

People have said, “A hobby has no budget. You just do it.” I understood this to mean that hobbies are done for enjoyment and not for profit. I have heard more than a few authors say, “I just wanted to get something published.” Or, “I just wanted to be able to hand out my writings to friends and relatives.” If this is your attitude, then you might want to put this book down because, in a real sense, you have already accomplished your goals because you have a fulfilling hobby.

Suppose, however, that you want to publish other works or that you want to create a sustainable process in which the last book funds publication of this one? Whether a traditional or a self-published author, you will need to become a business—and have a budget. In a survival sense, this is admitting that you are lost and need to find water, shelter, food, or help.

How are you like a business? Well, for one thing, writing a book makes you an entrepreneur—you have taken risk to build something, namely, your book. On its cover is your name; this is your gamble. You bring together all the components of your venture, hiring people to do the things you can’t do yourself or assigning some of your rights to a publisher who undertakes tasks on behalf of your joint venture. You work with other businesses in marketing and gathering the necessary materials to make your product available and noticed. Marketing your product is your responsibility. Hopefully, your expenses generate revenues and, if sufficient, earnings. This sounds like every business, doesn’t it?

Once you have embraced this business concept, you can see marketing from a different angle. It’s part of your business. Now you can ingest a few other business concepts. You network with other businesses. You may even notice needs that other author-publishers have and then offer the corresponding goods and services in addition to your book. You will brand yourself, your websites, and your social media with your promises and specific style.

Hardly anyone will tell you what this is because it is personal and perhaps even private. You will need to discover (or invent) this is on your own. In branding, you are not tagging your readers; they are tagging you just as they tag a few top choices in each product type.

Stepping back to observe large companies can be instructive. Take Coca Cola and Pepsi, for example. Both sell a similar product—a caramel cola carbonated beverage—and you can do the same thing with each of them, namely, drink them. Coca Cola for many years advertised “the taste that refreshes,” while Pepsi Cola advertised “the taste for a new generation.” These marketing slogans are not the respective brands, but point to them, as brand supporters lined up behind one or the other to say, “This is my cola.”

This is what you are trying to become with your book and *author platform* (your circle of influence among readers)—a desirable reading experience. Perhaps it’s your form of writing that makes you distinctive just like the taste of a beverage. Become distinctive and don’t copy anyone else.

One of the things literary agents, book editors, and even readers complain about is the “me too” author. When, say, Stephenie Meyer writes a successful trilogy on vampires, suddenly everyone is writing about vampires. Or, when E.L. James produces a sell-out

series on *Fifty Shades of Grey*, suddenly everyone is exploring somewhat kinky sexual exploration. Don't be the "me too" author regarding subject, and don't be that author regarding style, either. You need to develop your own voice and viewpoint.

Why? Nothing is yuckier than a cheap knock off of an existing product. In contrast, nothing is more refreshing than a new, completely unique flavor that tastes great and could be the next big thing. If your writing could be compared to a cola, then do not aim to taste either like Coke or Pepsi. Aim to be something distinctive. Something fresh and new attracts people and gets attention. Trying to stand out seems uncomfortable and may not get the best attention at first, but it will kick in sooner or later.

Branding for authors is basically pivoted on an idea of some sort and a list of keywords that describe you and your material. Brand yourself on the theme of the book itself or the main character. Maybe it's something about the character or the setting. Maybe it's the moral or concept of the book. Maybe it's some of your hobbies and other things that influence you as an author. These are just ideas. You know the old adage, "No one knows a book better than its author"? This can apply to the brand. Only you can brand you and your book. Once you discover your brand you can paint proverbial/virtual the walls with it.

Just like starting any business, the first year or two can be really hard. It seems like you are working your butt off and not making any headway, but that's what it takes to get "out there." Nobody said writing was easy—those who do have never done it. Writing is *work* after all; it's not a hobby when you go public. It takes good ol' hard work and time. Then one day things seem to "fall into place." Someone may notice you. You just never know when something will stick. Expect to make little progress at first, but if you stick with it, then you may pull yourself up. The beginning is when it feels like a fight for survival which it essentially is. If no one knows you're there in the woods, will they be looking for you? Probably not. If you don't get busy building that three-point signal fire, who will? If it's not burning when a plane flies over, then you're not getting anyone's attention, and you won't get rescued. Your business, you, and your book will all die if you neglect it! Marketing is a signal that you exist!