AUTHOR BRANDING: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Michael J. Sullivan
Riyria Revelations ● Riyria Chronicles ● Hollow World
A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF

- Author Riyria Revelations, Riyria Chronicles, Hollow World
  - Half a million English Language Books Sold
  - 20 Foreign Language Contracts
  - Self, small-press, and big-five

- Started an Advertising Marketing firm
  - Branding for hundreds of small-medium firms

- Forbes Article on Author Branding due to recognition from Goodreads Director of Marketing
A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU

- How many have published at least one book or article?
- How many are still in the pre-publication phase?
- How many are or want to be traditionally published?
- How many are or want to be self-published?
- Are there any hybrid authors in the audience: who both self and traditionally publish?
Marketing isn’t something to fear

- Doesn’t have to be scary
- Going to make this easy
- Helps shape impressions
- Readers want to connect
- Anyone can do this
WHAT “TRADITIONAL” MARKETERS SAY

- Define your target audience
- Craft a message to attract that audience
- Beat that message loud and often
- You’ll become rich & famous
MY RESPONSE TO THE “TRADITIONAL” APPROACH

- This is just so much…BS
- Exactly the wrong approach
- It creates a “false” brand
- It makes you fit the brand rather than the brand fitting you
SO WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY?

- Simon Sinek is good, Simon is wise
- Turns the model on its head
- Nutshell: Start with **why** you do what you do, and attract the type of people who **like** that kind of thing
• Examples:
  • Apple
  • Martin Luther King
  • Wright Brothers

• Reverse the order: What > How > Why
• Best 18 minutes on branding ever
It’s All About Why

• It’s not about making money – that’s a result not a “why”
• What’s your purpose, your cause, your belief?
• Why do you get out of bed in the morning?
• Why should anyone care?
• People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it
• So all you have to do is be yourself
Your goal is not to do business with everybody who needs what you have.

Your goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.

The result: develop trust & loyalty where “feelings” make decisions.

Find your **why**…and expose **that**
Define Yourself in a Single Word

- Joe Konrath: Contentious
- Chuck Wendig: Profane
- Neil Gaiman: Performer
- Hugh Howey: Freedom-fighter
- Michael J. Sullivan: Accessible
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO EXPOSE?

- Political views?
  - N.K. Jemisin – women and authors of color
  - Jim C. Hines – rape and abuse against women
  - Robert Bidinotto – Right-wing conservative
  - Michal J. Sullivan – Author’s rights

- Family?
  - My wife is my partner
  - Neil Gaiman is married to a rock star
  - Patrick Rothfuss discusses is son (name changed)
You Are Multi-faceted

- You don’t have to put “it all” out there
  - I’m actually very critical – but wouldn’t publicly denounce another author’s work

- Concentrate on the things you want to be known for

- For me that means:
  - Hard-working (many works), helpful to other authors (hundreds of “tip” posts), critical of establishments (traditional publishing), appreciative of readers (thanking)
Tools to Build Your Brand

- Author Biography
  - Tell a story
  - Expose yourself
- Multiple versions
  - 160 characters: Twitter
  - 20 word version (short)
  - 50 word version (bloggers/articles)
  - Long version (Amazon/Goodreads Profiles)
The Wrong Biography

Michael J. Sullivan has written 25 novels and published 9. He was born in Detroit Michigan and now lives near Washington DC with his wife, three children, and a dog named Toby.

- Boring dissertation of facts: Dragnet style
- No one cares about your birthplace, where you live now, how many children you have, or what kind of pets you like.
When he was eight, Michael J. Sullivan found a manual typewriter in the basement of a friend’s house and typed his first immortal words: It was a dark and stormy night. Okay so he “borrowed” that from Snoopy, but the desire to see what doors the typewriter keys would unlock became a lifelong passion.

For ten years Michael developed his craft by studying authors such as Stephen King, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck, penning thirteen novels along the way. All of them were rejected and he quit, vowing never to write creatively again. But never is a long time, and Michael returned after a ten year hiatus to write a series of books for then thirteen-year-old daughter who was struggling with dyslexia. He had only one condition, that he wouldn’t seek publication. After reading the third book of The Riyria Revelations, his wife made other plans. It only took 2 decades, 200 query rejections, a failed small press, and several years of self-publishing to become an overnight success. He now writes full-time for Orbit (fantasy imprint of big-five Hachette) as well as more than a dozen foreign language publishers. He’s currently working on his next series, The First Empire as well as the next book in his bestselling Riyria series.
What My LongBio Does

• Life-long passion…started at age 6
• Hasn’t been easy…many failures along the way
• Never say die…the little engine that could
• Family man – daughter and wife discussed
• Living the dream – finally made it
Blake Crouch: A Missed Opportunity

- Author of thrillers including serial killers and disturbing occurrences.
- Original Biography: where he lives, where he went to school, an award he received.
- Interview: A story about how when he was a kid, his parents were called into school because of the “disturbing” story he wrote for class.
EMAIL SIGNATURES

- Use images & links: this one reminds readers of all books
- Buy links for books as well as social media links
- Encourages additional buys without having to say anything
**4 Words**
Unlikely Heroes…Classic Adventure

**15 Words or less**
They killed the king. They pinned it on two men. They chose poorly.

**One Paragraph**
There's no ancient evil to defeat or orphan destined for greatness, just two rogues at the wrong place at the right time. Royce Melborn, a skilled thief, and his mercenary partner, Hadrian Blackwater, are running for their lives when they're framed for the murder of the king. Trapped in a conspiracy that goes beyond the overthrow of a tiny kingdom, their only hope is unraveling an ancient mystery before it's too late.
AUTHOR HEADSHOT

- Yes, you need one
- Professional version as soon as possible
- What is it saying about you?
  - Serious
  - Funny
  - Professional
PUBLIC APPEARANCES

- Neil Gaiman – always in black
- Jay Lake – Hawaiian shirt
- Mark Twain – white suit
- James Artemis Owen - vest & pocket watch
- Kevin Anderson - sports jacket and dress slacks
REINFORCE YOUR BRAND

• Every blog post you write
• How (or if) you respond to emails
• What you tweet about
• How (or if) you respond to readers on forums / reviews
  • Goodreads
  • Reddit
• Genre forums such as Fantasy Faction, SffWorld
THE FIVE TOOLS FOR BRANDING

1. Use your passion, your “why” as the foundation that drives EVERY communication

2. Develop bios of multiple length

3. Shape your external representation – i.e. headshot

4. Use email signatures to remind people what you have

5. Stay true to your authorial voice to present a familiar reading experience
IN CONCLUSION

- Don’t be someone else – be yourself
- Find your passion
- It’s all about exposing the parts of yourself that reinforce your “Why”
- Attract people who believe in what you believe in
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