

# Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

## [Building Author Brands](#)

*Working with Authors Who Do Effective Marketing*

**Recorded at the Digital Book World Conference 2011**

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**With**

**Steven Axelrod**

**Arielle Eckstut**

**Judith Haut**

KENNEALLY: It's a fine day indeed, I think, to discuss author brands as – I don't know how many of you know, but today, January 25, is the anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland. He's an author brand, I think, to ponder and reckon with. He can't be credited with inventing the phrase "wine, women, and song," but for him and his poetry, that eternal triad has been a faithful guide and certainly, he's kind of made it his own, I think.

And though Burns died 215 years ago at the age of 37, the Ploughman Poet, the Bard of Ayrshire, has enjoyed a lasting brand even into the digital age. And if you don't believe me, have a look at [robertburns.org](http://robertburns.org), or for that matter, [Scotland.org](http://Scotland.org), where you can learn about all the traditions associated with Rabbie Burns Day.

So with that in mind and that very powerful notion of what an author brand can be, I want to welcome you to this program, which is called Building Author Brands: Working with Authors Who Do Effective Marketing. And today, certainly, publishers and authors are fully aware of the value and importance of author brands, which often to readers are more important than the name of the publisher. But how does all of that work in the real commercial world where authors are usually committed to their publisher and their publisher to them, if only for a single book? What makes an author an effective marketer and how can a publisher be an effective teammate in that effort?

Those are some of the questions we hope to answer today, and joining us on the program – first, I'll introduce everyone, please. Arielle Eckstut is an agent-at-large at the Levine Greenberg Literary Agency and co-founder with husband, David Henry Sterry, of The Book Doctors. She's author of seven books, including *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. She's also a successful entrepreneur who co-founded the iconic company LittleMissMatched and grew it from a tiny operation into a national multimillion-dollar brand with stores in Disneyland, Disneyworld and on Fifth Avenue. Arielle, welcome.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

ARIELLE: Thank you so much, Chris. It's great to be here.

KENNEALLY: It's nice to see you. And joining her, beside her, is Steven Axelrod. He's been an agent for over 30 years and has been president of his own agency for more than 25. Before becoming an agent, Steve was an editor at The Literary Guild, a managing editor at Harcourt Brace and a reader for a number of paperback houses. His present clients include two-time Edgar Award-winning mystery author, S.J. Rozan, as well as many top women's fiction authors, including the number one *New York Times* bestsellers Christine Feehan, J.R. Ward and Julia Quinn. Many more as well. Steve, welcome to the program.

AXELROD: Thank you very much.

KENNEALLY: And finally, at the very far end of the table, Judith Haut. She is senior vice president of communications and marketing at Random House Children's Books, the children's book publishing division of Random House, Inc. Over the past six months, she's spearheaded that divisions rapidly expanding digital initiatives, including the launch of the picture e-book program, development of enhanced books and apps, as well as other innovative digital marketing programs. And just this past November, Judith's group received the WOMMY Experiential Award for their work on Random Buzzers, which is online at [randombuzzers.com](http://randombuzzers.com), a social network dedicated to young adult literature. And Judith, welcome.

JUDITH: Thank you so much for having me.

KENNEALLY: So here we are to chat with all of these people first, but before we do so, I've been asked to take a poll of the audience about everyone's role here, so with a show of hands, how many authors have we in the room? I'd say about 10 out of a room of maybe 75.

How many publishing executives, editors and so forth? Far many more, outnumbering the authors probably by about three to one.

Any agents in the room? And a handful of those as well.

Well, everyone on the panel here has occupied or occupies all of those roles at one time or another, so it's really representative, I think, that the panel is here, and I want to have you start to think about the kinds of questions you want to ask everyone. We have a microphone over there. If you do have a question, when it comes time for that piece of the program, for everybody who is here in the room and listening on the podcast that we'll be

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

producing for *Beyond the Book*, CCC's podcast series, it'd be great if you could just go over to the microphone or have someone pass it to you, all right?

But I get to ask the questions first, so I want to start with Arielle. She's the closest to me, but she's also closest to authors and entrepreneurs because of what you've done throughout your life. So the question really is with author brands, why do authors need to be entrepreneurs at all?

ARIELLE: That's a very good question. And the main reason is, if they're not, their books tend to go into the abyss very, very quickly. So, when I started out as an author, even though I was an agent, and was less concerned with the branding aspect of myself, my book sold a few thousand copies and they went out of print, which was not a great experience.

KENNEALLY: But how does branding yourself as an author change all of that? And I want to just sort of pause for a moment and say, branding is one of those phrases that's thrown out all the time without – I don't think – any real clear definition of what it is. I've come up with one myself, which works, I think, for anything, whether it's authors or cars or whatever.

And that is, it's a commitment between the customer and the company. So that could be Audi or it could be Harper Collins or it could be anyone at all. You're shaking your head, nodding yes. So you would agree it's a commitment.

ARIELLE: Yes. So just to take an example, a book of mine was just – a new edition came out called *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. This book came out five years ago under the title *Putting Your Passion into Print*. And that book came out. It got great reviews and it did fine, but it did not do great. It did not do what we wanted it to do.

So we rebranded the book and we rebranded ourselves. And what we realized from the feedback that we had gotten from the first time around was that what was unique about our book was that it gave tons of information, which lots of books on the subject do, but it also gave it with an extremely fun and humorous bent, and it was inspirational.

So we realized we had to create – we had to be the inspirational, fun, funny, how-to-help-authors authors.

KENNEALLY: So that became your commitment.

ARIELLE: That became our commitment and then around that, we developed a business. We developed an event and our event – just to give you an example, our event is called Pitchapalooza and it's like *American Idol* for books, where everyone gets one minute to

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

pitch their book idea to a panel of experts that includes my husband and I. And this event is, for all the people who have come, and there have been now thousands of people who have come to these events, people who were not interested, who just came to hold someone's hand or whatever, say, wow! That was so fun and inspiring. So we succeeded in our mission and what that helps do, obviously, is then help sell books.

KENNEALLY: That is about a relationship, I think. Everyone talks about commitment in relationships and people not being willing to commit. If you make that commitment, you are saying, I am going to make a relationship with you. So the relationship there is, again, that customer – whoever the customer may be – and with you. And I think that's an important piece of this, and we're seeing more talk about social media building those relationships.

ARIELLE: Yes, and I think the assumption used to be for many authors and still is, that they produce a book, they hand it off and then they get to stop doing whatever they're doing. The publisher takes over, the media takes over, etc. And as we know today, the resources are so limited within publishing houses that if people don't take the initiative themselves, then they're really left – unless they have a very big stroke of luck – with a book that is not going to find its place in the world.

KENNEALLY: We'll talk in a second about what authors are going to have to do to sort of pick up the ball. But is that in any way, from your perspective, relieving publishers of their responsibilities?

ARIELLE: No. A big no.

When I was thinking about this, and Chris and I had an earlier discussion and we got into kind of a heated discussion about the relation –

KENNEALLY: No fair telling.

ARIELLE: - the relationship between the author and the publisher and when and why it can get testy. And I realized that part of this is that authors who have huge brands already or huge companies, they're easy to sell and they're usually, in many ways, not as big a problem for publishers.

The authors that are a big problem for publishers are authors like me who don't necessarily have huge name recognition but are very aggressive in what we want to accomplish, so we demand a lot. And while publishers want my books to be successful as much as I do, they're not so happy about the demands. They don't have the resources and when I say I want to meet the sales rep who's talking to Barnes and Noble, they say, well, we can't

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

have every author want to meet the sales rep for Barnes and Noble. But I say, but I really want to meet that sales rep for Barnes and Noble. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't.

But it's this building aspect. Once it's built, it's OK. But in the building, there often is conflict, even though we're aligned in our goals. So that's where the problems come in. So the authors who – when we tell people that they can't expect a lot of their publisher, we still don't tell them to stop asking. We absolutely believe that the best relationships and the best successes are when there's a partnership involved.

KENNEALLY: Well, you beat me to it. That's what I was going to say, that this is a two-way street, though. All the same, while you are on the phone demanding the information about something, someone's going to ask you back, so what are you doing?

ARIELLE: Right. And we're doing a tremendous amount, and that's what we're constantly talking to authors about. You can't demand without serious action on your own part, and only serious action on your own part will get a publisher to move.

KENNEALLY: Right. And what's interesting about the environment today with the social media, is it allows people – authors who are by nature, possibly antisocial – to be social without having to change from their pajamas or leave the house.

ARIELLE: Right. Yes. We say that the social media aspect is to give to the shy. And not only that, but for writers, social media is often using the skill they already have, which is to write. So you can blog, you can tweet. We talk to so many writers who say tweeting is so much fun to figure out how to say something in 140 characters. It's like a mini haiku or something. So there's a challenge for the writer where the medium is natural to the writer, his or herself.

KENNEALLY: And I suppose you have to think about, again, that commitment and how it extends into the social media from the book. So if your commitment as the author of *The Essential Guide*, is to be inspirational and funny, I would expect your tweets or whatever else you do to follow that.

ARIELLE: Yeah. The voice of whatever you're doing needs to be consistent throughout. And in fact, we had an interesting discussion with our publisher where they were looking at our tweets and they said, all the texting language that you're using doesn't feel consistent with your voice. And we said, well, you try and write a tip for authors in 140 characters without using texting language. So sometimes the voice has to adapt to the medium but still, again, the fun, funny, inspirational part of it is still absolutely there.



## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

KENNEALLY: I can well imagine OMG and LMOA or whatever it is sort of fitting into all of that.

ARIELLE: Right, yes.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. Well, you also have a role as an agent, and so if I can sort of ask you to describe how that role is changing today, because you're in that pivot point between the publisher and the author, and this notion of branding and the expectations around it are becoming so much more important. How does that change what you're doing?

ARIELLE: Well, what's interesting is for me and for my agency, we always were about building authors' careers, not about selling individual books, so for us, our roles have not changed that much, though the planning previous to selling a book and then once a book is sold in terms of planning the promotion and marketing, has become more intense, I would say. So there's a lot more thought beforehand about exactly how the platform is going to play out and staging.

So, we no longer tell people that they can wait until their book comes out to start developing, for example, the social media platform. When they come to us, if they have not already developed a social media platform, that's one of the first things that we help them to do.

KENNEALLY: And I imagine it's part of the proposal, as well, these days.

ARIELLE: Definitely, yes.

KENNEALLY: Can you give people in the room some thoughts about what has to be in the proposal for it to be successful? And be inspirational and funny, please.

ARIELLE: (laughter) I can't actually give an example. I can give you an example. I can't say what it is across the board because the whole thing about each proposal is that it's tailored to the particular voice and brand of the author. For us, we had to prove how concretely we were going to make these words come alive in various mediums, through events, through social media, through all the things that we did.

Now, for other authors, for example, going around the country now and meeting with so many people who want to get published, a lot of, for example, literary fiction authors say, well, what am I going to do to promote my book? So for those kinds of people, we even suggest for people who are writing literary fiction to think about how are they going to connect with their community out in the world. Maybe their book takes place in a certain part of the world. Maybe it includes a certain kind of niche audience that they can

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

somehow get attached to and meet in the blogosphere. Or maybe they can write interesting pieces for the *Huffington Post*.

So no matter who you are, obviously, the writing for literary fiction is the number one thing. That's going to determine if your book sells. But it doesn't mean that you have to stop at that.

KENNEALLY: And finally, the relationship between authors and publishers is changing, clearly. And sort of the tee-off questions for the program were about how committed that relationship is or how likely it is to possibly split up. And we chatted about that some. Give us your thoughts and then lay out briefly this vision you had. You called it the age of the citizen author. Why is that going to really matter to publishing?

ARIELLE: Right. Yes. We've coined this term, the citizen author, which we see – now, what we see on the road, and again, we're seeing thousands of people who want to be published who know nothing about publishing. Almost zero. And what's interesting is that – and not to put a pall over everything – is that most of these people don't see any benefit to having a publisher. Most of these people just think they're going to self-publish even if they have a really great book idea, because they don't understand the value that's there.

So I think where it used to be that publishers were the castle up on the hill with the moat around them and authors banging on the doors to get in, I think it's rapidly changing and I think that there's going to be even more of a partnership that goes on because authors and publishers will be convincing each other to work with them more actively.

And if authors don't see a good reason to come to a publisher, they will find ways to publish themselves. Not that they will always be successful, but the people who are entrepreneurial – and we're seeing this all over the place – the authors who are entrepreneurial are making money – and sometimes major money – selling their books on their own.

KENNEALLY: Well, in fact, we're going to turn to Steve Axelrod and sort of pick that right up. But Arielle Eckstut, who is the co-founder of The Book Doctors, thank you for all of that.

Now, Steve Axelrod, we did chat, too, before the program and this notion of the author brand, it is tough to kind of get one's arm around it, for me, anyway. It's an opportunity and an obligation, sort of like one of those Chinese curses, right?

AXELROD: It absolutely is, I think unless you invent a genre, like Tom Clancy more or less did with the techno-thriller. If you're writing in an established genre, whether it's romance, whether it's mystery, science fiction, fantasy, any of those, what really sets you apart is

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

your voice as an author, and the voice becomes your brand. So the characteristics you bring – your world view, the way you write specifically – one of my clients, Jayne Ann Krentz, describes it as it's like a regional accent. Your voice as a writer is like a regional accent. You don't know you have it, but everyone else hears it.

KENNEALLY: Well, I have to say, Steve, mine is pretty hard to hear.

AXELROD: Exactly. But I think readers recognize it instantly and authors – many authors are successes from their first book or when their voice sort of meets the right material. I represent J.R. Ward, who's one of the most successful vampire romance authors, and she had written four other books before she wrote her first vampire romance. They're sweet, contemporary romances. They're beautifully written. They're very affecting. They went absolutely nowhere. All of a sudden, when she had this vision of a bunch of real hard-ass vampires who – it just brought her voice and her storytelling skills together in the right package and it became a brand. And it's distinctive and instantly recognized.

KENNEALLY: Right. I want to drill down, though, into your specialty, which is – first of all, you handle only fiction now.

AXELROD: Yes.

KENNEALLY: And specifically or particularly romance.

AXELROD: Right.

KENNEALLY: And those authors, you've made the point to me and I think it's fairly well-recognized, are especially sophisticated about marketing. They have been for a long time. It's not really that new, but it's been sharpened by all the tools that they've been given now with social media. But why should this be true?

AXELROD: Why are romance writers –

KENNEALLY: Why are they so gifted at developing this relationship, expressing this commitment that Arielle and I were talking about?

AXELROD: Well, I think romance writing, by its nature, is getting to the heart of a story. It's getting to emotions, it's dealing less with the surface, less with action. One of the reasons it's almost impossible to turn a romance novel into a film or a movie that anyone would watch is because all the action is internal. And I think that's what these writers are so good at getting at, and that's what this social media is, is really a connection. It's not like a broadcast, a view or a broadcast of images where you're trying to just make an impression

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

on someone by hammering them down. It's that you're trying to connect with someone through social media. And these authors bring their very distinctive voices to Facebook, to other social media sites and they connect with fans in amazing numbers.

KENNEALLY: And that's not really new. I sort of want to emphasize that point. They've been practicing this art for a while.

AXELROD: I remember reading an article in *The Wall Street Journal* probably – maybe as many as 15 years ago. Diana Gabaldon is a well-known writer and also something of a romance writer, was the first to broadcast via e-mail, because she's an engineer as well as a romance writer and took to computers very quickly and took to the Internet very early. She broadcast to her fans, the book is going to be on sale whatever the date was. Go into the bookstore that day and buy it and let's see how high we can get it on the bestseller lists. And it went to number two on the bestseller list. It was the first time – well, number two or number one, first time ever. *The Wall Street Journal* wrote it up. Back in the day, that was incredibly advanced.

I had an author probably close on 25 years ago, Jayne Krentz. When she had her first historical romance published, she sent out postcards to – she rented a mailing list, 10,000 romance fans. Sent out postcards to each one of them with a picture of the cover, which happened to be beautiful, and the date on sale, urging them, for a real treat, go buy it. It's going to be on sale this date. It hit the *Times* list.

It's more than just the connection with the author, but that's a big part of it, and these authors have been early adapters of all kinds of technology. It's fascinating, but they have been.

KENNEALLY: Right. But let's get to the heart of the dilemma. I was thinking about this as I was pulling the questions together and heard on the news that some Republican senator had said, if you hear investment tonight in the State of the Union address, that that was Latin for spending, that supposedly the President's going to call it investment, but they want to call it spending.

So I guess I want to ask whether it's investment or spending. Are publishers actively investing or spending in author brands?

AXELROD: What I'm seeing is that they're not actively investing or spending in social media. And I think it's a – it creates a deep sense of unease among publishers when they're doing something that isn't creating a – they're taking corporate assets, and their job is to invest them to enrich the corporation. And what they're doing is applying them to building a brand for an author who could leave after that book.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

And I think there's an unease that it engenders, and a lot of the efforts I've seen on the part of publishers where they think they're building author brands, they're really building a corporate brand. In their minds, they're building an author brand, but from the author's point of view, it's a corporate brand.

One example is a publisher who publishes very widely in one romance subgenre. They did a series of videos with all their star authors and they encouraged the author to put up an icon on their website. You push the icon, you push the button, you get jumped to the publisher's site. It's totally in the publishers format. It has all their authors. You can watch the video of your author. Sometimes another author's video is spliced onto the back of it.

The authors feel as if this is really promoting the publisher's interest, not their interest, and haven't really made use of it the way the publisher I think probably hoped they did. And it wasn't that the publisher was ill-spirited or ill-intentioned. It was just they need to build corporate assets and when the assets can leave after a book, it's very tough.

KENNEALLY: Yes. There's an inherent conflict there, and in your relationship as the agent, you're sort of between them and clearly, your first goal is to get the best possible advance that you can, and that advance has to be calculated as to how much work goes into the book. It's not simply the writing now, but the marketing of it. And talk about whether there's going to be any chance of recouping some of those costs through the advance.

AXELROD: Well, through the advance is the only way you'll pay it. Publishers are enormously resistant, and I've approached more than one about underwriting the cost of social media, underwriting the cost of Web promotion. They are very unwilling to do it. They will pay very generous advances. They'll pay advances much greater than they expect to earn out in terms of royalties. And they sort of know how to lose money that way. You try to approach them to lose money in a new way and they just shut down on you.

(laughter)

AXELROD: It's very, very frustrating. But what I'm seeing is a number of clients. One client in particular has a social media coordinator. She has a Web mistress who does her website, which she still believes is incredibly important. She has another consultant who does social media for her. She designs gift packages, prize packages, she works with booksellers to sent autographed bookplates, autographed bookmarks, limited edition collector card sets, autographed limited edition collector card sets, and she runs contests. She designs the contests, she runs them and she also helps the author come up with

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

different ideas to – promotional ideas to involve the imminent publication of a book with what's going on on the Facebook page.

And it becomes a very elaborate and somewhat expensive undertaking, but the author really believes that it's selling books in a significant number and connecting with the fans in a way that is really enhancing her brand, and that enhances the whole enterprise.

KENNEALLY: You just said something I was going to ask you about, which is that this can get expensive and the author believes it's working, but do they know it's working?

AXELROD: Depends on what you mean by know.

KENNEALLY: What's the ROI on all this investment?

AXELROD: Well, the return on investment is hard to quantify. I would say, in fact, it's impossible to quantify. And one of the problems we have – it think it's all – this whole business is very new. This end of the business is very, very new.

I went and looked on Facebook and saw which of my authors had the highest numbers of likes, and it goes from – in terms of the top five, we're up from like 42,000 to around 12,000. The one at 42,000 also sells the most books, so you could say there's correlation. Beyond that, there's no correlation. Two or three are around 12,000, 14,000, and their sales are – they simply don't correlate.

So you could say that there's a return on investment in a broad way. To really justify that with numbers is very hard at this point in time.

KENNEALLY: Right. And finally, Steve, I want to ask you about an author you're working with, Amanda Hocking.

AXELROD: Yes.

KENNEALLY: And the relationship you have there is a very special one and an unusual one, because it doesn't necessarily involve publishers, at least not in this country. Tell us about that. Tell us who she is.

AXELROD: OK. Amanda Hocking is a young woman, lives in Minneapolis. As of April 15, she had never sold a book.

KENNEALLY: April 15, 2010.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

AXELROD: 2010, I'm sorry. She has now sold well over 250,000 books. She has seven of the top 100 paid books on Amazon. She's all self-published through Amazon. She also self-publishes through Smashwords and through Barnes and Noble, through Pubit. She writes YA romance, vampire YA romance. She has a fabulous voice. And she approached me, not to help her with Amazon and Kindle, not to help her with U.S. sales, but because she was starting to receive inquiries from overseas.

A Hungarian publisher contacted her, a Chinese publisher contacted her, and she simply had no idea what these deals should look like so she reached out and I decided to take her on simply because I was – I read her material and I thought it was fabulous. She has a real gift as a storyteller, very unique and distinctive voice, and clearly it was working in the marketplace. We've started selling her all over the world. We have a lot of film interest now, which has also come in through just word of mouth.

But she is a phenomenon. I think she's also sort of the face of the future, to some degree. Not 100 percent, but she has one series about elves. The third book just came out. Someone from Amazon told me it sold 16,000 books I think in a day. It's phenomenal.

KENNEALLY: I was looking at her website. I don't have the URL right in front of me, but she says she's an obsessive tweeter and a Red Bull addict. I suppose that explains all that output.

AXELROD: You only call her in the late afternoon. Can't call her in the morning. I'd wake her up.

KENNEALLY: OK. Steve Axelrod, thanks so much.

AXELROD: My pleasure.

KENNEALLY: I want to turn now to Judith Haut, who, as we said, is a senior vice president of communications and marketing at Random House Children's Books. And Judith, it will come as no surprise to anybody that Random House has its own brand management team, but the kinds of brands you've been familiar with working with are the sort of brands we would think of as corporate brands, the Disneys and the Barbies and all the rest of it. Are there lessons from that experience that apply to the development of author brands, from your perspective?

JUDITH: Absolutely. We learned a lot from the relationships that we have with our licensors like Disney and Mattel and Nickelodeon and we did create a brand group in-house to manage those relationships. We learned a lot from them. We're applying that knowledge to our own home-grown brands like Christopher Paolini, Lauren Kate, Dr. Seuss.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

And I think what it gives us is a way of looking at our brands and our imprints even, as mini businesses, so we take a long-term approach at planning our publishing program. It's about strategy. We think about authenticity of a brand, protecting a brand, understanding the brand. By understanding the brand really well, we can market it really well.

KENNEALLY: That's all about that commitment we've been talking about, right?

JUDITH: Absolutely.

KENNEALLY: And I think authenticity is a terrific word to apply to a brand because a brand could be a positive and it could be a negative, and the thing that makes the difference is often the authenticity.

JUDITH: Well, you said brand is commitment. We think about brand as emotional connection and our goal is to elicit an emotional reaction from our readers, and that's what's going to drive someone to ultimately want to read and buy your book or connect with your author is you love it or you hate it or you're interested by it. So for us, that's really key and that's what we're doing here is building a readership for our authors by helping them make connections.

KENNEALLY: But what happens when you tell an author – a new author – that we're going to make you a brand? Do they have pictures of molten metal hitting the backside or what exactly do they tell you when they hear that phrase?

JUDITH: I don't know that we'd necessarily approach it as, hey, we're going to turn you into a brand in a negative way, because like you said, I think it can have negative connotations. But I think when we're initially working with an author, I think it's clear when we're establishing that partnership that we're intending to build them into something, and I think an author is excited to be able to work with us to define themselves and establish their voice. Like Arielle and Steve have both been saying, that's really key right now, is for an author to be able to define themselves, and the best thing we can do is help facilitate that by helping them develop their brand recognition, I guess you'd say.

KENNEALLY: Right. And over your career, you've worked with hundreds of authors and you've probably learned who are more effective as marketers and for what reasons. Tell us about that.

JUDITH: Some folks jumped right on into online marketing and they just got it. I think there's three important things to keep in mind as an author in order to be effective. You need to

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

understand the tools that are available to you, you need to define yourself, and you need to understand your audience.

Lauren Kate is a great example of an author who really understands how to market herself, but also how to work with us, her publisher.

KENNEALLY: For people who don't know, tell us what kind of books Lauren writes. It's fallen angels, forbidden love, that kind of thing.

JUDITH: You said it, exactly. And similar to the example that Steve was giving, we acquired this property in April of 2009 and today, I think 900,000 books sold. We launched the first book in December of 2009. But we worked with Lauren very closely and it's a great blend. She does a lot for herself. She tweets, she has her own website, we manage a Facebook page in the social media campaign. But it's a very productive partnership so we work together, we don't work at cross purposes.

When we're going to reveal a new cover for the next book in the series, she teases her fans the night before. We reveal it the next day and everybody's talking and it ends up working out.

KENNEALLY: It sounds like that requires a lot of coordination.

JUDITH: It does. And that's – I think, Arielle, you said this. It's important to have a positive and productive relationship with your authors and to work together, and at the end of the day, that's our goal.

We spend a lot of time working with every author, whether it's an author of a book that's going to sell 15,000 copies or Lauren Kate. If we're not developing our own social media campaign for that specific brand, we're advising them on how to do their own. We spend a lot of time giving advice to folks about – some people are starting at the beginning. What's a website? What's a blog?

KENNEALLY: I was going to say, share briefly some of that advice. Those are some of the questions that we chatted about, websites versus blogs, why would you do one or the other, setting things up, recommending developers. You really kind of get into the weeds with people on that.

JUDITH: We do, because they're all looking for guidance and I think that's really – you asked me how can a publisher help an author be an effective marketer, and the best thing that we can do is share our knowledge, share resources, provide support.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

KENNEALLY: Is that becoming a program for you?

JUDITH: Yes. In fact, we've sort of been doing it unofficially for years, but we're developing what we're calling an Author 101 kit, which we're going to put together and send out to every author who begins to publish with Random House so they'll know soup to nuts here's what Random House can do for you in terms of PR, marketing, online marketing, and here are the things that we recommend that you do.

KENNEALLY: Except, I want to ask how it works out when you sort of let the author loose, if you will. There's a control issue here, particularly around marketing and particularly when the investment or the spending is substantial. If an author is going to go out and start tweeting and posting to Facebook, can it go wrong?

JUDITH: I think there's definitely – people can make missteps, but it's our responsibility to work closely with our authors to, as I said, to guide them. People want to do it right. They want to establish a good reputation, so it's important for us to advise people. Don't do this specifically, don't do that specifically.

KENNEALLY: But there are no no-nos on that program?

JUDITH: There's definitely no-nos. We list – we recommend the right way to establish your own voice in blogging and the types of things that you should or shouldn't say, absolutely. There's some no-nos there, but not from a control way but just in terms of protecting the author.

KENNEALLY: And the question occurs to me as we're chatting about all of this, people have previous lives, right?

JUDITH: Yes.

KENNEALLY: And these days, when one has a previous life, in the digital age, it lives on forever online. Do you ever kind of make a sweep-through to find out what maybe Lauren was writing about on her blog 10 years ago just to be sure everything's kosher?

JUDITH: I think it's always important to understand your authors and their history and their background just so that you can be prepared to help them face anything that might come up. Again, that's our job –

KENNEALLY: They could have a conflicting brand.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

JUDITH: - is keeping informed – absolutely – about our authors. I keep saying it, but it's working together. And we've had a great success doing that with a number of authors on many levels.

KENNEALLY: Well, I want to give us an opportunity to invite the audience to ask questions right now. We have about 20 minutes left in the program. Again, it would be great if you could get the microphone or go over to the microphone or if somebody could just start that ball rolling. I'll even be willing to step down into the audience and do that, OK? And I promise to get to as many as I can. I saw your hand first.

INGRAHAM: I'm Adrienne Ingraham and I'd like to ask Steve Axelrod, can you tell us in more detail about Amanda Hocking and what she did to achieve her success?

AXELROD: Yes. I can quote from her blog. She has a wonderful blog. You can just Google her, get her blog address. She talks about the whole process in real detail and it's absolutely fascinating. But basically what she said, in March, she made the book available on Amazon through Lulu and basically, she did that for her mother. She wanted her mother to have a copy of her book, OK?

Then she put two books up and sold 45 books in two weeks and then she said in June, something magical happened, June 2010. I discovered book bloggers. I had no idea such people existed. I asked several if they would be interested in reviewing my books and most of them said yes, even if they didn't generally review self-published work. Then something surreal started happening. My books were selling. So thanks in part to book bloggers, June turned into a very good month. I sold 4,258 copies of all three books combined.

KENNEALLY: That's a good month.

AXELROD: And made a total of \$3,180. I have not paid for any advertisements on any site. I do give away ARCs to review blogs – advance reading copies – to review blogs, but that's the only money I've spent in regards to advertising and marketing.

A lot of people, she said, ask how did this happen, and she sort of basically says she's writing in a popular genre, the covers are nice, the price is good, the writing isn't terrible and the book bloggers recommended it.

KENNEALLY: That's all you have to do, I guess.

(laughter)

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

AXELROD: It's easy.

EMILY: Hi. My name's Emily. I'm a social media marketing coordinator for Sterling Publishing, so I have a question for Judith more. So, talking about enabling our authors to have tools and whatnot, how have you sort of organized it? Because I know what we struggle with is we have so many authors who publish so many books, and to be honest, it's like not every author gets the time and the budget of every other author. So do you sort of have like open-ended webinars besides your packet? Do you have somebody do one-on-ones with big authors? How do you decide that? Is it established yet or are you still working on it?

JUDITH: It's evolving. Our online marketing team and our publicity team work really closely together on social media, so the responsibility is shared there and the publicist, as you guys know, have a very close relationship with the author. So a lot of that educating is shared between the online group and the publicity group.

KENNEALLY: I was going to say, Arielle, you shared with me something that sort of comes up in my mind for that question. There was a piece in *The New Yorker* not so long ago. Tell us about that, please.

ARIELLE: I don't know how many people saw in Shouts and Murmurs the piece that was from the publicity department in a publisher to an author about how they need to get their social media up and running. Did anyone see this?

KENNEALLY: It's well worth finding, and I believe the instructions include, write 600 words a day in your blog. Keep this up indefinitely.

ARIELLE: (laughter)

KENNEALLY: Well worth finding. OK, yes, in the back. Did you have a follow-up?

EMILY: (inaudible)

ARIELLE: We can certainly talk a little bit more after. But it's really a lot of one-on-one talking and I think, again, that's the key. Having a webinar, you can certainly impart information, but it's that talking relationship between the publisher and the author to help them find their voice and make recommendations to them, and that's really how we've been doing it.

M: I'd like to ask the panel if there is a difference, in your judgment, in building author brands for nonfiction writers versus fiction. My background is I've either authored or co-authored

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

nine books on high technology, which is different than vampires. So, how would you differentiate what a nonfiction author would do versus a fiction writer?

AXELROD: Well, it really depends on your style as a nonfiction author. If it's very conversational in the way that you can impart information, just follow that in the way you do social media. If it's more structured, maybe you do that. I've read – I've followed blogs by software developers and they can be completely engrossing. It's really writing what you know about with the enthusiasm you bring to the subject.

JUDITH: And you also have the extra advantage of being an expert in your field, and that allows you to – media opportunities. So I think there's a range of possibilities as a nonfiction author to brand yourself, not just as an author of a particular book, but an expert in a topic.

KENNEALLY: And Arielle, what's your experience there? Are fiction or nonfiction authors more or less entrepreneurial?

ARIELLE: Well, I really agree with what Steve is saying, which is I actually think fundamentally, there's not that big a difference, that it's about your voice and whatever that voice is, establishing it in whatever medium that you're using. And like Judith is saying, if you are a nonfiction author with an expertise, you get the added advantage. The Internet is so great with niches, so if you have a particular niche that you're in, you can reach out to all the tweeters, bloggers, etc., in that area to cover your topic. But at the same time, for example, in the romance world, there is the most awesome group of bloggers who are covering the subject matter, so it's not that different, yeah.

KENNEALLY: When we did the informal poll at the beginning, we found there were some authors in the room. I wonder if there are any authors who also have some questions, but particularly, who may react to this notion that now there's this new responsibility, which is to do social marketing.

M: Thank you. Full disclosure, I'm a client of Steve's. And I do have a question, which is you were talking, Judith, about the three important aspects of social networking, social marketing for authors, understanding the available tools, defining yourself and understanding your audience. And it's that third one that I don't know what kind of advice you give authors. I don't know who reads me. I don't know who they are. I don't even know who reads my blog. I get 1,000 hits a day. I get nine or 10 people commenting. Who are those other people? How do I find out? How do I find out what they're thinking? Is that something that you are more specific about with your authors?



## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

JUDITH: I think to make sure that you're initiating a conversation, so when you're blogging, you're not just sharing your thoughts but you're asking them for their thoughts. We find some of the most effective campaigns that we run on our Facebook pages are when we're putting a question out there, a quiz, asking for people's feedback and then they all want to react and they all want to tell you what their opinion is, and you can glean certain information based on how they're responding to you. So I think, ask for their input. Ask them questions that's going to give you information about who they are and what they're interested in.

ARIELLE: I would ask you, why don't you know? When I'm interacting online with people who are reading my book, like on Facebook, I'm looking at where they're from, who they're friends with, what groups they're part of, all that kind of stuff. So I think it's incumbent upon you as the author – like Judith is saying – if you don't know, to ask them directly.

KENNEALLY: We have time for about two more questions.

M: It's more of a comment about that indentured servitude, having to write something, having to produce a blog that I don't necessarily want to. I'd rather be doing something else. It's forced content and I don't know how much value that has when everyone just sort of feels like they have to put something out rather than it's something that they want to put out.

KENNEALLY: Arielle, any comments on how to sort of inspire people to write?

ARIELLE: I think with social media you have to choose – you do have to choose something that you have some kind of passion for. So, if you don't feel that you can sit and write a blog every day, every week, whatever it is, maybe there are other writers that you love to read that you can comment on and take place in the conversation that's going on elsewhere. But if you don't want to be invisible, which most authors don't, at the very least, you have to find the thing that is the least obnoxious for you. But it doesn't have to be doing a blog or tweeting. I hate tweeting and I don't do it anymore.

KENNEALLY: Well, Arielle, I'll stop you right there about the tweeting, because in addition to our audience here in the room, we have an audience online.

ARIELLE: Yeah. Sorry.

KENNEALLY: And Angela tells me there's a question from a tweet.

## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

JAMES: Hi. I'm Angela James from Harlequin Carina Press and one of the Twitter followers of the hashtag wants to ask the panel, should the author's brand with readers be separate from the author's writer-to-writer industry reputation brand?

AXELROD: I'll start. I think they can be very separate if you choose to have them be separate. Amanda Hocking has a – in her blog, she's really writing to people who are in the self-publishing community and she'll produce literally scans of her royalty statements. It's not something a 13-year-old girl cares about who's into vampires. She's writing for the self-published community and the book blogging community, and they have taken her up in part because of this enormous candor she shows and this good will she's showing toward that industry. They write about the books because they love the books, but she's sort of paving the way in a sense by making herself very accessible and putting herself across as a real honest agent in a business where a lot of times people either have their own agendas or are misrepresenting things flat out.

KENNEALLY: OK. A last question from the floor.

F: Often for top-tier authors or top-tier brands, it makes a lot of sense for people to have their own blogs or their own entity, but for maybe a lower-tier author or somebody who maybe isn't as motivated towards blogging on a regular basis or interacting on a set schedule, what do you think about setting up kind of parameters for them interacting in existing forums and building their name and their brand through things that already exist? Do you think that that hurts author branding or do you think it's still a pretty valuable activity?

JUDITH: I would say it's valuable and it's a great way to start if you don't on your own have the resources or the time to manage, maintain a blog or a website, because it does take a lot of effort, I think. Starting in any way you can, as Arielle has been saying, to not be invisible but to have a voice is really important.

ARIELLE: I actually think that's the absolute necessary number one step for anyone is establishing yourself in the community. And just as a plug for Harlequin and Carina Press, you guys have the most innovative, interesting way of both introducing authors to the social media community and getting them involved, and then also the community that's already out there. If you're a new romance author, it is so easy to engage and to quickly become connected to very influential people in the world. It's just incredible.

KENNEALLY: Well, a great way to end that. I want to thank our panel here. Thank you in the audience today.

(applause)



## Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

KENNEALLY: Arielle Eckstut, Steven Axelrod, Judith Haut, thank you all. And if I may, indulge me for one more second. I want to come back to Robbie Burns. It was hard to pick something from him that seemed appropriate to this particular moment, but I found these lines. “O would some power the giftie give us / To see ourselves as others see us! / It would from many a blunder free us.” And that seems to me wise words for this program.

My name’s Chris Kenneally from Copyright Clearance Center. Thank you all for being here.

AXELROD: Thank you, Chris.

(Applause)

END OF PANEL