



## BRANDING FOR AUTHORS AND FREELANCERS

By Julie H. Ferguson

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**B**randing is all about gaining name recognition and a solid market position that highlights you and your product.

Branding applies to writers every bit as much as a box of detergent, and in today's competitive market, more than ever. It is an essential component in developing your publishing platform and for increasing sales of your work before and after publication, in book form or in magazines. **But, most importantly, branding means getting known as an author or freelancer worth reading.**



The branding process for writers includes:

- identifying your brand(s)
- differentiating your books/articles from others in the same fiction genre or nonfiction subject
- positioning yourself and your work

**IDENTIFYING YOUR BRAND:** Figure out the overarching theme of your books and articles, and the expertise and value you bring to them. This effort will eventually reveal your **brand** as you develop as a writer, and is more than your books' category and sub-category or an article's topic. It is not sufficient to say "I write mysteries" or "I'm a travel writer." They are not specific enough. (Mystery brands are often the sleuth themselves - think of DI Lynley in Elizabeth George's novels; in the travel world, a brand may be a region or a mode of travel.)

I found asking others, who knew my books and articles, provided insight into my commercially published work. Two comments got me drilling down further: "You are fascinated by what motivates leaders" and "You write history as if it's personal."

If you write in more than one genre or subject, go through the process for each one. I ended up with drafts for two brands:

- *I write Canadian history that tends to focus on the motivation of extraordinary leaders.*
- *I am a guiding light for Canadian writers.*

The latter, incidentally, drives my [blog](#) and [website](#), and provided my company name and logo.

**DIFFERENTIATION:** We often write in a highly competitive category, and our sub-category may also overflow with similar books to ours. It's a fact of life for an author. The brand we settle on must show how we differ from the rest. We have to find an angle that makes us stand apart and above the crowd.

Answer the questions:

- What makes my book(s) or articles different or better than others on similar subjects? Make a list.
- How can I make them more different, useful, and special than the others? Compile another list.

Think about them for a while and keep adding to the lists. Then select the two most important differences. Looking at my two brands, the differences I bring to each are:

- More and more, I am using the technique called creative nonfiction (CNF) to write my nonfiction books and articles. Also, I write about people and fields that have been overlooked by other writers.
- I specialize in the business of getting published, not the craft of writing that has an overabundance of books.

**POSITIONING YOUR BRAND:** Where do you want your books/articles to be seen, to be available, and what do you want them to be associated with? Your brand and differentiation will guide you in all your subsequent positioning and promotional decisions: the where, when, what, how of branding.

- First task - register your own name as a domain. Now! Mine is [www.julieferguson.ca](http://www.julieferguson.ca). If someone has the domain you want already, add a hyphen between your first and last name, or an initial. Do what it takes to get as close as you can to your name that appears or will appear on your book covers and in your articles' bylines. Even if you have no books pubbed, get your domain and start developing a website immediately after you've finished #1 and 2.

[GoDaddy.com](http://GoDaddy.com) is one of many companies that registers and hosts domains for reasonable prices, and you get email addresses with the same name. (e.g. [julie@julieferguson.ca](mailto:julie@julieferguson.ca)) No serious writer should use a hotmail, a gmail address, or a silly handle like downspout@....

At the same time, register domains for your book titles, so no-one else can beat you to it. Even if you don't end up using them, you may be able to sell them.

- Now, create your website! Check out other authors sites first and decide what you like and dislike. Make your site shout out what you discovered from #1 and 2.

Even if you have more than one brand, one website should be all you need. Above all make it interesting to strangers, as well as your potential readers. Make it worthwhile to come back to time and again.

Use keywords to position your website for search engines so potential readers can find them easily -- include words from your brand sentence, as well as the obvious choices like *fiction* or *mystery*. E.g. *biography*, *the subject's name*, *Canadian history*, *notable Canadians*, or *creative writing*, *publishing*, *writing workshops*, *books*.

- Start a blog for each brand if they are unrelated. I have two, one for my writing blog ([www.beaconlit.blogspot.com](http://www.beaconlit.blogspot.com)) and another for my author blog of a YA biography at [www.jamesdouglaoofbc.blogspot.com](http://www.jamesdouglaoofbc.blogspot.com). Make them different from each other, but congruent with each brand.
- Emphasize your brand(s) on your blog(s): Write to it! Keep current and blog what you learn for readers. Make it interactive with links, videos, and podcasts. Avoid muddying the waters by blogging on other subjects, such as your visit to Palm Beach or your dog -- visitors won't come back.
- Get links from high-visit sites and blogs to yours and vice versa -- they bring yours more traffic.
- If you are an established writer, find blogs with a similar brand and offer to guest-blog for them. I guest blog monthly on a BC history [blog](#), for example. It's a win-win for both blogs as it drives traffic to each. Also, offer to do blog interviews for bloggers who blog on your subject.
- Feature your brand(s) on your social networking sites. If you have a [Facebook](#) page for family and friends, consider getting another for your writing life - there's a big community out there. Definitely add a page that connects with your potential readers, e.g. Canadian history buffs and/or start FB groups using your titles. [Twitter](#) allows everyone more than one account too. As I tweet mainly about writing and publishing, I just have one for my Beacon brand.
- Your brand will identify events and conferences where you should be seen and heard. Engage with your writing community by going to book readings and to award ceremonies. Join writers' associations and those specializing in your genre. Join organizations that serve those interested in your subject and get involved with them.
- Offer yourself for interviews and your articles for publication in [targeted](#) media when current events relate to your brand by sending out media releases to the right people. (More about this in a subsequent article.)



**The results are gratifying:** When an editor wants an article on post-retirement travel, they think of you; when a publisher wants a book on BC history in the 1850s, they think of you; when a reader wants a Vancouver mystery, they think of you; when a media outlet wants an expert commentator, they think of you. That's what branding does for writers.

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