Virtual Book Tour Basics:
How to Connect with Your Audience and Sell More Books Without Leaving Home

By Sandra Beckwith

www.buildbookbuzz.com
A virtual book tour (also known as a book blog tour) is a popular book marketing tactic because it lets authors reach their book’s target audiences through online conversations, reviews, guest blog posts, and book excerpts that can lead to sales – all without leaving your office.

A virtual book tour is a promotional tactic that lets you interact with bloggers and online media outlets in ways that help you get the word out about your book. Just like an in-person book tour, you select a timeframe for the tour and work to schedule specific appearances. The possibilities include:

- Live Webinar presentations
- Blog Q&As
- Guest columns on blogs
- Reviews of your book written by key bloggers
- Book excerpts
- Podcasts (audio interviews)
- Video interviews hosted on the blogs or sites of others
- Blogger hosted contests that offer your book as a prize

All of these options come to life on the blogs that are popular with the people we want to buy and read our books. They allow you to connect with readers personally, share enough information about your books to help people decide if they want to buy it, and – this is my favorite part – include a link to a site where people can purchase it immediately.

Here are 11 reasons you will want to consider planning and executing a blog or virtual book tour by contacting the blogs that are read and enjoyed by your book’s target audiences:

1. You will reach the people who should read your book. There’s a blog (or 20) for just about every niche imaginable, so no matter how small (or large) your market is, you’ll find a way to connect with your target audience through your online tour stops.

2. Readers can enjoy instant gratification. Most bloggers will add a link to your book that takes the reader to an online purchasing site, whether it’s an online independent retailer or Amazon.com or BN.com, or a purchase page on your website. People will be able to purchase your book immediately, while they’re interested and before they forget.

3. Publicity begets publicity. Once you start doing blog interviews, other bloggers will notice you and invite you to participate on their blogs, as well. One opportunity leads to another – and yet another. The exposure can also lead to publicity in traditional media outlets as well as speaking invitations.

4. Your interview, column, review, etc., remains online indefinitely. In-person book tour connections are fleeting – you talk to a group in a bookstore or another venue and then everyone moves on, with no record of the conversation left behind. But the content of online conversations is typically accessible for months and years.

5. You will reach far more people than you would in person. How many people attend the typical, non-celebrity book signing event? Most authors are underwhelmed – even discouraged – by the turnout. Moving your tour to the virtual world significantly increases the number of people you can reach with information about your book.

6. It’s less stressful. Most authors I know would rather be at their computer writing than talking about their book at a signing event. With an online blog tour, there are no worries about stage fright or forgetting what you wanted to say.
7. **You save a lot of money.** A virtual book tour completely eliminates all travel expenses associated with in-person book and media tours. And you don’t have to deal with flight delays or other transportation snafus.

8. **You don’t have to worry about what you’re going to wear.** In fact, you can do your interviews wearing pajamas and fuzzy slippers if you want to. Seriously – who wants to dress up for a public appearance when they can settle in for a relaxed e-chat anywhere they want, wearing anything they want?

9. **You’ll become easier to find.** People are using search engines today more than ever before to find information they need. Sharing information from and about your book on multiple sites makes it more likely that people who have never heard of you and your book will find it – and buy it – when your visibility helps you move closer to the top of a search engine results page.

10. **You’ll enhance your topic knowledge by connecting with people who are interested in it.** Blog readers often share anecdotes and ask questions that better prepare you for other interviews or that can contribute to your next book on the topic.

11. **It’s easy.** Identifying the blogs, learning what kind of information they use, and contacting them with a relevant and interesting offer is easy to do. It does take time, but it’s not hard. It’s so easy in fact, that you can outsource it to a smart college student or intern.

Virtual book tours are worthwhile for any author whose target audience is online. This tactic will not only help you sell books, it will expand your online network while showcasing your expertise or storytelling skills. Target the right blogs and contact them in an appropriate way, and you’ll see results.

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**How to set up your virtual book tour**

The process is pretty simple.

1. **Identify the blogs and online media outlets that reach your target audience**

   Here are a few resources for finding blogs to contact:
   - Google (your search term is your topic plus the word “blog”)
   - Technorati.com (select “blogs” when using the search box at the top of the page by the site logo)
   - Regator.com
   - Google Alerts – set up alerts for your book’s topic. The alerts, delivered via e-mail, will help you identify blogs covering your topic and will give you opportunities to comment. (For a complimentary report on how to set up Google Alerts, go to http://buildbookbuzz.com/tips/)
   - Solicit interviewers and reviewers through your social networks

2. **Compile a database or grid with each site’s contact name, e-mail address, site URL, notes about the site’s format, and specifics about what you like about the blog.**

   Your notes about the site’s format and the specifics about the blog will help you in the pitching process. You can use contact management software, create a table or grid in Word, or use Excel. What’s most important is that you use a system that works for you.
3. **Start becoming “known” on those sites by offering helpful, informative comments on blog postings.**

When commenting on blogs, include your book title and your blog or website address in a mini-signature with each comment. (You can start commenting as much as a year before your book is published.)

4. **Select your tour dates.**

Once your book’s publication date is firm and you have confirmed when books will be available for purchase, select a two- to three-week window for your virtual book tour. The length of your virtual tour depends on your schedule and the size of your destination list. A short list will take less time than a long list. Your books must be available for purchase when the tour starts.

5. **Craft each pitch.**

Authors seem to be especially intimidated by the “pitching” process. “Pitch” is just another word for sales letter. It’s what you say via e-mail that convinces the blogger or online journalist that they should open the door to some book-related content from you. (Because so many authors aren’t sure how to approach bloggers and others, I’ve included a virtual book tour e-mail pitch template and sample message in Build Book Buzz Publicity Forms & Templates at http://buildbookbuzz.com/publicity-forms-and-templates/)

You don’t pitch in a vacuum, though. That’s where the database or grid you’ve created comes in. What you pitch to one blog might not work for another, so you use your notes in the grid to help you decide what to offer each individual site. Sometimes it’s real obvious – you wouldn’t offer an article to the host of an online radio program or podcast. You’d stress that you’re an interesting and animated guest – the kind of person that people will want to listen to. If you’ve noticed that the blogger or media site uses a lot of guest columns, that’s what you should pitch, and perhaps add a few suggested column topics to your pitch, too. It’s definitely not a one-size-fits-all process, which is why you don’t use a mass e-mail approach for this. Every site contact gets an individually crafted pitch.

6. **E-mail your pitches/requests.**

It’s as easy as hitting the “send” button, then tracking the responses. No response? Forward your original message with a friendly reminder note.

You’ll need to add a few more columns or fields to your database or grid for response tracking – both theirs and yours. Note what and when you hear from those you’ve contacted, how and when you responded, and due dates for content or next steps. Then keep your calendar handy so you can log all activity appropriately and deliver what you’ve promised when you’ve promised it.

7. **Share your tour schedule.**

Once your calendar is set, publish your tour schedule on your website or blog with links to your host blogs. Promote each engagement through social networking and e-mail announcements to your mailing list so that those who have already identified themselves as fans, admirers, or supporters have an opportunity to enjoy each interview or online event.

Virtual book tours truly are fun and easy! I hope you have fun with yours. And do let me know if you have questions – just send me a note at sb@buildbookbuzz.com!

### About the Author

**Sandra Beckwith** is a former national award-winning publicist who now teaches authors how to be their own book publicists through her “Build Book Buzz” educational materials and programs. Get her free special report, *Beyond the Press Release: 10 Exciting Book Buzz Ideas That Will Take You to the Top*, when you subscribe to her free Build Book Buzz newsletter at www.buildbookbuzz.com. Sandra is also the author of three books, including one about publicity for small businesses and another on publicity for nonprofits.

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