



Authors, Relationships, and Platforms: An Interview with Claire Reinburg of Clear Message Media

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The book publishing industry continues to evolve, thanks in large part to advances in technology. In this update to a 2010 interview with Claire Reinburg, <https://tinyurl.com/y94spmbh>, we will discuss topics relevant to the publishing world today such as author platforms, author relationships, and authors' use of social media to market themselves.

How does an editor build a strong relationship with an author?

At the heart of the editor-author relationship is mutual respect for the role each plays in content development and publishing. Authors create content to impart knowledge and tell an engaging story to their audiences. Editors facilitate that content creation by contributing editorial expertise to help authors refine their message and effectively reach their audiences. Editors who actively listen to and support authors in reaching their goals often have the strongest relationships with writers. The ideal editor and author relationships resemble a partnership where individuals with diverse talents support and respect one another and work toward mutual goals. As an editor, I've always appreciated learning from authors at the same time that I'm able to guide them in their publishing journey.

Has the transition from print to digital changed publisher-author relationships? If so, how?

To some extent the transition from print to digital has changed publisher-author relationships, but the foundation of the content-creation model remains the same. In many ways, publishers can open up even more opportunities to showcase an author's work through digital and online offerings as well as print. The biggest changes have been in planning from the start of the publication process, which formats the content and delivery methods to use, so that all the editorial and production steps can capitalize on both print and digital opportunities.

You've used the terms "nimble publishing" and "customized approach." Please elaborate and provide examples.

In previous years, publishing across nonprofits and commercial companies followed the same basic model. Authors signed certain publication rights over to the publisher and, in exchange, the publisher edited, produced, and promoted the author's work while sharing a percentage of

the proceeds with authors. Changes in the publishing landscape since our earlier interview in 2010 introduce many more opportunities for publishers and authors.

“Nimble publishing” is a flexible approach to delivering content that takes full advantage of the changes in content delivery and promotion. I find the most successful publishers now use every appropriate means to reach readers, from print pieces and publications to social media and “formats and media now known or later developed” (a little contract-lingo humor there!). Authors and their publishers or communications consultants can now better reach readers directly, whereas in the past most of that connection went through a publishing company. Authors are creating their own websites, connecting with readers and fellow authors via Twitter and Facebook, blogging, and otherwise forging direct lines of communication with their audiences.

I’ve seen many nonprofit and independent publishers at the forefront of this nimble approach to content creation, perhaps because they keep smaller staffs and encourage experimental thinking about how best to publish and publicize authors’ works. Coming from several of those smaller publishers, I can say we had to find new pathways to success out of necessity and also because we just liked breaking out on new paths to see what worked best for the authors and books we published.

Define “platform” as it applies to authors and book publishers.

It used to be a central story line in publishing that an editor or publishing house “discovered” an author and voilà – a bestseller was born. That scenario certainly still happens, but think of all the other author narratives we’ve heard, too. I once heard Andy Weir, author of *The Martian*, describe his path to publication, and it was a fascinating tale of crowdsourcing his idea and using his online community to help guide elements of his novel. There are authors who self-published their first books and then were approached by agents or publishing houses and found new homes for subsequent books.

Many authors establish their own platforms on social media or other venues before they even publish work. The newer subscription sites like [Substack](#) are a fascinating development, where authors like [historian Heather Cox Richardson](#) (*Letters From an American*) reach tens of thousands of subscribers and engage in conversations virtually through this novel platform. Having a platform of any kind on the web or at an association, university, or company can lead to becoming a published author. It used to be the books themselves provided the platform, but now more authors bring a strong platform to the publisher and they branch off together into a publishing project.

How do an author and a publisher build a platform to promote their books?

Social media may be the most common way besides the publisher’s website and Amazon that an author and a publisher build a platform to promote books. Readers in different content areas often cluster in a particular social-media platform, so beginning in the most popular venue for the author’s field is a good place to start. Many teachers, for example, have professional learning communities through Twitter and Facebook. A number of popular authors also use Twitter, and it gives them a direct line to readers and may attract new readers to their work. An author could also create a basic website and perhaps blog from that site. There are so many other opportunities, as well, to establish a platform, including through virtual events and in-person appearances and talks (when we move to having those again).

Do you have any “dos and don’ts” for authors using social media to build their platform?

As far as “dos,” I encourage authors to be themselves on social media and go more informal in communications while maintaining professionalism. Definitely promote your events and your work, but don’t make those promotional messages the only reason for your social media posts. Do connect with other authors on social media and follow back those who follow you. Engage with them as you are able to with your writing and speaking commitments.

The only “don’t” I will mention is don’t post too often; your voice and expertise are why readers will follow you, so stick to what you know and use your platform for good. Another caution: people say sharing and retweets don’t constitute endorsements, but really? If you are promoting another user’s content, it’s kind of an endorsement, so keep that in mind. People will take your guidance, and you want to be a trusted source for content.

How does Clear Message Media serve authors, associations, and publishers?

Carole Hayward, our executive director at [Clear Message Media](#), has built a strong team that includes publishing professionals who have worked in nonprofit and association publishing for many years. We know well the areas where authors and organizations could use additional resources and support. The previous ways authors reached their readers almost all involved their publishers. Now there are so many ways authors, either on their own or with help from a team like ours, can directly communicate with readers and find new audiences. I mentioned earlier Twitter, Facebook, blogs, online events, and websites as avenues for authors to converse with their readers.

If an author needs support in social media or blogging, our team can work with them and bolster not only their efforts but also those of their publisher. More visibility and better connections with the author’s audiences can also boost book sales. There’s so much room in the current publishing landscape for authors and their teams to use novel means to foster the relationship between readers and authors. I’m really excited at the opportunity Clear Message Media will give me to focus exclusively on authors and their work and contribute to helping them expand their reach.

Thanks to Liz Novak of IAPD for her review of these questions

Also of Interest: *An Experienced Textbook Author’s Views on Acquisitions Editors*, 2019, 2 pages <https://tinyurl.com/y7ey69ye>

Clear Message Media <https://www.clearmessagemedia.org>

About Claire Reinburg

Claire Reinburg joined Clear Message Media as Director of Author Relations in January 2021. In her new role, she focuses on helping authors build their platforms and reach more readers through novel channels. Claire previously directed NSTA Press, the book-publishing arm of the National Science Teaching Association, where she built NSTA’s book and e-book program and expanded STEM and science resource offerings to teachers in grades kindergarten through college. She launched NSTA Kids, an award-winning trade books imprint. Prior to that, Claire served as editorial director of the American Psychiatric Association’s publishing subsidiary, directing acquisition and development of new books and leading the journals program. Her career in publishing and content development has included editorial and management positions at scientific, medical, and educational organizations. She holds a master’s degree in English

from Georgetown University and has presented at both local and national meetings of association publications professionals.

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About John B. McHugh

John B. “Jack” McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary’s Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. He is a member of the ASAE Advisory Board for Publishing, Communications, and Media Issues and Practices.

Jack’s specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, career management, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, new ventures, organizational design, and social media strategy and policy. Mc Hugh is also the manager of the LinkedIn™ group, **Association** and **Nonprofit Publishing**.

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