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Questions Covered in this Session:

Q1. Why do we need to promote our own work – surely this is the job of a publisher?

Q2. What should I focus on when doing an author video? And how should I use this to promote the book?

Q3. How much should you say about a new book before it is published?

Q4. Do you have any tips for launching a technical book through social media?

Q5. How can I use social media to promote a book without being too ‘salesy’?

Q6. How important are reviews for a new book and how much weight do they carry as compared to endorsements? Any tips on how to encourage readers to write a review?

Q7. Which blogging method do you find most helpful: using your own personal blog, posting to your institution’s blog, or posting to a high-readership third-party blog?

Plus a request for website feedback:

Glenna Matthews: I just launched a website at glennamatthews.com. My Cambridge book is about California and the Civil War, and my website has a list of links to California sites associated with the Civil War era.
Why do we need to promote our own work – surely this is the job of a publisher?

**Jon Reed:** This is a question I’m often asked – and I’ve seen things from both sides over the years, as a publisher and an author – and have run social media training for both groups.

When it comes to social media marketing, I think this is usually better coming from the author than the publisher – because it is a personal medium based on your own networks, and because tone of voice is important. Readers want to connect with the author, and social media helps them do that.

However: publishers do also need to find a way to support authors in their social media efforts. This might be with technology (e.g. setting up blogs, Facebook pages) or training (workshops, guidelines or other resources). I think Author Hub is a great example of this!

**Andrew Martin:** Jon, you have a good point there – the publisher needs the expertise of the author to produce say the book or journal, and that need continues with the promotion of the item.

The author remains the expert in their field/industry, and where authors are able to work with the publisher in the promotion, it makes the promotional campaign stronger, and helps to persuade more potential readers to take notice (and maybe even buy).

One of the interesting things that we spotted in the results of our recent survey completed by our authors, was that 24.35% of respondents said that they have used social media (blogs and videos) to promote their own book and 30.10% stated that they’d like to use it to promote their own book.

So I think that there’s an interesting point that publishers and authors can explore together.

**Amy Watson:** One example of an author who’s very proactive on social media and is very good at using it to engage with his readers is Michael Scott.

As well as recently coming to the Press to be interviewed (**watch interview**) Michael is very active on Twitter and Google +. He regularly updates his own blog and his website in order to ensure that there’s plenty of ‘fresh’ new content available for his readers. Michael doesn’t use social media to explicitly promote his titles, but rather, he uses it to share his knowledge and his enthusiasm for his subject, and this is what makes him a really good example of an author who has used social media to his advantage.

[http://michaelscottweb.blogspot.co.uk/](http://michaelscottweb.blogspot.co.uk/)

(authorhub@cambridge.org)

[cambridge.org/authorhub](http://cambridge.org/authorhub)
Jon Reed: That’s an encouraging trend, Andrew, and certainly higher than when I first started teaching social media. The other important point is that, as well as an increasing interest among authors, there is a much greater usage by the population generally and by readers. Social media is increasingly becoming a way for readers to discover books online.

The sheer numbers of people using social networks make them an important tool to use / place to be found:

- Facebook – 1 billion+ users
- Twitter – 500 million+ users
- Google+ – 500 million users
- LinkedIn – 240 million users
- Pinterest – 70 million users
- Goodreads – 20 million users

Richard Brown: In addition to social media like Facebook, sites such as Goodreads as well as Author Central on Amazon also provide a valuable way of marketing your books.

Andrew Martin: I agree, and keeping that author profile up to date on Author Central is important – what with all the traffic that Amazon gets.

Amy Watson: Richard, would you mind sharing a link to your Goodreads and Author Central accounts (if you have them), as I think other authors might be interested to see how you use these accounts effectively?

Andy Woodfield: We are actually producing a quick guide on getting the best out of Author Central on Amazon. You can use your profile page for a number of things. Even something as simple as adding a link to your email signature.

Jon Reed: And you can automatically pull your blog into your Goodreads author page and Amazon Author Central profile (though only on Amazon.com at the moment) – which helps keep the content fresh automatically.

Richard Brown: Amy, my Goodreads author page is here and Author Central is here and there’s an Amazon.com version as well with access to my blog (as with Goodreads). One point about Author Central that might be valuable is if publishers posted review of books on the site. Currently you have to rely on either random individuals doing so or getting people you know to do so. What you quite rightly can’t do is to post reviews yourself.

Amy Watson: Brilliant, thanks for sharing this Richard, really very helpful!
What should I focus on when doing an author video? And how should I use this to promote the book?

**Jon Reed:** Video is a great way to engage and attract readers. The starting point, as always, is your audience. What would they find useful and where would they be likely to see it?

Videos that get across some useful, engaging and interesting information about your topic are more likely to be effective at reaching a niche audience than a salesy ‘this is why you should buy my book’ pitch. Having said that, you do also need to be clear about your marketing goal, and what your ‘call to action’ will be i.e. what you want people to do after watching your video. This might simply be including a jacket image and web address at the end of your video.

**Andy Woodfield:** Here is an example of a well viewed author video that we filmed in Cambridge at our Pitt Building. Jim Flynn was passing through Cambridge on a couple of media trips so it was a good opportunity to film him! Watch film.

There are a number of ways an author can put together a video. Most universities now have a media centre and can provide the right equipment. If you happen to be passing by Cambridge we can even do this for you, here, at our headquarters. Alternatively, most smartphones have a good enough camera on them for you to do it with a friend/colleague. We are here to support you whatever you decide to do and can help out with putting together the right questions and even help with some of the editing. We will post these guides soon!

**Andrew Martin:** One of the great things about video too, is that once posted in YouTube or Vimeo etc, it stays there, and continues to turn up in search results time and time again ... giving you and your work a longer lasting voice, than that of a printed advert or email.

So with a clear message, and ‘call to action’, you and your work can get long-term benefits from a video.

**Jon Reed:** I think that’s a great example of an author interview – which is probably the most common style of video that you will want to use. A few things to highlight:

- keep it brief – up to around 3 minutes is perfect
- don’t look at the camera! Occasionally a ‘piece to camera’ is appropriate; but too often this looks salesy. If you look at the interviewer, and you appear to one side of the screen, it looks journalistic.
• use different camera angles / stock footage to cover up edits
• have a clear call to action (link) at the end such as a web address
• focus on interesting information that is contained in your book; pique people's interest with a short video and make them want to read more!

Richard Brown: Andrew is absolutely right about YouTube. I posted one for my Rebellion Trilogy that was far too long and, as it was the first one I’d done, not very well produced. I wish I’d had Jon’s cogent advice at hand. Despite a lifetime spent teaching and having been filmed and interviewed on several occasions, video is not an easy medium to master for the uninitiated—in which I class myself.
How much should you say about a new book before it is published?

Malick Ghachem asks: *It seems to me what one of the things social media makes possible that was not possible in the same way for earlier generations of scholars is the chance to present informal thoughts about work-in-progress that has not yet been published. But some publishers may prefer that an author of a forthcoming book not say too much about a new book before it is published. Do you have any thoughts about this?*

Jon Reed: Thanks for the question, Malick! It's a good point and definitely a discussion authors should have with their publishers at commissioning stage. I think it depends partly on the publisher's attitude to this, which may vary depending on the book; but it also depends on the subject matter e.g. probably not a good idea for experimental scientific research to appear before it has been thoroughly peer-reviewed! But, in history/politics I'd have thought it might make sense to talk about your work in advance, especially where relevant to current events. Always in agreement with the publisher, if it is a book under contract of course!

Andy Woodfield: I think Jon has made a good point here. It depends on the subject matter. If you can give people an insight into what's coming without giving too much (or all of it away) then it can be a really good way to engage with your readers at an early stage. Social media is a great tool for this.

If you are ever in doubt about how much to say about your book, you can ask our publicity team for advice. Their email address is publicity@cambridge.org. Your Marketing contact will also provide some guidance as well.

Jon Reed: Yes, it can be a fine line between whetting people’s appetite and giving too much away before the book has been published! And make sure you fit in with the marketing/publicity schedule which may be quite fixed around publication date. You may also want to increase the volume of social media activity (e.g. blogging) in the run up to publication and just after. Again, a discussion you should have with the publisher.

One example of where you DON’T want to give too much away is for a new edition. You don’t necessarily want to say too much publicly about a forthcoming new edition (especially if it is still a year or so away), in case you kill off sales for the current edition. My publisher gave me a strict timetable for what I was allowed to say when about my 2nd edition!
Do you have any tips for launching a technical book through social media?

Author Luis E F Foa Torres has asked for some do's and don'ts.

Andrew Martin: Luis, thank you for this question.

I think technical books can do well in social media, but one of the biggest considerations you need to have is your audience.

Not everyone is going to be technically minded, just as not everyone on Facebook wants to see what someone's having for dinner. Therefore it's important to identify how to reach those people who are, and weed out those who aren't.

If you're using Facebook, you could try setting up a page (there's a starter guide for this on our Author Hub resources page here), and promoting this on social channels to build up an audience of interested people. You might want to use paid promotion for this (as that can really build a big audience fast, based on people's interests).

If you're already socially connected, and you've got some friends and colleagues who may be right for your book, and you're a Google user, you may want to build what they call 'Circles' (fundamentally a list) of people who you know are interested. You can then post on-topic content to that 'Circle', knowing that they (and only they) are going to get it. You can post widely on Google, but make sure you use hashtags ‘#’ to pick key words. These can then help other users to find that content (much like Twitter hashtags).

Facebook has a very similar feature a greatly underused ‘Lists’ function available to personal profiles, which works in much the same way.

On-topic forums can also suit technical books well. So you should see if you can locate popular/active forums for your industry, and contribute, without coming across too ‘salesy’.

There are some blogging methods, but we've got some blogging questions coming up, so we'll pitch them in there.

Maybe some of our author group members are trying some of these already? Would love to hear how they're finding this.

Jon Reed: I think the approach depends on what sort of technical book (I guess we're talking nanostructures and theoretical physics here, Luis!) but my feeling is that academic publishing really lends itself to social media (compared with e.g. fiction publishing). That's because social media works best in niche topic areas it is about...
tapping into existing communities of interest online. You also need some content as a starting point for using social media and you already have that with a book.

The size of audience that you can reach online will vary according to how wide or narrow your topic is but even small fields can reach a decent sized audience when it is a global one. The approach you take depends on the type of book, but a few ideas are:

- Blog posts that explain a complex topic. ‘How to’ posts always get a lot of traffic.

- Images – great for conveying technical information, and social media is very visual these days. Pinterest works because it drives so much traffic – people are much more likely to click on images than text. Pinterest isn’t just for travel writing and children’s books – I’ve seen, for example, Nature use it well for complex scientific information. Infographics are also popular on Pinterest.

- Tweetable tips / facts – some technical books lend themselves to bite-sized nuggets of facts / tips / definitions that can form the basis of a daily tweet (these can be pre-scheduled in bulk using HootSuite.com)

In terms of launching a book, it pays to have a marketing plan / schedule, to plan in advance – and to set up your blog / social media accounts early, to build up traffic and interest pre-publication.

Luis E.F. Foa Torres: Thanks a lot Andrew and Jon for the very useful answer!

Definitely, I think that social media can work very well for niche topics.

Thanks again for your tips.
How can I use social media to promote a book without being too ‘salesy’?

**Benjamin Gregg** asks: *Can anyone suggest ways to harness social media to promote one’s book in a way not exploitative of connections not commercial or professional, in which participants do not anticipate and likely do not desire book promotions?*

**Jon Reed:** Thanks for your question and comment in the earlier thread, Benjamin. I think what you’re asking is how to use social media appropriately without turning people off / annoying them by being too promotional?

This is a really important point, and is something to be aware of when using social media. People don’t always like being sold to on Facebook / Twitter, and it can be counter-productive.

First of all, I don’t think you *need* to sell, as an academic author. Focus instead on your content, your topic share information that you think your target readership will value, and promote that, rather than your book as such. Sharing genuinely useful / valuable information benefits your followers / blog readers, and no one can object to that. They don’t have to buy your book as a result. Just make it easy for them to do so should they want to i.e. include a sales link on your website/blog or on your Twitter bio / Facebook page / LinkedIn profile etc.

The other point to make is to combine social media with email marketing. People don’t necessarily like to be sold to on Twitter/Facebook, and you need to respect your audience; but they generally expect to be sold to by email!

One of your aims with social media marketing and a prominent ‘call to action’ on your blog/website should be ‘sign up to my email list’. This is easy to set up with e.g. MailChimp and, once in place, you can promote your email list using social media, e.g. using Twitter, or even an email signup form embedded in a bespoke ‘tab’ on your Facebook page.

You do also need an incentive to encourage people to sign up to your list though ideally related to what you want to sell e.g. a sample chapter or related resource.

**Andy Woodfield:** We’ve experimented with Facebook at Cambridge for the last 4–5 years and we often feel limited in the ways in which we can engage with readers (other than the obvious sales pitch you have mentioned). This demonstrates how important the author really is, in self-promoting their book online and via social media. Your specialism, credentials and ability to contribute something that other people can’t, is invaluable.

**Richard Brown:** What you can of course do is set up your own pages for specific publications as I’ve done: for instance this page tends to use it in two ways: to publicise forthcoming publications and to use it as a running commentary on progress and problems. This allows you to build up an audience before the book is published and then keep reinforcing publications afterwards by adding additional posts ... it helps establish a personal link with the audience.
How important are reviews for a new book and how much weight do they carry compared to endorsements? Any tips on how to encourage readers to write a review?

A question from Luis E F Foa Torres about endorsements and reviews.

Jon Reed: My feeling is that endorsements are good for encouraging people to pick up a book and reassuring them that it is worth reading; but, especially when it comes to Amazon, reviews are what is really essential. They influence online buying decisions and make a book more visible.

If you use social media, you are generally closer to your readership, and they will often use it to get in touch with you. E.g. I've had a couple of nice comments from readers recently via Twitter and LinkedIn. I always thank them and ask them if they would mind taking a few minutes to say the same in an Amazon review! The same applies if a reader emails you.

I also tweet a link to any reviews not just on Amazon, but on my blog where readers have posted reviews. I think that can help encourage other people to review books, as they know they'll get a mention / link. The same goes for blog comments, incidentally, I often tweet those as well as blog posts (automatically in the case of Publishing Talk, using Twitterfeed).

You can ask your networks if they would consider posting a short, honest review of your work; though, when it comes to drawing up a list of people to send review copies to, you would usually want to target specific individuals.

Encouraging and increasing reviews (esp on Amazon) is a tough one though and especially now that one has to start from scratch on Amazon with each new edition! I’d be interested to hear any tips anyone else in the group has.

Luis E.F. Foa Torres: Great tips Jon, thanks a lot!
Which blogging method do you find most helpful: using your own personal blog, posting to your institution’s blog, or posting to a high-readership third-party blog?

Paul Belleflamme: I use my own blog (www.IPdigIT.eu), which I share with some colleagues. I prefer this option because I have full control of what I post and of how I use the blog with my students (who greatly appreciate this method of teaching, which is inspired by the ‘flipped classroom’ idea).

The blog about Intellectual Property (IP), the digital economy (DIGIT) and Information Technology (IT). It aims at discussing the law and economics of innovation (‘Dig it!’). It serves to share our reflections and to interact with students.

Richard Brown: I also use my own blogs, and with over 20,000 hits a month it is a major one. Blogging allows me to get across what I want to and when and in ways that are not constrained by the ‘rules’ that rightly apply to third-party blogs. Combining the blogs with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and academia.edu and my own website allows me to publicise and market my research and publications. Critical in my thinking about blogging was whether it should be inclusive or exclusive in character ... in other words whether I wanted the blog to have as wide a readership as possible or one largely confined to individuals with similar research interests. I chose the exclusive approach so that it appealed to students as well as academics ... for me the right decision as I've almost got to half a million hits.

Alexa Sand: Richard, what are your strategies for getting so much traffic on your blog?

Richard Brown: Alexa, my primary strategy is to combine comment on contemporary issues with specifically history blogs that reflect the nature of my research and my publications. So, it's partly about sharing the fruits of research with marketing my own books. This is an approach that has evolved in the several years since I began the blog. It's important, I've found, to make sure that the blog has the broadest appeal ... from students to academics ... and this helps to build a regular and committed audience of ‘followers’.

Amy Watson: Paul, I've also looked at your blog and it's brilliant to see that so many people are using the site and are commenting on the individual blog posts. You said that your students really value using your blog, particularly as a method of teaching, and so can I ask what you find works well for encouraging interaction on your blog? What do you think your students value about the blog that encourages them to use it?

Paul Belleflamme: Amy, I'm an economist and so, I believe in incentives: I give marks to students for posting comments on the blog. For the course that I teach for the moment, I ask students to post up to 6 comments during the term and each comment is valued 4 marks (so 24% of the total mark can be gained through this activity). I fear that without this incentive scheme, the number
of comments would be much smaller. However, I don’t think that marks affect the quality of the comments (which I find surprisingly high compared to the quality of other assignments that I give). Although any comment receives 4 marks, my students devote a lot of energy to write high-quality comments. I see several reasons for that: (i) they enjoy this exercise; (ii) they are interested in the covered issues; (iii) they know that their comments are public and so, can be read by anyone.

Kenneth Marcus: Thank you, Richard and Paul, for that advice. I’ve looked at both blogs. As Andy and Amy observe, they are both terrific. I tend to go back and forth between using my institution’s blog (in order to build a community around it) and posting on higher-readership blogs such as those associated with newspapers and other news media sources. I don’t currently have students, so Paul’s incentive system wouldn’t work for me, but I do like outside-the-box approaches to increasing web traffic.

Malick Ghachem: Thanks to all for sharing these examples. In case others might be interested or Andy and Amy might find it useful in the session with Jon Reed, I too started a blog of my own at lawandrevolution.com. An unusually busy semester has kept me from getting to it the past month or so, but I plan to be back at it fairly soon.

Jon Reed: Hello all! Some great tips and discussion in this thread, and the blogs mentioned are interesting examples that are all worth a look. To answer the original question of which blog(s) are most helpful personal, institutional or third-party I think there are two things to consider: 1) traffic and 2) audience.

Traffic: Which of the options has the most traffic? Richard clearly has a lot of traffic to his personal blog, so it makes sense to use that; your institution may have a high volume of traffic (or be trying to increase it and want you to blog there); and certain third-party blogs do (and you can some measure of their traffic using Alexa.com). It’s worth considering some third-party blogs as part of a ‘blog tour’ around book launch if you can. But it’s not all about the numbers it’s also about...

Audience: You need to make sure you’re reaching the right people and not just the largest number. Some third-party blogs may have a relatively small readership, but be very targeted to your ideal readership so could be worth doing a guest post or two there. If you do a ‘blog tour’ (a series of guest posts on different blogs over short period of time, usually around launch) you need to be very aware of the readership of each blog you write for, and write appropriately for that audience.

Those of you who have multiple blogs, e.g. personal blog, book blog, institutional blog you have the option of writing on all of them, perhaps focusing on the one(s) with highest traffic. But again, the tone should be right for your audience. As Richard says above, “Blogging allows me to get across what I want to and when and in ways that are not constrained by the ‘rules’ that rightly apply to third-party blogs.” You have more freedom with a personal blog and a more personal tone might be more appropriate there, whereas a more academic ‘voice’ / more links and references may be needed for your institutional blog.
Another thing touched on above was using Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn alongside a blog. I think this is a great marketing strategy: you need content first (blog) but you also need to get that content out there (using social networks).

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are great for promoting blogs. I especially like Twitter for this which is where most of my blog traffic comes from. My top recommendation is to use a free tool called Twitterfeed (www.twitterfeed.com), which will link any blog to Twitter (multiple accounts if you wish), Facebook (profiles and pages) and LinkedIn (profiles). That means that whenever you hit the ‘publish’ button on your blog, the title of your post and a link back to it will automatically tweet itself to your Twitter account (and Facebook / LinkedIn if you wish). It's a great time-saver, and really helps build an audience.

Other places where you can share blog posts automatically include your Goodreads author profile and your Amazon.com Author Central profile. It all helps build a blog-based platform to promote you and your work.

One of the things I liked about Richard’s blog is the use of social bookmarking buttons (i.e. share on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc) at the end of every post. Most blogging platforms make these fairly straightforward to add. They are really useful for encouraging your readers to share your content on their own networks.

Richard Brown: For me, and it took several years to evolve and a few false starts, what I see as critical to developing an effective personal marketing strategy for my books is establishing a linked network of sites (blogs, website, Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn) that allow me to get across and reinforce my message. In that process, having an effective and regularly updated blog is central ... if you can get people reading your blog, they will then start reading other social networks that you use. You also need to recognise that though your blog may well be a marketing tool (and for you that might be its most important function), buying your wares will almost certainly not be the main reason why people read it and you need to make sure that its appeal is to the minds of your audience not simply their credit cards. It’s about getting across the subliminal message that ‘this has just been published’ or ‘I’m working on this or that’ and you never know but it might be well worth you getting a copy of it. If you like my blog, you might also like my books and oh yes, they are available on Kindle as well!!
I just launched a website at glennamatthews.com. My Cambridge book is about California and the Civil War, and my website has a list of links to California sites associated with the Civil War era.

**Andrew Martin:** Hi Glenna, thanks a lot for sharing your website.

It's a really clear site with clear directions to users who want to find out about you, your books, and how to find you in social media, and outside of the online at your offline events.

It's great that you've given each book its own page allowing search engines and readers to find this information, including the use of a book cover, and endorsement.

One thing I would recommend, is putting your web address into your Twitter profile description text, as this will help people find your site when they read your tweets. Kind of joins up the dots, and helps those interested in the Civil War to tune in to what you have to say about it, as I notice that you're using Twitter regularly.

**Jon Reed:** Hi Glenna, yes, I think you have all the most important information on there: About, Books (and a page for each book); plus ways for people to contact you prominently at the top email and Twitter. Would agree you need a web address in your Twitter bio though, so that people who discover you on Twitter can easily get to your website and get more info on the books.

As a future development, you may consider adding a blog to your site; but there's plenty of other social media stuff you could do if you want, without having a blog, e.g. the links to the California sites look interesting, and you have a lot of period photos on there. I wonder if you could generate some interest using Pinterest? You could share the images from your site, but also images from the websites you link to all of which could lead people back to your own site and your books.

Here's an article I wrote about using Pinterest that might be useful.

Opinions expressed are those of the participants and are presented in this guide with their permission.