

A little guide for first time authors

Building your author brand

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As any author, new or seasoned, would say the most important measure of the success of your book is that it reaches your readers. While your publishers can do a lot to drive this through their own sales and marketing channels, in today's age of social media and powerful personal and professional networking, the part you as an author can play in getting your book out there and visible to its readers cannot and should not be underestimated.

Indeed, **you are the single most important vehicle of promotion for your book.** But why is this? And what does this mean for you as an aspiring or new author? This guide is here to not only help you understand this but also to offer ideas and guidance on what you can do to build and harness your own unique profile (what is commonly now referred to as 'your personal brand') as an author.

What's in a name? (What's in a brand?)

“ What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

– *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare

... and yet, when we make choices, whether it be who to vote for or which washing machine to buy we pay attention to 'the name'. Ignoring all the marketing speak, the concept of 'profile' in any field accounts for something, and it influences how we engage and make decisions. But let's look at the world of books.

Given the impact a book has in our lives, whether it is for entertainment or knowledge, **we care about who the author is**. The name of the author says a lot to a reader about what to expect from that book and the kind of work created by that author. If it's a book that provides knowledge or support your personal and professional development, the name matters even more. All authors have a signature quality that makes them appeal to their specific niche of readers and keeps them coming back.

This 'signature' is your brand. There are a range of benefits to cultivating and harnessing it including:

- Meaningfully engaging with your readership
- Standing out from the noise and driving visibility and discoverability of your work
- Turning one-time readers to loyal repeat readers and advocates of your work

The moment you become an author, your name (i.e. your brand) is out there. And so in the next few pages we share a few ways in which you can put your best face forward in a way that clarifies your purpose and the message(s) you are sharing through the work you do. Whether that work is writing books, blogs and articles, sharing your thoughts and ideas via social media, delivering training and workshops, speaking at conferences and events or a combination of all of these.

Defining your brand: 5 prompts

Imagine this. You're in an elevator and it's just you and one other person. You're both going all the way up to the same 37th floor of the tallest building in town. You get chatting about the weather (of course) and then the person asks you – *so what do you do?* You say – *I'm an author.* And they say – *Oh cool, what do you write about?*

How will you respond? And by the way... you're now just two floors from reaching the 37th floor.

Defining ourselves and the work we do is a challenge we all face when staring at that blank bio field on any social media platform. But as an author, and an aspiring thought leader, this definition is all the more important. If you can't define who you are and what your work is about to yourself, how will you define it for others?

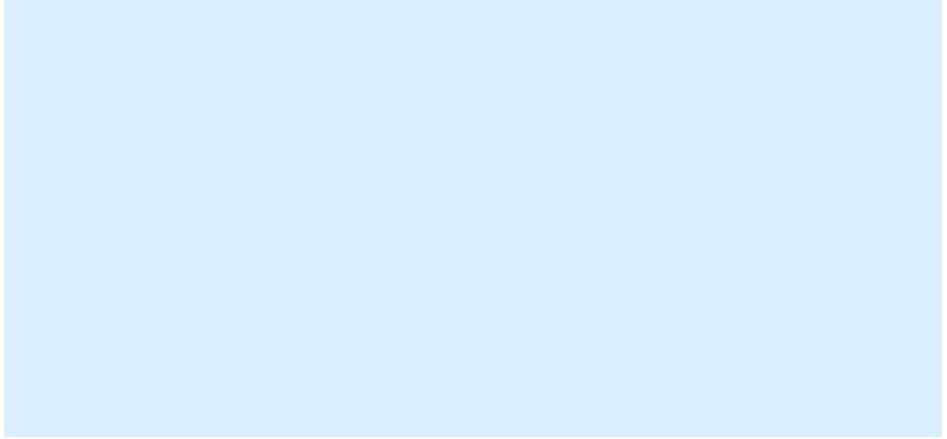
Your author brand can evolve with you over time but it helps to begin with a clear self-definition of what makes your work unique and what your readers can expect you to deliver consistently.

Following is a workbook style resource to support you on your way to finding that clarity.



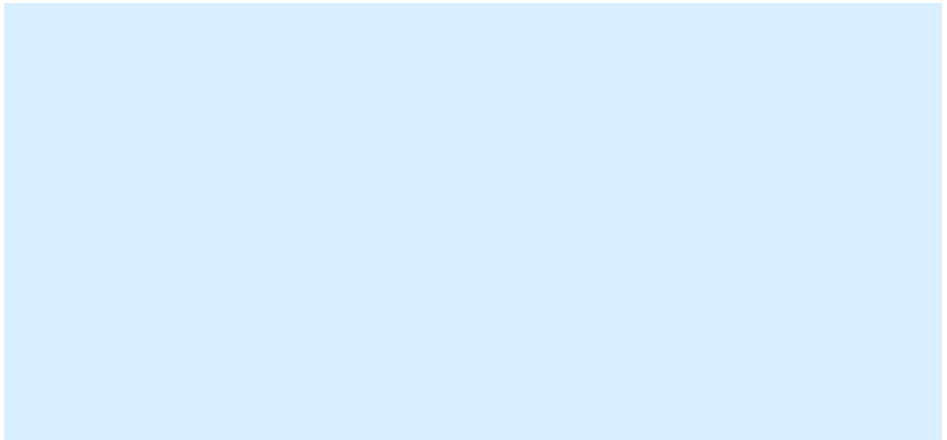
What's your mission?

Think big. What is your big purpose in becoming an author? What impact do you want to have in your discipline? How do you want to make a difference in your specific niche?



Who are you?

What is it that you have to offer? Who is your reader/customer? How will your work address their needs and help them solve their current problems?



What's your thumbprint?

How are you different from others in your niche/field? What makes your message/offering to the world unique? How do you stand out from the many other voices out there?

What's the proof?

Why should you be trusted? What makes you credible? What makes you an authority on the topic?

What's your look and feel?

What impression do you want to create? List five words that most resonate with you. What impression do you not want to create? List five words that you don't want your author brand to embody.

A large, empty light blue rectangular area intended for the user to write their responses to the questions above.

**Hurray, you now have
(brand) clarity!**



5 Brand building blocks

Now that you have clearly defined what you are about, how do you translate that to the actual spaces, online and offline, where you are seen and make it consistent?

Below are a set of building blocks that will provide you with a good foundation as your author brand grows and evolves with you.



The bio

Think about all the places where you have to provide a bio – your website, your social media accounts, ‘about the author’ descriptions, institution profiles, speaker/presenter profiles, etc. Take into account the work you did in defining your author brand in the previous section and now write two bios – a long version (300-500 words) and a short version (think Twitter size!).

You now have a consistent, clear and go-to bio to hand out when the occasion arises.



Your website

It’s a good idea to have a website. A website is a window for the world to look through and see what you are offering. Consider the look and feel of your website and the language and messages on it based on what you have clarified in the previous brand clarity exercise. Think about colour schemes, tone of voice, photos and graphics... what impression do you want to create? What story do you want it to tell? Consider the design and direction of your website based on what you have clarified in the previous exercise.



Your social media presence

Consider all the social media channels you have and be clear on which ones you will be using for professional purposes. What impressions do you want to create? Think about the words from the previous exercise. In particular, the five words you said you didn't want to be associated with. Keep the five words you want to look and feel as benchmarks and guidelines for the kind of content and messages you are sharing with your audience. Don't forget the **handy guidance** we've provided on this topic too.



Headshots and visuals

First impressions are formed in a matter of minutes. Decisions to say yes to one thing and no to the other made in a matter of a click and a scroll. Everything counts. Your headshots in professional bios, book pages on publisher sites and retailer sites, social media, etc. So, needless to say, it's a good idea to be intentional about them. What do you want to convey? Again, think about the words you chose and the impression you want to make.



Your content delivery

Do you write a blog? Do you have a monthly newsletter? Do you run workshops? Do you give talks at events? What are the various ways in which you take your work out to your audience? Are they presented in a way that is consistent with your author brand? What tweaks can you make? Perhaps it's an update to your blog header or newsletter banner. Perhaps it's a change to your slide decks and handouts. Think of all these touchpoints and how you want to bring consistency to the impression you want to make.

Responding to criticism or negative feedback

First, it is important not to worry or panic. While it can be difficult to be the recipient of negative attention, keep in mind that it is quite common. In most cases, such attention will not lead to a long-term negative impact, and in some cases, it can result in a positive experience. With that in mind, it is important not to rush a reaction without thinking through what the best response will be.

Ultimately, how you decide to respond to negative comments or people who disagree with you online will depend on your personal brand and comfort level.

Assess the situation before you respond

Here are some good questions to ask yourself to begin with:

- **Is this a single comment from one person or many comments from different people?** The number of people involved will affect how you respond. For example, a single message might warrant a direct reply whereas something that has garnered more public attention might warrant a response in a public way.
- **Is the commentor someone who you know or someone you've not been in contact with before?** If you know the person, you may have already had debates with them in the past and can reflect on those experiences as you craft your response. If it's a new person, then you might want to find out more about them before responding. E.g. Are they an active member of a group with strong political opinions on a topic that is relevant to the information in your text?
- **Is the comment a legitimate difference of opinion that sparks healthy academic debate?** If so, you may want to respond stating your viewpoints in a way that continues the conversation. This is a good example of how you can engage your followers and turn a negative into a positive. Remember to always stay respectful, even if those engaging with you are not. Take the high road.

- **Is the comment conveying information about your material that is categorically false?** If so, and if it seems that that faulty information is spreading, you may want to quickly correct the record. While the original commentor may never believe your words, others might.
- **Is the comment pointing out an error in your book?** If so, it's a good idea to check the accuracy of what they have said. If they are correct, it's good practice to thank them for pointing out the issue, acknowledge the need for change and apologize if necessary. Then let your editor know about the problem.
- **Is this about a highly controversial topic that you do not already have a clear stance on?** If so, you might want to think carefully about whether or not you want to respond. Social media is not always the best place for nuanced debates on sensitive topics.

Sense-check your response

Before posting, ask yourself:

- Is what I have written helpful or written out of emotion? As you craft a response – especially one on a public forum like social media where the impact will be larger, try to sort through your words and determine what is helpful and what may be written out of emotion. You can even draft a message, step away for a bit, and re-read it looking for words you can remove that are not constructive.
- Does this response reflect my personal brand in the best possible light?
- Have I missed an opportunity to turn this negative into a positive?
- Putting yourself in the mindset of the other, what is a likely response? Is this likely to cause a snowball effect where things get out of hand?

When you might not want to respond

You may receive a comment that is simply negative with nothing constructive to say, or worse – an unjustified personal attack. If so, it may be best not to engage. Remember, you do not have to respond if you don't feel comfortable doing so, or if there is little to be gained. If you have already responded, but the conversation goes in a direction you are not comfortable with, you can stop responding at that point.

If you choose not to engage you might also want to hide the comment. Depending on the platform you are using, you have a few options:

- Delete the original post/tweet - this will remove the response from your timeline. The downside to this option is that you'll lose any other interactions on the post, and you may get called out for deleting it. If anti-censorship is part of your personal brand, this will then convey the wrong message. Assess whether this seems like the best course of action before going ahead.
- If you don't want to delete your post, you can push the post/tweet down your timeline by posting more. To do this, simply increase your number of posts over the next few days to move the comment down so that it is less visible.
- On Facebook, you have the option to hide individual comments and block users from commenting on your page – this is a good idea if you are being spammed.

Crisis situations

Not all interactions on social media are positive and sometimes you may find yourself in the middle of a crisis communications situation. An example of this might be a Twitter 'pile-on', where many accounts are tweeting or retweeting something related to you or your work. Or, when your issue is reported in the news media or through influencers in your industry. This can be upsetting and difficult to deal with, so we recommend contacting your Sage editor right away so that we can support you.



3 Author case studies

Drs **Virginia Braun** and **Victoria Clarke** are the names when it comes to thematic analysis (TA) and qualitative research. Founders of reflexive thematic analysis, their brand is deeply rooted in intellectual rigour and commitment to making qualitative research accessible to all.

You might often spot them speaking about qualitative research on webinars and in-person talks, writing articles and harnessing social media to shed light on their work and to advocate for positive change in qualitative research and more widely. On their **website**, they share free resources and practical tips for doing TA.



Dr Tom Chatfield is an author, tech philosopher and an authority on critical thinking and digital culture. His brand is down-to-earth and is all about the demystification of critical thought, making it accessible, actionable, and relevant in today's world.

Whether it's through public speaking and podcasts, articles and blogs or his **social media** or newsletter, you'll find Tom sharing food for thought, empowering and inspiring people to engage critically with the world and become better users of technology. #TalkCriticalThinking



Oliver Laasch is an author, educator, and entrepreneur. His brand stands at the intersection of business acumen and sustainable practice. It offers a unique blend of insight, expertise, and passion, making it an attractive proposition for those seeking to integrate responsibility into their business strategies.

Oliver is a global research leader on responsible management practices and alternative business models, and the founder of the **Center for Responsible Management Education**. It's through this platform that he facilitates responsible learning, sharing practical tools and resources to drive positive change. Check out his **YouTube channel** and connect with him on **LinkedIn** to learn more!



10 Useful resources

7 handy online tools...

[Canva](#)

For creating your own snazzy graphics and artwork! *Canva* has ready-made sizes for social media and other digital spaces you need, as well as a plethora of templates and free images to choose from. It's an intuitive and easy-to-use free platform.

[Squarespace](#)

A popular and accessible website builder that is commonly used by many freelancers and small businesses who want to DIY their way.

[Wix](#)

Similar to *Squarespace* and another similar user-friendly platform for creating your own website.

[Linktree](#)

A handy little thing for when you want to direct people on your social media to various online pages such as your website, blog articles, book pages etc.

[Substack](#)

Want to start a newsletter to grow your audience? This is a popular one and free!

[Mailchimp](#)

Another well-established platform for email marketing that's free (for the first 2000 mailing list subscribers) and novice friendly. It also has tools to build your own website or a simple landing page.

[About me](#)

A great alternative to going down the full-blown website route. You can still showcase all your credentials and build a professional profile with this free single page website listing, but have it look more stylish than a CV!

... and 3 books on us (if/when you want to go pro!)



- [Brand Management](#)
- [The Power of Branding: Telling Your School's Story](#)
- [Brands and Branding](#)

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