



## Building Your Author Platform: 10 Ways to Leverage Authority Marketing to Grow a Meaningful Brand

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### Section 1: Branding

Definition of Branding = Creating an image in the mind of your audience

In today's landscape there are two distinct phases to creating that image:

1. **Phase One:** Pre Engagement (Before someone meets you, works with you, buys from you, reads your book, hears you give a speech, etc.)

In phase one you must leverage Authority Marketing to create an intentional image in the minds of your audience – one that accelerates the speed of trust and positions you as a differentiated, up-market option rather than a commoditized choice that can be shopped on price.

Quick Hit Checklist:

- Do you have a phase one impression?
    - Discoverability
    - Brand name
    - Assets
  - If you do have a phase one impression, is it one that encourages someone to move to phase two or it is one that discourages them reaching out?
    - Authority-by-association
    - Clarity
    - On-ramp to the corporate brand (if applicable)
2. **Phase Two:** Post Engagement (After someone takes the leap to buy from you, hire you, read your book, hear your speech, etc.)

The image you create in phase two is connected back to the answer to one very simple question: did you over-deliver on expectations or did you under-deliver on expectations?

Quick Hit Checklist:

- Are you over-delivering right now in phase two? If not, increased Authority and lead-flow won't put lipstick on a pig for long.

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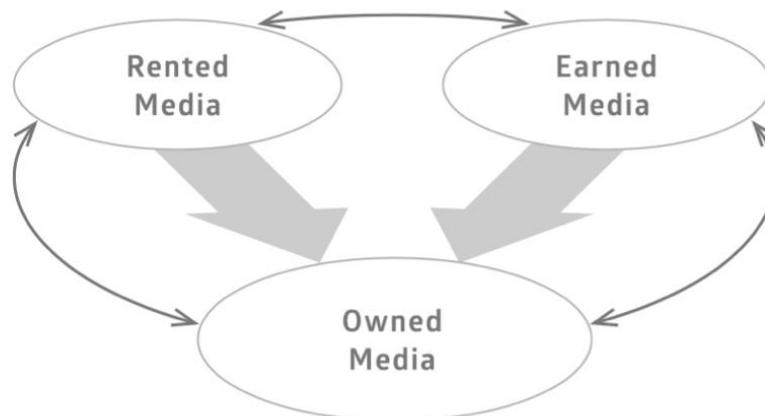
- Are you empowering happy customers and strategic partners to talk about you?

## Branding Checklist

1. Do you own your name as a URL? If not, head to GoDaddy.com and reserve it during the first break today. While you're at it grab the names of your kids and grandkids.
2. Conduct a visual audit of your brand – do you utilize images to build authority-by-association? If not, let's get to work on changing that.
3. Is your phase one image one that you own? If so, what channels are owning that impression right now and are they in the best possible shape?

## Notes

## Section 2: Welcome to the New Media Landscape



**Rented Media:** All media where you fully control the content but someone else owns the real estate.

Rented Media includes advertising & social media.

**Earned Media:** All media where the message goes out on someone else's real estate and the audience's impression is that you earned that message.

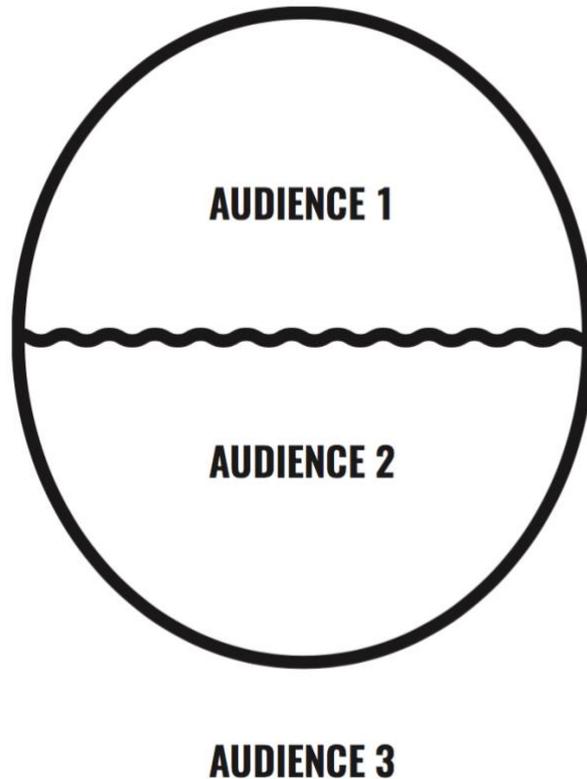
Earned Media includes your book, media interviews, speaking engagements, client referrals, awards, online reviews, etc.

**Owned Media:** All media where you fully own the connection with your audience.

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Owned Media includes your website, blog, email list, physical mailing list, office space and some events.

Think of your owned media audience like a stadium that you own.



As we talk through the three audiences, estimate your specific numbers in terms of the size of your current audience 1 and audience 2.

- **Audience 1:** this audience includes your existing clients and strategic partners—everyone who is spending money with you – and they are seated on one side of the curtain, backstage in the VIP section of your owned-media audience. This group either drives positive or negative word-of-mouth for your business and the better job you do empowering them to spread the word, the quicker you will grow.

How many people do you have in audience 1? \_\_\_\_\_

- **Audience 2:** This group sits on the other side of the dividing curtain and includes everyone on your e-mail list or snail-mail list who has not yet decided to spend money with you. They are paying attention—but you haven't established enough

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affinity with them to move them to audience 1 with a purchase. This group is on their way up the first hill with you.

How many people do you have in audience 2? \_\_\_\_\_

- **Audience 3:** this group is outside your stadium and includes everyone who is squarely in your target audience but who has no idea who you are.

Who are the key target groups in audience 3?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Section 3: Lead Generation

Most of your peers build their marketing and advertising campaigns around a 3-to-1 conversion and it's one of the main reasons why most people throw up their hands in frustration after spending a fortune and getting a fractional response. Put simply, very few people are ready to move from having never heard of you before to immediately raising their hand to buy or learn more the very first time they hear from you.

We certainly don't want to hide the 3-to-1 conversion but we want to be pragmatic and understand the best way to create leverage and predictable lead flow for you comes with the 3-to-2 conversion. In other words, what lead magnet is in place to get someone on your email list?

3 categories of 3-to-2 lead magnets:

1. **Newsletter sign-up:** the first is the most basic and, unfortunately, the most commonly used. This category of lead magnet often shows up as "click here to join our e-mail newsletter" or "click here to sign up for exclusive news and updates." As you might guess, or as you already know if this is your current lead magnet, this call to action converts at a horrific rate.
2. **Free-value offer:** the second category typically shows up in one of the following ways: "Click here to download our whitepaper/e-book/workbook/free report" etc. This category converts better than the first one, but the limiting factor for those who don't yet have a brand established is that those who are landing on your website for the first time may not associate value with your content yet, which limits 3-2 conversions.
3. **Interactive content:** the third category is the one that will give you the biggest return by far. Interactive content includes quizzes and assessments that give free, personalized value to website visitors. Magazines have been using quizzes for years, but BuzzFeed was the first online platform to really perfect the art of online interactive content. Books like Tom Rath's *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, Sally Hogshead's *How the World Sees You* and Katty Kay & Claire Shipman's *The Confidence Code* leveraged high-value assessments to build e-mail lists in the hundreds of thousands.

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The magic of good quiz/assessment marketing is that it is the purest possible value exchange; *both* parties get value. Your prospect gets free, personalized feedback based on the topic of the quiz. They might learn how they measure up to their peers in terms of retirement readiness, what kind of leaders they are, or what neighborhood best matches their personality. Alongside those results, they get free, high-value content from you that helps them analyze their results. On the flip-side, as they take a seat in your stadium, you get an incredible amount of data on them that informs where you want to seat them. This kind of lead magnet can be incredibly powerful—both to inform and educate your audience and grow your e-mail list (audience 2) but there are a few key lessons to be aware of. First, quizzes focused on the individual perform much better than those that assess a team or company. Second, the best quizzes have the clearest, most-simple value proposition. Third, and perhaps most importantly, you must understand that a quiz/assessment is not a survey. A survey is for your benefit—it collects lots of data and gives the survey-taker the same generic response (“thank you for participating in our survey”). A great quiz/assessment provides a highly personalized response that includes not only the quiz-taker’s specific results, but also context on how to interpret and learn from those results. You are prescribing a solution to your prospect at scale in a way that doesn’t require any investment of time or resources outside of the initial set-up.

The other magic component of a good quiz within the context of lead generation is embedding a few “Trojan-horse” questions that help you determine if this is a good lead for your product or service. In other words, if you know that good prospects for your company have annual revenue between \$1–\$5 million, there should be a question in the quiz that asks how many employees that entrepreneur has; this is a less intrusive way to determine likely revenue. Whatever the 1-3 questions are that help you determine who is a good lead and who isn’t, we want those embedded in your quiz so you can filter at scale.

To stick with the stadium analogy, we want to not only grow audience two, we want to know exactly who should be in the front row in terms of follow-up sequence vs. who might be an upper deck lead, and the assessment allows you to do that.

What kind of quiz or assessment might work best for your audience?

## Lead Generation Checklist

1. Do you have a 3-2 lead magnet in place or just a 3-1 magnet? \_\_\_\_\_
2. If you do have a 3-2 lead magnet, which category of lead magnet is it? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you taking an intentional approach to your lead funnel? If not, what can be improved across the five steps?

## Section 4: Content Marketing

Most who look at the amount of options when it comes to content marketing get overwhelmed pretty quickly. The key principle to remember is that the where is much less important than the what.

The best way to think of your content marketing strategy is like your own personal newspaper. The most common content-marketing mistakes we see flow from this analogy, including:

- **Sporadic delivery:** would you subscribe to a newspaper when you have no idea when it's being delivered?
- **Ad-heavy:** many people over-saturate their newspaper/ content strategy with promotional posts, which alienates their audience and often sends them running for the exits in your stadium. Most people are smart enough to avoid breaking this cardinal rule but it's an impulse that must be fought consistently.
- **Op-eds only:** by far the most common mistake we see from experts is filling their newspaper with op-ed content— meaning all of content is essentially your own perspective. This kind of content monologue works well if you're already a household name and your stadium is full of people who know to pay attention to your expertise. However, for those on the way up in terms of building an audience, this kind of me-first approach to content marketing is not only a slow grind in terms of growth, it's also exhausting—because you have to create everything.

So, with the above pitfalls in mind, how should you approach your content-marketing strategy? Regardless the category of media (earned, rented, or owned) or format of the content (text, visual, audio, or video), we recommend you break your content into three

### 1. You-driven Content

We sometimes call this category “evergreen” or “op-ed” content, because it primarily includes your own intellectual property. Most would-be Authorities fill their newspaper with 95% of this category of content and that often equates to a very slow grind in terms of growth. Think about it – if you don't have much of an audience in place in your stadium that knows to look to you as the Authority, when you serve up only your own content it's a super-slow grind in terms of growth. This category becomes much more important as your audience builds and people know to pay attention to your perspective as an Authority. Until then, limit this category to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of your content.

Examples of this kind of content include:

- **Evergreen content:** Don't guess what your audience wants to read when coming up with content. Instead, work backward. Determine what your target audience is looking for online. What questions do they want answered? What vexes them?

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Then, use your expertise and insight to answer their questions and furnish them with useful information. This kind of content generally focuses on broad topics or concepts pertinent to your industry and exists to capture those search results and pull in potential customers. Examples of content in this category include angles like “Four Questions HR Directors Should Ask Before Hiring” or “Three Ways Leaders Can Listen Better.” This can also include a teaching or educational series.

- Behind-the-scenes/personality-driven content: Few things build more affinity with your audience than behind-the-scenes access to your life and/or personality. This can include pictures from the road, humorous anecdotes, stories, and other personal content.
- Calls to action: You-driven content includes calls to act upon things that benefit you, be it linking your audience to buy your book or to sign-up for some event or activity. Part of being an Authority is serving your audience with products and services that solve their problems—but you want to make sure that you don’t overdo it in this category, or you’ll fall victim to the ad-driven pitfall detailed earlier.

## 2. News-Driven Content

David Meerman Scott coined the term “Newsjacking” in his popular book of the same title, and we believe it makes up an incredibly important piece of your content-marketing strategy on your Authority Marketing journey. While You-Driven content is primarily focused on serving those who already know you, to use a newspaper analogy, News-Driven content is your “front- page news” in terms of timeliness. Of course, the magic in such content is that it’s front of mind for all three of your audiences (those in and out of your stadium) and, as such, gives you a chance to “go viral” in terms of the reach of that content.

Examples of this kind of content include:

- Calendar-driven content: Although you can’t predict what news will break in the future, you do have the ability to create an editorial calendar for the year based on the predictable calendar-driven news cycle. This is different in each niche, but global examples include new year, new you, tax season, summer, the holidays, and so on. Think about the key dates/seasons for your target audience as it relates to your message and ensure you’re delivering super-timely content that lines up with those calendar-specific items.
- Newsjacking: This kind of content connects your message to what’s happening in the news cycle, making your expertise extremely timely for your audience. This could be driven by a high-profile story, an earnings announcement, a new research study, a 1,200-point drop in the stock market, or the launch of a new movie or TV series. A word of caution, though: if the piece of news is touchy or tragic, tread lightly or not at all—not every high profile incident is worth

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connecting to your message. When done right, newsjacking is both the most in-demand content for your target audience and also can be a driver of in-bound media and speaking requests, as you'll read about below.

Many of our Members drive significant inbound publicity and speaking opportunities from News-Driven content and it is almost always the most trafficked of each of the three content categories. We want to encourage you to create 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of your content in this category.

### 3. Relationship-Driven Content

Our favorite way to think about content marketing is as a relationship-building tool. Good reporters and the newspapers they work for don't limit their content to their own perspective. Instead, they rely on the expertise of others to curate the best possible content for their audience. When you involve other people in your content, you not only build a relationship with them, you also give them a reason to point their audience into your stadium. Content marketing at its best is a relationship-building tool and relationship-driven content includes:

- Strategic tagging within social media: One of the most effective & efficient ways to give your audience valuable content and build relationships with journalists and key influencers in your space is to share their content and tag them along the way. We do not want you to situate yourself as a 'fan' when you do this. Go above and beyond simply commenting, "Great post!" Instead, do this in a peer-to-peer way, adding commentary that only an Authority in the shared space could add.
- Hosting an interview series on your blog, via a podcast, or video format (or all three): An interview series puts you in a position to give value to your audience by showcasing content from the top leaders in your field and giving yourself an excuse to reach out to people you want to build relationships with. We're going to discuss this in much more detail later in this letter but we'd encourage you to pay extremely close attention to this tactic.

While the first two categories of content (You-Driven & News-Driven) are important, the biggest game-changer in terms of traction, impact and—frankly—fun is the third category. When you have a media mind-set, you are comfortable enough in your own Authority to curate content from others as a way to build relationships and give value to your audience. While You-Driven content and News-Driven content will both make an impact over time, relationship-driven content can make an impact immediately.

### **Content Marketing = Business Development When Done Right**

Let's say we were in our conference room with you and you wrote down the 50 most important relationship targets for the growth of your business on our whiteboard. That's

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the easy part of course – the next question is how do we go about building relationships with those 50 people?

Most of your competitors are doing the same old thing – offering free consultations, lunch invites and other tired and commoditized sales tactics. What if instead of pushing pitches at these 50 targets you flipped the script and rather than pushing a pitch at them, you put your media hat on and invited them to be a guest on your podcast? Think about it: how often do you get sales pitches? All the time—and most are outright ignored. How often do you get an interview request for a podcast? That would catch your attention, wouldn't it?

The magic in this approach is not just in catching the relationship target's attention, it's also in the following three areas:

- Assuming you are only interviewing smart people with good ideas, your audience is going to benefit from the content.
- You're changing the nature of your interaction with that prospect or potential strategic partner. Instead of a normal sales meeting or sales call where you're in a salesperson vs. prospect dynamic (a huge hill to climb), when you interview someone, it becomes a peer-to-peer interaction, which gives you a much more authoritative position.
- You're giving your interviewee a reason to share the link to your website once it runs. To go back to the stadium analogy, you're inviting that person on your stage and they're bringing their audience into your stadium with them when they share it.

## **What the Interview Series Looks Like**

We worked with a marketing agency based in Atlanta that was trying to generate attention from CMOs of Fortune 1000 companies in the area. Not an easy task to say the least and they had not been very successful up until that point. They embraced this mindset of thinking more like the media and went a step further – they built a podcast studio in their office. Their goal was not just to get their target customer to come on the podcast – their goal was to have a reason to get the target CMO into their office to do the podcast interview so they could see the culture and get a feel for the agency. They began reaching out to target CMOs and invited them on the podcast and the response rate was remarkable. Previously they couldn't get calls returned and now they were having a peer-to-peer conversation with these CMOs on their terms and in their office, all the while building goodwill with the CMO. They went on to close business with two of the companies they reached.

A couple of key takeaways regarding the interview series that falls under Relationship-Driven content:

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- **Focus** – the magic in a good interview series is that it allows you to focus only on relationship-targets and the time spent has value whether or not a huge audience is built based on the crossover with business development.
- **Resist the urge to bait & switch** – the interview series loses all of its impact if it is perceived as a sales tactic. Again, you need to be viewed as a member of the media (which you are when you have a podcast), so don't angle in with any kind of pitch as part of the interaction. Instead, leverage that peer-to-peer environment that an interview facilitates to further cement your Authority. Following the interview, you can send a follow-up note and perhaps even a signed copy of your book as a thank you, but you want to let them take the first step in terms of requesting more information.
- **Format** – Although some Members choose to do their interview series via text content in the form of a blog post, we recommend either a podcast or a video interview series as the target format because both facilitate a more intimate connection with the relationship target.

Content marketing, when used the right way, is a great bridge to new relationships. But it's a rare mind-set that sees that and utilizes it; if you can embrace it, you will be playing a game no one else knows is being played.

## Content Marketing Checklist

1. How well are you diversifying your content across the three categories discussed above? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are you using content marketing as a relationship-building tool? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What specific content platforms make the most sense for you based on our feedback?

## **About Zilker Media**

Zilker Media is a boutique agency providing end-to-end brand building for the world's leading brands and thought leaders. Drawing on decades of experience working with the world's most-respected companies, thought leaders, best-selling authors and authorities, Zilker Media helps clients build their brands, grow the size of their audience and drive meaningful exposure through social media, quiz marketing, PR and brand management. We believe meaningful communities are built through storytelling, service and strategic value and we work alongside our clients to build magnetic brands that make an outsized impact. Learn more at [www.ZilkerMedia.com](http://www.ZilkerMedia.com).

## **About Rusty Shelton**

[Rusty Shelton](#) first spoke at Harvard on the changing world of PR and marketing at the age of 23. He is the Founder & Chairman of Zilker Media, publisher of ForbesBooks and

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co-author (alongside Adam Witty) of *Authority Marketing: How to Leverage 7 Pillars of Thought Leadership to Make Competition Irrelevant* (ForbesBooks, 2018) and co-author (alongside Barbara Cave Henricks) of [Mastering the New Media Landscape: Embrace the Micromedia Mindset](#) (Berrett-Koehler, 2016). An active keynote speaker, Rusty's commentary on the changing world of PR and marketing has been featured in [Forbes](#), [Inc. Magazine](#), [Wharton](#), [Huff Post](#) and many other top media outlets. Learn more at [www.RustyShelton.com](http://www.RustyShelton.com), [www.ZilkerMedia.com](http://www.ZilkerMedia.com) or [www.ForbesBooks.com](http://www.ForbesBooks.com) or email Rusty at [rusty@zilkermedia.com](mailto:rusty@zilkermedia.com).