launched Mary Demuth’s site, we saw a huge skyrocket. I’ll share that story at the very end.

Why? First off, blogs boost Google rankings. If you ever hear a talk on search engine optimization (SEO), they always tell you you have to put new information on your website.
You’re like, “When am I going to update?” If your website is just “home,” “about,” “books” – “You mean I have to write a whole new book every week to keep my website up to date? That’ll never happen.” Your “about” page doesn’t change. None of that is very interesting for Google. But if you write a blog post every week, suddenly you have new content on your website and you want it integrated in.

Blogs also give your visitors something to share with each other, share on Facebook. No one’s going to share your “about” page, but a lot of people might share a blog post. They also allow for two way communication as comments come back to you and they give people a reason to return.

But I’m not going to kid you, blogs are hard work and they take a lot of investment. Some people will launch a website for a client and they get so excited they want a second website right away. I always try to talk them out of that or a second blog right away. Blogs at first are a lot like puppies and then they get older and they still require feeding every day. So you can have multiple blogs if you want to, but only after the first one is well taken care of. If you’re responsible with one dog, maybe we’ll get you another one, but I don’t want to get stuck feeding the dog after you decide you don’t like it.

Blogs are worth it. That’s what Susan did. She decided to integrate a blog into her website and she answered reader questions. As readers emailed her questions about her book, she would post answers to those questions on her blog. What she found was that as she posted those answers, it wasn’t just her readers that were asking those questions, people all over the internet were typing those questions into Google because they heard a guy say one time at a conference, “You should type your questions into Google.” She started ranking for the questions that people were asking and that brought in more traffic. People who had never read her books were reading her answers about her books, suddenly getting interested in her books, and her books started to sell more and more.

[29:31] Secret #4: Use a Content Management System

Secret number four is to use a content management system. In the olden days there was magical software that someone had on their computer. The owner of that magical software was known as the Webmaster and if you wanted your website updated you had to bring a humble supplication of cookies and/or money and beg that the great and wonderful Webmaster would deign to update your website. If he didn’t update your website, your website didn’t get updated. If he decided to go off to college or get hired by Microsoft, your website didn’t get updated. Those are the olden times where the web software is on your computer.

The new times, what we live in now, is where the software lives on your website and anyone with the right login information, password and username, can update your website. So now it’s just not you who has authority to update your website but also your assistant.

Content management systems are easy to update, easy to optimize, and easy to grow. They can grow with you. When you’re first getting started it may be pretty small, but as you go you can add features without having to get a whole new website.
The content management system that I recommend, and Michael Hyatt, Randy Ingermanson also recommend this pretty much across the board, the one to go with is WordPress. You want to avoid Blogger at all costs because Blogger does not rank well on Google and it doesn’t scale well. Authors who start with Blogger almost always end up having to leave Blogger and the longer you’re with Blogger the more expensive it is.

One of the biggest people on Blogger, Rachelle Gardner, who’s a literary agent (some of you probably follow her on Twitter, follow her blog), she started off on Blogger. She kept running up into the limitations of Blogger, so she came to us. She said, “I want you to move me to WordPress, redirect all the posts so everyone who went to the old posts goes to the new posts.” At the time, she was getting about 30,000 visitors a month. Now with WordPress she’s getting 60-75,000 visitors a month.

There are dozens and dozens of reasons why WordPress is better. Some of them are technical. If you’re curious, you’re welcome to look it up on our blog. We’ll go into the details. But just take my word for it. If you want traction, if you want platform, WordPress is the only good option.

It can be confusing though because there are three different flavors of WordPress and a lot of folks when they say WordPress what they think is we’re talking about wordpress.com.

Wordpress.com is actually very similar to Blogger and not much better or worse than Blogger. They’re both about the same. It is better, but wordpress.com is like an apartment. Think of Blogger like a dorm room; wordpress.com is like an apartment. It’s very easy to set up, you can move in right away, it’s not very expensive, but you’re very limited in what you can do. If you want to paint, you have to get permission. If you want the kitchen to be bigger, you just can’t do it. You can’t operate a business. It’s very limited.

Whereas wordpress.org is like owning your own house. You have full control over everything. You want to integrate a shopping cart? No problem. You want a bookstore plugin? No problem. You want a forum, podcasts? All of those things you can do with plugins. It’s kind of like an iPhone where there are all these apps for it; there’s all these plugins for WordPress where it can do anything that you can imagine. There are tens of thousands of plugins for wordpress.org. None of them work for wordpress.com.

There’s also a third version of WordPress called WordPress Multisite that’s kind of like a condominium. You have more ownership than .com, but not as much control as.org. For authors what I recommend is wordpress.org.

[33:17] Secret #5: Be Remarkable

Secret number five is to be remarkable. By remarkable I mean Seth Godin’s definition of remarkable. Godin had a very specific definition. He said, “Remarkable is worth making a remark about.”
I can tell right now if your website is remarkable. If I go on Twitter and do a search and no one is talking about your website on Twitter, your website’s not remarkable. If no one’s talking about your website on Facebook, your website’s not remarkable.

You can be remarkably bad. Have any of you seen the Friday song by Rebecca Black? [singing] “It’s Friday, Friday / Yesterday was Thursday / Tomorrow is Saturday.” You all are looking at me like – consider yourselves blessed. The song is real. It really did happen. It got over 100 million views. In comparison, the Super Bowl gets about 100 million views. Which means this song by this fourteen year old about her favorite day of the week got more views than the Super Bowl.

Wow, how did that happen? Because it was remarkably bad. People would watch the video and be like, “Oh my gosh. This is so funny it’s so terrible.” Then they go to Facebook and share it with all their friends. “You’ve got to see this video. It’s so bad.” And they would watch it and go, “It is bad.” And they’d share it with their friends. “You’ve got to see this. It’s bad.” That’s not the kind of remarkable you want to be.

You can be remarkably funny. You can be remarkably helpful. You can be remarkably informative. But you have to be remarkable somehow. Seth Godin calls this being a purple cow. If you’re driving down a road and you see a purple cow, you’re going to stop and take a picture. Because who’s ever seen a purple cow? But if every cow were purple, you’d drive right on by.

We heard earlier today about how authors don’t really compete with each other. There’s a bigger and bigger pie. If another author’s already doing something, you writing the same kind of book is not remarkable. It’s not going to get traction. They’re already there, they’re already famous. You’re not going to be able to copy them.

So you can measure your remark ability. There’s a great tool called Google Alerts. Did you know that Google will email you any time someone talks about you or your book on the internet? It’s free at google.com/alerts. Highly recommended to do this both for your name and for each one of your book titles.

My recommendation here is to find a niche. Focus your website on as small a group of people as possible. You’re like, “Well, I don’t want to talk to this small group of people my whole life.” That’s fine. Thrill that small group of people and then you can grow through concentric circles to bigger and bigger groups of people.

So if you write a book on parenting, you’re competing with all the big parenting gurus. But let’s say your husband was in Iraq and you had to parent over six years together over Skype because your children never saw your husband because he was deployed in Iraq. You write a book about parenting the children of a soldier and it’s all about parenting over Skype and what that’s like.

Well if that’s your book, most people aren’t going to want to read that book. They’re like, “I don’t have that problem.” But the people who do have that problem, the dads who haven’t seen their sons and have never thrown a softball to them, suddenly that’s a really useful book. Like “Man, I’d want to read that.” Then as you write that book you’re like this could also be parenting
Seven Secrets of Amazing Author Websites

your children when you’re in prison because prisoners have the same challenge that they don’t get to interact. Or parenting your children when you’re away on work. And suddenly that circle gets bigger and bigger. As those books get successful then suddenly people are wondering what do you have on parenting in general? This was really helpful, but my husband just came back, the war’s over now, but now what do I do?

Allison Bottke is a great example of this. She writes the Setting Boundaries book and suddenly Setting Boundaries isn’t a book, it’s a phenomenon. There’s one Setting Boundaries book coming out every year on all these different topics. But she didn’t start off to be an expert on all those different topics. Some of those books she had co-authors for who were the experts. So she brought her credibility and her brand, they brought their expertise; it’s a really great coauthor combo.

So find and start a niche. Be faithful in the little things before trying to be faithful in the bigger things. Don’t copy the competition.

[37:59] Secret #6: You Are Not a Website Expert

Secret number six is that you are not a website expert. You’re like, “That’s no secret.” Well, sometimes authors need a little reminding.

Some tips here. Don’t build it yourself. Building an effective website is a lot of work and it’s a very different skill set from writing a book. It takes the folks at our company about six months to get them up to speed with everything they need to know about running a website project. They’re still not doing all the technical work; we have people who do that. But just running the website it takes about six months of them working full time to get them up to speed.

So to get there on your own doing it part time, you’re either going to have to take a really long time studying or you’re going to have cut corners. Often when you’re doing something and you don’t know how to do it, you don’t even know what corners you’re cutting.

How many of you change your own oil? There’s always one guy and it’s always in the front row. Way to go! So, why don’t the rest of you change your own oil? You realize that Jiffy Lube charges you three to four times more than what you’d have to do if you changed it yourself? The difference is they can do it in ten minutes without you getting messy and ruining a set of clothes, whereas you can do it in half a day and the cost of clothes and a lot of frustration and an argument with your spouse about oil running down the driveway and cleaning that up (not that I would know).

The reality is that we live in a civilization where people specialize and become experts in certain things and we depend on their expertise for those things. This is not revolutionary, right? You aren’t like, “I’m not going to go to the doctor until I know about medicine.” No one goes up to a doctor and apologizes, “I’m really not a medical person.” You just go to the doctor, explain your problem, and he tells you what to do to fix it.
But people do that all the time to tech people. People apologize to me. People even apologized to me today for not being technical people. It doesn’t bother me! That’s why I have a living. If all of you were nerds, I’d be out of work! But somehow we don’t feel permission to hire the technical things when we hire every other technical thing in our life, be it legal or what have you.

That’s what Frank did. He tried building the website himself, but it’s not working out so he’s a little frustrated. But he has a brother-in-law who’s technical. He’s like, “Yeah, I’ll help you out. I’ll build you your website. I’ll help you out with the technical things. I’ll do it for free.” His brother’s name is Charlie and it’s like yes! I needed someone technical to do the website for free!

But here’s what just happened. Charlie offered to do a onetime project for Frank. What Frank asked for and thought he received was ongoing support of the website for free for now and for always.

You know how this story is going to end. A lot of you have lived this story. Every time I give this talk, I hear people on both sides of this who’ve suffered because often the cost of a free website is a relationship.

Six months down the road, Frank needs his website updated. He goes to Charlie and he’s like, “Charlie, I really need you to update my website.”

Charlie’s like, “Yeah, yeah. I’ll get to it next week.”

Frank’s like, “Yeah, but I have an agent who likes my manuscript and wants some changes to the website so we can pitch it to a publisher. I really need the changes.”

“Yeah, I got busy with work. I’ll get it done in a couple weeks.”

A couple weeks turns into a couple months and now months have gone by, the website’s not updated or changed. Frank doesn’t know what to do because his wife is related to this guy and he can’t get rid of her and now it’s really awkward and it’s frustrating because it’s just created a rift in the relationship. I see a lot of you nodding that have experienced this in your life. So the tip here is don’t hire your brother-in-law to build your website.

The one exception (and I have seen this work) is that if you are married to your web guy. That works. Somehow wives or husbands, generally it’s wives, are able to exert influence to get that website updated tonight.

So what you want to do is hire someone you can trust and you need to be able to trust them in two very important ways. First, you need to trust that they know where you’re going.

When I flew in last night I had to catch a taxi to the hotel. So I tell the taxi driver, “I’m going to the hotel. It’s the Hilton Garden Inn.” He’s like, “Yeah, yeah. Hilton.” I’m like I don’t know if the Hilton and the Hilton Garden Inn are the same thing. So I’m kind of stressing out as we’re leaving the airport because I’m seeing this meter and Dallas is a really big town. Finally I get out my iPhone and I give him the address of the hotel so I know he’s taking me to the right hotel.

A lot of people in their experience have a web company that they’re working with, but the web company isn’t going to the same place the author’s wanting to go. The farther they go the more
tension there is. The temptation, what the author does is reaches over and grabs the steering wheel and starts trying to drive. Which always inevitably leads to disaster.

It’s the equivalent of not liking what your hair looks like halfway through the haircut and grabbing the scissors and trying to fix it yourself. That never works and half of a haircut always looks worse than the old hair before the haircut. You need to trust that they know where you’re trying to go and you need to trust that they know how to get you there.

Some people may have an assistant that they work with who knows exactly what they’re trying to accomplish with the website, has the same vision. They’ve been working together for years, but the assistant doesn’t have the technical expertise to get there.

Have any of you taken a taxi in a third world country? Or a place like New York? Third world countries like New York? How was that experience? Were you closer to God at the end of that experience? I think that there are more conversion experiences in the backseats of taxis. It’s like, “Dear God, if you let me out of this car I will give you all my money and everything. Just please do not let me die.”

Why is it that taxi drivers drive that way? Well, if you go to a third world country, chances are that taxi driver owns that car. That is his entire investment for retirement. His entire net worth is in that car. If he gets into an accident it’s not just his life on the line, it’s his livelihood on the line and that of his children. So he has a huge physical and financial incentive to get you there safely. But he charges by the mile, so he also has the financial incentive to get you there quickly.

He, unlike you, has driven these roads before. In fact, all day long he drives these roads. He knows exactly what the timing is on that light and when he hits the yellow he knows he’s going to get missed by that much. He’s able to drive in a way you would never be able to drive not knowing the roads.

Now it may be that he’s incompetent and there are incompetent taxi drivers and they get into accidents. You want to try to pick a taxi that looks like it’s in good shape. If this side of the taxi is dented in, you may be like, “No I’m good. I’ll get the next one.”

So you want to pick a company that you can trust or a team you can trust. That’s what Susan did. She knew that she needed a good team for her website, that one person was not enough.

Why? Because designers are bad at SEO. The kind of people who design websites are artistic. They use the Mac because it’s pretty. They’re all about making the website pretty and search engine optimization, which is the art of getting your website to comply with the computer mathematical formula on a computer at Google, that’s really too technical and they don’t bother.

I can tell within just seconds when a website is designed by a designer because fundamental basic optimization techniques are not employed because they just don’t know about it. You’re like, “Okay, I realize that we need someone technical,” so you bring in the nerdiest person you know, a developer, to code your website. The problem is that developers are really bad at design.
When my developers are designing something they’ll often just make the color equal blue. It’s like, “I just let the computer pick the shade. It’s all the same to me.”

So you either have a website that’s really technically good or visually good, but not both. The people who are good at both are making half a million dollars working for Microsoft and aren’t freelancing because that’s a very rare skill.

But you don’t just want those two things, you also want someone who’s good at the marketing, helping the website actually accomplish the goals that it was set out to accomplish and helping you figure out what the right goals are for you and for your book. The body needs itself. No one person is both a hand and a foot.

You also want someone to keep your website secure. This is particularly true if you’re a Christian author, especially if you deal with anything relating to Islam. There are jihadist hacking groups and all they do is target Christian websites that talk about Islam and take those websites down. There are many other hackers that have malicious intent, plus armies of robots or bots that hack websites that are vulnerable. It’s a lot of expertise to keep a website from being hacked. It’s better just to have someone who’s doing that for you than to become an expert in computer security while you’re becoming an expert in design and development.

**[47:12] Secret #7: Google+**

Secret number seven is Google+. Who here is on Google+? Oh wow. That’s a pretty good number. Who actively uses it? Who’s used in the last week or two? Like two, three hands going up.

A lot of people think, “Google+, that’s a ghost town. No one’s on there. Why would I use it?”

Here’s why you want to use Google+. If you look at your Google Analytics, the pie chart will probably look something like this. For most authors 25% of their traffic comes from social media, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, all combined. Then 25% comes from what’s called direct traffic. This is someone clicking on a link in an email or clicking on a browser. And 50% of your traffic comes from search, most of which comes from Google.

Google doesn’t look at how many likes a page has to rank on Google, it doesn’t look at how many tweets it has; it only looks at how many +1s it has. So if you ignore Google+, you give a huge opportunity to every other website who is using Google+.

Believe it or not, it has the second highest rate of active users of any social network. Here we have Facebook, Google+ number two, and the third is actually YouTube. YouTube, which is also owned by Google, is the third most popular social network. Then you have Twitter below that and Pinterest way down there at the bottom. This is globally.
It may be different for your users. If you’re writing a book for twenty-five year old women who are planning a wedding, Pinterest is absolutely the social network you want because that’s where those kinds of people are hanging out.

Google uses Google+ to rank websites and ignores all of the others. So this one social network is worth that 50% of the pie while all the other social networks share for the 25% when it comes to traffic to your website.

There’s a special thing called Google+ Authorship that is your secret weapon. Almost no authors know about this and this is guaranteed to improve your traffic and your rankings. Google+ Authorship is a way for you to claim your blog posts and the posts on your website so Google knows who wrote them, which prevents piracy. If someone else copies that post, Google knows that you wrote it first and you get credit and they don’t link to the other one.

It also boosts your rankings and you get your photo on search results. Have you ever noticed why some people have their photo next to search results and other people don’t? Well, it’s because they’ve set up Google Authorship.

Instead of giving you the step-by-step how to do it, we actually have a step-by-step guide on our website. You can go to authormedia.com/authorship. It’s one of the most popular posts we’ve ever written because even to this day I don’t know of any other websites for authors that talk about how to do this. It’s kind of crazy. When the program from Google is called Authorship you’d think authors are like, “Ooh! I’m an author! I want my photo next to the results!” But it doesn’t work that way.

At Author Media we build websites for authors. You can do this yourself. If you want to do it yourself I recommend getting WordPress For Dummies. It’s one of the best books on using WordPress. It walks you through it. And Search Engine Optimization For Dummies. Or you can get a company like Author Media.

Our philosophy is that we hold your hand. We specialize in authors who are not tech savvy and we work with non tech savvy authors all day every day. That’s what we do all over the country. A lot of these things we do automatically (integrating the blog, search engine optimization, etc.). But a lot of folks don’t go with us and there are a lot of other really good website companies that are out there.

I do want to tell you about a cool thing we built for anyone, whether you’re with us or not, called My Book Table. When you’re selling books on your website, you have a couple of bad options. One is to ship the books yourself, where you have a garage full of books. That’s no fun, but you get to bring in the money directly. But you need a really expensive website to handle it and taxes and credit cards, and that’s such a huge pain. The other option is to have a page that lists all of your books on one big page. You probably see a “books” page with links to Amazon. The problem with this is that you don’t rank for your own books on Google.

I was doing a webinar with a really famous author and during the webinar we were doing it together. We were talking about this and he googled the titles of his books and realized he wasn’t
ranking number one for his own books and he had a well optimized website. When all of your books are on one page, you don’t rank. It has to do with how Google works.

So you can either have something that’s really expensive or you have something that’s not at all. We didn’t like either of those options and we didn’t like hand-making “books” pages that worked. We did an auditive where the time of our staff went and this took dozens of hours of our experienced staff making “books” pages that work.

What we did is we developed a plugin called My Book Table and for the first year we just used it internally to save ourselves time. Then we were like, “There’s probably a lot of authors who would benefit from this plugin,” and so we made it free. It’s available on the plugin store or the plugin repository for WordPress. I have a short one minute video about it.

[Start of Video]
Sarah is an author who wants to focus her energy on writing. She also wants an easy way to sell her books online. She added links on her website, but no one came. In other words, Sarah’s books weren’t selling. So Sarah added the Mind Book Table WordPress plugin to her website. With a few simple clicks she added her books to her site with buy buttons from stores like Amazon and Barnes and Noble. My Book Table’s advanced search engine optimization helped Sarah’s books rank number one on Google and its affiliated integration helped her make extra money on every sale. Now every time someone searches for her book, Sarah has a chance to get paid twice; once from her publisher and once from Amazon’s affiliate program. With My Book Table Sarah has more time to do what she really loves, writing! She also has more money, which is nice too. Let My Book Table do the selling for you. Check it out at mybooktable.com and get the power of the book source without the complexity. My Book Table: simple, search optimized, and affiliate compatible.
[End of Video]

That’s My Book Table. For the affiliate part there’s a paid version that you can buy, but you get all the features of My Book Table for free at mybooktable.com.

Here is Angela Hunt using a beta version. Notice we have all of her books listed, but if you click on the book it takes you to a page specifically for the book that ranks (here she is right at the top) on Google.

We can’t guarantee that it’ll rank on Google because that’s outside of our control, but it really helps. We’ve seen huge improvement for the rankings of our clients’ books that are using this plugin.

So WordPress makes things easy to update. Easy to update your content yourself. You get someone else to build you the kitchen, but you can cook the meals yourself. What you don’t want is where you have to pay someone to cook meals every time you want an update.

Mobile compatible is really important regardless of where you get your website. You want to make sure it works on mobile devices. Some websites half the traffic is on a mobile device, so look at your website to see if it works on an iPhone. A lot of websites don’t work at all on an

Speaker: Thomas Umstattd
iPhone depending on how old they are, which means half of your visitors can’t see or buy anything.

Search optimization, Google Analytics, all of these things we talk about we take care of for you if you want to go with Author Media. All you have to do if you’re interested is click the “Schedule Consultation” right there. You get a free fifteen-minute consultation with one of our WordPress website experts.

[54:47] Q&A

So with that, are there any questions?

Yes ma’am. [question asked]

The question is she’s trying to set up a blog on wordpress.com and they have rules that say she can’t sell directly or she’s having some other challenges.

That’s going back to the apartment-house; that’s the apartment side of WordPress. It’s very limited in what you can do. You can’t run a business out of your apartment. If your apartment finds that out, they’ll give you trouble.

What you want is wordpress.org, which has a very similar interface. If you already know wordpress.com, wordpress.org will be very easy to use. You have a lot more freedom and it’s open source, so there’s no limit to what you can do with wordpress.org. You could do good things, you could do bad things. It’s neutral. The software itself is free, which is nice. It’s just setting it up that you have to pay for.

Other questions. Yes sir. [question asked]

The question is if you have wordpress.com can you move to wordpress.org?

The answer is absolutely. It’s kind of like moving from an apartment to a house. You suddenly have all this room for your furniture and you’re like, “Wow. I thought I had more furniture than this.” It gives you a lot more room to grow in. It’s a pretty straight forward process.

You can even move from Blogger to WordPress. You can move your comments and your posts; all of that’s really easy. To do a migration where your old posts redirect to the new posts can be a little bit trickier, but that’s doable as well.

Yes ma’am. [question asked]

The question is do we submit our websites to the major search engines (like Google and Yahoo)?

The answer is you don’t need to do that anymore. Google and Yahoo find websites often within minutes in times of when they’re launched and so there’s no submitting. In fact anyone who says, “Hey, if you pay us money, we’ll submit your website to these search engines,” that’s a bit
of a scam. That was very much something needed ten years ago and now the only people doing that are just taking advantage because the way that Google works is different.

We do set up Google Webmaster Tools that pings Google every time your website – it isn’t just when it’s created, but every time it’s updated Google gets notified, can see the XML site map and some other technical things like that. But it’s very different from the olden days when you submit to directories and search engines.

We have time for maybe one final question. Yes ma’am. [question asked]

The question is do we do Christian book only or do we also do secular books?

We do do secular books. We don’t do all secular books. A lot of the folks that work in our company are Christians and we are a Christian company, so we don’t do books that are in conflict with the teachings of the Bible. But if you have a book on how to run a better business and there’s nothing Christian about it or a true crime book, we’ll do that. But if it’s advocating Buddhism or advocating Islam that’s not the kind of book that we’re going to do. There’s a blog post that I wrote that’s very specific about the kinds of sites that we do and the kinds of sites that we don’t do.

[57:38] Closing Remarks

Final story and then I’ll let you go. Mary Demuth, who won the award earlier today, came to us. She had a website that was relevantpros.com and she wanted to re-launch it, get a new looking website, and launch it on marydemuth.com. So we redesigned her website and refocused her website.

A lot of authors (and I’ve talked with authors today who are like this) have a lot of different things going on and all of that division of their effort makes their effort a lot less effective. The difference between a firecracker and a rifle round is the focus of the barrel of the rifle sending all the energy to just one place.

So we helped refocus her website and we integrated her blog. We got her off of Blogger, put her blog into her website on marydemuth.com. This is what it looked like. It doesn’t look like this now, but this is what it looked like when we launched it.

Before we built her website she was getting 300 monthly visits. After we integrated in the blog and made all of these changes, we re-launched, the next month she got 10,000 visits. She’s now getting between 20 and 30 thousand monthly visits. But visits alone aren’t that important. What are the metrics that we were changing? One of the goals was to get more email subscribers. She went from getting 3-7 new subscribers a week to 50-70 new email subscribers a week so that now she had an email list that would help her build her platform. Now she has over 23,000 visitors.

We would love to make you our next case study. Thank you very much.