

Building a platform part three

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

November 28, 2012

Now that we've talked about [why](#) we should build a platform and we've established a couple of big ideas, let's get down to some steps that a person can take to build a platform. These are things that you'll need to do to build content and to get the word out about your writing.

Contribute to magazines and on-line publications. You are probably way more fascinating than Elizabeth Gilbert, but before you write that best seller that has Julia Roberts itching to play your role, know that the way to get published is to... well... get published. That means begin at the beginning. Get up every morning and write a post or work on an article. Then submit.

- Magazines.** Does your denomination have a publication? Do you have a favorite, small magazine that you read? It's difficult to do blind submissions, because magazines have set topics that they work around for each issue. But if you can find out what those topics are, then you can submit something based on that. However, your best bet will be in reviews. Magazines tend to need book reviews and authors need their books reviewed. So that's a great place to start.

- Newspapers.** Do you know any editors at the local paper? Can you make an appointment with someone? The last time I reached out to the newspaper editor (I wrote a letter in support of something she said because I knew she was going to be attacked by some of the fundie preachers in town), I not only got a venue, but she began attending our church, and I made a great friend. Invite an editor to lunch. Try to find out what they need.

- Contribute to compiled volumes.** If you have a chance to contribute to an edited volume or anthology, it's usually a good idea. It often allows your writing to be read by a completely different audience, encourages you to make more connections, and gives you something to list on your CV.

•**On-line publications.** The strange thing about writing now is that most print magazines (especially in religion) have subscribers who are retirement age or older. Unless a magazine has a robust on-line strategy, they are not going to last long because younger generations read stuff on the Net.

Think about it. *Huffington Post* is one of the fastest growing news outlets. While print news is trying to gasp for breath, they skyrocketed. *Newsweek* announced that they will no longer be producing a hard magazine, but they will be going digital.

Even though the trends are clear, the dollars are biased toward tradition. Advertisers love print, so magazines can charge ten times the advertising dollars for print. (I always find it odd that seminaries and conference centers that are trying to attract younger people put ads in print while neglecting digital. I guess they haven't figured out that they need to do both.)

Publications have to invest on-line lest they go into doomed obscurity, but they don't get a lot of money out of their on-line presence right now. The upside is that this can be good for people who want to break into writing. A publication might need a lot of digital content, and we can provide it for them. Then we can get what we need—more connections with editors and readers.

Think about the digital venues that you read. Contact the editor and see if they need content and send them a sample of your work. You can do a 5-paragraph, 800-word blog post—intro, three points, and a conclusion.

Host or contribute to group blog efforts. Often, people will host a blog by different authors. You can ask to be a contributor. Blogging can be a lonely affair, but it's fun when you're working with other motivated people.

Engage in social media. I've written a lot about this... but social media matters. I read the newspaper daily. I go to conferences 2-3 times a month, and I still get 90% of my information from social media. Twitter works as a news aggregator. Pick a platform and get active.

Ask for an introduction. If you would like to write for a certain publication and you don't have any sort of relationship with the editor, but you know another writer who does, then you can ask the author to introduce you to the editor. That goes with

book publishing too. So far, I have not worked with an agent, but I have had some wonderful author friends who have introduced me and recommended my work (via email) to editors. Many agents don't represent religious authors, even though religious work makes up a huge segment of books that sell. And if they do, they often only represent Evangelical authors. So if you have not found someone to represent you, you're not doomed. We can be agents for one another.

Tomorrow, I'll write about what to do once you have your content established and you'd like to start speaking.