

*ASJA Teleseminar Series  
Publishing, Branding, and Promotion*

**David Cole on Publicity**

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*David Cole comes to us with just an exceptional platform and background in publishing, from writing, editing, and book production to publicity. He is author of The Complete Guide to Book Marketing, and a couple of other books as well. David has spent 30 years in publishing—and has served as a marketing professional and as an editor. He and his wife have their own book publishing company—Bay Tree Publishing.*

*David: Tonight I'd like to talk about what I see as the most important things writers can do to make themselves to make them more publishable, more attractive to book publishers. In years past, it may have been that being a good writer, having written a good book is what you needed to do to find a publisher. That really is not the case today—there's much more involved, it's a much tougher market place.*

**Why You Need a Platform to Get a Publisher**

First, I want to talk about how and why publishing has come to the state that it has today. I think it's important to understand a little bit of history because your role as authors has changed and you need to ask what is asked of you; it is helpful to understand why and why has to do with how it got here. In the second part, I'd like to run a few profiles of authors I've worked with and how

they've addressed the needs of building a platform and the needs of becoming attractive as authors. And then finally I'd like to talk about some of the tools that you can use to create the kind of platform that is the subject of tonight's talk.

**Traditional top-down publishing**—Let me start by drawing a picture of traditional publishing, because many of our expectations are built on that world, and things have changed. Seeing how things have changed makes it easier to adapt. Most of my experience has been with nonfiction and that is the core of what I'll be talking about, but what I have to say does apply to fiction as well, it's just that some of my suggestions and some of the tools I recommend may need to be adapted for fiction authors.

It used to be that for a publisher, the ideal author was someone who could write well. A journalist was an ideal author. They were used to deadlines, they knew how to do research, they presumably could write and being communicators they could probably talk about their books pretty well. Given those qualifications, publishers could then say, alright, you've done half the work. You've created the written work, now our job is to get the book into the hands of readers. In other words, the marketing part.

I'm sure you have all heard that these days publishers don't do the kind of marketing that they used to do, that in fact publishers rely on you as the author to do the marketing, and you ask yourself what are they really doing and why do I need these publishers?

Let's look for a moment at the old model to begin with. In the world that certainly I started working in, the model of book publishing was to a large extent, top down. Picture a world where consumers had limited choice, limited expectations—a world that did not have the internet, did not have chain book stores, all that you had was maybe six thousand, independent book stores,

mom and pop shops, that carried maybe ten thousand titles. I don't know if you are aware but the average Barnes and Nobles chain book stores have over a hundred thousand book titles. As you know those book stores are starting to disappear as did the independents disappear. Amazon of course has millions of titles. So people suddenly have access to every book in the world, in a way that they didn't 30 or 40 years ago. If you lived in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Chicago, you may have access to a book store with a large number of books. If there was a book that you had heard about a book you could ask your local book store to order it. That was something that was done commonly.

Similarly with the other media, television and radio, in a world before cable, there were half a dozen channels not hundreds of channels. There was a lot of radio, but not talk radio.

Newspapers were the significant way that you reached people—and magazines—and that was how you reached people. So if you wrote a book in those days, you probably published with a NY publisher, because that's where the center of publishing was, it still is to a certain extent, but it no longer needs to be of course. The NY publishers had sales people who visited those five thousand stores and told them about your books. The NY publishers had access to the book reviewers in the major newspapers, and they had access to the book clubs, the book of the month club. It's hard to imagine now how influential the book of the month club was in those days. So when we talk about the top-down model of publishing and of writing, it's a profound difference.

*If you got a publishing contract with a NY publisher, they would give you an advance, because they were confident that they could sell X number of copies. And if they didn't sell X number of copies, they would come close. If they lost money on your book, they had a big book that would make up some of the money, and they didn't have the corporate pressures for return of investment that exist today. A friend of mine who worked at Random House many years ago*

*talked about how before there was John Grisham, there was James Michener, and James Michener paid for hundreds of what are commonly called mid-list books. In other words the profit of Michener financed the publishing of a lot of books that were marginally profitable or unprofitable. That is largely true still today, but the margins have decreased and publishers are under pressure on every side so that the top down model has in fact crumbled.*

**Big media today**—Think again of the infinite number of choices that consumers have today. Not only have the number of book readers decreased, but they have the internet and they have every other book published almost available to them in every other language under the sun. if you don't want to read a book on the subject, if you want to find out about Oriental rugs from Pakistan, or if you want to find out how to drill a well or how to evaluate a mutual fund, you don't need to buy a book, you go online and a million websites will help you find out how to do that.

If not any of the million titles on Amazon. You can watch hours of business reporting on cable television, you can watch rugby from New Zealand on television; your choices are just that broad. So, it means that top down model simply does not apply. This is true for you as an author and for you as a publisher.

*I want to give you the view of the publisher as much as I can, because as writers, you have a twofold sales job to make, you need to sell your book to a publisher and then you need to sell your book to readers.*

The most important thing is to educate yourself as much as possible about the business of book publishing. And if you don't, not only will you make mistakes, you'll find yourself being told no for reasons that you don't understand and not having the chance to turn that into a yes.

## **Building a Platform**

The reason why this is so critical, and is that we are swimming in a sea of information. We are all bombarded morning till night by every possible opportunity to learn and read and discover and be entertained online and offline. The question is, if publishers can no longer market you based on the top down model, what is left?

[So how do you build a platform and an audience in a world inundated in media and information?] The fact is that people are still interested in people. When I spend my day online going from website to website, reading peoples blogs and emails, then I flick on the radio and catch a few moments of an interview, turn on the evening news, what am I left with at the end of that day? I am left with occasionally maybe a new idea, but more likely what I am left with is a person. A celebrity, a personality, some piece of individuality, people are attracted to and remember people.

## **Becoming Slightly Famous**

When people talk books, they say oh I am reading Malcolm Gladwell's new book, or Amy Jan's new novel, or John Grisham's new novel or a new book by Lisa Zhee. People remember and focus on and are alert to personalities, individual celebrities. It is a cliché again for publishers that the best author is someone who is already famous, who is a celebrity. But if you are not a celebrity, not already famous, and I assume you wouldn't be on the line if you were, then the rest of the talk would be focused on what you do, not to become famous, because that's probably not likely and maybe not even appropriate, but to become slightly famous, to become somebody and

that somebody is meant to by building a platform. Nancy, do we have any questions at this point?

*Nancy:* Just a comment—by definition many people who are writers to a certain degree are introverted and in Jungian terms, introversion is not a negative in any sense. There are whole cultures where extroverts are looked upon as brash and kind of openly forward, so it's simply a matter of individuals who simply have an inner focus, whether they are an artist, a physicist or a writer.

You've mentioned areas where a writer could shine and start building a platform that seemed to offer a lot of integrity for someone with an inner focus, someone who is not cut from the cloth of big media, or never thought that they were born to be in the media, but they have a book, they have a message, and now they find that they have to be involved in media if they want their book to be successful.

**Niche**—One of the things you had mentioned was a niche, so this is the idea that one becomes slightly famous within a topic area. They don't need to be on Oprah—rather the goal is to become “slightly famous” within their own field, among the insiders of their area, they are seen as having a reputation, with gravitas, seen as someone who has insight, is important, has something to say, follows the issues, continues to periodically come up with something very meaningful.

**Passion**—Another quality that you mentioned was passion. Even people who are shy may have certain topics about which they care very deeply and feel quite passionate about. And if you ask them about one of those topics, they're off and running—and quite articulate. Compared to other topics where they may be at a loss for words. Those two were the areas that struck me that you

have really good vision and just going forward I want to hear more about platform building and for all kinds of writers, not just media stars.

### **Publicity for the Rest of Us**

And this talk is really meant for, not the media stars, but for most of us who are writing as part of daily activity and are engaged in subject matters that we care about.

*It's absolutely true that there are a small number of people who are going to find themselves on Oprah and become instant celebrities, but I really want to address the people who are trying to build a career as writers through hard work. And who are doing so because they have something to say. That have a passion they have a subject matter, they have something to communicate as opposed to having someone become famous for the sake of being famous.*

I've been to writer's conferences where I've heard people talking about how important it is to look good on TV as an author etc, and I think that is very misleading.

The authors that I'm going to talk about here by way of example, people I've worked with, are pretty much ordinary people, but people who have had a passion for their subject and who have more than just had the passion, established themselves as experts, as to a certain extent as spokes people in their areas of expertise. And that's really what's meant by a platform.

Becoming known in your area, your niche, your little piece of the world as someone who's opinion on a topic counts.

### ***Case Study 1: A Book on Affirmative Action***

I worked with an author whose name was Bob Laird. Bob had just retired from his job as admissions director at the University of California at Berkeley. He had a passion for affirmative

action policies. Affirmative action in university admission. He had been there through all of the fights for affirmative action, and he had been an outspoken advocate. So when he came to me he had a book called 'The Case for Affirmative Action in University Admissions'. It was, how should I put this, it was well written, it was dense, it was not an easy read, but it was clear. It was detailed. He addressed the issues clearly and well. He knew what he was writing about.

Does that make it a saleable book? Well here's what helped in my decision to publish the book: one thing was his title. He's director of admissions at the University of Berkeley California. He had the credentials and the credibility to speak on the matter. He had the experience; he had been at the heart of the most vociferous conflicts of the subject. He also said to me when we first met, I have hundreds of thousands of frequent flier miles, and I'm willing to use them all to promote this book, because I believe in this cause and I want to use the book as a chance to speak about it. More than that, Bob was an experienced speaker himself, he said I've spoken at every high school in California, and maybe there was a few he hadn't spoken of, but he had been up and down the entire coast of California, and literally spoken to every school in the entire state for his role as admissions director at Berkeley. He also had contacts in the civil rights community.

This is not a pop consumer book, but the core of his readership is not the general public, the core of his readership is other admissions directors. The author Bob Laird was known throughout the country to his colleagues, to his peers, at other universities. And I said, okay, let's give it a try.

Our marketing plan was based on his platform. The platform was; his credentials. So we use those credentials to make sure the book was reviewed in the higher education journals and magazines. The Chronicle of Higher Education is like the trade journal of university and college administrators. They reviewed the book and there was no question that they would read the book.

Many such journals reviewed the book. There are, as in every profession, there are conventions, professional meetings, for the people who are engaged in that profession. So Bob was a speaker, and I can't remember the name of the convention, but basically for university administrators, for admissions directors, admission personnel. We got him a number of speaking engagements at major universities, prestigious universities. Yale and I don't remember whether it was Yale and Harvard but it was a number of such prestigious universities, along with book store events that were associated with those talks. There were a few nice extras that we got again these were extensions of his platform, of his profession. So we got a foreword, we said who can we get, we got testimonial quotes from a number of from professors, from well known academics, to give us testimonial quotes for the cover, but we managed to get a forward and this was through Bob's contacts in the civil rights community, we got a foreword from the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

Because we had Bob speaking at these various colleges and book tours on the east coast, we got a call from CSpan2, I don't know if that channel is still on the air, but CSpan2 the cable station had a series, may still, where they filmed in book stores, book talks, mostly on social, historical, topics. They liked serious topics. Affirmative action was a perfect topic. They ended up replaying it four times. Each time they showed the talk, we would see a boost of sales at Amazon. So did we sell a huge number of copies? No, but we did modestly well. It was only possible because of the author's platform. And again, Bob is not famous, nobody I'm sure on this line has ever heard of him. He's not a household name, but he is known within his small, small world. His small niche. That platform, modest as it was, worked well for him. Let me give one more example, and I have several of them now, and then we can take more questions if there are, and then move on to the final portion.

## ***Case Study 2: A Book on Energy Policy***

Bay Tree Publishing ([www.BayTreePublish.com](http://www.BayTreePublish.com)) has just come out with a new book—“*Invisible Energy*,” David Goldstein is a PhD physicist and the energy program co director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which is sometimes called the NRDC. It’s a national environmental organization. He’s also a McArthur fellow; you know the McArthur award is what’s called the genius award. So again, the author came to me with credentials, with credibility. He spends his time, lives in San Francisco actually, some of his work is educational, he speaks a lot to political and scientific groups, and he spends a fair amount of time in Washington DC working mostly with legislative aides.

I should mention that David has a McArthur fellowship, the fellow has very impressive academic credentials. His McArthur fellowship was awarded mostly on the basis of his work; he was one of the people who developed the Energy Star program. I’m sure everyone is familiar with the Energy Star rating on appliances. He helped develop standards, criteria for refrigerators, this is his famous story that he tells frequently and repeatedly. Refrigerators are the biggest use of electricity in the domestic use of the economy. And going back to the 70s, they were energy hogs, every year they had gotten bigger and used more energy. He helped develop standards, for California and it ended up getting adopted for the country that basically mandated manufacturers to build refrigerators that were more energy efficient. The result was that after these standards were passed, the refrigerator manufacturers took these, were forced to follow these mandates, the refrigerators continued to get bigger, but they began to use less, and less and less energy. This is one of the reasons why California despite its huge growth in population has not continued to use more electricity, because of electricity standards, air conditioning standards, David Goldstein was one of the people who created these standards.

*David Goldstein's contributions to the field of energy efficiency save more energy every year than is produced by all of the nuclear reactors in the country.*

That line alone made his book worth publishing.

We're actually now publishing his second book. We published his first book a few years ago, called 'Saving Energy, Growing Jobs' and this one is called 'Invisible Energy'. But the point is that he comes with, again, David Goldstein, nobody has ever heard of this guy, right? Other physicists have people policy wants, in this really small area have heard of him, but beyond that he is totally unknown, but he has credibility and he has some context. His first book he had a foreword from Olympia Snow. We could have had a foreword from Diane Feinstein, and David said no, I want a republican because I want people to see that energy efficiency, that this is not a partisan issue. So we had Olympia Snow, again, I don't know how much that helped. The new book has a foreword by Robert F Kennedy, Jr., which is great. You know, these names open doors, so even if the author is not famous, even if you are not famous, if you have somebody, if you are active in a field, where you can reach the people in that field who are famous, and then you have some leverage. This again is part of what the platform means. Nancy are there other questions here?

*Nancy:* Having had the opportunity to talk with Dr. Goldstein, he comes across as a fairly low-key person, very bright, astonishingly bright, but he definitely has a passion about the topic. And it just shines through everything he says—like a story about a doctor who developed a little energy-efficient stove for the people in Darfur living in the refugee camps, Instead of being involved in some form of highly abstract science and scientific discourse, he is involved in

energy issues—and, because of his passion for this topic, he brings it down to a really human level. It really brings the topic alive.

*David:* That's absolutely right, and again to return to something I had said earlier about having to be presentable on Oprah or looking good, David is clearly a science-type, a PhD in physics. He is not Mr. Key Note Speaker, but he has passion and cares about what he is talking about and that makes him articulate, but passion sells. That's something else I tell authors regularly because of how tough the business is and the industry is and how much competition there is.

*I always tell authors that the greatest marketing tool in the world is your passion as an author and that nobody cares about your book more than you do. So if your enthusiastic and if you want to reach people, then that provides the greatest tool for achieving that goal.*

## **Platform Building**

*David:* I'm the kind of guy who wants to know why I'm doing something. So that educating myself about the context in which I'm doing something is absolutely critical and so that's part of my presentation as well. In terms of building a platform,

Basically platform building involves everything. I'm going to be mentioning a number of tools and I would like to emphasize the more you do the more effective you will be. Each one builds on the other. That is what a platform is about.

Step 1 is creating a good book, a well researched book, helps establish your credibility. Just having your book published established your credibility, right? You're a "published author"! Having a position of responsibility establishes credibility, having won an award is helpful, having achieved something in your field establishes credibility.

Step 2 is taking what you know and communicating it as often and widely as possible. Being on a speaking circuit, public events, professional meetings, at clubs, if you have the opportunity; being on the radio or television, being in the newspaper, writing articles. Not all of these will be natural to you. But some should be. If you are a writer and you are working on a book, you should be using the material you are writing, you should be as you are writing it, what I tell people is, you are not becoming a onetime author.

You should be becoming a regular contributor. When I did my book the complete guide to book marketing, this is my laboratory for what I have to say, I was writing a column for a publishing and marketing newsletter. So I would take the column, I would then use the column for what I was doing in the book. The fact that I was writing columns was a marketing ploy, not a ploy but you know a something that I could tell the publisher. I also put it in the newsletter. This column is by David Cole who is writing his book the complete guide to book marketing which is forthcoming.

So everything I was doing was promoting was promoting everything else I was doing. I spoke at industry events, publishing events, so I was building the market for my book there; I was serving on industry boards, professional organizations, so I was building my market there as well. These are not things that are particularly, this is not rocket science, but it requires hard work, it requires dedication, it requires caring about what you are doing. But the main thing is to remember that the book is not the product is at the bed of a long abstract, exercise. The book is what you are doing all along and is tied to everything you are doing all along. I talked about how the internet has diffused the audience, our audience as authors. And made life harder for us in a sense. It also has made our lives easier.

**Blogs**—If I am writing a book then by golly I should have a blog, presumably, I am not writing a book about everything, I am writing a book about something. And there are lots of people who are interested in that something, who will be interested in reading my blog.

*What better way to write a blog than to engage those people in the blog?*

They care what you are writing, get their feedback. If you actually incorporate their feedback, they are invested in your book. They are part author. Who would want to buy a book more than someone who feels like they had a part in writing your book? You are connecting with people who are going to buy your book. Whether its environmental or social justice or devotees of romance novels or people who are passionate fans of Portuguese fadu music, you are building an audience online and this is important.

**Facebook**—I don't tend to be an early adopter of technology. So I've come somewhat recently to Facebook, but I have become a great fan of Facebook and she's saying what do you do with that, how do you relate to it? I would say Facebook is a wonderful tool, what you need to understand about Facebook is that it provides the opportunity for presenting you in two ways. One as a person with a multiplicity of interests. And two as a person with expertise in something in particular. I had a conversation about this, with a couple of friends, and I was saying I do two kinds of writing. I write kind of from a professional point of view about publishing, and then I do also write what I would call meditations, which are poetic, reflections on life. Kind of poetry but not poetry. And I was saying should I keep those separate? Do I want to show these meditations to my professional colleagues and I got an amazing response, they said, no no no no no, people want to know you're a person.

Show them you're a person. So Facebook is an opportunity to be an expert in a subject, and also to be a person. Now how does that help you as an author or a potential author? If you have ten thousands friends on Facebook, and I always wondered what that means, how can you have ten thousand friends on Facebook, but the fact of the matter is, is you don't know ten thousand people, you know maybe a couple of hundred, but among those ten thousand, there are a couple of hundred, some are your colleagues, some are your relatives, and then there are the people who knows somebody who knows somebody.

If they are following you, then you are showing you are a person of interest. You are expanding your audience. Now it may be they were interested in you for the wrong reason, but you can't look upon everybody as a potential customer for your book. You look at people as somebody worth talking to and you expand your base, your customer base in doing so. And enjoy that.

**LinkedIn**—Twitter and Linked In are two more tools that are obviously very popular. They are much more professionally oriented. Linked In there are groups that you participate in that make you a professional colleague with a lot of people in your area, Twitter I don't appreciate particularly, I have not grown to use it but people do and they build up followings and its worth a try.

**SCRIBD**—Here's one that I have discovered and I'm a great fan of, it may be new to you, is [SCRIBD.com](http://SCRIBD.com). S C R I B D. com. It's an opportunity, it does two things, they call themselves the you tube of documents. It's a place that posts your writings and also has a social networking component. You can create a community there, you don't get any real feedback there, you might get people saying 'oh that's great' but it's a chance to promote your work, and for fiction writers there aren't as many places to go, hook up and make yourself known so it's a good one. So those

are some of the online tools that I think everybody should be using. And again all of those tools, \ You may not feel comfortable getting up in front of an audience, but you're a writer for sure because you wouldn't be here if you're not and you know you can do your writing on all of these online places.

**Time-efficient use of Facebook**--About Facebook, it's a source of information. A lot of stuff comes in and a lot of it is totally useless, and I hate to say it, but people sending me pictures of their kids. Sometimes I enjoy it but it's an opportunity to keep in touch with relatives that I otherwise wouldn't be in touch with. But I also get to keep in touch with professional information. People share little articles & connections and things that I might have missed otherwise. I have gotten with Facebook, with all the online things, I spend all of my day pretty much in front of my computer, so you have to be very careful that you do not get sucked in to these things and become you know, wastes of time instead of productivity tools. So how much time would you say you spend a day on Facebook? I would say I spend 10 minutes a day on Facebook.

That's all. Then I spend maybe 10 minutes, maybe less on SCRIBD. I go through it quickly. I don't have 10 thousands subscribers you know so I'm not and there are people I have to say it, but I block their posts because they are a waste of time. But I go through it quickly. There are some people that I respond to and either on a professional or a personal basis, and then I try and post something, I know you should be posting at least once or twice a week at minimum, but I try not to let two weeks or so go by without posting something. Whenever I try something, whenever one of our books gets a review, or an author is interviewed, we have a new book or we have something... news, any news that's professional I try to post it. I don't post personal things very often but occasionally I do.

Here's an example, I sing in the Berkeley chorus, so I mentioned that the community chorus was giving a concert and I was singing in it and I heard from all kinds of people who I don't ordinarily hear from, so it was fun. Does that help me sell my books? Maybe, maybe not. But it doesn't hurt. It was fun and enriched my life. As I say there's this funny thing... I've been trained to separate my professional and personal life and it has been refreshing, not easy, but required a certain amount, it felt nervy to integrate them, but I have attempted it and I haven't experienced any bad results and maybe it helps over the long run. I don't know, but it is certainly a way to broaden your audience there is no question about that.

*Nancy:* That is so marvelous, and for me it's the delight that I can tell you take in the new media. I'd mentioned to you that George Clooney the actor had been quoted as saying that he'd rather have prostate exam than a page on Facebook.

*David:* For George Clooney it may be different, he's a celebrity, here's a guy who can't go out to a restaurant without being bombarded. I don't have that problem; nobody comes up to me and says 'Oh David Cole, can I have an autograph?' So that's not, he's coming from a different place. But I think for me it's an opportunity to share and I think it's delightful and I encourage people, to share. What is writing, but sharing? What are we doing as authors, as writers but sharing? So it's just one more way to share.

*Nancy:* Considering the kind of pressure that a lot of free lancers feel periodically(if not all the time), how do we focus our promotional efforts?

Where is the bang for the buck in terms of media? I know in my own humble experience, that radio was the most wonderful way to sell books and astonishingly effective, I mean you could be in your PJs having a cup of tea and reach 10 thousand people and jack your sales on Amazon just

by showing up and sharing your passion and I was wondering if there was other media you would like to focus on in terms of platform building.

*David:* Well I don't know that I have other media, I mean other than I didn't talk about the traditional media, radio, newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters, I would say kind of as a wrap there are two kinds of marketing or two steps in marketing. One as a writer you are marketing your book to the publisher. Then there is, once the book is published, selling it to the public... there is an ongoing marketing, the kind of marketing that you are doing online is all the time. It establishes your platform and establishes you as an expert. It also creates a base niche audience. When you have a book out, as you say, radio is still very effective. Getting an article in a magazine or a review in a magazine, these are very effective. So my distinction wouldn't be between old media and new media so much as what you are doing on a regular basis as opposed to now we are on campaign mode. Because you wouldn't be doing radio all year round, unless you have another reason to. Unless you're building up your reputation some other way, except that a radio audience is very diffuse, whereas other media allows you to focus on the people who are most interested in your topic.

*Nancy:* Well I think this has been so marvelous and in closing from my side I just want to, we just want to thank you so very much for all of this great, inspiring and really quite eloquent information. It also intrigues me that two of your closing thoughts were on how to charm publishers.

The third in this series is going to be 'How to Write a Book Proposal' with Andy Ross, and the other was charming your audience, and the second in this series will be branding—how do you

distill down your personality, so that people connect with your expertise and who you are. And so I think you've just launched the series in the most marvelous way.

*David:* Thank you so much Nancy, it's been a pleasure. ASJA is a great group and I always enjoy attending events when I do and meeting the members. Goodnight everyone..