

Editors Canada presentation: How to make social media work for you

This is a slightly amended version of a brief presentation I gave at the Editors Canada conference in Gatineau on 10 June.

Most of my social media activity has been on Facebook. I've been using Facebook for just over five years – a relatively short time – and have been a member of Editors' Association of Earth and affiliated groups since they started, more than four years ago. I don't have a business page on Facebook, although I do have a business website, and I don't have a social media strategy as such, but I do have a philosophy of sorts. I also have more work now than I've had at any other time in my 24 years of freelancing and, on average, it's better-quality, better-paying work. This is not unrelated to my social media activity.

When I was thinking about the topic of this session – **How to Make Social Media Work for You**, as an editor – I came up with a slogan. And the slogan is:

SUBSCRIBE TO THE TRIBE

That's my main theme for this session: Subscribe to the tribe. We editors have created a tribe though the power of social media, and if you're not a member, you're missing out on the benefits of membership.

I Googled 'tribal marketing' and the concept already exists, but in a different sense: it concerns marketing to so-called 'tribes' of consumers. What I'm talking about is marketing *by* and *through* a tribe. In the world at large, there are obvious downsides to tribalism, but we editors have formed a civilized and self-regulating tribe.

Someone commented on a Facebook post last weekend, 'this group is the word nerd friends I didn't know I needed'. The group is Editors' Association of Earth. Editors all over the world are friends you didn't know you needed.

When I'm marketing myself on Facebook, it's to other editors. I never go to groups of authors or publishers to look for work. And I rarely say, 'I'm looking for work at the moment: does anyone have any leads?', although I have said this once or twice, and there's a group called EAE Ad Space where it's acceptable. In a sense you are marketing yourself **to** the tribe, and in another sense you are marketing yourself **through** the tribe to the world at large. And it seems to work. Everyone in the tribe has a large number of interfaces with the world of publishing and the outside world in general. It's a highly dynamic system.

I think benefits accrue naturally to good members of the tribe: as time goes on they are exposed to resources, referrals, contacts, leads in an organic kind of way. The tribe looks after its own. So, what you need to think about is 'how can I be a good member of the tribe?' I have some pointers to offer on this (again, related to Facebook in particular). At least some of them may come naturally to most of us, but others may not.

1. *Join Editors' Association of Earth* and affiliated Facebook groups, if you're not already a member.
2. *Be active.* You'll learn a certain amount by lurking, but there are greater benefits if you are seen and known.

3. *Be a regular.* Try to check what's going on in the groups every day, or as often as you can.
4. *Be helpful.* Offer advice and opinions where you can. Don't assume that others will do it.
5. *Don't focus entirely on the business:* attend to the social side. It's still social media, after all.
6. *Be supportive of other editors.* Congratulate them and commiserate with them as appropriate. Use your empathy.
7. *Don't be judgemental* and don't correct people.
8. *Be willing to make an objective case for any claims you make.* Don't confuse your editorial preferences with cast-iron rules.
9. *Be flexible.* Be willing to change your mind. I know that the Facebook editors and the resources they provide have made me much less prescriptivist than I used to be.
10. *Friend lots of editors.* Ignore your usual friending rules, if you have any. Reach a critical mass of editors among your friends, so that your own page is frequented largely by editors. Most of my Facebook friends are editors. Very often when I post something on my page, even if it has nothing to do with editing, everyone who likes it or comments is an editor. This is because they are members of the same tribe, whether or not they are thinking in those terms. And I think of all these people as real friends. I don't friend clients, because that's a different kind of relationship, and I find that clients respect that professional distance.
11. *Try to be light and humorous* at least some of the time. Don't be ultra-serious. Don't get into bitter disputes over the serial comma or anything else. Try to maintain a sense of humour.
12. *Give something of yourself,* and tell them something they don't know, sometimes. We're all experts at being ourselves. Try to offer something a little different. Provide a window into your life as well as your work. Use distinctive aspects of yourself. For example, although there is a significant Irish presence in the editors' groups, it's quite small. Because of my upbringing and life experience, I have access to a particular body of knowledge about Irish language, culture and history. I am an expert on that, and I do use it, although not in a premeditated way. Editors are sharp and inquisitive, and they like to hear something that they didn't know. They love knowledge for its own sake. They think learning new stuff is cool.
13. *Maybe have some recurring themes* in your posts on your own page. For example, in the past year I made a big pot of soup most weeks, and posted the ingredients on Facebook. These posts became incredibly popular, especially with my editor friends. It seems that editors really love soup. They also love cats and dogs – not necessarily in that order.
14. *Enjoy it.* Social media is there to be enjoyed. What we get out of it depends on what we put in.

Most of all, don't forget to *subscribe to the tribe!*