

# Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

## Interview with John Blossom, Shore Communications On the Second Web

Recorded at the [NFAIS 2011 Conference](#)

For podcast release  
Tuesday, March 1, 2011

KENNEALLY: In Philadelphia attending the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual conference of NFAIS. They call it *Taming the Information Tsunami*, and just as a tsunami washes over entire islands, remakes them and makes everyone living there start anew, we're going to chat with someone who has an idea about how the Web is all new again.

Joining me today on *Beyond the Book* is John Blossom, president of Shore Communications. He is a widely recognized content industry analyst, and author and just a really fascinating fellow who has insights that really sort of look ahead to where we are going. And John, welcome again to *Beyond the Book*.

BLOSSOM: Thanks very much, Chris. It's my privilege.

KENNEALLY: We're happy to have you because you've got an idea here that – it's the book you're working on right now. It's your second book and it is about this Second Web. So I suppose we have to ask you, put it on a bumper sticker, John. What's the Second Web about?

BLOSSOM: Thanks, Chris. My first book, *Content Nation*, was about social media and trying to help people understand how that changed that work, our lives and our future. Looking at how the Web is evolving, I see something called the Second Web, the Web being reborn and becoming a Web that works like the world itself and subsequently becoming a world that lives in the Web. There is not just so much data out there, but so many sensors out there collecting data, that it's beyond overwhelming. It's not a matter of an information tsunami. It's recognizing that we live in data all the time and how do we become a society that swims in data rather than being overwhelmed by it.

KENNEALLY: There's that old line about Vermont, more cows than people, so we live in a world now with more data than people.

BLOSSOM: Absolutely. There are literally becoming trillions of sensors out there on the face of the planet and most of those sensors are going to be Web-enabled. We used to have a way of connecting the Web called the Internet protocol. Version four was the most up-to-date version of that that was widely deployed and it had billions of addresses.

# Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

Well, as of this month, they ran out of addresses for the old Web. The new Web, version six of IP, now is going to have 340 trillion trillion trillion network addresses. That means that literally every grain of sand on the face of the earth could have an Internet address, which means every point on the globe can tell us something about itself.

KENNEALLY: Well, that's fascinating, but how is it going to change the way we work, the way we live and for the people in the audience at *Beyond the Book*, how is it going to change publishing and creation?

BLOSSOM: Well, it means that the people who are out there on those nodes of the Internet, equipped with these sensors, equipped with intelligent devices such as smart mobile phones and what have you, have the ability to make decisions more quickly than ever before, and those decisions are going to become more distributed than ever before.

We're used to having the idea that there are these pots of information that we accessed and those would be things that would help us make decisions. Increasingly, that decision-making process is getting more and more diffuse and it means that publishers have to be able to get their content into these contexts far more rapidly and effectively than they have in the past because they simply come and go in real time far faster than they can ever think about making a business deal.

So it's as if the lower end and the middle end of the global economy is beginning to take over the value of content from the highly centralized publishers that we've been used to over the last several decades.

KENNEALLY: We really need to think that through, John, and I think it starts by going beyond what Brian O'Leary, who we've chatted with recently at *Beyond the Book*, calls the container, because the container contains us, it restrains us. The information that's now going to be available and diffused, it lives without a container.

BLOSSOM: It lives without a container and it lives on virtually any platform that we want it to. And one of my favorite examples of that is something called Google TV that's in beta form right now but demonstrates a lot of the capabilities of this sort of thinking, where you could be pulling up a YouTube video on your mobile phone and cueing up any number of YouTube videos. You get home, you turn on your Google TV, you click on a little panel there on your mobile phone. All of a sudden, you're watching that video on your television screen. You decide, ah, well, my wife wants to watch something else. I'm going to watch it on my mobile phone instead.

Where are people's strategies in the midst of this in terms of how they're going to be distributing content? We don't care whether it's on a tablet, on a mobile phone, on a



## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

television. We just care that it works and that it does something for us. So we own the context.

It's much more difficult for the publishers to be able to say, you have to come to us. Everybody has to come to the consumer to be able to say, we're going to put the content where you really want it in the form that you want it.

KENNEALLY: That is a change and that goes back long before the Web, of course, because the publishers said, we want you here every Saturday night for the particular program. We want you at the newsstand at 9:00 in the morning to get your newspaper. They told you when to be there, and now we're telling them, if you will, when to be there for us.

BLOSSOM: Absolutely. And yet, ironically, you can flip a lot of the old models around and apply this Second Web thinking and get a lot of value. We're used to the newspaper, the magazine showing up in our driveway or in our postbox and we're used to that being mass-produced content for millions of people. But what we really need to be thinking about is taking older technologies like that, flipping it around and saying, how can I mass-customize things for those individuals to be able to have perfectly customized magazines for that person at house A and a completely different magazine for a person at house B.

So the platforms aren't necessarily going to become obsolete if you apply Second Web thinking to them and say, this is how people want content. My editorial prowess may have some value there, but only if I package it exactly the way that they want it.

KENNEALLY: Well, John, you're researching the book right now. Tell us about some interesting companies, some interesting thinkers you've chatted with or are interested in talking to who you really think are taking us in this direction.

BLOSSOM: I think one of the interesting things about this is that to some degree, the Second Web is a renaissance of Google. We're used to Apple dominating a lot in mobile technologies, but certainly in the last year, we've seen the rise of Android that has allowed many manufacturers to integrate Second Web-style technologies into a much wider array of platforms than ever before.

Android won't be the be-all and end-all of these things. We'll have apps from vendors like Apple and what have you for a long time. But what we're beginning to see is a plethora of software companies being able to use platforms like Google Android to be able to create value out there on these mobile devices using sensors more rapidly than ever before.

So the real winner of this, you might say, is the cloud, that is, companies that are able to create large stores of data, help people analyze them, help people translate it, help people contextualize it where they are geographically, where they are in their social network at a

# Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

particular point in time. So we're seeing a new wave of startups complementing companies like Google in the cloud, taking advantage of these opportunities.

KENNEALLY: Well, to paraphrase James Carville, then, it's the data, stupid. If you're a publisher, you have to stop thinking about content, words, pictures, even, and start thinking about data. Would that be right?

BLOSSOM: Well, you certainly can get a lot of value out of words still, because one of the ironic things is that this new environment is encouraging lean-back content, as some people are referring to it as. That is, people are willing to spend more time with content if it's right, but you have to get it in the right place at the right time. And data is one of the key things that helps the content to get into the right place at the right time.

People are not going to spend time to go to a bookstore anymore. They have to have the right metadata, the right ratings and reviews of information there so that they can take best advantage of their lean-back time to really get immersed in the content the way that they want and to share it the way that they want.

KENNEALLY: It seems to me that if there really is an economic upside to this, it may not be for publishing, but certainly for all kinds of other things we do in our lives, the restaurants we go to, the places we like to visit for vacation, maybe the state we're going to move to when we get a new job and how we're going to find a new home and so forth. Those kinds of commercial transactions will certainly find a tremendous potential in this Second Web.

BLOSSOM: Absolutely, because we'll certainly still have mass markets, but we're talking about mass contextualization in the Second Web markets. So I think we're going to see a renaissance of small and medium businesses really being able to drive revenues locally and within specific communities so that you don't necessarily need some of the large capital infrastructure that people have used in the last 40 or 50 years to be able to succeed. We're going to see smaller and medium-size businesses being able to take advantage of more of these contexts more rapidly than larger organizations.

KENNEALLY: Well, what if I'm the classic liberal arts major, though? The world is becoming so data-driven, I worry that I'm just not going to keep up. I'm not doing too bad a job, but I think about the small business owner. How hard will it be for them to really grasp all these opportunities and put them to work for them?

BLOSSOM: I think the good news about the Second Web is that it's highly transaction-driven. That is, it's easier in the Second Web to be able to monetize things that you're doing, be it information that you're creating or providing products and services, because it's easier to find the right person for the right good at the right time. And it's much easier to perform



# Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

transactions in that environment than ever before using some of the technologies that are available on mobile devices.

So I think what we'll see is increasingly – and what we are seeing increasingly – is all sorts of subscription services coming up, and not just for content. For things like food, for things like personal services and what have you. So we'll see the ability to monetize what we do more effectively without some of the centralized monetization services that we've had in the past.

KENNEALLY: We're chatting with John Blossom about the book he's writing right now called *The Second Web*. And I was thinking back to your first book, John, *Content Nation*, which we chatted about, and there you looked at the impact of social media. What's the place of social media, the user-generated content and all the communities that are forged in social media – what's the place of that in the Second Web?

BLOSSOM: Social media is integral to the Second Web because all this information that's floating around comes in a social context. If we're checking into a particular location using a service like Foursquare that's out there on mobile devices, that's telling people not just about what we're doing physically, but it's also telling people what we're doing socially because people in our social network learn about that and they learn about the brands that we're implicitly endorsing by doing things like that.

So social media is one of the cornerstones of it, but it's highly amplified by the sensory environment that the Second Web has created around it, so the two go hand in hand, but the data cloud surrounding social media in the Second Web is the accelerator of its value.

KENNEALLY: Well, John, if you've got it right, the Web is dead. Long live the Web.

BLOSSOM: Absolutely. And long live Content Nation in the Web.

KENNEALLY: That's right. We've been chatting with John Blossom, an author, an analyst and tomorrow a keynote speaker at the very end of the NFAIS 53<sup>rd</sup> annual conference here in Philadelphia called Taming the Information Tsunami. John, thanks for joining us again on *Beyond the Book*.

BLOSSOM: Thank you very much, Chris. It's been a privilege.

KENNEALLY: And for all of us at Copyright Clearance Center, this is Chris Kenneally wishing you a great day.

END OF PODCAST