

Promote Your Book without Depleting Your Treasury

It is an unfortunate fact in these times of bottom line, profit-oriented publishing houses that the burden of publicizing a book falls directly on the shoulders of its author. That means you!

That's very different from the stories we used to hear about coast-to-coast press tours and book signings and other costly promotions. Unfortunately, those days are passed, despite the fact that you at last are ready to begin writing in your retirement.

Without a strong promotional effort, few books can survive in the highly competitive market we all face today. Whether you publish through the traditional method, POD or self-publish, maintaining a continuous campaign of selling—and selling really is what promotion does—is essential to your book's success.

This can be a very expensive effort. Fees for professional PR consultants run high. Advertising generally is costly. As a retiree on a fixed income that can be a difficult burden. But writers, few of whom have deep pockets, have discovered new and creative ways to stretch the dollars and frequently gain free publicity.

Two for One

Think of promotion as a two-pronged campaign. It should be designed to promote not only your book, but you as the expert who has authored it. Books come and books go. Their popularity eventually dies out. But your reputation must continue to grow and grow as you produce new writing. So let's first look at the benefits of developing you as expert authority in your field.

Branding

This effort is a type of branding: Taking your knowledge and using it to build your reputation as a specialist in the area you have chosen to write about. That doesn't mean you will always be restricted to writing on the same subject. Your topics certainly can vary, for recognition as an expert in one or two fields will help sales even of unrelated books.

Your reputation as an authority in a given subject will lead to interviews and profiles on radio and television and in print. Invitations to speak publicly will begin arriving. You soon will no longer be just an author; you will have achieved some degree of celebrity, more than enough to keep your retirement pretty active.

Getting an Early Start

You'll want to crank up the promotional wheels several months before your book is released. The goal is to create excitement in anticipation of its arrival. The most effective way to do this is to create a web site or blog if you don't already have one.

The Internet has become one of the leading tools for promotion of books. Best of all, once you have mounted your site, the rest is free. No cost to reach potentially thousands, even millions, of readers. When you click on the article *Harnessing the Web's Magic*, found in the article links from this "Marketing" page, you'll learn how to use these superb tools most effectively.

To Hire or Not To Hire

Your first major decision will be whether or not to hire a PR professional to develop a full-scale campaign. The price is steep, as stated earlier, but the results can be remarkable without major effort on your part. Many small firms exist, as well as

knowledgeable individuals who function as PR freelancers. They can save you a good deal of money, but you will have to work very closely with them to tailor the campaign.

While expert in promotion, few have specific experience in the very specialized field of publicizing books. The third option, of course, is doing the promotional job yourself. It is not that difficult, but it is time consuming. The tasks are essentially the same, whether you do them yourself or hire a professional to complete them.

Going It Alone

Step one in the process is to create a Press Kit. I often call it an “Impress Kit” when talking with students because the job of the kit is to tell members of the media about you and your book. A strong press kit will impress!

Three key documents will do this job. A fact sheet on the book should stress its uniqueness and its value to the person who chooses to read it. The essential message and the content of the book must be described. Details like the ISBN and the release date of the book are essential.

A page on your background and your qualifications to write the book should be included. Any books or articles you have published should be cited, as well as reports or other documents written during your career. Memberships in professional organizations, as well as awards and honors are important in establishing your qualifications.

Include information on your education, family, relevant aspects of your career and your life experiences that have contributed to your ability to write this book. If you have an interest in television appearances, it is important to include a professional-looking photograph. Print media also often use a picture.

In addition, a solid press kit will offer a pre-written press release that often makes the difference between obtaining coverage or not if the reporter is a bit lazy or overworked. And many are.

Endorsements and testimonials play an important role in the kit. As soon as any favorable reviews have been completed, include them. A reproduction of the front cover of the book frequently finds its way into print media to illustrate a review or profile.

Pitches and Press Releases

Prior to publication of the book, you should begin contacting the media with short blurbs relevant to your book. When you launch your web site or blog, notify them. A short press release can do the job, announcing both the site and the forthcoming book.

The release should be used whenever you want to make the press aware of an event, such as a reading, a signing or other happening. Write it in a simple straightforward style. The header should state the date the release is effective, a means of contacting you and a very strong headline summarizing the key point of the release.

A pitch is in essence an invitation to the press to attend an event. At the same time it gives the reporter enough information to write a short blurb, if so inclined. The simplest format is to follow the standard journalistic sequence of Who, What, Where, When plus contact information.

A second variation of a pitch letter can be used to market yourself to an editor or producer as a particularly exciting subject for interview whether in print or broadcast. It must be written confidently and forcefully, justifying its content with facts not just meaningless adjectives.

Making Contact

The names and addresses of media contacts can be found at your local library. Directories of newspapers, periodicals and broadcasters are available in most reference rooms. If you are determined to book interviews on air, add a “Talking Points” to your press kit to assure a potential interviewer that you indeed have much to contribute to the interview.

Clicking on “Broadcast Talk Shows” on the Internet will produce a long list of potential opportunities. *Radio-TV Interview Reports* publishes ads from authors who want to be interviewed. It is quite expensive, but read by thousands of producers from coast to coast as they look for provocative or stimulating guests.

Click on www.freepublicity.com/getontoptv?10005 for some interesting reports on broadcast promotions. You might also try www.sabahradioshows.com.

Signings and Appearances

Reports on the effectiveness of book signings differ greatly. Some authors talk of selling substantial numbers of books, while many others bemoan the minuscule number they are able to move. All, however, agree that the exposure is beneficial. Many signings occur in bookstores. Some follow a presentation by the author; others are simple signings.

These events can be easily arranged by contacting the bookstore manager or owner, particularly those located near your place of residence. Bookstores usually enjoy promoting the “hometown kid’s” work. A small table, chair, supply of books and promotional material are all it takes to do the job.

Another marvelous venue is the public library, where signings almost always are preceded by an author's talk or an open discussion with the author. Most libraries maintain a regular schedule of activities that include authors' presentations and signings. The web site www.ala.org/publicprograms/authors@yourlibrary is a marvelous resource for authors. It is used by librarians to locate published speakers. Be certain to register on the site. It will help you obtain appearances.

Service clubs like Kiwanis and Rotary, the local YMCA or YMHA and other community organizations are usually eager to find interesting and informative speakers. You probably were a member of one of these before your retirement, and may still be a current participant. If so, the chances of an invitation are even greater. Be sure to make the Event Chairperson aware of your availability.

So you see, there are endless ways to promote your book at minimal financial cost. But it does take some effort. We have only scratched the surface. I strongly suggest you spend some time studying *Book Marketing from A-Z* written by Francine Silverman. It is an excellent compilation of authors' comments on the importance of promotion and the techniques they have used to sell their books. There's no time like the immediate to ensure your book won't collect dust on a store shelf. Start planning and implementing your marketing and promotional programs now.