

## Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—February 7, 2023

21 Participating on Zoom

# Websites that WOW Readers: How to Create or Update Your Online Home



**Pauline Wiles** is an indie author with six books published. Her day job is helping authors and writers create attractive, effective websites. She noticed others were often overwhelmed by the task and loves to dispel some of the myths around how difficult a web project should be. Her professional resume includes teaching computing to adults on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as entrepreneurship education and marketing analysis. Pauline is a board member of BAIPA, the Bay Area Independent Publishers Association.

**Pre-Meeting Chat:** We began with praise for the TikTok presentation from last month and speculation about the April talk on Artificial Intelligence in book publishing (for scheduling, writing, text-editing, and picture generation). Jennifer also mentioned our March meeting on metadata. Our book awards Gala this year will be in-person on June 17 in Minneapolis at Open Book. All upcoming meetings are now on the MiPA website. Lunch and Learn with Paul Nylander on Book Design on February 23.

### Introduction to the Talk:

Pauline's contact information is: [www.paulinewiles.com](http://www.paulinewiles.com) and [web@paulinewiles.com](mailto:web@paulinewiles.com). Her talk outline is as follows.

1. What Makes a Great Website?
2. When Is It Time?
3. Technology: Good News!
4. One Key Decision
5. Keeping It Fresh
6. Maximize Your Budget

## What Makes a Great Website?

When you get it right:

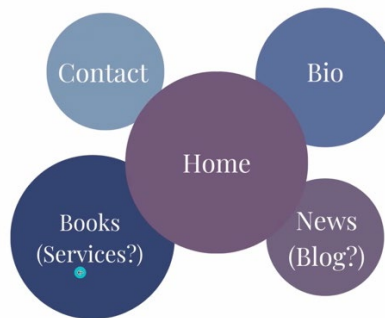
1. It connects to your ideal reader
2. Shows you're professional and serious
3. Implies strong work. It is a clue to if your books are strong
4. Prompts action
5. Gets you found on Google
6. Serves as marketing home base

Web designers have 50 milliseconds to make a good first impression.

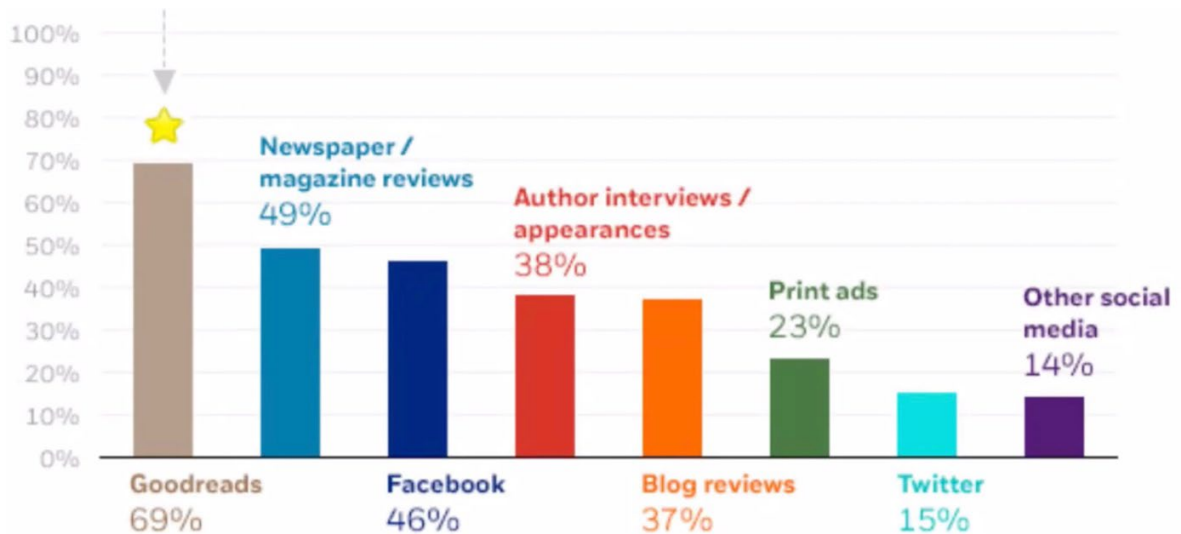
## When is it Time?

Most of those in the audience tonight have a website already.

1. Website Worries: What should go on there? Blogging is too hard. I'm overwhelmed by the technology. How can I make it look good.?
2. What is your website headache? Updates, security, web company died, complexity.
3. Here is what she recommends for your site. You don't need much more.



4. Website should look good on a desktop, laptop, tablet, or phone. Keep it consistent.
5. Blogging is not critical. Goodreads is the best marketing channel. Check out [bit.ly/stop-blogging](http://bit.ly/stop-blogging).



## Technology Good News!

If you are overwhelmed by technology, here is minimum you will need (grandmother-level): a. online space (hosting), b. clever bits (technology, platform, tools, CMS), c. content (words, images, book covers), d. domain name (yourname.com). a. and b. can often be purchased together now. Web-building software systems are cheaper now but still could look bad depending on what you put on it. Pauline’s website has help at: [bit.ly/website-starter-kit](http://bit.ly/website-starter-kit).

So what is the secret sauce? First, keep it sleek and simple, which is quicker, easier, cheaper, and looks better. Second, be sure the phone version looks good.

Pauline recommends the following:

Squarespace—easy, stylish

WordPress—If you enjoy tech, it’s powerful

Carrd.com—if you are a starving artist

Migration is an option too. She has migrated many clients to Squarespace.

### **One Key Decision**

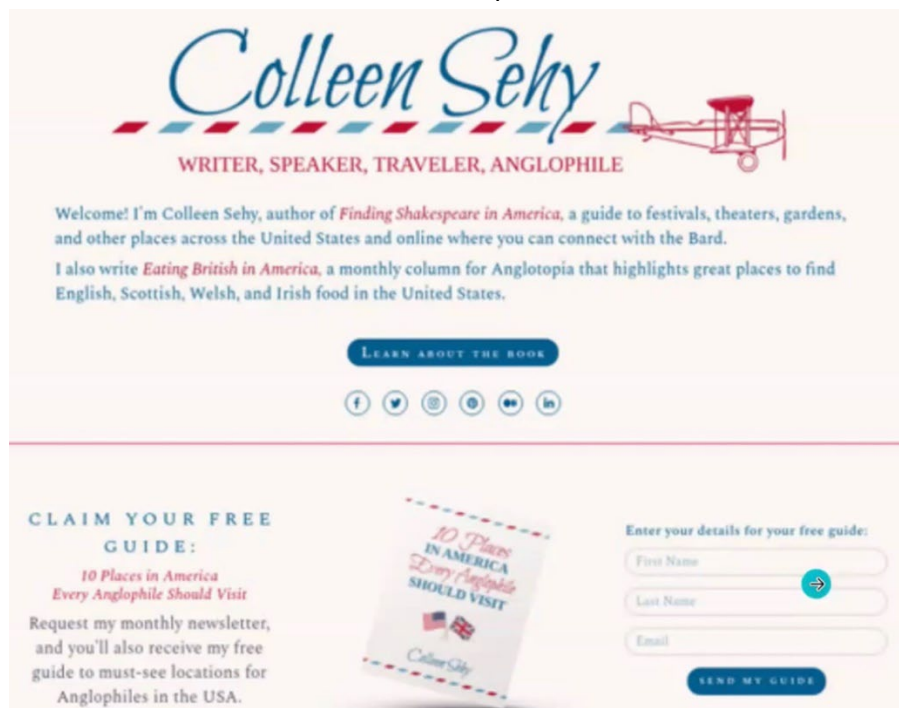
This is the most useful advice Pauline has for us.

#### **On Every Page—What is the Call to Action?**

Possibilities:

- Buy a book
- Inspire with your message
- Book you to speak
- Gather their email addresses (for their permission to stay in touch)

An example:



70 percent of authors have no call to action.

## Keeping It Fresh

94 percent of people cite design as a reason they don't trust certain websites.

- Keep your background clean and simple.
- Purge clutter: An example is your sidebar where clutter, distractions, vanity, broken links, outdated info and other uglies often live! Sidebars also look very bad on phone screens. "A lot of author websites are absolutely loaded with junk. There's way too much stuff and people don't know where to go. They don't know what to do."—Orna Ross
- Use larger text and fewer words. Attention span is an issue.
- Fonts should be paired. Most should be sans serif, and use serif and script sparingly.

Sans serif

Serif

Script

- Choose TWO accent colors. Use color to draw eyes to what you want reader to focus on. For example a color package might be: background, text, and two others for emphasis.
- Invest in your images. Pick carefully, be sure they are clear, not too small, and are well edited. Have a professional head shot taken of yourself. Photoshop it to make it more interesting, Use edge views of your books. They look much better.



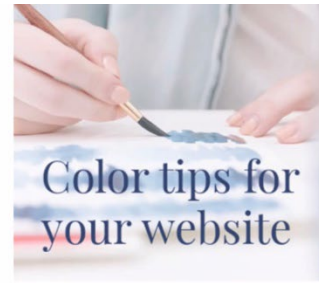
[bit.ly/best-website-tools](http://bit.ly/best-website-tools)

- Leave room for people to comment on your website.
- Assume they are on a smartphone (make sure your website looks good on phones)

## Maximize Your Budget

Pauline recommends Carrd.com as the cheapest and adequate site. (\$19/year)

She has hundreds of advice steps on her website



If you would like Pauline to build your website, she charges \$3,300-\$5300 for a custom design. To do it yourself, she recommends the Squarespace website template for \$247. She can help with this.

“In this day and age, it’s pretty clear that a website is one of the most, if not the most, important parts of your digital presence”—Entrepreneur Magazine

#### **Questions and Answers:**

Q1. Joan Marie Verba comments: another option is to build a site from scratch with html and CSS, which gives greater flexibility.

A1. That may be an option for some.

Q2. Joan, what was missing from the site building software site that caused you do it yourself?

A2. She didn’t like the WordPress themes, they just didn’t do exactly what she wanted.

Q3. Did you consider recommending WordPress as a software template?

A4. Pauline decided she had concerns about the reliability of the system. She didn’t want the website to go down while on vacation. It is too specialized and you need WordPress experts to help.

Q4. Is there a way to auto-populate your mailing list?

A4. Sending out mass emails requires an unsubscribe button at the bottom. My favorite option is [Mailerlite](#). Best as free plan. For large number of mailings, she recommends [Convertkit](#), [FlowDesk](#), or [Mailchimp](#). Most sites will allow you to insert code to forward to your mailing list.

Q5. What is a reasonable range for all the parts needed for a website?

A5. The bottom of the range is \$19 plus \$12. She uses a hosting service for about \$200 per year. For [Squarespace](#) it is about \$200 to \$300 per year. E-commerce adds to the cost. She has more details on her website.

Q6. Is it easy to switch to Mailerlite from MailChimp?

A6. The mailing list can be exported. Pick those who have been most engaged. Delete the automatic welcomes for the old listed people.

Q7. Pauline, could you take a look at an existing website and go through your 50 items checklist and give it ratings?

A7. Yes, I have something called a [Power Hour](#) where you can pick my brain by special request.

Q8. I use [Wix](#), is that okay?

A8. Yes, that could work, but I haven't delved deeply into it.

Q9. How does the cost of Squarespace compare to WordPress and GoDaddy?

A9. GoDaddy is just the hosting part so it is not like the others. Squarespace will cost you a bit more than WordPress, but it's hard to get help on WordPress. Squarespace is analogous to Apple (everything included) while WordPress seems more like Android.

Q10. Your talk emphasized content and style rather than the technology. What stylistic choice seems most important to you?

A10. It's hard to sell books on a website if the covers are bad. Think about common elements in your cover designs.

Q11. One needs to plan for the fact that the hosting website may not last forever. Portability is something to think about.

A11. The strongest platform to be on is WordPress. Others are harder to migrate. It's a trade-off.

Q12. Where do you put the sidebar if it is not on the side?

A12. Pauline puts it on every page. Don't only put it on the home pages.

Q13. Do you discourage putting the back cover blurb on the website?

A13. No, the back cover has about the right amount of information.

Q14. Should a press or media pitch be on a separate page? It could be much longer.

A14. I think a media kit is different. Different audiences should be approached in different ways.

Q15. Can you talk about SEO?

A15. This is a big topic. Any website builder allows you signal words and descriptions that will rate highly. Look on Google for the most important words and phrases. Stick to words that are important for YOUR audience. The more niche the subject gets better results.

Q16. Should author and speaker websites be combined?

A16. If they have similar content, they should be combined.

Q17. Is there a good reward for getting people to sign up for your email list?

A17. It should be something your reader would like. A juicy extra. A preliminary chapter is not too useful.