

Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—November 8, 2022

15 Participating on Zoom

Building Your Author Platform



Rachel M. Anderson is a former MiPA board member with more than 30 years of experience in communications across a broad range of disciplines in both print and broadcast industries. She currently is a marketing and PR consultant and publicist. She wrote a book when she was only 12 (unpublished), and her son (much later) had his book published, which led to Sigma's Bookshelf, her company dedicated to exclusively publishing teenage authors.

What does it take to build an author platform?

Rachel said that it takes patience, perseverance, time, and effort. The key is starting very early, ideally when you come up with your book idea. If you start early you have time to build a fan base and create demand for your book. Booksellers want to know what you have already done—through newspapers, TV, and social media. Do you have a lot of followers? You need to define your target audience and then build your brand. Who are the people you want to reach—who would be ideal? Anyone who can read is not good enough. Is it teachers, librarians, kids, book club people, mom's groups, outdoor groups, people with careers in a specific area, etc.?

When building your brand, how can you prove you are an expert in some area so people trust your ideas? Imagine you had direct experience with buckthorn. Start brainstorming all associated words like nature, parks, weeds, or any other words associated with your expertise. Sketch them all out on a piece of paper and pick the words that seem the strongest.

Then define your audience. Make a long list. Get mailing and email addresses. Here are some kinds of contacts that should be on your list:

- Personal contacts (people who already know you)
- Influencers (well-known people in your target market). Twitter is good tool for this.
- Bookstores (you have to contact them)
- Giftshops
- Schools
- Associations (related to your market, not just ones you are in)

Then you can be in contact with them all along the way. For example, you can do a book cover reveal. You can discuss reviews as they come in. You can prepare people for your launch. To do this you need a

marketing plan. This is required for many of the booksellers like Barnes & Noble. Here is what they would like to see:

- Story synopsis
- Short author biography
- Target audience and markets (key ones you have identified)
- Main selling points (What will the reader gain from reading the book? What is new?)
- 3 competing titles
- 3 professional reviews (not Amazon reviews). You may have to pay to get good reviews.
- Publicity/promotion plan (What will you do to drive market interest?)

Consider both traditional and online methods for your marketing plans. Your social media posts can sometimes get lost because there is so much competition. Traditional methods include newspapers, TV, radio, and blogs—areas with gatekeepers.

First Question and Answer session:

Q1. Rachel had a multipage questionnaire which covered these area. Is that still available?

A1. Yes, but it is mostly the areas I have been discussing here. Rachel and Ron then told the story of the marketing of *An African Son*, *Abraham Boi Watson's Perilous Journey* and how numerous Liberian organizations were contacted.

Q2. How do you get your book into Barnes & Noble, for example, through their corporate office?

A2. Go to the website and search for their book buyer(s). You will need to send an email with your marketing plan. You will also need to send a physical copy of the finished book. Six to eight weeks later you should get a letter or email with their decision. Local stores might also be an outlet. Start by talking to the store manager. If you do a store event they will buy about 20 copies, but unsold copies may be sent back with mailing costs added. You might want to purchase any left at the end of the day, say for a 20% discount, and that also saves the mailing costs.

Q3. Does an author review count toward the three professional reviewer goal?

A3. Yes, if is a well-known author.

Q4. As a publisher, we look at the literary value of a book. What other items could lead to a bookseller rejection?

A4. One needs to have a following online. To continue selling copies after the launch, the author needs to be doing promotions and events. Again it is best to do all this before the launch, maybe six months early. You can also presell event tickets or books before the launch.

Five Steps for Building a Solid Author Platform:

1. Have a marketing plan, as we discussed before.
2. Have an author website. (This is crucial. It doesn't have to be great, but you need one where people can focus on your book.) Social media presence is not enough; buyers need a web landing place you have created.
3. Present yourself as an expert.

4. Share your expertise (e.g., write articles, blog, speaking tours, teaching). Look for conferences that are relevant. Put out regular press releases. For example, Community Ed is a possible place to do talks.
5. Get serious about social media. Pick one or two and do them well, and be active. Have a presence. Facebook is easy, free, and good.

Author Platform Example



The Moments Between Dreams
A Novel
JUDITH F. BRENNER

- Instagram started at 100 followers, and now up to 4,000.
- Twitter started at 20 followers, and now up to 400.
- Over 3,000 readers entered recent Good Reads book giveaway.

www.JudithfBrenner.com

She invested \$1,000 for a professional website, \$1,600 for PR, more than 100 hours attending webinars and studying other author platforms and posts.

Second Question and Answer session:

Q1. How can you establish yourself as an expert for fiction? It seems easier for non-fiction.

A1. You build the awareness around the author background and the true story at the core. If it is totally made up—talk about the location or other factors. Find the connection to reality. People are looking for a story, not an advertisement.

Q2. Is it true that Minneapolis has become an important publishing center?

A2. New York is the main national publishing site. But there are many good ones here. Traditional Minnesota publishers include Milkweed, Greywolf, and Coffee House. There also are several hybrid publishers like Beaver's Pond, Calumet, Wise Ink, and many more. There are many festivals and organizations like MiPA and the Loft.

Q3. What is an ideal blog post length?

A3. Whatever your audience would like, 500 words maybe. Blogs should relate to current events and the time of year. The key is continuity and regularity.

Q4. Did the Goodreads giveaways work for Judith?

A4. Rachel doesn't have recent results. But notice how active she is now many months after launch.

Q5. My book was on Barnes & Noble but recently disappeared. What might have happened?

A5. Somehow there has been a glitch or has been pulled off. You might have to push the data through again. Some books that don't sell remain on shelves for many years and on their website, so your case is odd. Don't worry if it is just on the Minnesota shelf—that's actually pretty good.

Q6. Is there a way to keep my MailChimp messages from going into junk mail?

A6. Don't know. Look it up on Google.

Q7. Some writers have become very successful. Was that just luck or how did they do it?

A7. J.K. Rowling took a long time to break through. It helps to have a big publishing company behind you. It is much harder for small press, you can't buy an ad for \$25,000, for example. One of Rachel's authors, Adam Shepherd, and his book *Scratch Beginnings*, broke through by being seen on Harry Connick Jr. Adam now has a speaking career.

Q8. How can we contact you?

A8. Address is below. There are tons of examples on my website.

Q9. I noticed that Springboard for the Arts is on your website—why?

A9. That is so donations can be made that are tax deductible.

Q10. What are some of your teen books about?

A10. Rachel scrolled through information and pictures of her Sigma books. They are mostly fiction, very creative, on many subjects. She does about three books per year. She recommends pixabay.com for free pictures, that she used to make her covers.

Here is information about Rachel's publishing company for teens and her contact data. She would appreciate any donations for Sigma's Bookshelf.



**SIGMA'S
BOOKSHELF**

The November fundraising drive for my son's teen book publishing company is now underway.

www.sigmasbookshelf.com/donate



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