



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality

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MODULE 5

Commentary

In Modules 1 through 3, commentary was provided as downloadable audio files. However, by Module 4, the laptop computer I used to record the audio went defunct, so the course materials that should have been presented as audio, with the category label "AUD" were just the PDF documents of my transcript notes prepared for audio recording. For the final Module 5, what should be the audio lecture portion of the course is now presented as written commentaries. Much of the commentary was written with the intention of being script, so please forgive the casual, informal style of the content. In the course syllabus, all Commentary files will bear the category label "ESS" for blog-style essay.

Promoting a Book: What Works and What Doesn't

Most authors are introverted and if I may generalize, if we could, we'd write our book, put it out there, and then retreat back to our hiding holes not to be seen or heard from again. Most authors loathe the marketing and publicity part of publishing but do it anyway because being an author is a profession. It is the work that you do and work means sometimes you've actually got to do stuff you don't like doing.

Plus, if you want to turn writing into a profession and have the opportunity to publish more than one book, then you don't really have a choice here. You've got to promote your book.

Don't fall into the common trap of exceptionalism, where you believe you're exceptional, that you can be that one exception to the rule. I know. Your book is awesome. It's the best book ever written and anyone who reads the first sentence of your book will see it for what it is, a work of genius, and buy immediately and tell all of their friends about it and you can sit on your laurels while your book shoots up to the New York Times bestseller lists by virtue of its own merit, am I right?

These days, even traditional authors are pulling ten times their own weight in marketing and PR. Long, *long* gone are the days when a publisher does all of the book promotion work for an author.

And if you're self-publishing your book, that promotion is all the more important.

So how do you promote your book?

Start with a marketing plan. You've got to prepare one.

Several workbooks in this course will walk you through putting together a comprehensive marketing plan, so I won't repeat myself here in our chat. Plus, that kind of in-depth technical information is best left to written text, so you don't miss any vital material.

For this chat, I'll talk about my personal experiences with what worked and didn't work.

The book tour. I don't know. That was kind of a futile endeavor for me. When *Holistic Tarot* came out, I did several author events at Barnes & Noble, local bookstores, local fairs or events, and metaphysical shops. So here's the cool part, and maybe this part is cool enough that you want to do it anyway.

Huge posters of my face were plastered all over floor to ceiling glass display windows in some of the biggest Barnes & Nobles of my area. As some of you know, I write under a pseudonym. Some of Hubby's coworkers approached him and remarked, "Hey, what's your wife's name again? Because I swear her photograph is plastered all over the so-and-so Barnes and Noble for a book on... what was it, tarot? Is that like tarot fortune-telling cards or what? Anyway, I swear it was her, but I dunno. I didn't recognize the name."

I got to meet a lot of really cool people at these events, some of them who have developed into my close friends. How fun is that! So okay, I should say, for that reason alone, because I made some enduring friendships from the meet and greets, the bookstore events are totally worth it.

But from a sales perspective, blah. I don't think it made a difference.

Also, since some of the events were, shall we say, in the mainstream, the turnout was pretty awful! One event had only 2 or 3 people in the audience I didn't recognize, meaning everyone in attendance were my friends. Most of the seats were filled because I forced my buddies to go. The bookstore manager who handled events had arranged for this whole sound system and we were worrying about the mic and the turnout was so dismal that we ended up not even needing a sound system. Blah.

Also, I've decided I dislike events because I'm so prone to misspeaking. Once you're an author, even if you're not exactly a well-known author or whatever, you're kind of a public figure now, and you have to watch what you say. At one event, someone asked me about some angel tarot or something about tarot decks that soften the Death,

Tower, Ten of Swords, and other such cards so that the tarot wouldn't be so scary and I think I may have inadvertently guffawed and sounded like an elitist snob. I wish I could take that moment back, because you know, at the end of the day, we all need to go for the deck that works for us personally, right? So for me to get judgey was bad form. I regret that moment. It's something I still think about to this day and wish I could take back. I was a newbie at all the public speaking author stuff and just kinda blurted out my real opinion, tactlessly.

The problem is, in reality I am kind of an elitist snob but given the opportunity, I can hide that fact pretty well. I should have hid my snobbery in that moment because that would be the politically correct thing to do. Except I was caught in the moment and I misspoke and revealed my true colors. Doh.

So in-store book events... ehh... that has to be your call, but I didn't find it to be effective. For me, I think it was because I did the events at mainstream national chain bookstores, and the subject matter of my book was anything but mainstream.

See? What I did wrong was I didn't go where my target audience would be. Maybe if I had selected a metaphysical or New Age bookstore I would have gotten better results. So again, back to the prompts of the workbooks in the course—you always have to frame your strategic planning around your target audience.

Now, if you have a book to promote, I'll tell you what you *should* do—submit presentation proposals to national conventions related to your book's subject matter! To give a concrete example, that would be the San Francisco Bay Area Tarot Symposium or the Northwest Tarot Symposium for tarot authors. That's a really smart idea. I've loved every tarot conference I've gone to and every time, find it to be an incredible opportunity to promote and market your books.

So if and when you've released a book, you've really got to do your research and plan on getting your butt to some of these conventions and national conferences.

Also, I found online marketing to be the most effective. Buzz spreads so much faster on the Internet. The notion that you have to do in-store book events as an author is antiquated, I think, and may have been applicable for a different generation. But these days, everyone is online. Everyone is on social media. People are getting their news from YouTube, Facebook, online aggregate news feeds, and blog sites. Why would someone make the physical trek down to a bookstore on a Friday night when he can watch your talking head and learn all about your new book via YouTube? Think about that. Seriously.

You know what is the best marketing you can do as an author in the 21st century? Interacting with your target audience online.

Several nonfiction author friends of mine, not in the tarot world, totally different subject matter, also released books and they did the traditional brick and mortar bookstore tours. It was exhausting for them. They traveled around the state from place to place to do author reading events. Ultimately, it was a significant overhead on their own part, because most publishers today won't foot the bill for travel expenses on behalf of an author, unless you're like VIP or something, and such a tour takes up a ton of time, and all of that did not translate into sales. Even if a major publisher does agree to help with book tour expenses, it's only going to be part of the full expense; no matter how you dice it, if you're traveling around the country, or even state, for your book tour, you bet you're going to be footing some of that bill.

I've found, from my personal experiences, that online promotions do in fact translate to sales. Unless you're J. K. Rowling or Oprah, the book tour doesn't make a whole lot of sense. You're not J. K. Rowling, I don't think, and I'm not Oprah. At most we can attract, what, a crowd of 20 heads to come see us talk about ourselves and of that 20, 10 already own a copy of your book, which is why they're there, so no new sales, and the other 10 are stragglers who saw people gather in a corner of the store and got curious. Of those 10, seriously, maybe 2 or 3 will actually buy your book. Considering your royalties, you just blew a whole night with a fake smile plastered on your face answering questions you've answered a million times over "What inspired you to write this book?" and having to pretend like this is the very first time ever you've been asked that question and for what? Three dollars in author royalties?

Sorry, my true colors of snobbery are coming out again. Here's my point. Be smart. Don't just do something because everybody else you see around you is doing it. Obvious advice, you think?

The only benefit to the traditional book tour is you get to brag to all your friends and your social network that you went on a traditional book tour and by and large, people are *not* in the know and therefore think that's cool.

Now, to play devil's advocate for the book tour, and this *is* quite a compelling argument in favor of the tour, you get to interact face to face with people who either have been following your work for quite some time or people in your line of work and there's something so fun about connecting with others in the same line of work as you. The huge benefit to the book tour is the social one, getting to connect with like-minded kindred spirits. Which...by the way...in this day and age, you can do online, from the comfort of your home office, in your pajamas, pimple cream dabbed on your forehead, while shoving potato chips in your face.

When I did the book tour, AT each event, in the moment I was super glad I did it, because I got to connect personally with tarot enthusiasts. I really do want people who read *Holistic Tarot* or *The Tao of Craft* to get to know me, who I am, and get to connect with the essence of me, too. The book tour provided that invaluable opportunity. From

my book tour, I made some permanent friends that to this day I'm still in touch with, gab about personal stuff with, and who have come to be close confidants.

So, if for no other reason, the book tour is worth it for the personal connections. But if you're talking about sales, then no, a book tour won't translate into more sales. In fact, the overhead expenses you have to incur to do the book tour is going to eat IN to your personal earnings. The enormous amount of time and energy it takes from you doesn't translate, from a billable hourly perspective, into a financially sound investment of your work.

Not only is online promotion low cost, but it's actually effective. After I do an online thing, I can literally see a spike in book sales for that day. By and large the folks who I connect with who've bought my book will tell me they heard about the book from this so-and-so online interview or talk thing I did. It's almost always a reference to something online.

If you really want to be ahead of the curve and on top of your book promotion game, you have to get with the times. Long gone are the days of brick and mortar author events. We've really entered the Digital Age and you've got to put most of your eggs into the online promotions basket. It's what works. You can take my word for it or you can do what you've gotta do and then learn the hard way for yourself. But I'm telling you: to yield the most productivity out of your investment of time, resources, and energy, focus on online marketing.

Instead of ending on a fluffy, inspirational note, I'll end with a practical tip you can implement right now. Subscribe to HARO, that's H-A-R-O, for Help A Reporter Out. When journalists are looking for experts in a particular field to interview for articles, they'll post their queries on HARO. The queries are organized by subject matter so you can subscribe only to the call-outs relating to certain topics, like the topics related to your book.

Then check the HARO queries routinely. Daily, if you're willing to be diligent. When a query comes up on a subject matter related to or even closely related to what you've written about or what you can claim expert in, reach out to that journalist. That way they can get a quote from you.

For example, you've written a book on feng shui. A writer for a women's magazine is putting together an article on basic feng shui for bedrooms to attract love and romance. Imagine being cited in that article, "Jane Doe, author of *Feng Shui for Successful Living*, recommends..."

When you get quoted, a significant number of readers might just be interested enough to then look you up, find your books, and even buy your books.

Having a tweet, Instagram post, or Facebook post go viral, even if it has nothing at all to do with the content of your book, will translate into book sales. I'm sure you could have figured that one out on your own, but I'm reminding you anyway so you'll be conscious of that while you draft your marketing and PR plan.

This one is going to elicit groans from the introverts: going to social events. Attending big weddings, shareholders' meetings for mega corporations, events held by your local chamber of commerce, and all sorts of local events where there will be a public gathering will bring in book sales. It's weird—even if those attending the public gathering aren't necessarily part of your target readership, you'd be surprised who will end up buying a book outside *their* knowledge base just because they met the author.

It has happened to me more times than I can count. I'm at a wedding. We engage in small talk about what we all do for a living. I mention that I've written a book. *Oh really? What is your book about?* I warn them, "I don't think you'd be interested. It's a really niche topic..." *Try me*, they say back. You tell them about your woo-woo book. *That's actually quite fascinating. My cousin twice removed is a card reader. I've always wondered how the tarot works...* A week after that wedding event you get an e-mail from that stranger you met. *Guess what! I bought your book! It's wonderful and I'm learning so much. Thank you!*

The hubby and I were attending a shareholders' meeting for a company we invest in and for shits, I had with me the I Ching oracle deck I produce as part of my online I Ching course. During a particular segment of the programming, the hubby joked, take out your deck and do readings to see what is true and what is not, yada yada, something like that, won't get into the details. So I did, just privately between the two of us, flipping over cards, and our little thing attracted curiosity. Several people came by and asked me about the deck I was holding. I talked about what it was, the I Ching, how one might use the I Ching for financial investments, we exchanged business cards, and within the span of a few weeks, sales of my I Ching course surged. Those we met at the event bought the course, checked it out, then told all of their friends about it, and those friends bought the course, checked it out, then told all of their friends. And that snowball formed within the span of a few weeks. You *never* know where you'll attract sales, so always be dialed in to potential opportunities for marketing and publicity.

I also recognize, whether I like it or not, that these days, everybody is dialed in to YouTube. Having a presence on YouTube is going to help your book sales. There's something about getting to see your face, feeling connected to you on that personal level, even if it's virtual, and following your content through a series of videos over a period of time that inspires people to support you and go out to buy your book. About two years after *Holistic Tarot* came out, I started to be more active with video uploads on YouTube and have seen it generate more book sales. I even get emails from complete strangers confirming as much. "I saw your video on YouTube... so I went out to get your book..."

These days, the majority of folks get their news, updates, information on their hobbies and pastimes, extracurricular learning on their areas of interest, and connecting with society at large through YouTube. Your entire target market is on YouTube, so if you're not on there peddling your book, you're missing out! Plus, YouTube now has these algorithms that totally work in your favor as an author if you know how to title and tag each video correctly. Your target market will have established a history of watching videos on certain topics only, and YouTube's algorithm will match that to the keywords for your videos and then if there is a match, recommend your video *for you* to your target market. In other words, free publicity straight to your target market. Definitely think seriously about curating a YouTube video presence, because in this day and age, it is one of the most effective methods for promoting your work and raising your author platform.

Really pressed for ideas on how you can make that author YouTube channel thing happen for you? Try this. Produce a 5- to 10-minute video where you share "behind-the-scenes" insights for each chapter of your book, or give a sneak preview, or expound on the topics further. Let's say there's 10 chapters in your book. Boom. 10 videos. You're already generating content and you haven't even started the creative part of brainstorming. Produce a video where you just talk about yourself, your background, who you are, and get more personal. Your readers love that. People can't get enough personal info about their favorite public figures.

The secret to effective book promotion is to have a plan. You need to have a plan. Do not wing this. This is too important for you to play by ear. Seriously.

Module 5 includes a workbook to help you formulate your marketing plan. Use it. Modify as needed but definitely use it as a starting point. Then, adjust your frame of mind so you can set your expectations accurately. Expect book promotions to become your new job. This is your new job. You need to clock in a certain number of hours at your new job every single week. You may need to work weekends at this new job. If you can set your personal expectations to treat book promotion as a job, and you're not afraid of some hard work, then you can single-handedly outsmart the odds of success.