

Building a social media platform

By  Mia Botha

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I long for the days when tweeting was a sound birds made, posting was something you did with an envelope and a stamp, and if you didn't want to be someone's friend, you had to look them in the eye to tell them. And a following? For that you had to start a religion.

Today, as a writer, I have to use these tools to build my author platform, I have to brand myself, I have to make friends with you. Someone I don't know, which reminds me of Friends, remember them? Chandler, Monica, Ross, Phoebe, Rachel and Joey. Pre-social media friends. Them, I get, so I thought, 'How can I take something I understand to help explain something I don't?'



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For an author platform you need a base, where do they spend a lot of their time? Central Perk, the coffee shop, I say Central Perk and not their apartments. Why? Because at home you are messy and sloppy, online you want to present a more professional image, dress up a little, brush your hair and go out for coffee. The coffee shop is like your blog or your website, put your best foot forward, use good quality pictures, and clean up your typos.

If you don't have a blog try Tumblr or Wordpress, they have free templates. (Amanda Patterson posted some helpful advice on [blogging for writers](#)), from your blog you will share your content to your friends of choice.

How will you choose your friends?

Chandler is a lot like Facebook

Facebook is by far the largest social media network. This a good place to start if you don't have an online presence. You make friends, you post status updates, upload photos and notes.

It reminds me of Chandler because he seems to be the most normal of all the friends, except for all his neuroses and insecurities. Just like us, mostly normal, but all odd in our own way.

Ross is very Google+

This is probably the network I have spent the least amount of time on. Google+ is now the 2nd largest social network, so I will have to change this. Instead of making friends, you join circles.

Most of the users are male, reminding me of Ross who is such a guy, in all his wonderfully awkward, dinosaur-obsessed nerdiness.

Phoebe is Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blog. Your messages are restricted to 140 characters, so you need to know exactly what you want to say - even though most Twitter users don't.

I find reading the gibberish that scrolls past hard to read, but with practise, it has started making sense. It's like listening to Phoebe talk, you need a moment to figure out what planet she is on.

Joey was made for YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing site. Instead of photos and statuses you upload videos, the original idea was that you could broadcast yourself by uploading videos. You can watch anything from bloopers, interviews, talks, and tons of DIY or step-by-step tutorials.

It chews through bandwidth and time with equal fervour, as the actor and resident goof ball of the group, he reminds me of YouTube.

Monica is ideal for LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a network especially designed for business people. You can invite professional people to connect with you as well as recommend them and write referrals for them. You can join groups and read articles of interest and list your projects, current and past, your qualifications and your achievements. This is the most serious of the bunch, just like Monica.

Rachel is perfect for Pinterest

Pinterest is a virtual pin board. It is the fastest growing social media network, when you see something you like on a website you can pin it to your board with themes and you can follow people with similar tastes and re-pin their pictures to your boards.

Like Rachel, it's pretty. And it's a form of online hoarding and dreaming, it's also the closest I'll get to a Jimmy Choo collection.

Five general tips for beginners

1. Remember to brand yourself before you begin. Go on a specialist branding course for creatives like [The Write Brand](#) or employ a consultant.
2. We seem to forget that social networks are public forums, we feel protected in front of our computer screens and so we tend to over share. This is fine for a personal page, but not so great for your public persona.
3. Find your favourite author and make friends/follow/connect with them. See what they post.
4. Content is king. Don't post for the sake of posting, make sure you add value as you have to inform, entertain or engage your friends in some way.
5. Make a posting schedule that works for you and stick to it. Try to post something daily or at least once a week, original content takes time to generate.

To build your author platform, you need to make friends. The friends you choose should bring new friends back to your Central Perk to learn more about your product.

That is why you spend time with them. Which of the six are right for your brand? Facebook is a definite and for the rest you have to choose the ones that suit you. All of them are good and fulfil a different role, use your favourite one, but don't neglect the others. They'll be there for you.

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Mia Botha facilitates for Writers Write. She is also a novelist, a ghost writer, and the winner of the Mills & Boon Voice of Africa Competition.
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