



Get the Most Out of Your PR Dollars

Experts share their best advice on how to market your novel for publishing success.

BY MARI PASSANANTI

Congratulations on the impending publication of your novel—one of hundreds of thousands of titles to hit the shelves this year!

With more novels competing for ever-shrinking review space, how can yours stand out in the overcrowded marketplace? Four prominent book publicity and marketing professionals share their best tips and insights on how to get the most buzz for your buck.

Understand your publisher's plans for your novel. “Too many authors don’t understand their publisher’s marketing and publicity plans,” says M.J. Rose, founder of

the marketing service AuthorBuzz and co-author of *What To Do Before Your Book Launch*. “It’s critical that authors and their agents know who is responsible for what aspects of the book launch.” Read all contracts, and ask questions before and during the marketing campaign.

Approach PR as an investment.

As an author, it’s a good idea to spend the necessary funds to build your brand, no matter the uncertainty. “The correlation between reviews and sales is unpredictable at best,” says Sharon Bially of BookSavvy PR. “The true value of media exposure is comparable to building a résumé or an art

portfolio, which will always be part of an author’s identity and cachet going forward.”

But Rose cautions that many authors focus heavily on publicity—a gamble—but give short shrift to marketing, which guarantees coverage through ads. “The purpose of a paid campaign is to get conversations going,” she says. “Nothing sells a book like word of mouth.”

Hire book specialists. Fauzia Burke of the book marketing firm FSB Associates says a solid track record matters. Novelists should seek out professionals who have run successful campaigns *for novels*. “Hire an experienced book publicist who has years invested in media relationships,” she says. Specialists help authors cast a wide net within a strategically defined media segment—not target every existing outlet.

Time everything carefully. An author should focus on buzz at least three to six months before her novel launches. But if you miss that window, you can still invest in targeted advertising, especially on sites or in publications that draw self-identified readers. “Because of the Internet, no book dies anymore,” says Rose. “A book is new to any reader who’s never heard of it before.”

Participate. Don’t let your publicist or marketer do all the dirty work. Take initiative in a variety of promotion, from being a guest blogger on a website to getting a byline in a magazine. “Be as involved as possible,” says Jocelyn Kelley of Kelley & Hall Book Publicity. “Come up with ideas,

angles [and] areas of interest [to help promote your book].”

Burke advises her clients to have their “digital houses”—website and social media presence—in place before launching a book campaign. “Every time you create and share content, you shape your professional brand,” she says. “Today, publicity serves to amplify—not launch—an author’s brand.”

Embrace trends. Kelley says many novelists worry that their books will appear too much like other books already on shelves, a fear she calls unfounded. “Books with similar story lines can actually help bring your book to the attention of editors and reviewers,” she says. “They are always looking for trends.”

Expect enthusiasm, professionalism and communication. “The publicist should be excited and eager to spread the word about your book,” Kelley says. “The publicist should have read your book. He or she should be generating unique angles to help spark interest from editors and reviewers.”

A publicist should also provide a detailed work plan, including a list of outlets they intend to pitch. “The author should see the pitch before the professional uses it to make sure [everyone is] on the same page,” says Rose.

Understand costs. Most marketing firms work on monthly retainers (standard fees). Many set minimum lengths for campaigns—two or three months is typical—though some charge on a project basis. “The average monthly retainer for a respected firm is \$3,000–7,000,” says Burke.

Don't dismiss the “small guys.”

It’s rash to ignore little-known media places. Many book blogs and similar smaller venues have dedicated followings of readers who love to talk about books—exactly the readers novelists want to reach. So market your work accordingly. “Authors sometimes look at smaller media outlets as a waste of time,” says Kelley. “Some feel that if it isn’t Oprah, it isn’t worth the time or effort to write a guest post or answer interview questions. [But] you never know who is following a particular website.”

Use social networking sites wisely.

“With social media, it has never been easier to find and interact with readers, and to create long-term engagement with the community,” says Burke, recommending that authors set aside time daily for updating their social media accounts, including Twitter, Facebook and author blogs.

Be realistic. No matter what steps you take in marketing your work, know the road to publishing success is long, and that the outcome you yearn for might not transpire. “It’s very hard to make your book a bestseller if your house doesn’t want it to be a bestseller,” says Rose. “There’s no shame in being a solid mid-list writer who keeps getting contracts. Authors do themselves a disservice by having their eye on the golden ring—being among the 1 percent who become bestsellers. You’ve won by getting on the merry-go-round.”

Mari Passananti is the author of *The K Street Affair* and *The Hazards of Hunting While Heartbroken*. She is currently working on her third novel.

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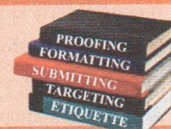
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