



THE 'secret' OF SUCCESS

Frank Warren is the creative mind behind the world's largest advertisement-free blog, PostSecret.com. He's travelling Australia this month on a sell-out tour and offers *Get it* a few amazing secrets of his own...

How long have you been running this site for now?

The PostSecret Project started in November 2004 when I first invited strangers to mail me secrets anonymously on postcards. The 'Sunday Secrets' website began a few months after that.

What's your personal description of the PostSecret project?

Even though there are books, a website, art exhibits, and events, I think of PostSecret as a community art project. It all starts with a safe, non-judgmental 'place' where people feel comfortable sharing their hidden truths, which can be soulful, funny, sexual or shocking – but always artful.

For those unfamiliar with the concept behind PostSecret, how does it work?

For years strangers from around the world have mailed me their secrets artistically rendered on postcards. I share them back with the world every Sunday at postsecret.com and in books and at PostSecret events.

It's a simple (and successful) concept, what was the inspiration behind it?

I think a boring job was one of the main reasons behind PostSecret – I was doing pretty mundane work copying medical articles but I was always drawn to doing something much more creative and meaningful. I also believe that a huge part of the inspiration behind PostSecret, that I have been able to see in hindsight, is that uncovering secrets I had buried in my past allowed me to reconcile with secrets that had been haunting me. I think I was always meant to be doing this and working with secrets.

You were listed by Forbes as the fourth most influential person on the Internet – did you set out to host a world-renowned blog (over six million views per month) with successful spin-off media, or did it just 'kind of happen'?

My original goal with PostSecret was very modest, and that was to receive 365 postcards in one year, and now, I have received more than a

half-million. I knew that I would be fascinated by what people would send me if I could just earn their trust but I had no idea that the website would become the most visited advertisement-free blog in the world, or that secrets are simply limitless.

You've enticed people from all around the globe to share their deepest, kindest, funniest but sometimes darkest secrets; were you prepared for people to start sharing issues of suicide, eating disorders, rape and so on with you?

Before PostSecret began I had trained and volunteered as a suicide prevention hotline operator. Because of that, I think I was better prepared when heavy or dark secrets began arriving along with all the other types. I think that background, along with having many personal struggles myself, allows me to feel a sense of solidarity with others painful secrets. I think peoples' reactions can be very personal and that can be the most powerful part of the project – that moment when you see a secret in someone else's handwriting articulating your secret better than you could. It's pretty powerful.

How did/do you manage this kind of responsibility?

Because nearly all of the secrets arrive anonymously it's unfortunately not possible for me to respond individually. But I have been very pleased to organise several fundraisers for Hopeline and so far, the PostSecret community has raised over \$1 million to fight suicide.

Why did you decide to 'tour' this concept?

The most gratifying part of the project for me is the PostSecret Events. At live events I get to share some of the secrets that have changed people's lives and I can show images of secrets that were banned by the publisher. There are some video, audio secrets, and surprises too... I might even reveal one of my personal secrets! I also leave time for audience members to share their own secrets which is always the most emotional and memorable part of the evening. Transforming that safe, non-judgmental space from web to the real world seems to be where the project is leading me now.

How has your life changed since the explosion in popularity of PostSecret.com?

I was able to sell my previous medical research business, a few years ago, and now I get to spend 40 – 50 hours a week on secrets. My days are spent going through postcards and spending too much time on the web. I do a lot more travelling now which I really enjoy, most of the time.

Do you have any advice for those aspiring to host a popular new-media format?

My advice to anyone trying to make an impact on the web would be to try and find a way to give voice to the unheard. Find a new way to tell untold stories. Also, the more you monetise your site with advertisements, the less value it will have.

Do you have a secret you can share with us?

Before PostSecret I was never that guy that people tell their deepest secrets to.

More on Frank's Australian tour at handsometours.com