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Books: The new business card?

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By Blaise van Hecke, publisher and co-owner of Busybird Publishing

We live in an age of sharing. It's become both a form of self-promotion and networking.

Look at social media: outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, et al, allow us to tell the world the minutiae of our everyday lives. Parents post pictures of kids and boast of their accomplishments. Partners profess their love (or frustration) for one another. People tell you when they had a great day at work, or when some idiot cut them off on the road, or when they're miserable because they have a cold.

We share everything, and while some of us might frown on this as a practice, it's only going to become increasingly prominent as the next generation adopts this as their standard, and more and more outlets become available.

Ten years ago it was MySpace. Then Facebook came along. Then Twitter. There are new ones popping up all the time. Those who are successful are those who have learnt to complement the existing avenues, rather than supplant them. It's also instructive that people need to get in front of social networking to capitalise on their benefits.

Businesses have done this to an extent with Facebook pages. LIKE them on Facebook to learn more about them, and get their updates – unless you're one of those people who LIKES indiscriminately, and then disregards notifications of updates.

Still, we might catch an update in our newsfeed. These can serve a threefold purpose:

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1. To inform consumers of that business's existence
2. To interact with consumers
3. To advertise with consumers

The issue with this sort of thing is that any connection with a reader is both brief (in that it can only communicate a limited amount of information) and fleeting (in that the information is only there temporarily, before it's replaced by the unending Facebook feeds). It's hard to make a mark, and to engage people on any meaningful level.

So, where do we turn? Outside of typical avenues of advertising via television, radio or in print, or on the internet, how else can we reach out and touch people, to let them know we're out there, and what we do?

There is another traditional route remaining, and one that's becoming increasingly popular: writing a book about your business.

It's actually astonishing this is not an outlet that has been used more in the past. Sure, we might get weighty biopics about magnates or their fat corporations – particularly when they fall into disrepute, or bankruptcy (or both) – but nobody has actually married the idea of writing a book as a form of promoting their business.

Now, this isn't a mindless commercial, an endless practice in selling yourself – ie the literary version of an infomercial. There is no better method to disconnect from a reader than to abuse their hospitality. The intent here is to establish a meaningful dialogue.

A book allows you to develop a relationship with your reader that the transitory nature of social media or other forms of advertising do not. You can explore your past, the nature of your business, as well as your goals – the boundaries are yours to determine. But in doing this we are promoting ourselves and our business (and our values), as well as engaging consumers in a way they have not been engaged before: intimately, with a view towards developing a long and productive relationship.

Books are becoming the business card of the current generation. They are ideal particularly for smaller business, trying to find an edge on their competition, trying to entrench themselves in the community or in their field, or simply trying to establish themselves and gain a foothold.

We all have a story to share with the world. Businesses themselves have their own story.

What's yours?

- Blaise van Hecke is the publisher and co-owner of Busybird Publishing. She is also the author of *The Book Book: 12 Steps to Successful Publishing* and a contributing author to *Self-Made: Real Australian Business Stories*. For more information visit www.busybird.com.au or contact busybird@bigpond.net.au

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