

# Broadcasting Brilliance With Kim Coles

Interviewed by Christine Chirichella



During this year's Build Business conference, attendees will enjoy a fun and inspiring keynote presentation from Kim Coles. She's best known for her role as a cast member on *In Living Color* and the hit television series, *Living Single*. In addition to her acting career spanning 35 years, Coles is a comedian, author, speaker, and coach.

Her presentation, *Broadcast Your Brilliance*, will impart her wisdom about how to find and define your signature story. Coles will help you access the power of owning your life lessons to connect with customers, clients, and the world as we adjust to this new normal. Her techniques will help you gain visibility, create maximum impact, and become more profitable.

*Marketer* recently talked to Coles while she was social distancing at home in California. Here she shares a little about the power of your story and why it's going to become even more important in the days following COVID-19.

## **Marketer: How did you get into acting? What was your favorite gig and why?**

I started in New York, actually as a stand-up comedian. I grew up watching all the great comedians on television in the late '60s, early '70s. I fell in love with Carol Burnett and Lucille Ball, all the great funny ladies (and men too). I wasn't even sure that was what I wanted to do; I just knew that making people laugh worked for me, especially in high school. I discovered the way to win friends and influence people was to be funny. After high school, I used this natural talent to develop a comedy routine for the talent competition in a beauty pageant for plus-sized women. I ended up winning first runner up! That gave me the confidence to start performing on stage.

Around 1985, comedy was really beginning to explode. Eddie Murphy had become huge and he was just this kid from Long Island. So that was my way in. It was so much fun, I was so fearless then. Performing in New York led to an audition for *In Living Color*, which brought me to California. I spent one year on that show, and the rest of my career took off because I was already in Los Angeles. I was getting noticed; I was getting seen. Warner Brothers created the show *Living Single* around me and Queen Latifah. I spent five amazing



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years there. By the way, that’s the answer to your question about what was my favorite gig. That and two episodes of *Frasier* was not too shabby.

**Marketer: How did your role as an actress prepare you for becoming an author and keynote speaker?**

While I was on *Living Single*, I was always present to the fact that I needed to develop other things. I didn’t realize I was an entrepreneur, but I didn’t just do that show. I wrote a one-woman show and performed it. I wrote my first book and did a lot of other projects. I think that’s what kept me relevant.

After the show ended, I worked a little bit, but nothing was ever as big and bold as being a regular on a network show—that’s always the holy grail for someone like me who loves the sitcom. Getting into this business was actually very easy for me. Most people struggle at the beginning of their career. I struggled in the middle of my career, after I was already “famous,” not the beginning. I kept wondering, “Why am I here and why am I not getting hired?”

So, I started really trying to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do to come back to myself and reinvent myself. I went back to comedy and focused on my gifts, which are love and laughter, making other people feel good, and making them feel good about themselves. I don’t have to be on

a TV show to do that. I started speaking and just being transparent and sharing my story. That’s what led to everything I’m doing now.

Being an actress prepared me for this. I’d already been branching out. It was now imperative that I focus on doing those other things while waiting for the acting jobs to come so I could keep money flowing. So, I discovered this whole other existence for myself. Right now, the whole industry is shut down but, because I started speaking and teaching online courses, I have a means to be able to still bring money in, and that’s powerful.

**Marketer: As we think post-COVID-19, how important will our stories be? How do you see storytelling changing?**

I think storytelling has always been important, but I think it will be more important than ever because it’s how we’re going to keep connected, and how we’ll continue to connect with our customers and clients. The companies that right now stay visible and show how they’re caring about their customers and clients are the ones that will continue to get work and clients when this is all over. If you metaphorically put the covers over your head for too long—I think there’s a certain allowance for going, “What the heck is going on?”—but I think those of us who came out and said, “How can I be a part of the change, how can I be a part of healing?” are going to stay in the forefront.



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Those stories of encouragement and courage ... those people who had the virus and healed from it ... are going to be so valuable to hear because there's so much disarray. We're going to need to hold onto something bigger than ourselves.

**Marketer: Why is it so important to define a signature story, and is now a good time to think about how to tell your story?**

I know a lot of people who've said, "I've always wanted to write a book." Now is a perfect time to start writing your book, because the world has sort of slowed down to heal itself. It's also one of the things I do—I'm a story and book coach, I started my publishing company. I've got a handful of clients right now who are working on turning out their books so they can be ready when we open the doors and life opens up again.

So, think about your story, think about your life in a new way. I call it pivoting on purpose. We're all going to have to pivot, you might as well do it with a purpose right now. Be thinking about what's going to happen—there will be a new normal. Our stories are important because we resonate with stories, we see each other in each other's stories.

We also need more stories of kindness at this time, and stories of people who are heroic and on the frontline who are brave. These stories are going to be important because

show courage and great pain, hanging in there and figuring it out no matter what.

**Marketer: Why is storytelling so important to everyone and, in particular, for marketers? How can they best apply storytelling and the signature story to differentiate their firm's brand?**

As a company, you must apply storytelling to differentiate yourself, to tell your consumers and buyers your "why." You have to get them to buy into and resonate with your why. Stories help you to stand out and create energy around what you're doing, which is legacy building.

Story is the foundation of who we are, and it should be infused in all of our language and business. It already is, so why not use it to create an opportunity for people to feel a part of something bigger than themselves? Engineers and architects are such creative people. I went to Brooklyn Technical High School and most of my high school buddies are engineers and architects. So I know that mind set of creating something out of nothing to be used for human consumption. It's a building, but it's more than a building. So those stories need to be infused in your work, so you're the one who gets the job.

More than ever, your philosophy and way of being is going to be important. Because if this disease has taught us nothing else, we're



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human, we're fragile, and we're perfectly imperfect.

**Marketer: How do you think work and the world have changed from COVID-19? Do you see positive takeaways or lessons learned related to storytelling?**

I think we're going to have to be a lot more creative. I think companies are going to find ways to adapt. Those companies that sent people home to work remotely may decide to keep it that way because it saves on overhead. In my industry, all events are being canceled, so I'm shifting to working online and so will a lot of people. They're using Zoom and other tools.

I do know this. The respect that I have for grocery store workers has gone up immensely. They're just as essential as the doctors. They're working with their masks on, scanning my bread and tomato sauce with a smile on their face. I think it's going to make us look at each other differently.

**Marketer: What can attendees expect to hear at Build Business to help them in their marketing and business development roles?**

Connection matters more than ever, transparency and authenticity matter

more than ever. I love that nobody's getting their nails done, nobody's getting their lashes done. My eyebrows look like Sasquatch. None of it matters. Authenticity and transparency are all we have right now.

The message will be about how we as humans are resilient. We will figure this out!

**Marketer: What would you like the audience to learn, feel, and walk away with after hearing your keynote address?**

I'm always going to come back to the power of stories. I want the audience to feel inspired, encouraged, and uplifted, with techniques to tell their stories better than ever. ■

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Learn more during the October 9 keynote presentation, *Broadcast Your Brilliance*, during the virtual SMPS annual conference.



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