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BOOK MARKETING: How to Unlock Valuable & Powerful Social Media Opportunities Interview with Rich Brooks

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest is an Internet marketing expert. Rich Brooks is founder and president of Flyte New Media, a web design and marketing firm that helps clients increase their online visibility, drive more qualified traffic to their sites, and convert that traffic into leads and business.

He's a nationally recognized speaker on entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and social media. He's the founder of The Agents of Change, an annual conference and weekly podcast that focuses on search, social, and mobile marketing. He's also a regular contributor to socialmediaexaminer.com, the world's most popular social media marketing blog. He's the tech guru on Maine's Channel 6 Evening News, and teaches web marketing and social media courses for entrepreneurs at the University of Southern Maine's Center for Continuing Education. Rich, welcome to the show, and thank you for being this week's special guest, expert, and mentor.

Rich Brooks: I'm glad to be here, Susan. Thanks for having me.

Susan Friedmann: Let's dive in and chat about social media, and look at where are some of the big opportunities right now for new authors on social media. What's your thinking on that?

Rich Brooks: I think that's a great question, and I don't believe that there's one-size-fits-all. Obviously there's going to be a lot of different types of authors out there, a lot of different types of books, topics, whatever it is, and I run into this with small business owners as well, you have to understand your audience, and you have to know where your audience hangs out online. It would be wrong for me to say, "Oh, you need to be on Facebook, because everybody's there." Well, yeah, everybody is there, seemingly, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're ripe to hear

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about your book and get excited about what you have to share with the world.

So it could be that it's Facebook, but, you know, maybe if you were skewing for a slightly younger audience, that it might be better for you to be on Instagram or Snapchat. Or, if this is a B2B book that you have, you might be ... Business to business ... You might be thinking more about creating more content on LinkedIn. Depending on the type of topic, it also might be something ... I consider blogs and podcasts to be part of the social media milieu, and so it might be about creating content in those platforms.

The most important thing is to know who you're writing for, and once you know that, then you can start to do some research and find out exactly where those people hang out online. I wouldn't just stop with the big social media names that everybody throws around, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest. I'd also think about smaller social media platforms that might be around a specific topic or niche, and that can also be a great way to find really passionate users. Even things like discussion forums for specific topics might be great places to get questions, to establish yourself as an expert, and then start putting links to where they can buy your books locally or online, where people start to say, "Hey, that's person's really an expert in gardening," or "that person's really an expert in romance," or whatever the case may be.

Susan Friedmann: Well, that's right up my street, Rich, because I believe in niche markets. Where would authors go about finding out what the sort of niche platforms are? Where are they, where do they find them?

Rich Brooks: That's a good question, and I think probably the best place to start is just by Google, where I do all my research. If I were looking for, say, people who were do-it-yourselfers, you know, because I was writing a do-it-yourself book, I might put in, like, DIY or do-it-yourself forums, do-it-yourself discussion boards, do-it-yourself blogs, do-it-yourself podcasts, those sorts of places, and so just ... And I forgot to ask before we started, Susan, but does your audience span both nonfiction as well as fiction, or is it just one or the other?

Susan Friedmann: It's primarily nonfiction, but we do have a few fiction listeners as well.

Rich Brooks: In the nonfiction world, which I probably can speak more intelligently to, like let's just use the do-it-yourself thing, like if you were going to create some do-it-yourself content, some of the things that I might be

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looking for is, are there blogs that are looking for do-it-yourself content? One of the things that I might do is do a search on Google that would be like "a guest blog plus DIY," and that would help me find blogs that are targeting my audience that are interested in getting guest blog posts from somebody like me. And, chances are, if I can write a do-it-yourself book ... And in my mind, I'm thinking about handyman type stuff, or I should say, "handyperson" type stuff, then I'm probably going to find those blogs that are looking for fresh content.

I should also preface this to say that I am a huge proponent of having a piece of real estate that you own and control on the Internet, that social media is very fleeting, things change all the time, and so it's critically important for every author to have a website of their own that they can drive traffic to, something that they completely control, including the domain name. Once I have that in place, then I might do what I'm saying now, and find some guest blogging opportunities. I don't get paid for writing these articles, but I do get to create links back to my website, which is going to help people find me, and on my website, I'll probably have an opportunity for people to sign up for my email newsletter. I might go to iTunes, and I might do a search on DIY, and then I'm going to find all the podcasts that are about DIY, and then I might find which ones actually are more interview-like shows, and then I might pitch myself as an expert in the DIY community, and that, again, might help me get more links in to my website, as well as introduce me to my ideal readers.

Susan Friedmann: Which is a great way for authors to build their brand using social media, and as you say, having their own website, which is key here, because who knows? I mean, Facebook's here today, but maybe it's gone tomorrow. I don't want to put all my eggs into one basket. I know you claim that maybe social media has changed the way we do business today. Do you want to comment on that?

Rich Brooks: Well, I do believe that it's changed the way we do business, and it's been very good for our business, as well as our clients' business, in many industries, not necessarily all industries, but in many industries, because it does a lot of different things. It creates a personality for your company. Now, if you're an individual author, chances are, you already have a personality, but social media definitely gives you an opportunity to show people [inaudible 00:06:47] the creative process. There's a lot of ways ... Of course now I've got DIY stuck in my brain, but, you know, if I was showing people how to fix their kitchen sink, as an example, I might create a short video that I would post up to YouTube or Snapchat or Instagram, for instance, as a way of kind of building an audience and

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building trust with people, because people are going to buy from people they trust, so if they see my face, whether it's on a video or a photo or a quote, they're going to start to trust me more, assuming that what I say makes sense to them.

So that's going to help, definitely. That being said, as much as social media is important, I think that too many small businesses, entrepreneurs, and authors put too much stock in it. I work with a lot of small businesses, I've worked with a number of authors, I am an upcoming author myself, and social media plays a part, but you have to realize that it's just one part. Search engine optimization is going to play another part, and building an email list, so there's a lot of different things that are going to make the difference.

I find, these days, that it's much tougher to get noticed in social media than it was just five years ago, so you have to be, in social media, very creative in what you say, because so many other businesses are out there. For example, there are probably a hundred thousand YouTube videos dedicated to makeup, but there's also people out there who have created a niche ... Or [nitch 00:08:10], I guess, depending on how French or American I sound right now ... That they created videos that show you how to look like your favorite actor or actress. Now, that was something nobody was doing, and that built up a lot of momentum for them.

Yes, you can use social, yes, it has changed the ways, but you still have to be unique and interesting and provide value for people. But at the end of the day, it's not the only thing you should be doing, and going out and just hoping that a Twitter account or an Instagram account is going to change, helping you sell hundreds of thousands of more books, is just ludicrous. That you're still going to have to put in work, and you're still going to have to find those people online, you're still going to have to provide value and somehow bring them into your circle, bring them into your audience.

I think a lot of that might come down to using social to move them to your website, but then on your website, getting them to join an email list, or if you've got a podcast, getting them to subscribe to the podcast. I think it becomes a supplemental thing, and I think a lot of authors have succeeded in the past because they've created a blog around their topic of interest, which led into the book, or they've created a podcast either to support their book or as a way of gathering information which then

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becomes a book. So, social is important, but it is not a silver bullet, and I think authors have to remember that.

Susan Friedmann: What I hear you saying is that they shouldn't rely on, let's say, selling their book through social media. Is that correct?

Rich Brooks: Definitely not. I mean, it's great that you might sell a few copies, but again, I think you want to bring people back to your website, and on your website, you should have some sort of mailing list, so that when your book is ready to come out, if it hasn't already come out, that you can let people know. I think you want to build up excitement and anticipation, so for example, using social, you might drive people to your website, and on your website, it might say something like "download a free chapter of my book." Assuming that they got there, and assuming that the topic is interesting to them, they're going to be likely to want to download that free copy. And to do so, you're going to email it to them, so then you've captured their email address. Now, when your book is ready, you know that the people who have asked for a free chapter, well, they're interested in what you have to say, to the degree that they were willing to give up their email address, and thus, they've given up access to the most profitable, or the most influential part of the entire Internet, which is their inbox, so that's pretty powerful.

I find that email marketing ... Social media gets all the attention, and it's sexy, and it's new, and it's shiny, but email marketing, in my opinion, is a much more powerful tool for authors to really build an audience, and then be able to sell more copies of their books. Social's a great way of meeting people; email's a great way of selling product.

Susan Friedmann: That begs the question of building that list. So many people are relying on social to build that list. What would your recommendations be in terms of that?

Rich Brooks: There are so many great approaches that people can take. For example, one thing on Facebook. Facebook changes all the time, and if you've got a business page, as opposed to a personal profile, to promote your book, the problem is that Facebook isn't going to give it a lot of love in the news feed, so you need to buy some ads. What I see a lot of people doing is using Facebook ads to drive people to some sort of opt-in page. Now, there's a lot of different ways that you can raise awareness. You could do a giveaway, like a few copies of your book, it could be the free chapter that I mentioned earlier. Maybe you put on a webinar, a free

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webinar that's related to your topic. All those things require people to give you their email address, and you can frame it in such a way that they'll also be getting great information from you on a regular basis.

Those are definitely some ways that you can leverage social media. In fact, both Facebook and Twitter, and probably other platforms as well, have ways that people can sign up for an email newsletter right within the social media program, so you don't even have to leave Facebook, or leave Twitter; they can actually share their contact information with you right then. I am a big fan of webinars; I've seen a lot of power in this platform, so if you're writing a cookbook, you know, having a webinar on how to stock your kitchen properly, or if, especially gluten-free, which is a hot topic, you know, how to stock a gluten-free kitchen so you can cook anything you want, and you do a webinar that shows off your expertise, this builds an interested audience, and they're going to give you their email address to be able to access this webinar.

Those are some ways. I might have some recipes on my website, even if they're also featured in my book, and to download the calorie count, or to get a printable sheet of the recipe, that might be something that's behind an email registration. All these tactics are ways that I can build up my list of interested people, so again, I'm not buying any lists here. I'm getting people excited about what I have to offer, I'm attracting people who are interested in my gluten-free recipes, and getting rid of anybody who has no interest in that type of stuff, and that way, I can talk to a true, pure audience who are going to be much more interested in buying my book when it comes out.

Susan Friedmann: I love that information. You did mention blogs earlier. Let's talk about the importance of blogs. What's your feeling on that?

Rich Brooks: Blogging is probably my favorite platform when it comes to social or SEO, and the reason is, is because it does both. I personally love to write; like, it's my easiest way to express myself, and also, I love search engine optimization, the art of ranking higher in Google. Blogging does both. Every blog post I create, and there's a lot of techniques to this, but every blog post I create, the goal is to answer a question or provide some information for somebody who would be searching for a company like mine, flyte new media. We're a digital agency, so we work with small businesses; what do they want? Well, they want to rank higher in the search engines, they want to generate more leads online, they want to figure out social media, so I create content on my blog that answers those questions.

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Well, when they go to Google, they ask these questions, and if my blog post answers their question better than anybody else's ... And there's a lot more to it than that, but if it's a relevant answer, then Google's going to show one of my blog posts as a potential answer. Every blog post I create creates a new web page, and every web page is another opportunity to rank well for something that my ideal customer is searching for. That's how I use blogs to bring people into the flyte new media fold. Once they're there, they hopefully can see all the things my company has to offer.

Now shift this over to what an author may do. I'm writing a book, as I mentioned, and hopefully it'll be published soon; it's all about how to generate more leads online. So I could write blog posts about all the different techniques that I talk about in the book about how to generate more leads online; people go to the website, and then maybe there's some sort of opt-in there. They've done a search, and the blog post answers that specific search. I'm establishing myself as an expert, I'm getting in front of more people, and then hopefully, they're either opting into an email newsletter, if I don't have the book ready yet, or when the book is ready for sale, maybe they're like, "Hey, this guy provides all this information for free; imagine what I'm going to get if I actually buy his book," and then all of a sudden, they're going over to Amazon, or they're being directed to a local bookstore where they can buy my book.

Susan Friedmann: I believe that there are different types of blogs. Can you address that for us?

Rich Brooks: In terms of the different types of blog, do you mean, like, are there different types of blog posts we might create?

Susan Friedmann: Well, different formats of blogging.

Rich Brooks: The beautiful thing about a blog is it's really just a printing press, so, for example, I like to write "Dear Abby," I call them "Dear Abby"-style posts, where I do a question and answer, and often, those questions come directly from my clients asking me questions via email or in person. There's also different types of blogs where I might create a video, upload it to YouTube, and then embed that video back in my blog and write some additional content about it. I also have my podcast, The Agents of Change, and we do a full transcript of every show and include both the audio and the transcript in each one. Those are definitely some formats. I personally am a big fan of WordPress as a platform. It's a

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great content management system for your entire website, and it's a great blogging platform, so that's usually where I focus my attention.

Susan Friedmann: You talked about SEO. Let's talk about some basics of SEO, and things that our authors need to know. First of all, tell us what it is, exactly, and then what are some of the basics that our authors need to know?

Rich Brooks: Well, why don't you, Susan, give me an example of one author, not necessarily by name, but a topic that you know of one of your listeners, and so I don't use the DIY example every time.

Susan Friedmann: Well, we have a lot of motivational books, also a lot of self-help books.

Rich Brooks: Well, self-help, like, are we talking about weight loss, are we talking about parenting?

Susan Friedmann: It could be weight loss, it could be parenting, it could be ...

Rich Brooks: Let's do parenting, because weight loss is a very, very competitive industry, and it's going to take a lot of work to get noticed for weight loss, and it's one of Google's hardest topics to crack, because they have stricter rules around health issues and financial issues than just about anything else. You really have to establish your expertise when you're playing in that sandbox.

So let's go with parenting. Okay, so I'm a parenting expert, I've got a book coming out, I want to get in front of people, I want people to find me when they Google things. I might just take a look at all the chapters in my book that I've got ready to go, and in those, I'm sure there are a lot of questions that either I've been asked, maybe because I'm a therapist, or just because I'm good at parenting, so I'm going to create some content around that. Let's say one is about how to deal with teenagers who don't listen.

Okay, so then I've got my topic, and I start coming up with some ideas of what are the kind of questions that people are going to ask, what are the phrases that I want to rank well for. Well, let's say that I come up with a list of 10 to 15 keyword phrases, and it could be something like, you know, "teenagers," "bad teens," "disrespectful children," "discipline issues," whatever it may be. I go and I use a free tool online called Google's Keyword Planner, and, believe it or not, you can Google that and you'll find it. You have to register, but it is a free piece of software.

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You can use it also to bid on the Google AdWords, but we're not going to use it for that right now; we just want to do some research.

So I put in those phrases into the Keyword Planner, and what Google does is it spits back all of the phrases based on ... And related phrases that I haven't even thought of yet, based on everybody's search history. It's going to tell me what are the most popular search phrases, how many times each month they're searched on, and then also, what kind of competition I can expect out there in terms of, like, how many other websites are competing to rank well for the same term. Based on that information, that may change some of the words that I'm using. Like, "disciplining teens" may turn out to be a phrase that nobody's searching for, or that has a lot of competition, so that's not what I'm going to really be targeting.

"Well-behaved teens," although that seems like an unlikely term, might be something that a lot of people are searching for, but doesn't have as much search competition. So then I'm going to write a blog post called "Well-Behaving Teens: How to Get Your Own," and then I'm going to make sure that I use the phrase "well-behaved teens" a few times within the blog post, not so it sounds spammy, but just so that Google knows what this is all about. Then, I might have it link over to another related post somewhere on my blog, and I'll publish this post, and then I might even find some other blog post that I've created, and I might link back to this specific post using the words "well-behaved teen."

There's a lot more to it, but those are the basics. If you can create content that uses the language of the person searching for your content, your ideal customer, and not just once, but if you create content on a regular basis, like maybe start off, if you've never blogged before, with a blog post once a week or once every other week, for six months or so. That's going to start to establish you in the eyes of Google as an expert. A lot of that is what's called "on-page optimization," meaning that the words on the page match up with a search somebody did.

The other side of the equation that you need to be aware of is what's called "off-page optimization," and that's the number and quality of incoming links to yours. There's a lot of techniques to do this, but I'll share with you the one that I like doing, and actually I've found to be very effective, and that's guest blogging. I might go out and find some mommy blogs, and some parenting blogs, and some other online resources like that, and I'll use that same technique I mentioned before.

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I might say, like, "guest blog, parenting blogs," and I'll Google that search, and I'll find parenting websites and blogs that are looking for guest writers, and so then I'll repurpose my content, it won't be the same post, it'll be something related, and then I'll link back to my original post. When Google sees that, they'll see that there's a website that created a link into mine, and all things being equal, that's going to help increase my search engine visibility as well.

Susan Friedmann: Fabulous information. As you know, I like to talk about mistakes, common mistakes people make. Let's focus it on the social media, let's go back to the social media and talk about mistakes people make in that arena.

Rich Brooks: So, mistakes that people make, one thing would be is to think that their book is the most important thing in other people's lives. Now, surely, it's going to be the most important thing in some people's lives, but if all you're doing is just talking about your book, and how awesome your book is, and how many people it's going to help, and all these [inaudible 00:21:46], people are going to tune that out. You know, it's an old saw, but, you know, as it goes, everybody's tuned in to one radio station, WII-FM, "what's in it for me." They're not going to care about your new book, or how many hours you put into it, or anything like that. They may care that this book can help them solve some of their problems.

So if I'm creating this book on parenting, I'm going to share a lot of content on social media about parenting, and maybe about parenting teens, because again, I'm going to try and niche this down as much as I can, but 80% of the stuff I share is not going to be about my book, or even my own content. I might be sharing things that I read in Fox News, or Huffington Post, or NPR, or another blog from somebody I like, maybe another author whose stuff I really like. I'm going to make sure that people realize that I'm just interested in helping them with their parenting troubles when it comes to teenagers. Maybe I'll find a really nice article from the American Psychological Association on teenagers and the troubles they face in today's world, or something like that.

I'm going to be seen, and try and create this persona as the teenage parenting expert, and from then, I will start to attract a lot of people. But if I go in there guns blazing, thinking that everybody cares about my book, I'm going to be sadly mistaken, because everybody's dealing with their own thing, and they've got their own product to sell, or they've got their own problems, and very often, they're not coming to social media to learn about your book, they're coming to connect with friends and

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family. You really want to be careful and not come on too strong in social. As you said earlier, it's not a great place to sell your book, but it might be a great place to start to build a community, build an audience, and make connections that will ultimately lead you to more book sales.

One is trying to go too wide and not deep. One of the things that I often tell people just getting started in social media is you actually don't need to be everywhere. What I would focus on is having one social media platform and one social media network, and really nailing those. What I mean by that is a social media platform, a place where you can basically get out what you want to say, but still have some interaction. Years ago, I studied in London for a semester, and I used to love going down on Sundays to Hyde Park, to Speakers' Corner. There'd be people all around standing on overturned milk crates, or literal soapboxes, and they'd just be preaching whatever was important to them, whether it was politics, religion, women's rights, what have you, and crowds would gather of varying sizes, and occasionally they'd shout things back. And I'm like, now, I think that was the most close example in real life to what a blog is like, where somebody would get up on their platform, and then they would build an audience, and then people could leave comments and engage with them.

That's a very powerful platform, especially for authors, so whether it's a blog, or a podcast, or a YouTube channel, or a webinar, I think of all those as social media platforms. But you can't be great at everything, especially if you're a solopreneur, which most authors are. And then a social network as well, and again, this gets back to some of the earlier points about finding out where your audience hangs out. The social network is what most people think of when they think of social media. It could be Facebook, it could be Twitter, it could be Pinterest, it could be Snapchat, it could be LinkedIn. It's where your audience hangs out online the most, and I leverage those two things together, my strongest platform and the social media where my audience is hanging out, and I connect those two things. Over time, as I start to get better at them, and it becomes more natural, and it's not so painful to go post something to LinkedIn, or to create a story in Snapchat, then I might start adding some more things to my social media marketing.

Susan Friedmann:

I love the example of Hyde Park Corner. I had never thought of that in terms of being the old-fashioned way of social media. That's exactly what it is.

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Rich Brooks:

Yeah, social media and all of these digital marketing ... I mean, some people I talk to, and it feels so foreign to them, and I'm like, "It's not really that different." Yes, it's a little different, you have to get used to it. I know my dad, who's 75, when he finally got on Twitter, he would take him like four hours to craft 140 characters. Now, he's able to rip them off a little bit more easy. Because at the beginning, we think it's so different, but it's just a matter of going out and doing things.

People are trying to be perfect. You can't be perfect, and here's the beautiful thing about starting on a new platform: Nobody's going to notice anything you do for a while, so you can screw up, you can make mistakes, it's all okay. You can tweet, and it's a terrible tweet and it gets no response, but over time, you'll start to feel like a native, and you'll start to figure out how to best use hashtags, or what times of day should you be posting to Facebook, because you're going to see responses. You know, just like a little kid throwing rocks into a lake, you're going to start to see those ripples, and you start to pay attention to them, and it'll start to make sense.

Again, getting back to the question of "what are some of the mistakes," you do need to pay attention to what is going on, and you do need to measure things. Like I said before, you need to have a website; you also need to have Google Analytics installed so you know how many people are coming to your website, how they found you, and how they acted once they got to your website. Did they sign up for an email newsletter, did they download the free chapter you're offering, did they go to your table of contents page? What did they do when they were there, so that you can continually improve your digital marketing, and continue to improve the results you get from that marketing.

Susan Friedmann:

Very wise words, thank you. If our listeners wanted to contact you to find out more about your services, how could they go about that, Rich?

Rich Brooks:

Well, the easiest way to get in touch with me is reach out to me on Twitter. My Twitter handle is @therichbrooks, T-H-E Rich Brooks. That's actually where you can find me ... Or, that's how you can find me on almost every social platform, I'm always "therichbrooks." If you're looking for help, maybe, on marketing your own book, you can head on over to takeflyte, F-L-Y-T-E, .com, and if you love podcasts, like Susan's podcast here, and you want to learn more about digital marketing, head on over to theagentsofchange.com, and that's where you'll find my podcast, where we talk every week about search, social, and mobile marketing with experts around the world.

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- Susan Friedmann: Fantastic. And if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be?
- Rich Brooks: The golden nugget would be something we've kind of talked a little bit about already, which is just that it's really important for authors to be building their email list. Use social, but use it to drive traffic to your website, and give people reasons to get on your mailing list. A come-on that says "join my mailing list" is not enough; you need to develop a lead magnet, and for authors, a good one is always a free chapter, but it could be something else. Maybe it's a, "win a free signed autographed version of my book," we choose them weekly, or monthly, however often you want to do that. But definitely always be building your list, opt-in list, of interested people, and that's how you're going to build your audience, both for this book and every book you write in the future.
- Susan Friedmann: Wise words. Thank you so much. And thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview, and I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.