

Title:

Are Readers Important To Authors?

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Summary:

Bestselling authors speak of their fans in almost reverential tones, as well they should. A loyal readership that comes back for more, book after book, is the real key to long-term publishing success. Savvy authors work diligently to produce great work that will continue to please their audience, but many of them also communicate directly to their fans. Author's web sites are all the rage, some of them quite elaborately produced.

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Keywords:

Article Body:

Bestselling authors speak of their fans in almost reverential tones, as well they should. A loyal readership that comes back for more, book after book, is the real key to long-term publishing success. Savvy authors work diligently to produce great work that will continue to please their audience, but many of them also communicate directly to their fans. Author's web sites are all the rage, some of them quite elaborately produced.

Fauzia Burke is the founder and President of FSB Associates, <http://www.fsbassociates.com>. Her company specializes in publicity utilizing the Internet and author websites.

We asked Fauzia: What is the most unusual publicity program you've developed? "We're proud of our ability to harness all the power of the Web in the service of authors and their books, and we're especially committed to making the online presence fit the project.

Here are some examples: "Our site for Doug Stanton's *In Harm's Way* goes beyond words and pictures to include audio interviews with survivors of the 1945 sinking of the USS Indianapolis, video clips of the actual rescue at sea, and a discussion board. Our campaign introduced the book to many audiences, from World War II vets and history buffs, to college and high school students.

"For Christopher Rice's supernatural thriller *A Density Of Souls*, we used animation and graphics to create an online gathering place that echoes the eerie atmosphere of the book, and added exclusive material like a virtual yearbook from the New Orleans high school of the story, and back-story on the characters. We even helped promote Chris's appearance on MTV's *Real World*.

"We used cutting-edge animated maps in our site for Rick Atkinson's Pulitzer Prize winner *An Army At Dawn*, to illustrate critical points in the Allied assault on German-held North Africa in 1942-43. Animation helps bring alive our site for Tony Horwitz's *Blue Latitudes*, combining a sea chart that traces the voyages of Captain Cook with excerpts from corresponding passages in the book.

"But we don't use bells and whistles for their own sake. Our site for Mitch Albom's novel *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* called for a simpler approach that lets the warm story and the wonderful writing take center stage. Because this is the kind of book people love to share, there's an e-postcard that fans can send to their friends. There are teaching guides, and reading group materials, and a Q&A with Mitch. And for the Spanish edition of the book, we've created a Spanish-language site that will help broaden the audience even more.

"For all these books, we also waged word-of-mouth campaigns designed to attract attention, site traffic and media coverage. In the end, these coordinated efforts produced the most satisfying of all results - sales."

Quite a few author websites are just storefronts whose major purpose is to sell books. Others have a much more intimate feel, inviting visitors to: "Come on in and meet me. Stay and chat." With all the other pressures on their time, why do bestselling authors go to the trouble of answering fan e-mail, or posting responses to message boards on their web sites, and continually upgrading them with information about their new project or where they will be appearing?

Nicholas Sparks, www.nicholassparks.com, whose first book, *The Notebook* set a new standard for romance, answers the question: You interact with your fans more than many authors do. Your web site is particularly interactive, with message boards and an e-mail address for fans to reach you. Why did you take this approach? "People have so many questions about my novels or want to know about me, and there's a lot of misinformation out there. I wanted to have the correct answers put up where readers could easily access them. The web site is a way to make sure the truth is getting out there. For instance, the question, Where did I get the idea for *The Notebook*? If I say it was inspired by my wife's grandparents, this is very much the truth, but not much information. Readers want to know more: How was it inspired? In what way? How did that whole thought

process work? So I explained the whole situation so the readers understand."

Does that interaction encourage the word of mouth buzz about your books? "Maybe a little. But not everyone cares about what an author's life is like. They just want to read a good book."

Anna Jacobs, <http://www.annajacobs.com>, has written 29 novels, mostly historical sagas and romances. She resides in Australia, her primary publisher is in the United Kingdom and her books are sold worldwide including the United States.

We asked Anna: Romance authors seem to have a more personal relationship with their fans, interacting with them on web sites, message boards, Internet chats, book readings. Why is that? What does an author learn from this interaction that assists her with her work? "I'm not sure it's just romance authors. I think it's a woman's approach. I happen to believe that if you put something back into the universe it will bring good karma. Or as my daughter puts it: What goes around, comes around. But I also keep in touch with readers because if you can 'attach' readers as well as writing good books (the latter is the prime pre-requisite) they go out and talk about your books to others.

"I learn a lot from readers' emails about what has particularly pleased them. That doesn't hurt. Also writing is a very solitary activity, so it's nice to be in touch with others. And we all need feedback and praise. I'm as human as any other. I love to hear that someone has enjoyed my books. It's much more fun than sales figures."

Susan Elizabeth Phillips, www.susanelizabethphillips.com, is the only five-time winner of the Romance Writers of America Favorite Book of the Year Award; inducted into the Romance Writers Hall of Fame, 2001- pioneered, and some say, perfected the "romantic comedy" school of fiction. writes with a touch of humor. We asked Susan: You seem to interact quite a bit with your readers through your web site. You even mentioned there were several categories of fans you have, those who enjoy the humor in your books and those who are more attuned to what happens to the characters. How does the fan interaction shape your writing? "I love my readers, but I do my best not to let their comments shape my writing in any way. About ten years ago, the light finally went off in my brain and I truly understood that every book I wrote would be somebody's favorite and somebody's least favorite, that everybody in the world (gasp) wasn't going to like my books. This was intensely liberating. It told me that to do my best work I concentrate only on pleasing myself. Truly the biggest 'Aha Moment' of my career."

It's not only romance authors that have their own website, Stuart Woods,

<http://www.stuartwoods.com>, writes hard hitting mysteries and has been on the New York Times Bestseller list many times.

Stuart answers the question: You are one of the bestselling authors who regularly corresponds with readers via e-mail, why? "It gives me a direct kind of feedback. I get a sense that what I'm doing is the right thing to do. I've never made any changes in what I do because of what I've heard from readers. The vast preponderance of people love the books and write to tell me so."

And it's not just the household name authors who value their readers.

Lydia Joyce's, www.lydiajoyce.com, most recent book is "The Veil of Night" an intense, sensual remaking of the Gothic genre, with a mysterious Duke, a crumbling manor, and an older heroine with her own secrets to hide.

Lydia told us: "To be absolutely crass, if I didn't have fans, I couldn't make money. And if I couldn't make money, writing would be a hobby, not a job!"

"But fans are important to me for far more than financial reasons. My desire to become a writer started with the ghost stories I used to tell around Girl Scouts campfires. I loved how I could affect other people, how I could thrill them, excite them, and make them care about the people in my tales. The pleasure that other people get from my storytelling is a major motivator for me. If it weren't for that, I could be perfectly happy to leave my stories in my head where they started."

Lynne Connolly is the author of the Richard and Rose series of books, romantic suspense novels set in the mid eighteenth century. Her latest book, "Harley Street" came out in March, and pits the new Lord and Lady Strang against their deadly enemies, Julia and Steven Drury in a tale of old transgressions come to test new found love.

We asked Lynne: Why are your fans important to you as an author? "They validate my work, tell me that I'm on the right track. Fans aren't unthinking admirers, and can often give you information you never had before. Their encouragement keeps me going, and presenting my work to publishers and agents with confidence. Economically, they buy the books, making it possible for me to write more and for my publisher to continue having confidence in me. I sit at home all day on my own with a keyboard for company. Fans connect me, help me to keep on target. And a fan is a reader. They complete the link, the communication between writer and reader.

Marjorie Jones's, www.marjoriejones.com, "The Jewel and the Sword" was just

released by Medallion Press. She tells us fans are important to her because "For me, fans are the end-all-be-all of the writing experience. Finishing a book is a terrific feeling. Selling that book to a publisher is an amazing feeling. Having that book accepted by the reading public is better than both! Why are they important? Because without them, my stories would float indefinitely inside the walls of my hard-drive. No purpose. No reason for being. Fans give the stories life."

Take a few minutes this summer and find out a little bit more about your favorite author. If you really enjoyed their last book, let them know. They would like to hear from you.