

Maximize Your MESSAGE



How the Top Influencers in the World
Get Heard and Make a Difference



Platform
UNIVERSITY[®]

eBook



Maximize Your Message

INTRODUCTION

So you have a message, and you want to get it out into the world. How do you make sure your message stands out in the midst of all the noise? What are you going to do to make sure your voice doesn't get lost in the fray?

We talked to dozens of top influencers—people like Dave Ramsey, Jen Hatmaker, Donald Miller, and Amy Porterfield—about what they do to maximize their message. Their answers were surprising and enlightening.

And the best part? Eleven strategies came up over and over by different experts in different ways.

Strategy 1. Treat Followers like Friends

Strategy 2. Serve the People in Front of You

Strategy 3. Make it Simple, Keep it Clear

Strategy 4. Lean in All the Way

Strategy 5. Connect to Your Why

Strategy 6. Build Your Email List

Strategy 7. Be Confident, Be You

Strategy 8. Keep A Good Attitude

Strategy 9. Face Your Fear

Strategy 10. Invest in Your Tools

Strategy 11. Surround Yourself with the Right People

We've distilled these strategies into this ebook so you can see for yourself. Read, take notes, and get ready to change some habits. We're convinced as you internalize these practices and make them your own, your message will continue to spread, and you'll be able to live your purpose and keep changing lives.



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 1: TREAT FOLLOWERS LIKE FRIENDS

One thing top influencers do is treat their followers like friends. This might seem counterintuitive. But it's true. "I want people not to just be invited to things," Bob Goff told me, "but to be actually welcomed when they got there."

"Sometimes there's this degree of separation between me and my audience," Jen Hatmaker told us, "because so much of [what I do] is online or it's distant. But I never forget these are real people with real hearts, with real problems, with real issues, with real passions, and real families, and so I care about my people really deeply, deeply."

As a comedian, Andy Andrews said he learned he wasn't necessarily the funniest guy in the room, but he could always make friends with everybody. "It's part of what I tell business people. People love their friends. I realized that when I first started getting booked, there would be people better than me, but if I could make friends with somebody, they'll give you a shot because you're their friend." So even if you're not the most talented at what you do, you can be the friendliest—and sometimes that's better.

"How do we help the people we serve feel like they're on the inside?" asked Chris Brogan. "I'm baffled by how many people send out emails from donotreply@pleaselorddonteverwritebacktome.com. You're basically saying, 'I would not like interaction with you right now.' People say, 'But where do you find the time to reply?' I answer, 'Where do I find the time to help the people that might want more of my help? That seems like a crazy question.'"

Jon Gordon even gave his cell phone number out to an audience. "Call me if I can ever help you, or just text me and I'll respond," he told them, joking: "Please don't all do it at once." When we asked him why he did this, he said, "Doing things like that keeps me focused on what matters most, to remind myself it's always about one person at a time." Bob Goff did the same thing. He actually printed his cell number in his bestselling book *Love Does* for any reader to call.



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 2: SERVE THE PEOPLE IN FRONT OF YOU

The second strategy almost every influencer we talked with employed was that they don't focus on growing their audience nearly as much as serving the people right in front of them. Specifically, they focus on serving one person at a time.

“Social media is just a reflection of life,” Glennon Doyle Melton told us when we asked her about her strategy for using social channels. “If you do not serve well the people in front of you, then don't wonder why there's not more. Four people, five people—when I had twenty people at Momastery, it was the exact same thing as it is now. Sometimes when I freak out because there's so many people, I pretend that it's still twenty people.”

At one point, admitted Crystal Paine, she got overwhelmed with the concept of “list building.” So she just stopped. She told herself, “I don't want to list build anymore until I figure out what to do with the people who are already [here].”

“Every day I value people. It starts there.” That's what John Maxwell told us when we asked what has made him so successful over time. “Nothing is worse than a person, especially in a leadership position, that does not value the people he or she leads. You'll make a mess of your leadership. You'll make a mess of other people's lives. You manipulate them. You'll take advantage of them. You'll use them for personal gain, all the stuff that's wrong in leadership.”

Andy Andrews emphasized the point this way: “If you would get your mind off yourself and what you think about yourself and your value of yourself, and if you can manage to get your mind on helping other people ... you won't be able to handle the workload.”

“Don't focus on building your business,” said Jon Gordon. “Focus on loving, serving, and caring, and your business will exponentially grow.”



Maximize Your Message

“Just serve your audience,” said Pat Flynn. “Your earnings are a byproduct of how well you serve your audience. Whenever I have a decision to make, I go back to that phrase and say, ‘Is this the best way I could serve my audience?’ If not, then I don’t do it.”



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 3: MAKE IT SIMPLE. KEEP IT CLEAR.

You might think your message has to be revolutionary to make a difference, but these influencers emphasized that clarity and simplicity are actually more powerful.

“One of my secrets to success is not always reinventing the wheel,” said Amy Porterfield. “I’m not always creating new programs, dabbling here, dabbling there. If something works for me, I repeat it over and over again.”

“If you confuse, you’ll lose,” said Donald Miller. His StoryBrand Workshops help companies clarify their marketing. Successful screenwriters simplify, he told us. “They sit down and say, ‘Jason Bourne can’t want to know who he is and also run a marathon and also marry a girl and also adopt a dog. We have to get rid of the clutter.’ So, with your website, you’re saying way too much stuff, using way too much inside language. Nobody is going to understand the story you’re telling as a company.”

Carrie Green agreed. “I’ve always kept it really simple,” she said. “For me it’s always been about being really clear about what my core message was. Then everything I did, every post I put out there, it had to align with my message and it had to resonate and connect with my audience.”

And in case you’re reading this and wondering how to get clear about your message, you’ll love this advice from Jeff Goins: “I think that clarity comes with action. We all want to wait for clarity to happen, and then we’ll act, but really we act our way into clarity. We just have to do the next right thing.” When it comes to getting your message across, clarity wins. What is your next right step?



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 4: LEAN IN ALL THE WAY

The fourth strategy influencers talked about was working hard to get their message out into the world, especially through difficulties and discouragement.

“Be ready for a lot of hard work,” Dave Ramsey said. “It’s real, it’s game-on every day. You’ve got to be excellent in the ordinary. Diligence, diligence, diligence, all the time.”

Jeff Goins admitted that diligence wasn’t always his strong suit. “I’d take a shower, I’d get an idea, I’d start a blog, and then three months later, I’d abandon it because it hadn’t succeeded as quickly as I’d wanted it to.” But then he got serious. “I was so frustrated with myself, with trying and failing and flaking out, that I decided, I’m going to give this a real go ... the next day I got up at 5 a.m., and I started writing, and I did that for a whole year.”

“We work. We work hard. We work when no one’s reading,” said Jen Hatmaker. “We work when no one’s watching. We work when no one’s listening. We work even though people tell us, ‘Nah, this is no good.’ We work anyway, and we put in the hours. We put in the time and we treat the calling with respect. We say, ‘We’re going to invest here,’ in the early hours and put in the time.”

“Grit is the single biggest factor and predictor of success,” Jon Gordon told us. Grit, as he defined it is “the ability to move forward and persevere, despite rejection, adversity, and challenges.”

When we asked Rory Vaden about the role of persistence and hard work in success, he gave us an analogy. “When a storm comes,” he said, “what cows do is very natural ... [T]hey will try to run away from the storm. The only problem with that is that ... they’re not real fast. [So] as the cows run, the storm actually runs with them, which maximizes the amount of pain and time and frustration that they experience from that storm.”



Maximize Your Message

Rory said we do the same thing. “We spend so much of our lives constantly trying to avoid the inevitable challenges that come along with the difficult circumstances that our own choices have led us to. What ultra-performers realize, and people who overcome by self-discipline, is that problems that are procrastinated on are always amplified. Waiting always makes it worse.”

Those who are able to stand strong in the face of adversity and fight for what matters to them will be the ones to get their message heard.



STRATEGY 5: CONNECT TO YOUR WHY

Without a clear connection to the reason you're doing what you're doing, you'll burn out, get off track, or fail to communicate what you're trying to say. Influencers emphasized how important it is to constantly come back to your "why."

Whenever she starts to get tired, or jaded, or lose focus, Crystal Paine said, "I remind myself of those emails and those in-person meetings that I've had with women who have tears in their eyes who tell me that because of my blog, it impacted their whole entire life, and their family, and their home, and their business and everything. I remember that and say, 'It is worth it and I have to keep going. If I give up now I'm being a coward.'"

Amy Porterfield told a story of hearing from a reader while she was on a webinar, about the incredible impact she'd had in her life. "Someone said to me, 'Amy, this teaching here changed my life a year ago. I never ever would have thought that I could quit my nine-to-five and start building a business that I absolutely love. And today, my husband doesn't work because of it. He watches our children and I get to run this business.

"I had to fix my voice because it got a little cracky at that moment," Amy admitted. She thought to herself, "As long as I keep hearing stories of 'This actually changed my business and my life and allowed me to move forward in different ways and build a life by my own design,' I am going to keep doing it every single day."

Crystal and Amy nailed their why. And it's important for more than motivation. It's critical for direction.

Staying connected to your why keeps you from working for the wrong reasons. "If you do what you do only for clapping, then you give the audience the power to tell you when to stop," said Jon Acuff. "When they stop clapping, that's when you stop, too. There [are] going to be moments when they don't clap and you have to have something bigger, more important driving you."



Maximize Your Message

“You have to be working for a bigger purpose,” Jon Gordon agreed. “You must surrender to a bigger purpose to your life. It can’t just be about you. Influence is about others. Why is your message so important? Do you have this written down somewhere where you can return to it often?”



STRATEGY 6: BUILD YOUR EMAIL LIST

This was probably the most standout piece of advice from the influencers. It's something we preach diligently at Platform University to all of our students. *Why collect email addresses? How to collect them?* That's all covered by the influencers in this section.

“List building should have been my number one priority from the get go,” said Amy Porterfield. “If you have a list of loyal fans and followers, when you're ready to launch something new, you have an audience that is ready to listen. Social media is good but it can only go so far when you're competing with everybody else. Having that list ... I wish I could go back and have started that on day one.”

“You've got to build that email list,” echoed Jeremy Cowart. “Social media is awesome, having followers on social media is great. But everybody checks their email on a daily basis. It's such a personal, beautiful way to communicate with your audience.”

Donald Miller said this was his greatest regret about his early years of blogging. If he had it to do over again, he said he would “capture email addresses in exchange for something valuable.” That giveaway is critical for subscriptions. “Nobody is signing up for your newsletter, right? But if I say *Five Keys to Telling A Great Story* or *How to Tell A Story*, which is a PDF that we give away, I'm getting hundreds and maybe thousands of email addresses, because I'm giving them something.”

The giveaway was a problem for Josh Axe. He knew he needed to create a optin bonus, but he just kept putting it off. “I started trying to make one. I had to try and make it perfect. That's what everybody does—until it's perfect I'm going to spend three years getting this thing done. Finally, one day I went like, ‘You know what? This is halfway done, but we're going to get it done this week. I don't care if it's not perfect, we're going to get it out.’” He did and it started paying off immediately. “People aren't looking for perfection today, they're looking for results, they're looking for transformation.”



Maximize Your Message

And don't be discouraged. If your list is small right now, you might have one strategic advantage you can leverage. "When you're starting out, when you have ten email subscribers, you should absolutely know who those people are, what their problems are, what you can do to help them," said Pat Flynn. "That's your opportunity to work closely with them. When you do that in the beginning, they're going to feel much more attached to you than anybody else, because you're giving them that time and attention. That's your opportunity to do that."



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 7: BE CONFIDENT, BE YOU

Whether we call it being yourself, “finding your voice,” or something else entirely, growing in self-confidence is one of the most important things we can do for our audience and our message.

“I think that the biggest thing that has helped me in the last few years has been to grow in my confidence,” Crystal Paine told me. “Because I went into blogging as a very shy, a very insecure person and it was very hard for me when I got [any] criticism. I wanted to run. I wanted to hide under a rock and I wanted just to pretend I didn’t exist anymore. I’ve learned a lot about courage.”

This is critical because even a very important message won’t always be well-received. “Listen,” [Fawn Weaver](#) has had to tell herself, “if someone reads this, and it blesses their life, if it is only five people, I am going to do it.” It can’t be about the number of comments, likes, and shares. “If you believe that your message is important enough to put out there, whether or not people follow you, then you know it’s time to do it.”

“I think that you just throw your heart into those pages,” said John Maxwell. “I think that’s what makes the book live. It’s because of who you are and what you believe. Give me a person’s heart before you give me their skill.” Catch that? When it comes to maximizing your message, being yourself might actually be more important than your skill as a writer.

Jeremy Cowart said this was his most important advice for writers. “Be authentic. I think there’s a lot to learn in that, just identifying your voice, knowing what it is you have to say.” The trick is staying true to that voice.

Why? It’s “letting your audience know that it’s going to be consistent, and they can depend on that on a continual basis.”

Of course, the more confident you become, the more you put yourself out there, the more open you become for criticism. Jen Hatmaker addressed this. “My skin has gotten thicker, which is part of leadership, a necessary part.” The reason it’s necessary is that our audience can tell when we’re holding back.



Maximize Your Message

“Self-preservation does not work for my community ... I would say my secret sauce is almost embarrassing transparency.”

“The most personal stuff is always the most universal,” echoed Glennon Doyle Melton.



Maximize Your Message

STRATEGY 8: KEEP A GOOD ATTITUDE

The attitude about our messages can impact them far more than we sometimes realize. If you aren't equipped for success, you won't be gifted with success.

Lewis Howes told us he wished he would have learned, sooner in his journey, how to constructively deal with his emotions and attitude. "I think there is so much wasted energy and emotion from not being emotionally fit and intelligent," he said. "If I could do it all over again, I would have read books, had someone coach me."

Carrie Green echoed Lewis' statements about emotional fitness. "It's really about conditioning yourself for success. I always say success is not an accident. You have to do it on purpose ... I think you have to focus on training your brain to get you to this place where you realize you can do it."

Our emotional intelligence and conditioning comes through in how we frame our circumstances. "You can be the author of your own story," John Maxwell said. "You need to write it. You don't need to accept your life. You could lead your life. You can be a person of significance. People think, Well, I've got to have so much money. I've got to have a position. I've got to have a title. I've got to have some influence, and then someday I'll do something for others that'll make a difference. I said, 'No, significance is now.'" The difference in someday and today is attitude.

"I wrote a lot of books that no one ever read," Jen Hatmaker told us, "but you know what? I'm going to tell you that I don't regret any of that, not one day of it, not one ounce of work, not one minute of obscurity. It was so good for me to develop my craft, to learn what it meant to be a writer, to find my voice, to practice in relatively low-stakes environment. I mean, when not a lot of people are buying or reading your stu you're kind of like, 'Let's just give this thing a whirl.'"

How might your attitude about your message be impacting the success of your message?



STRATEGY 9: FACE YOUR FEAR

There are a hundred road blocks that get in the way while we are going after our dreams, but fear is one of the most common. We are scared of all kinds of things. Here is how the influencers we spoke with overcome their fears.

Some opt for the straight acceptance approach. “It’s scary every day.” Dave Ramsey told me. “It’s back and forth every day. It’s scary, it’s a roller coaster ride. Fear’s natural, but do it anyway.”

“There is no way around this except with a bit of risk,” said Jen Hatmaker. “When you launch, when you jump, when you leap, when you say ‘yes,’ when you finally invest in your gift or your dream, you’re just not guaranteed.”

Others have figured out workarounds. “I am a worrier,” said Amy Porterfield. “It’s insane. I can’t keep space in my head for that worry or it totally squashes all my creativity and my excitement around the projects I’m working on. I literally have to tell myself, ‘All right. For the last ten minutes you’ve worried about that, we’re going to put that away now and we’re going to just focus on what’s in front of us.’ I literally say that to myself.”

When it comes to fear, Rory Vaden has an interesting approach. “Action cures fear,” he said. “If we can help other people, then all the fear and the worry and the mistakes and all the things that we do wrong—they’ll just disappear, and we’ll keep moving forward.”

And finally, Jeff Goins admitted his trick for overcoming fear is acknowledging what he calls “good fear ... that pushes out the bad fear. I learned this from my friend Jody Noland, whom I write about in my book, *The Art of Work*. Jody was this person who found her calling at 58 years old. I said, ‘Jody, what made you do it? Did you eventually get brave?’ She goes, ‘No, I didn’t get brave ... It wasn’t that I was afraid of failing, because I was. It was that I was more afraid of not trying.’”



STRATEGY 10: INVEST IN YOUR TOOLS

People often ask questions about the specific tools they should be using to maximize their message. What's clear from the influencers I asked is that the key strategy, whatever the specific tools, is keeping them sharp and learning how to use them well.

“I think the more tools we have around our waist, we build that confidence where we can influence and impact others,” said Lewis Howes. “When we don't have the tool belt, it's hard to feel confident; or if we have a tool belt with no tools in it, that's even worse. You've got to start building.”

“Choose your weapon—Periscope, YouTube, podcast, Facebook, Twitter, blog—it doesn't matter,” said Rory Vaden. “Just choose it and do it and learn it, and you've got no excuse for why you shouldn't be getting your message out there to the world.”

When it comes to using social media, Jon Acuff recommended doubling down on what's already working for you, whatever it is. “It's one thing for me to say, ‘I love Twitter.’ It's another thing for me to look at my blog and go, ‘Facebook is 85 percent of my blog traffic.’ Okay, well, maybe I need to invest more in Facebook, even if Twitter is where I'm more naturally inclined. That's data. What's the data telling me? Because that, to me, is how you make an impact, and you start to lean into the right things.”

Pat Flynn is a fan of podcasting and has one very compelling reason. “The cool byproduct of podcasting is that when you interview somebody, you actually have an amazing relationship with them. You've been able to talk to them for x number of minutes, which is probably more minutes than you could talk if you were to cold call them and just say, ‘Hey, can we chat for a little bit?’ You're actually building a relationship, you're learning about each other, you're talking, and then you can take those relationships with you elsewhere.”

Josh Axe emphasized search engine optimization. “We have a lot of visitors come to my website through searching keyword terms. It's different for every industry, but for us, I write an article on chia seeds or coconut oil. If you search coconut oil uses, we rank for that on Google. That's really it.”



Maximize Your Message

Video has been key for Carrie Green. “[It] has been one of the most powerful things I have ever, ever done,” she assured me. “It allows me to get myself out there, get my message out there and for people to see me and to hear me and to know what I’m like as a person and to build that authority and that credibility. From that perspective it’s been phenomenal.”



STRATEGY 11: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

As influencers with a message to maximize, one of the most powerful strategies we can employ is to surround ourselves with people who are going to support our vision and give us the kind of counsel and advice that will keep us on the right track.

“I would connect with a number of mentors early on,” Lewis Howes answered when we asked him about what writers and influencers should be doing. “It’s kind of like having your own personal advisory board. I would find people in different industries to advise you, once a month or something, where you could reach out to them ... and ask them for feedback, and have them give you challenges.”

“I’m 68, and I can honestly say that I’m having my best days right now,” said John Maxwell. “I think that’s for several reasons ... One is because I have awfully good people around me. Good people, really good people. I’m reaping the benefits of having these kind of people who love me and who are very competent and very good and gifted, around me. They’re making me better every day. They’re allowing me to extend my life, my influence, my calling, my message, because they’re multiplying me.”

“You become who you surround yourself with,” Josh Axe recalled reading. So he prayed for the right crowd. “I remember praying to God ... ‘Would you send a flood of mentors and strong influences and leaders into my life?’” God answered the prayer. Who are the five most influential people in your life? How would your message get maximized if you could become just like them?