

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 90

How a “No-Content” Book Became a #1 Bestseller on All of Amazon

with Michael J. Knowles

Welcome to this episode of the Real Fast Results podcast! Today’s special guest is the infamous indie author and publisher Michael J. Knowles. He is a managing editor and cultural correspondent at The Daily Wire and a recent Yale graduate. In addition to that, he’s also a fine actor, but right now, he’s best noted as the author of *Reasons to [Vote for Democrats: A Comprehensive Guide](#)*. This book became a bestseller on Amazon, and not just a bestseller in one certain category, but the bestseller over all the books on Amazon. If you didn’t know, this is actually a gag book, filled with almost no content until you reach an extensive bibliography at the end.

Coming Up With the Idea for This Book

I wish that there were some elaborate story about how I was going to market this thing and that I knew it was going to make it to #1. That really, wasn’t it. I thought it would be a funny gag. I was just sitting on the couch with my fiancé, and I said, “You know, there really ought to be...” And, by the way, this is an old gag. This gag has been around since at least 1880, which is when the Republican ticket of Chester Arthur and James Garfield published a blank book of their political opponent’s statesmanship and political achievements. Again, that was also republicans trolling democrats with this same gag.

I thought it would be kind of funny, and obviously, it worked right now, with the conservative movement and media. So, I thought I could sell \$50 or \$100, and mostly, I

just wanted to have one so that I could give it to my very left-wing aunts and uncles, and friends, and things like that. So, I designed it myself and called up a couple of friends of mine that are in the movement, the [Daily Wire crew](#) as well as [Ben Shapiro](#) and [Steven Crowder](#), and some of those kind of guys. I asked them for a blurb, and Shapiro said it was “Thorough”. That was the full review. We put it up there, and within three days, it was in the Top 10. Within four days, it was the #1 book in the world, and it sat there for almost two weeks.

The Cover

I’m very happy that I did the cover. I’m not a great designer, but it’s a blank book, so it’s not that hard. I was going to ask a friend of mine, who is an actual illustrator, to do it for me and say, “Let’s split the profits,” assuming that I’d make about \$100 on this thing. I’m very happy now, that I did not do that. Never before would there have been more litigation over a blank book.

The real question this brings up is, “Why did this one work?” There have been many versions of this. There’s a book on Amazon right now called *Irish - Erotica* that’s also blank, and so is *The Written Wisdom of the German People*. There are a bunch of books. Once I put mine up, there were like a million knockoffs, and none of them sold. So, the question is, “Why has this one done so well at this moment in time,” and I think this occurs only five months or so after President Trump is elected, after he’s injected this wild enthusiasm, humor, and kind of, madcap style to politics today.

So, You Think This Occurred because of the Situation?

Yeah, a little bit. I think that if there’s one thing that President Trump has shown us in the last two years, or however long he’s been running for president, it’s that a little sense of humor can go a long way in politics, and it has clearly been sorely missed over a number of years. I think just a little light-hearted fun, and not mean-spirited fun, by the way. One thing I like about the book is that it’s just a joke. It’s not mean. It’s not calling anyone racist, or sexist, or this, or that, and the other thing. It’s the kind of gift that you can give to your liberal friend and share a laugh over, and also get your point across [laughs].

The Strategy

Absolutely. You know, there was this interesting timeline of things. I was going to ask Ben or Andrew Clay, because I go on Andrew Clay’s podcast a lot. I was going to ask him to do something with Steven Crowder, or whatever. It’s these kind of political media, internet celebrities. I actually didn’t really need to because right away this book took off, just from posting on my own social media, Twitter account and Facebook, or

whatever. It took off until it was within the top 1,000 or so books on Amazon. I thought, “Wow, that’s really surprising. I can’t believe how fast that worked.” Then, it went up to around the top 500, and that’s when I started thinking, “Wow, this has some momentum to it.” It was only at that point I asked them to retweet it and put it out over [The Daily Wire](#).

I think the lesson to be learned from all of this is that... Obviously, I have a platform that I could use, like The Daily Wire crew, and some of the conservative media types are friends of mine, so they would promote it. But, after just getting lightning in a bottle, and the clear gift from God... I mean, like mana coming out of the sky... After that luck component, and the right timing of that, having a platform, and friends, and an infrastructure to promote the book... I think the job took care of itself. I think it did a lot more than any publisher would have ever been able to do for me.

Essentially, I’ve been building a platform for a long time, and I had a network of people. You know, I don’t work for [Steve Crowder](#), but we are friends. We have a relationship, professionally, and it’s the same with Krieger University, which is Dennis Krieger’s non-profit. Also, actually, Dennis himself. I went on his show to talk about the book. These are just, sort of, friends of mine and relationships that I have. Clearly, they were right in the wheelhouse for this book. They fit right into that niche. So, they were more than happy to promote it. I think they probably would have promoted it even if they didn’t know me.

Having that network and that platform really... It’s like Adam Carolla says, you have a pirate ship, and you don’t need to wait on publishers. I mean, truly, between the time that I sketched out the cover of the book, and formatted the pages, and got it on Amazon was about 24 hours. I was able to get that up there really quickly. The amazing thing, especially for people who are interested in indie publishing, is that when you show success, people want to buy your product.

You know, if I had gone to a publisher and said, “Hey, I want to publish a blank book,” I would have been laughed out of the room. Since I sold, like, 80,000 copies in a week and a half or so, I had people calling me. I mean, major publishers were calling me and trying to buy the book, to the point where I had to hire a literary agent to publish a very non-literary work. They actually had an auction to buy a blank... You know, a message and a phenomenon.

How Big Is Your Platform?

You know, my own social platforms are relatively small, just like anybody’s. Now I guess it’s bigger, after the book blew up, but you know, I might have had 3,000 Twitter followers, or something, and maybe 3,000 Facebook friends, or something like that. Since I contribute to different websites, as I’m sure many of you do, those platforms open up a lot. I write for [The Daily Wire](#) and help edit that website. That website has 40,000,000 page views a month.

I mean, that is a massive website. So, even if you're only getting one post up there, it's being seen by a huge number of eyeballs, and that can do much, much more than your own personal platform could ever do. It can really can do more for you than most publishers could. You know, the job of the publisher is to get you to those outlets. If you can do it yourself, then why should you have the middleman take a cut?

I've done guest blog posts all over the Internet. I've written for a dozen or two dozen websites, writing guest posts or whatever. Even at *The Daily Wire*, I don't write regularly all the time. I'll edit parts of the website, and I'll go on the Andrew Klavan show and contribute as a cultural correspondent, but I've only written a dozen, or half a dozen, pieces over there. But, it's enough to give you an imprint, and to give you a platform, so that when you pull up people that you've worked with at these websites, or have done other things with, that you can ask, "Hey, would you give me a little plug." Usually, they will be happy to do it because it doesn't cost them anything.

One thing that I think was essential with this book, [*Reasons to Vote for Democrats*](#), is that it capitalized on this moment in trolling culture and the internet culture. The right wing is much better at the internet, I think, than our friends on the left. We're just much better at it, and I think it's because we've been shut out of all of the mainstream outlets for so long.

We've been shut out of Hollywood, and obviously, the mainstream news media. Comedy Central, I think, doesn't allow conservatives within 300 yards of their building, and that's even though my book is trouncing Trevor Noah's book. Those shows haven't been funny for years. So, where do we go? We go into the Wild West, which is online, and conservatives are able to express their wit, and their intelligence, and their cleverness. I published a blank book, and it got 2,000 reviews. These were so funny and so biting, and people wanted to spread this around. It felt like a real accomplishment in the suppressive left-wing culture that conservatives could say, "Ha! Finger in your eye. We made a joke about you the #1 seller in the world."

How Long Have You Been Networking Like This?

I have done it for a while. I've been in the conservative political world for seven or eight years, probably, and maybe even more. But, not in a totally concerted effort. I mean, I'd work on a campaign, I'll advise a politician, I'll write for some websites, I'll copy edit, I'll do this, and I'll do that. I'll volunteer for certain organizations, and I'll be a member of certain fellowships. The least secret society in the world is the Hollywood conservative group, which is called The Friends of Abe, and a much oppressed minority we are.

You know, you just participate in that, and it's like any other professional endeavor. You very often find out that industries are much more communities than they are businesses. They are just people, and if you're interested in that world... I was quite interested in politics and the conservative movement, and I'm concerned about the state

of the country, so you'll just naturally gravitate towards what you're interested in and what you're good at. Being in that world gives you a huge leg up, compared to if you had started from scratch and had to build up an entire platform by yourself.

I wish that I could take more credit for being an evil genius, or some kind of wizard. I'd be happy to take it. But, there is something, I think, to be learned about not planning every single thing out to the nth degree. You know, I got engaged about a month ago, and about two weeks later, mana fell from the sky. I was joking that God was clearly pleased with my decision. In the old days, he probably whispered to people and gently suggested things. Today, we're such dolts that he has to shake us around and say, "You idiot! Why don't you pay attention?"

I've been in conservative politics for a while, to some degree, and I've done a lot of campaigns. Especially in show business, I've tried many tactics to gain any ounce of notoriety, or money, or anything, and it was the least likely thing that suddenly became a hit. So, there is, I think, an important bit of advice to get from this, and that is to constantly be doing *that* thing. Constantly be in that world working, contributing, and taking on lots of different aspects of it, and I think that you'll have a greater likelihood of success. I think that if I had said I'm going to dedicate six months to this ridiculous prank, and seeing if it would go anywhere, I think the likelihood of that not working would be almost 100%, except that lightning struck.

I'm glad I had the idea. I think it was a fun idea, and I think that I hit the right tone. People are really sick of angry, vicious political attacks, whether they are humorous or not. The infrastructure that I had available to me had to have been there or none of this would have worked. Then, that last "special sauce" was luck or providence, but it was indispensable without that. Of course, I don't think that would have done very much if the groundwork hadn't been there for however many years.

Connecting with Michael

The best way is probably through Twitter. It's @MichaelJKnowles, but I'm on every platform. You can find me on [Facebook](#) or on Twitter. I'm sure that you can find my email on a million pages that are out there. But, please do connect. This is one aspect I've really loved about this whole experience, and that is talking personally with people. It may take a while, but I'll always get back to you. I'd love to hear everyone's thoughts. It's been a really fun and totally surreal experience for me, but the most amusing part is reading what everyone else is writing. I mean, those reviews on Amazon, and those Tweets, are really made up of some genuinely funny humor. So, send them at me because I look forward to reading them.

Real Fast Results Community

If you are diggin' on this stuff and really love what we're doing here at Real Fast Results, would you please do me a favor? Head on over to [iTunes](#), and make sure that you

subscribe to this show, download it, and rate & review it. That would be an awesome thing.

Of course, we also want to know your results. Please share those results with us at <http://www.realfastresults.com/results>.

As always, go make results happen!