



BOOK MARKETING &
Social Media:

THE 3 BIGGEST MYTHS

BY TIM GRAHL

There's a ton of advice swirling around out there about how authors should use social media to sell books. I read the posts. I watch the videos. I'm constantly looking for that secret that I'm missing. And each time, I'm reminded of the same thing:

When it comes to selling books, spending a huge amount of time building a social media following is a waste of time.

I'm going to debunk three of the myths about how social media can be used to sell books. Then I'm going to share a couple of things you can do to actually take advantage of these platforms.

Tools vs. Blueprints

All of the things we use to build our online platform—blogs, email lists, social media, podcasts, guest posts—are [all just tools in the bookselling toolbox](#). The focus should *never* be on the tool itself. The focus should be on what we are trying to build—in this case, an author platform. But with the current proliferation of social

media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn and others, we often lose sight of that.

Most authors decide that they must use these tools to sell books, so they run around trying to figure out the best way to do it. This is the same thing as picking up a hammer from your toolbox and then running around trying to figure out what to build with it.

Before you build any new structure, you must start with a plan or blueprint. Then you reach into your toolbox and pull out the right tool for the job.

Social Media: Work vs. Pleasure

I love using Facebook to keep up with family, friends and colleagues. It's great to maintain connections with people. But as I wrote in *Your First 1000 Copies*, when it comes to evaluating your social media performance, it's important to separate work from pleasure.

I try to be honest with myself about what I'm doing while I spend time on social media. I'm not marketing.

I'm not doing something that will actively grow my platform or books sales. I'm doing it for fun. Which is fine. But I'm honest with myself about the effectiveness of what I'm doing. I use it for pleasure, not work.

Myth #1: Growing your social media following will increase your fame

[Take a look at the top 100 people on Twitter in terms of follower count.](#) Now, how many of them are not independently famous *outside* of Twitter?

Social media is not a place to “grow your fame.” It's a reflection of the fame you've created elsewhere. Outside of a few outliers like *Shit My Dad Says*, your social media following will grow as your popularity grows.

I'm one great example of this.

From June 2012 through May 2013 (the year leading up to my book launch), my Twitter following grew from 1,357 to 1,432. That's a growth of 75 followers.

From June through December 2013, my Twitter following grew from 1,432 to 1,789. That's a growth of 357. That's almost five times the growth, in half the time.

That happened with zero promotion and almost zero activity on my Twitter account. Go check out my Twitter page. All I do is respond to people and retweet what other people post about me or my book, creating almost no original posts.

So why did my following suddenly grow? Because my overall “fame” grew, outside of Twitter. Of course, my numbers are a pittance compared to many other people's, but this observation scales perfectly to the average situation. My story is the norm, not the exception.

If you're focusing on growing your social media following, you're focusing on the wrong thing. It will always grow slowly while you're running around trying to build your follower numbers and Facebook “Likes.”

[You should be focusing on your obscurity problem](#)—the fact that not enough people know you exist.—And

you don't solve that by increasing your social media following.

Myth #2: There's a way to use social media that works, you just haven't figured it out yet

Honestly, I often feel this way.

I look around at all the advice and "success stories" and think maybe I'm missing something or just doing it wrong. This may be how you're feeling too. It's not true, however.

I've gotten the chance to pull the curtain back several times, and the truth is always much more mundane than you would think.

Here are the common elements I've observed in "successful" social media campaigns:

- **It actually *wasn't* successful.** This is the most

common. We see something bouncing around the social mediaverse and assume it must be selling like hotcakes. Once you get a look behind the scenes though, that's not usually the case.

- **There was something else going on.** Successful campaigns usually have something else going on that isn't as public. I'll show you book launch examples later, in which I was questioned by several people after the launch who assumed our social media campaign had been a big hit. The truth is, most of the book sales came from everything but social media. Social media was just the most public way of commenting on the book's progress. People then made assumptions about social media's effectiveness in terms of actual sales.
- **The scale was enormous.** The successes I've seen selling things via social media were due to the enormous scale of the product's overall marketing and ad campaign.

Your 5,000, 10,000 or 50,000 followers/fans aren't go-

ing to generate that many sales for you. Especially [when you look at what's happening with Facebook and their fan pages](#).—Bottom line: you're going to have to pay for that marketing.

Which leads me to our next myth:

Myth #3: If I get a big enough following, it'll turn into book sales

This has to be the biggest lie out there.

And I'm calling it a lie because I've seen people who know better actually continue to repeat mistakes based on this myth.

In fact, [in a December 2013 interview, Gary Vaynerchuk made the claim](#) that if a fiction writer started up Twitter and/or Instagram accounts for their book's characters, it would be the difference between selling 200 copies of their book and selling 25,000 copies.

That is a lie.

I've never heard or seen anything close to that happening, and I'd love for someone to show me stats that prove me wrong on that. I'd be extremely surprised if there was even one person who could prove that more than 20,000 extra sales were made by creating Twitter accounts for their book's characters.

That's the part that makes me angry.

People like Gary, and many others who write about the effectiveness of social media, are either writing from ignorance, spouting unproved theories, or greatly inflating their own results.

I have personally tested the effectiveness of social media in selling books, and have worked with other authors who have tested it. Their tests aren't on the scale of my Twitter following of less than 2,000. These are tests done by people who are connected to hundreds of thousands, even millions of people.

Here are few examples:

- In a book launch last year, promotional tweets about an author’s book went out to a six-figure Twitter following. It resulted **in only a few hundred book sales**.
- A few months ago, a friend had someone with well over 1 million Twitter followers promote his book at a great time of day. It resulted in **no noticeable bump** in book sales.
- In multiple tests across many social media accounts, it was found that it’s the norm to get less than 1%—more like 0.25%—of your followers or fans to take action on any given update. “Action” meaning just clicking on a link, and not even converting to a sale. (Try it yourself: Use the service [bit.ly](#) to see how many people click on the links in your posts.)

Also, not to continue picking on Gary Vaynerchuk, but his newest book is all about social media strategy. Here are a few of his social media numbers, as of late 2013:

- Twitter - 1,016,311
- Facebook - 147,604
- Instagram - 34,563
- LinkedIn - 152,735
- Pinterest - 15,778

All five platforms combined, that’s 1,366,991 connections.

Stop and think about the daunting task of building that kind of following on social media.

Now consider this: in the first week of sales for his latest book, *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook*, Gary sold about 25,000 copies (according to Nielson BookScan). Even if you take out all the other promotion he did— dozens of interviews, appearances on NPR, CNN, *Huffington Post*, etc.—and assume that all those book sales came through social media, *that’s still only a 1.8% conversion rate*.

That means for every one book sale, he needed 55 con-

nections on social media—assuming every single sale came through social media.

Now consider your own social media presence. Think through how much time you're spending on it, in hopes that it turns into book sales, and do the math to see how many book sales are going to result.

These are the myths about social media and book marketing. My hope is that I will be able to save you a lot of time and frustration, and help you see through a lot of the misinformation swirling around out there.

I don't want to just leave you with the sad truth about how too many authors invest in those myths. There is a way to effectively use social media to support your author platform.

Social media is just another tool in your toolbox. When people try to use it as the myths dictate, it's the equivalent of grabbing a hammer to get a screw into a board. It will mainly waste time and frustrate you.

What I want to show you now is the *right* way to use social media to build your platform.

Here are some truths about social media:

Truth #1: It's a great way to connect with individuals

Although I talk about the importance of Outreach and connecting with influencers, it's often hard to make that first connection. Either the person doesn't respond to your email, or you're not even sure what to email them.

This is where social media can be very effective. Even influencers who have teams of people to maintain their email inbox for them will often maintain their Twitter account themselves. This can be a great way to get past the gatekeepers and introduce yourself for the first time.

This has worked for me several times when I've wanted to connect with someone. I emailed them and never heard back, so I reached out with social media and got a

response. Then I was able to follow-up with email, from which I also got a response.

Social media is *not* a mass strategy. It's a 1-to-1 strategy.

Experiment with thinking of social media more as a tool to communicate 1-to-1 instead of a way to communicate with masses of people. You'll start to see your effectiveness go up, your time-wasting go down, and your frustration dissolve.

As you build your platform, the number of people you are connected to will continue to grow. When you first get started, it'll seem pretty easy to keep track of everyone. But as the numbers grow and you meet more people, it will be harder to stay connected to everyone.

This is where social media can be extremely helpful.

I've been able to stay connected to people whom I've met incidentally or at conferences, or who have emailed me on that social media site. This is fun on a personal level,

and also extremely helpful for building my platform.

Truth #2: It's easier to leverage other people's followings than to build your own

One week, 11 people shared my current blog post on Twitter. If you add up those 11 people's follower counts, it comes to 17,901. Do you know how much time and effort it would take me to grow a following of 17,901 people on Twitter?

By inviting people to share your content on social media, you'll be able to reach many, many more people than you could otherwise, with much less time and effort than building your own following would take.

Here's another thing to consider:

Most people don't have email lists. Most people don't have a blog. Most people don't guest contribute to other blogs. The typical person who waits tables or inputs data

all day only has one way to share content online: social media.

By inviting people to share your content on social media, it allows them to be involved in what you're doing, and to help spread the word in the only way they can.

While Myth #3 above still holds true, making your content easy to share and inviting people to do so is a great secondary way to spread your message.

Using the right tools

When you're engaging with social media, it's important to remember your goals. If you're using it for fun and to stay connected with friends, family and colleagues, then that's great. If you're hoping to build a huge following that will turn into big book sales down the road, you're going to find yourself frustrated, with a lot of wasted time behind you.

Also, more importantly, be discriminating when reading any advice—even mine. Judge it against what you've experienced and make sure people are backing their advice

up with real-world experience, not anecdotal conjecture.

The ideas, tools and tips I share are here to help you reap the greatest impact out of everything you do. You can dig a hole with a spoon, but it's a lot easier to use a shovel.

The same goes for social media. Yes, it can have an impact on your platform. Yes, it can help you sell books. But if you try to use it for something it's not built for, treating it as your biggest marketing method, you'll be back to digging a hole with a spoon.

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