



# OWN IT

*Oprah*

AT OPRAH WINFREY'S OWN  
NETWORK, THE MEDIUM  
TRULY IS THE MESSAGE.

BY STEPHANIE WILSON



LIVE YOUR  
OWN  
BEST LIFE

Join the network

Oprah's Book Club 2.0

The year was 1992 when Oprah Winfrey wrote in her journal that one day she would create her own network—the Oprah Winfrey Network. The seventh season of her eponymous show was the most popular program on daytime TV, and the term multimedia was not yet part of the modern vernacular. The network she envisioned at the time was defined in the traditional sense: a television company producing programs for broadcast. A few years later, when *Time* magazine named Winfrey as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century, *The Oprah Winfrey Show's* average daily audience of 14 million U.S. viewers was cited as the main source of her clout. Today, Winfrey has that many followers on Twitter, a social media network that didn't exist prior to 2006. She also has her namesake network, OWN, which debuted on January 1, 2011. But don't think OWN is just television: this network is all about connection.

A joint venture between Winfrey's Harpo, Inc. and Discovery Communications, OWN is officially billed as “a multi-platform media company designed to entertain, inform, and inspire people to live their best lives.” At OWN, integration is not just a jargonish buzz word but a thoughtfully executed mandate that delivers the message of empowerment via an interconnected network of outlets—OWN's cable channel, Oprah.com, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, and Oprah Radio—all supported by a growing range of social and new media platforms.



**WILD INTERVIEW**  
Oprah Winfrey and author Cheryl Strayed beneath the redwoods at Winfrey's home in Santa Barbara, California.

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“WE’VE CREATED A DIGITAL READING CIRCLE THAT’S AS WIDE AS THE WORLD, AND EVERYONE IS WELCOME.” —OPRAH WINFREY

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Club participants  
around the world

The best example of how OWN news spreads across the network is the launch of Oprah's Book Club 2.0. The original book club began in 1996 and expanded into a cultural phenomenon that showcased the seismic impact of an endorsement from Winfrey. An Oprah's Book Club seal of approval could boost sales of a book by as much as 6,500 percent in the week after she announced the club's next read during her talk show. In May 2011, when the program ended its 25-year run as the No. 1-rated daytime talk show, the future of the book club was uncertain, much to the dismay of readers, authors, and publishers alike. That uncertainty ended once Winfrey picked up Cheryl Strayed's memoir, *Wild*, published by Knopf in May 2012. The book chronicles Strayed's attempt to hike 1,100 miles along the Pacific Crest Trail—all alone, with no experience or training—in an attempt to find the version of herself that had vanished after she lost her mother to cancer. While Strayed's poignant story is deeply personal, her struggles strike a universal chord, a sentiment echoed in many

of the original book club's selections.

On June 1, details about the second coming of Oprah's Book Club were posted on Oprah.com and spread via Facebook and Twitter. Within days, bookstores around the country displayed copies of *Wild* bearing an updated version of the familiar Oprah seal. On June 4, enhanced Oprah's Book Club 2.0 digital editions of *Wild* (available for the iPad, Kindle, and Nook) hit the virtual stands. The July 2012 edition of *O* magazine, released on June 8, introduced readers to a book club designed for how people read now, with a feature interview with Strayed, accompanied by the following message from Winfrey:

I read Cheryl Strayed's memoir, *Wild*, on my Kindle, on my iPad, and in hardcover, too. I love this book. I want to shout it from the mountaintop. I want to shout it from the web. In fact, I love this book so much and want to talk about it so much, I knew I had to reinvent my book club.

Within weeks, *Wild* had climbed to the top of the *New York Times*' Best Sellers list for nonfiction, where it remained for six weeks,



**FAIRFIELD, IOWA**  
Winfrey joins in evening  
meditation at The Golden  
Dome of Pure Knowledge for  
*Oprah's Next Chapter*.

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# PHILIP STEIN

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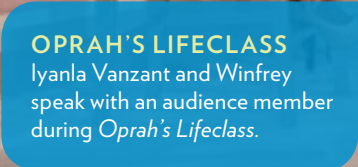
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the world are saying via  
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Create your own book club  
using GroupMe

proving that the well-documented Oprah Effect is still in effect.

The 2.0-enhanced digital editions of *Wild* feature exclusive content, including Winfrey's margin notes, which are revealed by tapping the "O" at the end of a highlighted passage. Rather than intrusive, the notes are insightful, welcome additions that help readers (certainly this reader) forge a more personal connection with the narrative. I sat reading *Wild* on my iPad in the middle of the night, unable or unwilling to put it down. Around me the world slept, but the highlighted passages reminded me that I wasn't alone, even in my solitude. I was excited when I flipped the page with a swipe of my finger and found a highlighted passage waiting—*I wonder what Oprah thinks!*—while other times, I found myself speeding through the text when along came a yellow passage begging me to slow down and be present rather than plowing through to the end. With just a few highlighted passages and short notes, Oprah's Book Club 2.0 enhanced my reading experience—a stellar execution of OWN's "Live Your Best Life" mission.

As readers around the globe progressed through the book, Oprah.com posted weekly webisodes with Winfrey and Strayed and invited readers to submit questions and share comments on the site and via social media. Select posts were curated on Storify, providing a real-time snapshot of what readers all over the world were thinking, feeling, and sharing as they read *Wild* together.

Six weeks after the Book Club 2.0 announcement, the interactive experience culminated with a simulcast of Winfrey's interview with Strayed during the Emmy Award-winning *Super Soul Sunday* series airing on OWN and live-streaming on Oprah.com and Facebook.com/OWN TV. Their conversation took place at Winfrey's home in Santa Barbara, California, where the duo sat beneath the redwoods and discussed what it

meant to be wild.

Just two minutes into the two-hour episode, Winfrey comments: "This [book] is so inspirational. No matter where you are in your climb in life, no matter what you're doing—you know, I'm building a network—you have to keep getting yourself up no matter what obstacle is there. You just have to keep getting up." This little aside offers insight into why this particular book resonated so deeply with Winfrey: She's in the middle of a journey of her own.

"I thought I had myself pretty well figured out—until I started the arduous climb of building a network," she shares. From the time OWN was officially announced in 2008, Winfrey had been faced with a mountain of challenges that continued after the network finally debuted in January 2011. Following a strong launch weekend, OWN's ratings began to decline. The one thing that Winfrey and team knew for sure was that viewers wanted to see more of the station's namesake, but she was busy with the final season of her talk show, which concluded on May 25. In June, Winfrey announced that she would expand her role at OWN from chairman to chief executive officer and chief creative officer, and immediately appointed Erik Logan and Sheri Salata—her proven team from Harpo—as the network's presidents. They got to work, and by October, Winfrey's first new show was ready to air. *Oprah's LifeClass* remixes examples of signature "aha moments" from *The Oprah Winfrey Show's* archives with fresh commentary. Immediately following episodes during the premiere week, Oprah.com and OWN's Facebook page streamed live discussions hosted by Winfrey in her familiar Chicago studio. Viewers around the globe could chime in via social media, making for an interactive experience that drew a larger audience than the cable channel that first week.

"I MOVED INTO THE NEXT  
CHAPTER,  
AND I AM HAVING MORE  
FUN THAN EVER."

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**THE TAJ MAHAL**  
Winfrey travels to India to  
film episodes of *Oprah's Next  
Chapter* and *Super Soul Sunday*.

On January 1, 2012, exactly one year after Winfrey welcomed viewers to her next chapter and the network, *Oprah's Next Chapter* made its prime-time debut. For the two-hour special premiere episode, Winfrey traveled to the New Hampshire home of Aerosmith front man Steven Tyler for an intimate, no-holds-barred conversation that set the tone for the entire first season. "After twenty-five years, I got myself out of studio chairs," says Winfrey. "I moved into the next chapter, and I am having more fun than ever—moving around the country and the world talking to people I'm really interested in getting to know and I think viewers [are], too." As the saying goes, numbers don't lie, and *Oprah's Next Chapter* continually set new ratings records for the network as Winfrey and her camera crew crisscrossed the country for interviews with everyone from author and activist Gloria Steinem to rapper 50 Cent. Winfrey brought viewers with her to Haiti for a visit with humanitarian and actor Sean Penn, to Barbados for a heart-to-heart conversation with Rihanna, and to India for a tour that began in the slums of Mumbai and concluded in a royal palace.

Her next chapter, it appears, is a bit of a whirl. In the name of building a network, she appeared on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, which necessitated a few days filming the various spoof spots that ran throughout the show. She hosted *Oprah's Oscar Special* and took to the stage for Oprah's Lifeclass: the Tour, which delivers OWN's message to a live audience. She traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, to the set of OWN's hit series *Welcome to Sweetie Pie's*. The unanticipated expansion of her face-of-brand role doesn't alter her larger duties as the network's the-buck-stops-here



**NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
Winfrey with Steven Tyler  
at his private home in  
New Hampshire.

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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI  
Winfrey visits with Miss Robbie  
Montgomery on the set of  
*Welcome to Sweetie Pie's*.

chief. "It's not just oh, gee, I get to create these shows," says Winfrey. "If you're going to allot a certain amount of money for a show, that show needs to pay off."

It also needs to be in line with her vision for a network of mindful programming while simultaneously resonating with viewers and enticing advertisers. Building a network isn't an easy task—and it doesn't happen overnight. When OWN didn't become an instant success, the immediate media backlash was brutal. Winfrey used her platform to answer the naysayers with a two-part documentary, *Oprah Builds a Network*, which aired in July 2012. During the show, she shares her reaction to the negative media coverage of her new venture:

You cannot let yourself be defined by what other people say....So to me, it's a spiritual trial. It's happening because you can't know who you are when you spend too much time on the mountaintop. You have to be taken down from the mountain in order to rise to the next level. There's no way to accomplish anything of value without having a challenge. Nobody just rides into anything.

The documentary ends on a high note, as Winfrey is informed that *Super Soul Sunday* earned the network its first Emmy Award. "This Emmy means that somebody other than ourselves has noticed that the work we are speaking to, that we are giving our life's work to, that [our] work is meaningful."

With OWN's ratings on a steady rise, Winfrey and team are now focused on continually adding to the network's roster of mindful programming. The lineup at press time includes *Super Soul Sunday*, *Oprah's*

*Next Chapter*, and *Oprah's Lifeclass*, as well as family docu-series such as *Welcome to Sweetie Pie's*, *Married to the Army: Alaska*, and *Six Little McGhees*. Heeding the audience's call for "More Oprah!" OWN also offers *TV Guide Magazine's Top 25 Best Oprah Show Moments* and *Oprah: Where Are They Now?* In mid-2013, OWN is debuting two original scripted programs, by writer-director Tyler Perry. But the show that Winfrey is most excited about—the one she has been tweeting, posting, and talking about nonstop—is *Iyanla: Fix My Life*, hosted by author, inspirational speaker, and talk-show host Iyanla Vanzant.

While Winfrey calls *Super Soul Sunday* the heart of her original vision for OWN, she says that the work Vanzant is doing is the soul of that vision. The Harpo Studios-produced show follows the host as she goes deep into people's lives to help them discover and pull back the curtain on what is "broken." While it may sound exploitative, it's more like group therapy, as Vanzant uses examples from her own life to help real people with real problems fix theirs.

Vanzant refers to it as "participatory television," and the audience can participate by doing "The Work" on Oprah.com: supplemental worksheets, questionnaires, and study guides that coincide with each of the show's episodes. On the site, Vanzant also posts video responses to questions submitted by users. Winfrey describes the show as "the manifestation of what I had in mind when I decided, ok, I am going to say yes to the network."

By saying yes, Winfrey has put herself in a position that challenges her every day as she tries to live her own best life. No matter which medium you prefer, the Oprah Winfrey Network can help you live yours, too. ♡

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