



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality

benebell wen

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.

The Book Trailer

Do you need a book trailer? No. You definitely do not. Is it my personal opinion that you should produce one anyway? Yes, if and only if you can do it in a budget-friendly way.

I shot all of my book trailers myself, with low-budget equipment I already owned with no professional help whatsoever. So the production value of my book trailers aren't great, but in terms of measurable utility, they definitely helped drum up interest and brought in book buyers I might not have otherwise been able to reach. The effort I invested was worth it. Had I spent a thousand dollars on the trailer, then no, it would *not* have been worth it. So do a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether you should create a trailer.

On the Internet, people's attention spans are that of fish. If there is a whole bunch of reading they need to do to figure out what your book is about, they won't do it. A book trailer is going to be a lot more appealing to them, so they'll actually watch it. It's a great first point of contact for many of your prospective customers. But again, remember: attention span of a fish, so your trailer needs to be short and sweet.

Also, when I say "book trailer," I use the term loosely. What I really mean is you should consider producing video content on YouTube that markets or promotes your book. For *Holistic Tarot*, I created a more "traditional" appearing book trailer that strung together royalty-free b-roll footage with cutesie music and text that appears across the screen. The video was targeted at someone who knew nothing about the tarot and my goal was to try to pique that person to *get* interested in the tarot and thus go on the adventure of learning more about my book. For my second book *The Tao of Craft*, I went with a different approach. No

produced trailer this time. Instead, I set up my camera, pointed it at my head, and just talked personably about the anticipated release of my second book. I felt the latter approach, the personable one I took with *The Tao of Craft*, ended up being a lot more effective than the b-roll produced traditional book trailer I did for *Holistic Tarot*, so that's something for you to think about.

Here's what I mean when I say book trailer: a video you upload onto both YouTube and Vimeo so lots of folk on the Internets can find it that drums up interest about the upcoming release of your book. What's your book about? Why should someone buy your book?

These days, a lot more people than you realize get their news through YouTube, including new product releases. Plus, if someone gets excited by your trailer, that person might just share it on his or her own social media account and give you free publicity. Creating video book trailers and other online media that's easy for people to share with their friends is one of the best ways you can promote your book.

For a book trailer, and remember by book trailer I just mean a well-produced, well-scripted YouTube video that introduces the release of your new book, keep it to about 5 minutes, and no more than 10 minutes if you want to go longer.

Before you go through the trouble of creating a book trailer, test your own video production equipment. How is your audio? Is it clear? Do you have a decent handle over video editing? If you answer no to any of these questions, then it's better to not produce a trailer at all. People on the Internet can get unreasonably annoyed by poor sound quality or poor visuals, so your efforts can backfire quickly against you if you don't have the basics down.

The best book trailers, even nonfiction ones, tell a story. You have to tell a story. What is the story of your book? People love "how I came to write this book" narratives, so that can be part of the story you tell in your trailer.

Your book trailer must send out a clear, concise message. So before you start, decide on what that message is. Let me be more specific. Your message can't simply be, "Hey, I've got a new book out. Buy it!" Instead, your message has to impliedly answer the question of utility and benefit to your target reader. What usefulness and benefit is there to reading your book? Why should I read your book? What do I stand to gain from reading your book? In some way or another, you want to answer these questions through your book trailer.

For instance, the message I tried to send with my three-minute book pre-order trailer for *Holistic Tarot* (by the way that was my first ever attempt, *ever*, at video-making...) was that the tarot can be used by the everyman for everyday decision-making and to help you tune in better to your creativity. Implied beneath that as subtext and through the way I tried to utilize imagery, music, and text throughout the video, is that *Holistic Tarot* is not about occult tarot, fortune-telling, or psychic tarot; this is a rational-based approach to tarot.

Another example is my "book trailer" for *The Tao of Craft*, which was seven minutes long, but not a trailer in the traditional sense. Instead, it was just me in my dining room, talking to you,

sharing the news of my second book that will be coming out in stores soon. I talk about how I came to write that book, the general premise of the book, and what the book means to me. You might notice how I broke my own general rule for trailer purposes with *The Tao of Craft* video. Here, instead of pitching why this book would be useful to you, I pitched it as a memoir that I was reluctant to write but now feel called to share. (For those who have read *The Tao of Craft*, you know it's not actually a memoir, but what I mean is it's a memoir in the sense that it's a lot more transparent and revealing of my personal practices as a metaphysical practitioner.)

After that book came out, I did produce an official book trailer, but later took it down for stupid personal vanity reasons. When I was creating it, I was suffering from some serious eczema and psoriasis, attempted to cover the skin rashes with too much makeup, all if it became painfully obvious on an HD camera, and after it went public, I just decided, ew, gross, no, not my best side, so I took it down because I didn't like how I looked. Haha. No, but seriously. I took it down because I didn't like how I looked. I may later put one up that's been slightly revised so that at least there is a book trailer with keywords for SEO purposes so I can attract some potential readers to the book. Anyway.

Don't worry if you have zero experience with video making. Prior to starting *Holistic Tarot's* book trailer, I had zero experience with video making, too. But where there is a will, there is a way, for sure, and I resolved to learn basic video making, at least enough skill to create my own videos and not have to outsource and pay a third party for book trailers.

The most important and in fact imperative guidelines for your trailer are these:

1. It sends a clear message.
2. High quality audio.
3. Seamless video editing.

If you don't think you can achieve those three points on your own through do-it-yourself book trailer making, then don't make your own book trailer because a poorly produced one is much worse than simply not having one at all. I've noticed that people watching videos on YouTube are really intolerant of poor sound quality or distracting noises in your video. So if you're recording and all of a sudden your neighbors start doing construction and you can hear it ever slightly in the video, trash the video and start over. When you layer voice and background music, you've got to be really sensitive to the balance between voice to background music so that the layering is not distracting to anyone watching. Background music should be barely noticeable. Unless you're listening for it, you shouldn't even realize there's background music.

A few other random tips I learned: in terms of "scenes" or what you see on-screen, make sure no "fixed scene" is ever up for longer than 10 seconds. Go for 7 seconds to be safe, in fact. In other words, let's say a photo or picture goes up on screen during your book trailer. It should not be up on screen for longer than 10 seconds, and no longer than 7 seconds to be safe. Nothing should remain totally still on-screen for longer than that. Just your "talking head" is okay because your head is not remaining still—the fact you're moving gives that footage

animation. People's physical senses today, in the 21st century of video watching, need stimulation every 7 to 10 seconds and if you do not stimulate their senses every 10 seconds, they get bored. So no "stills" up on screen for longer than that time. That's what I learned through the course of video-making, which is why you are still going to see some of the older videos I made not following that rule...because I hadn't realized the rule yet. 😊

If you're going the route of just your talking head, then lighting is everything. The lighting has to be ten times better than as if you were doing a webcam chat with your buddy. Really give your video production thought. If you're on a shoestring budget and you're just going to be shooting in your home, that's fine, but know how to maximize that shoestring budget. For example, I'm sure you own a solid white or solid cream bedsheet. Worst case scenario, pin that shit up somewhere and use that as your background if everywhere else in your home looks like a hurricane has blazed through the place. Since this is the mind, body, spirit category of writing, you can even opt for cloth that has some more esoteric-looking patterns, like a tablecloth printed with the zodiac wheel, or a mandala print. Finally, test the lighting to make sure your face is well illuminated.

For a book trailer, I would write out a script of what you want to say before shooting the video. That way you stay on point, you don't insert too many "ums," and you don't ramble.

If instead of filming your own talking head you want to go the route that I took for *Holistic Tarot's* book trailer (you can watch it on YouTube for an idea), then go on the web to look for royalty-free or public domain b-roll footage. B-roll, or B reels, are essentially generic but supplemental or stock video footage that advance the narrative but aren't the main driver of the narrative. I found that there are a lot of generous videographers who make available for free download b-roll footage they've taken. Search for several that include imagery, colors, and symbolism that can advance the narrative of your book trailer and string them together in MovieMaker, then record your voiceover to add to the string of b-roll footage.

Whether or not you make a book trailer, if you want to raise your author platform, do consider creating a YouTube channel and getting into video making.