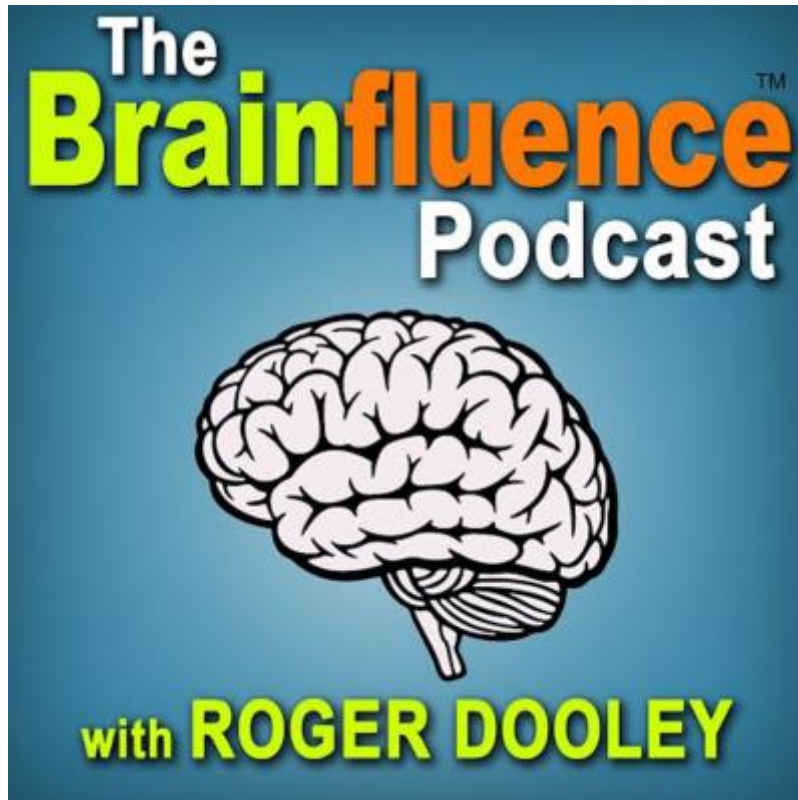


How to Get Known with Mark Schaefer



Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast, I'm Roger Dooley. If you have anything to do with marketing, which I guess is fairly likely, you're probably already familiar with the work of this week's guest. He's a professor who teaches graduate classes in business at Rutgers University, but he's no ivory tower academic. He's written six bestselling books telling businesses and individuals how to market in the digital arena. His book, *The Tao of Twitter*, was the bestselling book ever on Twitter. His book, *Return on Influence*, was the first book to explore influence marketing in that level of detail. He's the person who popularized the all-too-real concept of content shock. His newest book is something we'll all find relevant and timely, it's *KNOWN: The Handbook for Building and Unleashing Your Personal Brand*. Welcome to the show Mark Schaefer.

Mark Schaefer: That is one of the nicest introductions I've ever had. I love the fact that you said, "He's no ivory tower professor." That is awesome, and it's true.

Roger Dooley: Well, I've met you in person, Mark, so I can vouch for that. I looked all around for that tower and did not see it anywhere.

Mark Schaefer: In fact, he would even surprise you that he's a professor if you met him.

Roger Dooley: They let this guy in the door? What's going on here?

Mark Schaefer: Thank you for that, it's very nice of you.

Roger Dooley: Mark, before we get on to your new book, I want to just get your take on the world of content and content marketing. It's about three years ago that you wrote this blog post about content shock that

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basically explained why content marketing would cease to work, or at least content marketing as we knew it then would cease to work. A lot of what you've predicted has played out. Are there any of your predictions that really haven't panned out? What do you see, briefly, as the present and future of content marketing?

Mark Schaefer: Well Roger, it was quite surprising to me that that blog post became really quite a sensation. It would not be unrealistic to say that it's become part of the lexicon of marketing today, this idea of content shock. But to me, when I wrote it at the time, it was simple common sense, it was simple economics that, in any economic human or natural system, when there's too much of stuff, when there's some sort of imbalance of supply and demand, something has to change. That's what I saw happening with content.

The general idea that there's more and more content all competing for the same eyeballs, for the same attention, means that the cost of marketing, in some way, is going to change, is going to go up. Either we need to spend more time creating better content or getting help on that. We're going to have to boost it, promote it, use advertising. But in some way, the cost is going to change. When that happens, some people may not be able to compete anymore. Some people maybe would have to fall out.

Here's a very real example of that. I'm a contributor to the Harvard Business Review. I've been writing articles for the Harvard Business Review for about two years. When I sent in my last article, the editor wrote me back and said, "Mark, this is a great article. We would've run this two years ago. But I am getting so much content today, and the competition to have a place in the Harvard Business Review is becoming so much more intense, that what I would run two years ago is not what I would run today." Now, it proves my own point.

Now, what is my option? The competition here may be CMOs or CEOs or CTOs who are getting help from public relations departments and agencies to craft these posts now. In my business, like you, it's just kind of

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me doing this stuff. I'm creating the content. Either I've got to spend more time, which translates to money, or I'm going to have to drop out. That's really what the idea of content shock is about. It's a simple concept, but I think it absolutely is playing out in many, many ways. In my view, this is the number one trend that's impacting our marketing budgets, our strategies, our tactics, and even the skillsets we have to look for when we're hiring for our departments today.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, you know I think there's a side effect of that, and that's the devaluation of content, or demonetization of content. A few years ago, if I wanted to learn how to market on Pinterest, or run really effective email campaigns, I might have to pay for an instructional series, or maybe buy an expensive e-book of some kind. Today, you can go on sites like Buffer, or Crazy Egg, or any number of others, and get these monumental, epic blog posts for free that are the length of e-books. They run thousands and thousands of words, very well illustrated. You can just get them there for free. Or maybe you can get something even better if you give up your email address, which costs you really nothing. I think the ability to actually sell content goes down. It's really interesting how this is playing out, but you're right, the bar is certainly getting higher and higher.

Mark Schaefer: It's fascinating and it's also tragic in some ways, because we can look at what's happening to the traditional media, and even very important institutions like The New York Times or The Washington Post, and some of the high quality magazines that we've always loved, and they're struggling with continued monetization of the content. We can see the lessons and the things that they have to go through. That's applying to us in our businesses today as well. They have to find radical new ways to monetize, radical new ways to fund their staffs. In some ways, it's not happening. In some places it's not happening and cuts have to be made. The nature of content is changing. The nature of the business is changing. It's impacting really all of us as business people and as consumers.

Roger Dooley: Well, it'll be interesting to see how it plays out. 'Cause it's certainly the demise of really high quality ... I wouldn't call it the demise, but

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certainly the reduction in the ability to create high quality journalism is troublesome, but presumably it'll stabilize at some point. Let's talk about your new book, KNOWN, Mark. Some of your other books have been really on the leading edge of new areas, but personal branding is not one of those. I think Personal Branding for Dummies came out five years ago. Usually by the time there's a Dummies book out, that means there's a marketplace and body of work out there. So why now? What sets KNOWN apart from this rather lengthy and large body of existing work on personal branding?

Mark Schaefer: Well, I was very careful about this. I did a lot of research, because I didn't want to redo something. I didn't want to create something that had already been created. When I write my books, it's to solve some big problem, something that's much more vast than something I could cover in a blog post or a podcast. What was happening here, the seeds for this idea were really planted a few years ago. I had a discussion with a colleague who is very well-known in the marketing space, and we were going back and forth debating can anybody become known today. I think there are a lot of personal and professional advantages that could be created for the people that become known, compared to someone who maybe isn't paying attention to their reputation and their presence online. That was one seed.

Another seed was, I do a lot of executive coaching. Some of the people are coming to me saying, "You know, I'd like to write a book someday. I'd like to start a speaking career someday. I'd like to be invited to be on this board." Or, "What would I need to do with my career to be invited to teach someday?" I kept giving the same answer. I kept saying, "Well, to do this you need to be known." I felt like I was only giving half an answer, because I couldn't really tell them how. I needed to answer this question: can anybody become known? Is there a process?

When I surveyed what was already out there, I read every book I could find, I signed up for online courses, I read every piece of academic research. What I found was really pretty fluffy, and it didn't really answer

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the question what do you need to do to become known. There was a lot of emphasis on follow your passion, find your passion, follow your dream. But then it doesn't really tell you how. It doesn't tell you how to activate that.

Furthermore, a lot of the stuff out there, Roger, honestly is just flat out wrong. It's not a difference of opinion between me and another author, it's just there's a lot of research that shows that the most successful individuals, the most successful companies don't necessarily follow a dream, they follow a plan. The biggest reason for business failures is that people follow a dream but there's not an audience big enough out there to support whatever it is and help that dream come true.

My view is let's think it through. Let's go through some exercises to really think this out. I started with the academic research, and then I started trying to find people in lots of different fields. Business of course, but also education, real estate, construction, fashion, art, music, law, and I talked to them to see how did you get there. What I found is certain themes emerged and, in fact, that people followed the same path, they did the same four steps, every person, every field, everywhere in the world without exception, so there was a path. I thought well, let's demystify this. Let's put this in a way that is accessible, that's achievable, and inspire people to really do something rather than spend all their time trying to figure out what their passion is.

Roger Dooley: Right. One thing I like, Mark, is that you distinguish between a passion and a sustainable interest, because not everybody has a complete passion about some topic that they actually could be useful to other people on, and they do like and enjoy. Looking at my own case, I probably could've been a case study in your book, and I'm actually kind of upset that I wasn't. 'Cause I started writing about neuromarketing and related topics about a dozen years ago or so. When I started, I actually did not have a huge ... I certainly didn't have a passion for that area. It grew out of the fact that my daughter was finishing up her neuroscience degree and was going into marketing.

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I started reading about the intersection of those two topics a little bit, and I registered a domain because I was kind of SEO web guy at the time. So what do you do? You grab a domain and then you start populating it with some content so you have aged content there. It's all SEO 101 back in the day. What I found was that, as I went through that rather mechanical process of trying to post a few small, short articles every week that I wrote, that I actually did get an increasing level of interest and enthusiasm in the topic, and I was getting a little bit of positive feedback.

It sort of fed on itself, so I started doing better quality stuff and more stuff, putting more into what I was doing. Eventually, by the time I had a few hundred articles out there, I was starting to get some speaking invites, and then a book contract from Wiley, 'cause I already had a body of work. I mean, Wiley didn't have to say, "Hey, well can this guy write?" They could make some judgment as to whether I could write by looking at what I'd already written.

Then that, in turn, as you describe in your book, the book then feeds the process of getting known even more, where now I get better invites from around the globe to keynote things, where before the gigs were not quite as interesting. It's really like many of your examples, it was a case of picking something that you had an interest in that there was some kind of a market for and then just grinding it out by sticking with it.

Mark Schaefer: You are absolutely a perfect example. One of the comments I made in the book is often we don't follow our passion, the passion follows us, and that's exactly what happened to you. Maybe your passion, it could be cooking, or hiking, or motorcycles, but that doesn't necessarily mean that's what you want to be known for. You do need to be known for something that you love, something that you're truly interested in. You're a fine example of that, because you're going to be spending a lot of time with this.

The other thing is that you found your voice, you also found a space. Because this was not very crowded, people weren't really covering this topic. You created a blog, you eventually diversified, you moved into a

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podcast. That got into books and speaking engagements, so you built your audience year after year after year, and that's how you became known. That's really a perfect example of how it works. I interviewed nearly a hundred people for the book, that's exactly the path that all these people found.

Now, you are kind of one of the lucky ones where you were smart enough to detect this and you have this SEO background, and you could kind of sense that this was an unsaturated niche. What I do in the book for people who don't have your level of expertise is to walk them through that process. I do a few exercises to help you figure out what's already out there. How are you going to fit in? I think that's really the power, I hope, that's going to come to people through this book.

Roger Dooley: The fact that it was a nichemanship game, although that wasn't really exactly what I was thinking when I began, but I was certainly never going to be a top neuroscience blogger, 'cause I'm not a neuroscientist. Was not going to be one of the top marketing bloggers because, you know, there's people like you out there. I could be the top neuroscience marketing blogger. That niche combination, that applies to all sorts of endeavors, and applies to businesses, to even university majors. You may not be the top music school in the country, and you may not be the top marketing school, but what if you had a music marketing program. Maybe you could be the top one in the field. Just more of a general topic there, but works for personal branding too.

Mark Schaefer: Yeah, well that's one of the exercises I have in the book is to mash up a topic, even in a crowded field like music, or fashion, or food, with a personal interest or a personal value. One of my favorite examples in the book is a young lady in Brazil who's a food blogger. Now, there are lots and lots of food bloggers, but she has a passion for Hollywood. She loves movies, she loves television. She created a video series in Brazil where she makes recipes from famous food scenes in the movies, and she dresses up like the characters when she makes these recipes. She dressed up like Walter White from Breaking Bad and made blue rock candy

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that looks like the meth that he was making, and dressed up like the character to do this. It's just so much fun. It's just so creative and inventive. She just loves this, you could just see the enthusiasm. I can't understand it 'cause it's in Portuguese, but that's a great example of finding your own little place in a very crowded space like food by mashing it up with another interest.

Roger Dooley: That's an interesting story, and it kind of contrasts with your experience in Holland where the locals told you that the Dutch philosophy was if you try to stand out we'll bop you on the nose. I think even in our own culture, we've got the tradition about the nail that sticks out is the one that gets hammered down. What do you tell people who feel uncomfortable with standing out? I think you'd have to have a special personality to dress up like movie characters and so on, particularly rather unusual ones. What do you tell people that maybe have some difficulty standing out in any way?

Mark Schaefer: Well, every step in the book I try to be really sensitive to personal differences, to national differences, even issues around what's going on in your life. I have a whole section that says, is this the right time for you to do this? This is not a rah-rah book saying if you can believe it you can be it, if you can dream it you can do it. That's not what this book is about at all. It's very practical. It recognizes these differences and celebrates these differences and says you know, maybe the time isn't right for you. Maybe your time is a year from now. I give examples, one guy wrote an essay for the book about why he decided not to become known. I want to provide that balance.

But I also want to encourage people that look, there's a place for every type of personality. I mean, I'm naturally an introvert. I don't like crowds, I don't like big parties, I don't like being the center of attention. I like small, individual dinners, one-on-one dinners, or having a lunch with somebody, that's what I enjoy. It really takes a lot for me to push myself out there. But I've found a path that works for me.

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The internet is big enough, and the internet is new enough, that I think there is a place for everybody. I think 10 years from now, 15 years from now, we'll look back and say, "Oh, I wish I lived in 2017, because the internet was really just beginning. There was so much opportunity back then." And there is. The internet is just beginning. There's room for everybody. There's room for lots of new ideas. Ideas that are going to be so important to us 10 or 15 years from now haven't been invented yet, and maybe it's your turn.

Roger Dooley: I think one of the more amusing stories is when you talk about a mutual friend, Dorie Clark, 'cause it's kind of ironic, but the thing that helped drive her personal brand is an article she wrote for the Harvard Business Review on building personal brand. It's very meta there. We had her on an earlier episode of the podcast. But I think that's also a good example of capitalizing on what works. Had some other topic really taken off for her, she might well have decided to leverage that, and to then a subsequent book deal and so on.

Mark Schaefer: Well, the reason I love that is because whatever you do to try to codify what you stand for, what you believe in, what you think your sustainable interest might be, it's probably going to change over time. You'll get feedback from your audience. Someone will say, "You know, I really loved when you did this." You'll go oh wow, they're right, that is something about me that's special.

The thing I loved about that story with Dorie is she was confused. She had a lot of different ways to go. She had a very eclectic background and was kind of searching for her thing. Then she wrote one single post for the Harvard Business Review and it snowballed. She just went with it, and she was rewarded for her thinking in this area. I think the lesson is it doesn't have to be perfect. Just take the first step and start. Six months from now, you're going to be better than you are today, it's going to be easier to create content than it is today. But that will never happen unless you start.

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Roger Dooley: You make a good point too, Mark, about getting feedback of varying kinds from your audience as far as what's working and what isn't. I know that my own emphasis shifted quite markedly over the years, where I started off with the very neurosciencey approach. But what I found got more traction, articles incorporated behavior science and were a little bit more actionable than ideas that required expensive technology, so that drove it. Today we've got such great tools too, to measure different kinds of audience engagement. We've got analytics programs that tell you how long people are spending on articles, and how many views they're getting obviously. But you've got, also, the social media sharing tools to see okay, what are people excited about enough to share.

By just getting stuff out there to begin with, you can take that early feedback and see what's resonating with your audience and let it guide you. That may be good or bad. It may take you in a direction that you really don't want to go, in which case you have to make a decision. But think that if it works for you and it's working for the audience, you're going to be a lot more successful.

Mark Schaefer: My blog is different than it was a year ago, because my audience is like a hammer on a forge. They're changing me. We create content, but content also creates us. The feedback that I get is changing me, it's honing me, it's refining me as a professional, as a business person, as a leader, as a content creator. I think responding to that feedback and being flexible, and being open to it over time is a great key to success.

Roger Dooley: It's kind of ironic that after the whole content shock thing that creating great content is such a key part of your recommendation for personal branding. One test that I like is your 35 headline test. Why don't you explain what that is, for seeing whether somebody's got the right niche for themselves or not.

Mark Schaefer: A couple people in the book talk about how one of the challenges is coming up with an idea but making sure it's sustainable. One little test to see if that's the case is to dream about what you want to be known for someday. Then right down 35 headlines that could be the topics

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for a podcast, a video, a blog, whatever your drug of choice is going to be in terms of content creation.

Then you've got to look at that list and say okay, am I going to be able to do this for months and months and months, or even years? On average, of the people I interviewed for the book, it took about two and a half years. I'd be interested to hear what your experience was on this, since you seem to be kind of the role model for this book. But it took about two and a half years to really get traction, to say yes, I am on my way, the invitations are coming in, the opportunities are coming in, or I'm able to stop this activity and devote it more to this.

The variability kind of ranged from one year to five years. But on average, it was about two and a half years. You're going to be living this stuff and breathing this stuff for a long time. That's why my focus is on this idea of sustainable interest instead of just a passion. Sometimes a hobby is just a hobby and it needs to stay that. You're going to ruin it if you try to make it into a book, or a speaking career, or a business.

Roger Dooley: To answer your question, I think that two and a half years is probably pretty accurate. I think that probably somewhere around the two year mark ... You know, it's not an overnight thing, but I was starting to get some traction then. Then by three to four is when increased even more. It's rarely something that happens overnight, I totally agree with that. As far as the headline test goes too, if you get to 11 and you're already bored with the whole project, then that may be a clue as to, in fact, you're doing the wrong thing.

Something else I liked is you talked about another mutual friend of ours, Rand Fishkin from Moz. He was in a space a few years ago where there was just a massive amount of content already. I can't imagine many more topics that were perhaps more overexposed and beat to death than SEO. Every half-baked SEO expert had a blog. Some of them were actually quite good, others maybe not so much. But everybody wanted to create content around SEO, so it was this massively overpopulated area. But by choosing a different medium, the long-form, whiteboard video, really

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nobody else was doing. Mostly it might have been either blog posts of varying lengths, or perhaps short quick-hit videos. Eventually, he carved out a niche that now he owns and is well known for.

Mark Schaefer: He's a star.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, but that wasn't an overnight success either, he ground away at it for a few years.

Mark Schaefer: Well, and like I said, every single person kind of followed this pattern. The thing I love about the Rand Fishkin case study is, number one, you're right, this was a field characterized by incredible information density. The way he was able to stand out is a different content form. He did something that nobody was doing, and it matched his personality, it matched his values, and it also, as you said, it took years for it to work. It was not an overnight success.

The other thing that I think is notable, this was one of my personal learnings from the book ... I went into this project with kind of a thesis. Whenever I write a book, I let the research write the book. I kind of have a hypothesis, but I twist it and turn it and adjust it all along the way. One of the things I learned was the incredible significance of having a purpose. This came out in a lot of the research, most notably the very fine book, *Grit*, written by Angela Duckworth. She codifies what makes up grit. A big part of that is knowing that you're having an impact on other people.

One of the things that Rand said, he almost has this urgency to teach, this urgency to help people. I think the quote in the book was something like, "I feel like I have this big hole that has to be constantly filled if I'm not teaching other people." Even before I read Angela's book, I started noticing this, that when I interviewed successful people who are known in their field, whatever that was, they would inevitably say, "I'm having an impact on people. I'm changing people's lives. I'm helping people, and that is the fuel that keeps me going." That was reinforced later through some of the research that I read, that to really hang in there and do

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this in a sustainable way, you have to have a sense that you're helping other people.

I'll give you another example. There's a lovely artist I feature in the book, one of my favorite case studies. This is a woman that created miniature paintings every single day now for, I think she's up to four years. She said, "One of the things that drives me is yes, I'm making a good living and I'm very lucky to do that as an artist, but I now have the ability to help people and art venues that I believe in." Even an artist making paintings says, "The thing that drives me to do this every single day is it allows me to help other people."

I think that's a very strong message, especially in our world today where it seems to be all about us, all about the hustle, all about following our dream. What I learned through this book, it really isn't about me, it's about them. It has to be about them or you're not going to be able to make it in the long term.

Roger Dooley: Makes a huge amount of sense, Mark. Jumping back to Rand, I think one thing that was undoubtedly a driver was that there was, and still is in the SEO space, so much bad information, so many supposed experts who are doing things that could actively hurt their clients. Certainly, I've heard horror stories over the years about some unsuspecting small business that hires an SEO consultant who does a bunch of spammy stuff and eventually they get banned. They went from little traffic to no traffic. They simply weren't able to differentiate good information from bad information. When you get somebody who has an ethical and knowledgeable approach to the business and can share that knowledge, I think that, in itself, is a big motivator. Just knowing that perhaps you're helping some people without that much experience avoid potential disaster for their business.

You talk about writing a book ... This will probably be the last thing. We're getting a little bit short on time here. But these days, anybody can write a book and publish it on Amazon. Do you think the credibility value of a book has gone down, or are most people still capable of distinguishing

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the well-curated process of a major publisher with anybody just hitting the upload button on Amazon?

Mark Schaefer: You know, I don't have an answer to that question. I think that would be a very, very good research project for someone. I will say this, that creating a blog, creating a podcast, creating a video series, still rather common activity. Writing a book is still something special, it's still something rare. The fact of the matter is, in our field there's a lot of value placed on social proof, these icons and symbols of power and authority, something like Twitter followers, the Klout score with something a few years ago. These badges, these testimonies, it still means something.

I think that a book ... My instinct here is, whether it's good or bad, people may not dig in to really find out. It's that you wrote a book. I think there is a movement today, and maybe I'm one of the ones that started this, when I started I had my books published by a publisher, and I started to see how the publishing industry is changing. Now, my last three books I've self published. I feel strongly that there's really not much of an upside anymore to going through a publisher. In fact, there are some risks. Maybe you'll have to invite me back to talk about that, 'cause I know we're running out of time.

Roger Dooley: That'd be a good topic.

Mark Schaefer: It'd be a great topic, and I'm very opinionated about that. I'm very passionate about that. But you know, I don't know, Roger. I don't know if writing a bad book can harm your personal brand as much as we might think. I've got my own opinions, but I haven't really thought about it that much. I really haven't seen much research about it. But I do know this power of social proof, that writing a book still means something. It's still special, so there could be some value there.

Roger Dooley: I agree. I think the mere act of creation, assuming it's a reasonable-length book and it's well enough put together, there is, as you know, a lot of labor that goes into that however it's published. If it's a credible job at the end of the day, that costs the author a lot of blood, sweat

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and tears. Anyway, let me remind our audience that we are speaking with Mark Schaefer, author of KNOWN: The Handbook for Building and Unleashing Your Personal Brand. Mark, how can our listeners find you and your content online?

Mark Schaefer: Think it's pretty easy. You can find everything in one place, and that is at BusinessesGrow.com. See, my SEO play here, Roger, was I didn't get Schaefer.com, 'cause I figured no one could spell Schaefer anyway, but they might be able to remember businesses grow. So BusinessesGrow.com, you can find my blog, my podcast, which I do with Tom Webster called The Marketing Companion, information about my books, and lots of free resources to help businesses of every size.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well we will link there, to Mark's books, and any other resources that we've mentioned in our conversation on the show notes page at RogerDooley.com/podcast. Mark, thanks so much for being on the show.

Mark Schaefer: It's been a delight, thank you.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.