

This was my chat at SinCLA March 5, 2017

BRANDING. I KNOW, IT'S A SCARY WORD; DOESN'T IT JUST SEND SHIVERS UP YOUR SPINE?

I totally understand why the word “branding” can make you cringe: you don’t want to be a *brand*, you want to be a *person*; you don’t want to *market* to others, you want to *connect* with like-minds; **you don’t want to become a product, you want to create art.** I get it and I agree. But...

WHAT DO I MEAN BY “HAVING A BRAND”?

I’m not talking about logos or neon signs. I’m talking about having a clear idea of how to market yourself and your work.

Think of it this way: When you step into a theater to see the latest Bourne movie, you’re expecting to be bombarded by car chases and thrilling adventure. If, instead, you found yourself watching a British period piece, you would be confused and maybe ticked off.

The same reasoning applies to your brand. You are **promising** your audience a particular kind of reading experience. Maintaining continuity in your voice as a writer, as well as continuity in your presentation regarding all things social media and promotional materials, is vital to building a successful author brand and establishing a strong fan base.

Does this mean an author can’t switch it up? No. (More on that in a sec)

SHOW OF HANDS

HOW MANY OF YOU ARE PUBLISHED?

HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE A WEBSITE?

HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR BRAND IS?

OKAY...LET’S GET TO THE NITTY GRITTY...

WHAT IS A BRAND?

We’re not talking about branding like for cattle when there were no fences—so cattlemen could claim ownership. We’re talking about the marketing term that helps identify products and helps people make purchasing choices.

WHAT IS AN AUTHOR BRAND?

By the way, it takes up to 10 impressions for brand awareness! Remember this.

An author brand is building an image or identity that no one else can offer. For example, when you go into the bookstore to purchase a Michael Connelly book, you don't say where is *The Wrong Side of Goodbye*? Okay, maybe some of you do. You know all his titles. But most would say, "Do you have the latest Michael Connelly book?"

FYI, Michael wasn't always a big deal, but after his Harry Bosch character took off, he was. His brand is writing Bosch in Los Angeles.

Most writers don't think about branding or, they do, but not until after they've been published for a while. Mainly because they don't want to be pigeonholed.

STORY ABOUT MY ACTING CAREER AND NOT WANTING TO BE PIGEONHOLED...

AND STUPIDLY I DIDN'T THINK ABOUT BRANDING AS WRITER, EITHER...

WELL, I DID, BUT I STARTED OUT AS A THRILLER WRITER AND HAD ALL SORTS OF BRANDING IN PLACE FOR THAT, EXCEPT I COULDN'T GET MY THRILLERS SOLD...SO I MORPHED INTO A COZY MYSTERY AUTHOR...BIG SWITCH...AND I HAD TO REBRAND... More on that in a sec.

No matter what stage of your career you're at, you should have a brand. A strong brand helps you in the same way it helps a company. It gives you name recognition and ultimately helps sell your books.

So, branding should be part of your business plan. In fact, you should brainstorm what your next few books will be "about" when your first one is being published so you can see the **big picture** of how you want to be known.

If you already have a few books published and don't know your brand, I've got a few tips in a moment.

Here's how to start developing your brand if you're not yet published.

DETERMINE HOW YOU WANT TO BE KNOWN:

Consider:

- The types of writing you want to do
- Which subjects you want to write about
- The types of stories you want to tell
- The themes you want to share
- Which kind of readers you want to attract
- The spin-off books (sequels or series) you would like to publish
- Your values, interests, passions, purpose

Is there one **quality, topic or theme** you'd like to become known for?

AT ONE POINT I WANTED TO BE KNOWN FOR THE PHRASE "BELIEVE YOU CAN," BUT I WASN'T A SELF-HELP GURU.

THEN I WANTED PEOPLE TO KNOW HOW MUCH FAMILY MEANT TO ME, SO ALL MY THRILLERS WERE ABOUT STRONG PROTAGONISTS WITH A LOVE OF FAMILY. WHEN I STARTED WRITING COZY MYSTERIES, STRONG PROTAGONISTS WITH A LOVE OF FAMILY BECAME A HUGE THEME, BUT I DIDN'T THINK OF THAT AS A BRAND.

MORE ON THIS IN A MINUTE.

Once you know what your topic or theme or quality is, you can become known for it.

That's your BRAND.

How would you like to be known—as the WHAT writer?

WHEN I GOT MY BREAK, I BECAME THE CHEESE LADY, THE CHEESE SHOP WRITER, THE CHEESE EXPERT. I also

became Avery Aames. I marketed myself as Avery.

More on this in a bit.

Is there one theme or thread in your writing, i.e. *Family, location, character*?

Can you describe that thread in once sentence or catchphrase?

Kate Carlisle uses: *Smart. Funny. Murder.*

Do you write a theme? Can this be your branding statement? Do you write the Amish knitting mysteries? The historical Hollywood mysteries? The deadly noir thrillers.

You could be known as the WHAT _____ writer?

OKAY SHOW OF HANDS...

THOSE OF YOU WITH A WEBSITE. ARE YOU THINKING RIGHT NOW ABOUT THAT WEBSITE AND WHETHER IT TRULY REFLECTS YOUR BRAND?

SPEAKING OF WEBSITES:

Make sure your website NAME is easy so readers can find you. GET YOUR URL NOW. MAKE IT REFLECT YOU OR THE THEME OF YOUR BOOKS. You can have your name + author or author + your name if your name happens to already be taken.

If you come up with a tagline or catchphrase, you might want to purchase that one, too.

Make sure your website and tagline are clear. People should get what you're about immediately. Be specific with what photos you are including.

MY WEBSITE CATCHPHRASE IS:
SAVOR THE MYSTERY

I HAVE A:
SAVOR THE MYSTERY FAN CLUB

I ALSO USE THE CATCHPHRASE, ONLY ON THE SITE:
TASTY, ZESTY, DANGEROUS – foodie terms that describe my
work (cozies, short stories, suspense) but also describe “me”

Now, like I said earlier, I started out as the Cheese Lady, the cheese
expert, etc. Say cheese was my catchphrase.

But then I expanded into Cookbook Nook mysteries and had my real
name to contend with. I wasn't just Avery any longer. And I
thought...

Uh-oh. How did I brand that?

WELL, I BECAME A CULINARY MYSTERY WRITER.

OKAY, FINE, BUT THERE ARE LOTS OF THOSE.

WHAT WAS MY BRAND? WHAT MADE ME DIFFERENT?
THAT'S WHEN I CAME UP WITH MY CATCHPHRASE:
SAVOR THE MYSTERY...I'M AN ENTERTAINING FOODIE
AUTHOR. When you come to my website, savor the recipes, savor
the short stories, savor the entertaining reading on the site.

I also incorporated both of my series plus both of my names on the
one website. Before I had two sites that linked. But Avery and Daryl
both wrote tasty mysteries.

And now I'm expanding into French food with THE FRENCH
BISTRO MYSTERIES, set in the Napa Valley.

BUT - Do I only write about food?

No, and here's where it gets tricky. I also write suspense novels. No
food. Am I going to confuse my readers? Probably – a bit. I'm still a
work in progress, too, on this branding thing!

But I won't confuse my readers that much because the writing voice is
the same. There's still no bad language or sex on the page. A fan
could definitely tell by the covers that the TONE is different. But I

will assure them that if they read a cozy mystery, they can read my books. There's no blood, guts, and gore in them. Will they read them? That is the question.

So what is my brand? What is the theme that underlies all my work? I write about strong female characters with deep ties to family and friends. That "aspect" is on my website in the form of photos and catchphrases.

By the way, it takes up to 10 impressions for brand awareness! Remember that.

USE YOUR BRAND ACROSS ALL YOUR SOCIAL NETWORKS:

Use the same title, tag line or catchphrase, photo and colors, etc., across all your social networks, as well as in articles, videos, and guest posts, and always provide a link "home." This helps you get you known quickly and easily and is another way to strengthen your brand once you've developed it.

SHOW SAMPLES OF MUG AND BAG AND GIVEAWAYS, ALL OF WHICH HAVE MY WEBSITE ON THEM. SOME HAVE SAVOR THE MYSTERY. OTHERS HAVE SAY CHEESE...

ASK OTHERS FOR HELP:

- What do you perceive as my theme or thread?
- What do you think when you read my books?
- How would you describe my books?

CREATE AN UMBRELLA THEME

If you write across genres, it's possible to find an "*umbrella theme*" – this term is new to me! It's something that ties everything together into a brand, even if you write two or three genres.

For example, you could weave similar themes, topics, issues, or locations into them. *Like what, you ask?* i.e. wine, food, knitting, pets, lawyers, Florida, California, snow, family values...your choice.

*Let's say you write a thriller set in the wine country.
You can also write a cozy about a wine maker.
And you can write blogs or articles about how much you like wine.
You are The Wine Writer.*

YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING WHY HAVING A BRAND MATTERS?

You're thinking, I'm just getting started. I'm small. Yes, you might be, but you want to sell big, right? It's much easier to get from point A to point B if you have a plan.

A brand helps you set a plan. A brand helps potential readers get to know you and hopefully like and trust you. Your brand helps readers understand who you are and what type of books you write. That makes it easier for them to decide to purchase those books. And that's the ultimate goal, isn't it? To buy your books!

A FEW STEPS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING YOUR WEBSITE/YOUR BRAND: (I found these terms in an article about branding and loved them.)

- 1) EMOTIONAL VELCRO. You want people to feel they've formed a bond with you. You want them to purchase your book simply because your name is on it.
- 2) PERCEPTION OF HIGH QUALITY. Yes, it helps to win awards and such because that gives the reader a *perception* that your work is high quality, but reviews help with that, too, so make sure you get your work out there and reviewed. There are lots of review sites, blog reviewers, etc. Contact them. Then develop a thick skin because not all reviews are great! Always ask the reviewer if you can use a quote for your website or other promotional materials. Don't ever do the following...if a reviewer writes: "Not her best work..." You cannot use, "...her best work." LOL
- 3) SOMETHING SPECIAL OR DISTINCTIVE; Your author voice. It's yours. It's no one else's. Your website should reflect that. Your brand is an implicit promise to your readers that they're going to get what they came for, whether it's thematic or emotional. [You don't want to

promise them adult fiction and then have children's fiction. You don't want to promise them dark mystery and then provide romance.]

Aside: this is something I'm struggling with because I also write suspense...but like I said, I've made sure that the cover art assures the reader that they are not purchasing a cozy mystery. Plus the blurbs and other information reminds them that the suspense novels are faster paced, etc.]

- 4) **BRAND BUILDING IS FIRST.** You need to define what makes your brand unique and different from others or you're doomed. So again that color scheme, logo, tagline, your message points matter!
- 5) **CLEAR CONSISTENT BRANDING** will help your reader feel comfortable. By the way, when you go to conferences and go online and get people talking about you, always use your central points. You want them talking about you in a consistent way.

THINK OF THE BEST COMMERCIALS YOU'VE EVER SEEN, LIKE THE BUDWEISER COMMERCIALS ARE MEMORABLE BECAUSE OF THE CLYDESDALES.

THINK OF TELEVISION SHOWS THAT ARE GRIPPING. DOWNTON ABBEY HAD A BRAND. GAME OF THRONES HAS A BRAND. PEOPLE RETURN TO THESE SHOWS BECAUSE THEY ARE EMOTIONAL ABOUT THEM. THEY'RE FANS.

**THINK OF AUTHORS YOU WILL FOLLOW FOREVER...
STORY OF AN AUTHOR I WON'T FOLLOW BECAUSE SHE
CHANGED HER TONE SO DRAMATICALLY.**

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION YOU ARE MAKING FOR YOUR READERS?

In my case right now, it's the food. They come for the food. But they also come for the relationships. More and more people are talking about the love that they feel my characters have for each other. Relationships matter IN MY SUSPENSE NOVELS as well.

BACK TO THE WEBSITE

GETTING QUOTES/BLURBS FOR YOUR BOOKS THAT YOU CAN

USE ON YOUR WEBSITE.

This is known as **brand equity**. Again, this was a new term for me. Whoever you are quoting has a certain value in your field. This person is vouching for your work. This is why your publisher would be excited about a cover quote from Michael Connelly as opposed to John Doe. Now, most of us won't get that quote, BUT ASK someone you know who is well respected FOR A COVER QUOTE. Do it in writing. However, give them an out. Not all authors have the time to give a review. Some publishers don't want authors to review "outside" their genre. Be flexible. If you can, build up a review crew.

By the way, it takes up to 10 impressions for brand awareness!
Remember this.

HOW ELSE DO YOU BUILD A STRONG BRAND?

- Have a great product. DUH!
- Grab readers' emotions.
- Build all aspects of your brand equally, that includes website, letterhead, business cards, social media sites, bookmarks, giveaways – plus how you act at conferences and book signings. Are you authentically you?
- Be consistent. What do you want people to remember about you and your writing?
- Deliver on the brand. By the way, some publishers will ask you to have a pseudonym because the brand is completely different, i.e. Nora Roberts (romance) and JD Robb, (her pseudonym for futuristic mysteries). That's okay. She links the two sites, but her fans will NOT make a mistake and purchase the wrong genre.
- Always refine your brand by the success you achieve. IF NECESSARY...evolve! I've had to.

A FEW CLOSING TIPS:

- Embrace yourself as a writer. Yes, you might work a day job, but you ARE a writer. Introduce yourself as such.
- Speak clearly about who you are. That doesn't mean don't mumble. It means have a CENTRAL message. On your

website, on your social media sites, in all your blog posts, and at your fingertips when talking to anyone about your writing, at a conference and elsewhere.

- True, few people want to be pigeonholed, but the value of REPETITION is it helps people remember what you are about. **I REPEAT – it takes up to 10 impressions for brand awareness!! Remember this.**
- Don't assume people *know* you or what you do. Repeat your message when you're meeting new people. Have it down in a pitch. [IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT, ROCHELLE STAAB AND I DID AN ELEVATOR PITCH THAT WORKS FOR AGENTS, BUT ALSO WORKS FOR KNOWING WHAT IT IS YOU WRITE. THE LINK IS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoWjXMe6OU>]
- Be specific. Sometimes authors choose too broad a genre definition. Personalize it. I don't just write mysteries. I write foodie mysteries that are ENTERTAINING. SAVOR THE MYSTERY!
- Branding is about connecting with your readers so they will want to find you and read you. Connect with your readers.