How to Market Your Book

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Traditional and Social Media Methods

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Introduction

Congratulations! You've written or are on the path to completing your manuscript. It's been a long journey; yet in many ways the life of your book is just beginning.

At this stage it's important to begin looking ahead and planning how you will market your book--to consumers, to retailers, to workshop attendees, and more.

Many strategies are available to you, from authoring a blog to promoting your book on Amazon to blasting a custom press release across the Internet.

But before you decide which strategies and services are right for you, you first need to ask yourself a few questions.

Who?

Before you can market your book, you need to know who your readers are. To what age group are you reaching out? Is your readership specific to a certain geographical location? Do they share a certain passion, like woodworking or knitting? Are they lovers of a certain genre, such as sci-fi or romance? Are there certain professional groups that are likely to be interested in your book?

The better you understand who you are trying to reach, the better you can plan where and how to reach them. For example, while a recent Pew Research Center study found that 13% of online Americans use Twitter, the same study found that the largest percentage of users are in the 18-29 age group. So, if you are marketing a book about paying for college, Twitter might be a bigger slice of your overall campaign than if you were marketing a book about planning your retirement.

Different blogs and publications have different readerships; by having a clearly defined picture of your reader, you can ensure that you properly allocate your resources (including your time) so that your campaign is as effective as possible.

Also, think beyond consumers at bookstores: Are there organizations that might be interested in purchasing your book? Attendees at workshops or speaking engagements?

Think about everyone you are trying to reach, and then plan on how best to reach them.

What?

What will your marketing plan look like? What materials will you need for your campaign? Every book is different, and goals differ as well.

For some books (typically nonfiction), an active ad campaign on Google makes sense. For others, a press release sent to specific areas and industries is an effective approach. For yet other books, an aggressive social marketing campaign is the right focus. And if you are planning to approach traditional media and websites that review books, then you will need a well-written pitch letter and press kit.

A well-rounded marketing plan--whether created and executed by a publisher, a publicity firm, or you the author--will incorporate some or all of these elements. Ultimately, the materials you will need depend upon where and how you intend to market your book.

When?

Timing is a crucial element of book marketing. Decide when you want to release your book--your “pub date.” This date will drive the timing of many of your marketing efforts and will be listed on your promotional materials. In coming up with this all-important date, consider several factors.

A book for all seasons
Is there a specific time of year or an event around which it makes sense to release your book? For example, if you’ve written a diet book, you probably want to release it in January, when many publications and retailers are focusing on “New Year, New You” themes. Or perhaps you’ve written a novel that is perfect for beach reading, or an in-depth exploration of a historical event that has an important anniversary coming up.

Tying your book to events that are already getting media attention can be a great way to generate buzz for your book.

Factor in long-leads
Another consideration is giving bloggers and editors enough time to review or feature your book. Certain national newspapers and magazines are considered “long-lead publications,” and require lead times of 3-6 months to schedule reviews or features.

Many blogs and websites, on the other hand, require less time, as they don’t plan their stories or posts so far in advance.

Breaking news
While publications want a review to come out on the heels of the book's release, a news story or other feature does not need to be linked so closely to the book's publication. For example, if you've written a book on solar energy, and a new solar energy incentive is introduced in your state, your pitch to write a related article for an environmental blog would still be relevant after your book's publication.

Where?

In focusing your marketing efforts, consider where your readers spend time. Showcase your book, your expertise, and yourself in those places your readers are most likely to frequent.

Online retailers
Obviously book buyers shop at online retailers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble.com. Amazon offers various tools for authors who want to gain exposure for their books, such as author profile pages, where you can let customers know a little more about yourself, and the Search Inside!™ tool.

The more material you make available to potential readers, the more likely they are to purchase your book (especially if you're a first-time author), so be sure to take advantage of features like Amazon's Search Inside tool, Barnes & Noble.com's See Inside feature, and Google Books.

That social networking site
With a population of users larger than many countries, Facebook is a perfect place to promote yourself and your book. Set up a personal profile and a page for your book, create and join groups, and actively update your pages. While you're in a social mood, set up accounts on other popular sites like LinkedIn and Twitter. With growing usage (13% of online Americans use Twitter as of 2011) and integration with Apple's iOS 5 mobile operating system, Twitter is another platform for reaching potential readers in large numbers.

Online communities
These virtual communities allow you to interact directly with people who love books. Some sites cater to a general population of book enthusiasts, such as Goodreads and Shelfari, and others are more specific, such as Figment.com, a site that is popular with writers and readers of young adult books. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Target your search. Look for online communities that are as specific as possible to your genre. Not only will you have more to contribute, but people who are passionate about a subject may participate in several online communities, and so you may find yourself developing relationships across multiple sites.
- Participate. Set up a profile page, find or start groups, join in discussions, and comment on others' blog postings.

- Don’t focus on selling. Not every interaction in an online community has to (or should) be about promoting your book. Be yourself and make a real contribution. By participating in relevant communities, potential readers can get to know you and you can learn more about your readers and what they are looking for.
- Practice reciprocity. As you develop relationships with group members, consider asking particularly active ones if you can send them a copy of your book to review on Amazon or (if applicable) their blog. If they like your book, see if they will provide blurbs for your website or recommend your book to other members of the group. Be prepared to do the same for others. Good relationships are never one-sided.
- Share your expertise. Share your knowledge with others on Squidoo (www.squidoo.com), a community website founded by bestselling author Seth Godin. The website launched with the tagline "Everyone's an expert (on something)” and allows you to create a page called a “lens” on any subject you please, which can then be seen by millions of Squidoo users.

Your local media

There is a lot of competition out there for coverage in big newspapers; unfortunately, not everyone can make it into the pages of the *New York Times* or the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. However, editors of local newspapers and producers of local TV and radio shows are frequently looking for interesting stories about residents.

- Publishing a book can be a great local interest story. Send a press kit to local editors and producers, and be sure to follow up. Let them know if there’s a story idea that would be of particular interest to the community. For example, if you’ve written a book on parenting tips, and you’re heading into a cold suburban winter, offer to write a piece on fun things to do with your child at home.
- To reach local readers, also consider location-specific news sites such as Patch.com, which reports on local news and events in towns and cities around the country.

Why?

Before finalizing your marketing plan, set clearly defined goals. What are you trying to achieve? Chances are your primary goal is to sell as many books as possible. Do you have a target in mind? Perhaps you are looking to sell enough books to recoup your costs, or to fund a sabbatical to write your next book.

Determine how aggressive your promotion will need to be to achieve your goal, and keep that target in mind when setting your marketing budget.

Selling books is certainly the goal of most authors, but perhaps you have other goals in mind as well.

Maybe you're an expert who makes your living through speaking engagements, and you're looking to use your book to enhance your credibility and build your name. In that case, you may not be as interested in boosting your Amazon sales as your are in marketing YOU. Or, perhaps you're interesting in spreading awareness about your book's subject matter. Make sure you understand what you are looking to accomplish so that your plan is as effective as possible.

How?

We've discussed some general points and ideas to keep in mind as you create your marketing plan. Now on to a few specifics. How will you alert your readers about your newly published masterpiece? And do you need a professional?

There are some things for which you may need professional assistance, and there are other tasks you can do yourself. Obviously, some of this depends on your experience with publishing and marketing, your particular book, and your goals. Let's take a look on some efforts where you may want a helping hand.

Copy that
Unless you have professional copywriting experience, you are better off having your marketing materials written by a professional.

This service should include your press release, your pitch letter, back cover or flap copy, your book description for online retail sites, sell sheet copy, your website copy, and so forth. (If you decide to write these materials yourself, you should at least have these items proofread.)

Book publicists
If you envision a marketing campaign that focuses on print media, TV, and radio, then you may want to enlist the help of a publicist. A publicist has relationships with various media contacts--ideally ones who review and/or feature books like yours.

If you are considering working with a publicist, here are few tips to keep in mind:

- Discuss your budget and goals with your publicist. Ask your publicist what is realistic for a budget of your size.
- Make sure your money is going toward efforts that are most likely to produce results. If your publicist feels getting national review attention will be a tough sell, then ask her what she sees as the right plan for your book. Perhaps an aggressive social media campaign makes more sense. Or, if you've written a book on something topical, then perhaps a radio tour will give you the biggest bang for your buck.
- Avoid publicists who don't have a specific strategy for *your* book: sending out hundreds of unsolicited copies to editors who are already flooded with books for review is likely to blow through your budget--but not all that likely to sell your book.
- Look for a publicist who has experience working with books like yours. If you've written a novel about vampires and your publicist primarily works with nonfiction authors, then you are probably not a good fit.

- Find out who will be working on your campaign. If you're looking at a big firm, make sure you speak to the person who will actually be creating and executing your campaign. Make sure you are comfortable with this person and he is responsive to your questions.
- Ask about follow up. Sending out pitch letters and review copies is relatively easy. Following up with editors, producers, and bloggers is not. However, without follow up, the initial pitch isn't likely to go anywhere.

Create a website

Many of your marketing efforts will direct readers to your website, so it's important that your site makes a good first impression. Your website should have an attractive, professional design and be easy to navigate. Unless you have experience with web design, you may want to hire an expert to create your site for you. At a minimum, your page should include:

- A "book shot" displaying your book in its jacket or printed cover
- A brief description of your book
- Your author bio
- Links to e-tailers where visitors can purchase your book (or an order page if you are selling books directly from your site)
- Information for retailers interested in purchasing copies of your book

You should also considering including on your website:

- A table of contents (for nonfiction books)
- An excerpt that draws readers into your book and leaves them wanting more
- A link to your blog
- Reviews, endorsements or news about your book (such as speaking engagements or book signings)
- Social sharing buttons for sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as social bookmarking sites like Digg and Reddit
- A way of contacting you regarding media questions, ordering queries, etc.
- An author interview or FAQ page

Discuss all of your ideas with the professional you are considering hiring to create your site. Ask to see samples of her work, and make sure you establish how updates can be made to your site after its initial creation.

Advertise online

You also may want to consider online search advertising, such as Google AdWords. Known as a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) campaign, this type of advertising allows you to set your own budget and bid on certain keywords that, when users search for them, will bring up ads for your website on Google search results pages.

While you can do this yourself, it will be more effective to have an experienced professional monitor your campaign, making changes as necessary to improve your results.

Do-It-Yourself Marketing

There are certain things that you can, and often should, do yourself. For example, involving yourself in online communities relevant to your book is something you can do best. While you can certainly pay someone to set up your profile and load your bookshelf on a social book site, only you will have the passion and know-how to establish a genuine online presence in these communities, and to build relationships and create discussions that will interest others and make them interested in you.

Remember, being part of a community isn't just about selling your book; it's about participating and contributing in your own unique way.

Here are some other affordable and effective ways you can promote your book:

- **Customer reviews:** Customer reviews can influence a reader's decision about whether or not to purchase your book. This is especially true if you are a new author. Be sure to send your friends, family, and colleagues copies of your book (or, even better, ask them to buy copies), and to write objective customer reviews on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.com. Follow these tips when it comes to reviews:
- ***Keep it real.*** The key word here is "objective"; if an acquaintance can't be impartial, then don't ask him to do it. If readers see a slew of glowing reviews that all look as though they were written by your mother, they are likely to develop a distrust of you and your book.
    - ***Focus on Amazon top reviewers.*** For maximum credibility, solicit reviews from Amazon Top Reviewers. These reviewers have badges next to their names, such as "Top 10" or "Top 50" reviewer. You can find a current list of Top Reviewers at http://www.amazon.com/review/top-reviewers.
- ***Do your homework.*** Many of these Top Reviewers list their email addresses, as well as the types of books they prefer to review; send a brief pitch and offer to send a review copy. But first, check out their reviews, and see just how "brutally honest" they tend to be, and how well-written, thoughtful and fair their reviews are.
    - ***Stick to type.*** Also consider the types of books they tend to review; someone who generally reviews romance novels may not get your post-apocalyptic zombie saga. To speed up your search, find books that are similar to yours, and focus on Top Reviewers who provided compelling and balanced reviews of those books.
- **Alert the media:** Once you have a press release, you need a way to distribute it to the masses. PRWeb (http://www.prweb.com/) is an online press release distribution service that releases the story to major news sites like Google News, Yahoo! News and Topix, as well as more than 250,000 subscribers, 30,000 websites and 30,000 bloggers and journalists. Prices range from $80 to $350 per release depending on the package you choose.

- **Become an expert:** There are websites that specialize in connecting journalists with subject-matter experts who can provide quotes or ideas for stories. This is free exposure that boosts your credibility and gets your name out there. Check out HARO (http://www.helpareporter.com/), FlackList (http://www.flacklist.com/home.php), Reporter Connection (http://www.reporterconnection.com/join/?11526), or NewsBasis (http://newsbasis.com/) to learn how to position yourself as such an expert.

- **Workshops and Speaking Engagements:** There's plenty you can do from your computer, but sometimes nothing beats going out and meeting potential readers in person. When setting up face-to-face connections:

    - ***Provide value.*** Make it worth people's while to attend your event. If you've written a book on knitting, offer a free knitting workshop at your local yarn or craft store. If you've written a book on retirement planning, invite members of the local media to participate in a workshop (and give away free copies of your book).
    - ***Consult a speakers bureau.*** A speakers bureau can connect authors with audiences. Newer authors may want to consider a site such as Maestro Market (http://www.maestromarket.com/), an online marketplace connecting talent with people planning events.
- **Back to School:** Your relationship with your college or university didn't end when you tossed your cap in the air. Reach out to your alumni network: Pitch an article or interview to your alumni magazine, announce your book's release in an alumni newsletter, or consult your university's speakers bureau about being added to the bureau's speaking list.
- **Be their guest:** Reach out to blogs relevant to your subject or genre, and offer to write a guest post. This allows you to reach new readers and grow your reputation, and to create backlinks to your own blog or website. Make sure you approach bloggers who share your passion, and that you provide unique content that offers real value to the blog's readers (don't simply pitch your book). You can reach out to bloggers on your own, or join a community like My Blog Guest (http://myblogguest.com/), which connects guest bloggers with bloggers seeking content. For even more assistance, consider a blog tour coordinator such as TLC Book Tours (http://tlcbooktours.com/), which can arrange for you to "appear" on 10-15 book-related and specialty blogs within a month.
- **Solicit reviews:** While your novel may not appear in the *New York Times Book Review* next to the latest release from Jonathan Franzen, there are various websites and blogs devoted to books that can provide thoughtful and engaging reviews of your work. A few of these include Blogcritics (blogcritics.org), The Midwest Book Review (http://www.midwestbookreview.com/get_rev.htm), and Bookslut (http://www.bookslut.com/contact.php). However, there are many others that may be more relevant to your book. And remember:

    - Follow the rules. Before contacting a reviewer, read any book submission guidelines listed on the site, and make sure your book is eligible and that you submit the proper materials within the time frame indicated.
    - Be selective. As always, try to assess if the reviewer or site has reviewed books like yours, to give your book the best chance of receiving a positive review.

- **Give it away:** Promote your new masterpiece with an online contest. Offer to send a free copy of your last book to the first 50 people who tweet about your new one. (A great use of any extra inventory sitting in your garage!) Or send a free eBook to the first 50 people who “Like” your new book’s page on Facebook. People love free stuff--and it’s great way to create buzz around your book.

Do Your Homework & Know Your Options

As you can see, there are many ways to promote your book, and what you choose will be individual to your budget, your experience, and your content.

Keep track of other books like yours that are experiencing success in the marketplace, and see how those authors and publishers are promoting their books. See what keywords pop up in their press releases or web copy, and which blogs and reviewers have featured them.

But most of all, commit your time to promoting your work, and developing your own personal brand. Ultimately, the followers you gain and relationships you build will help you to sell not just this book, but many more to come.

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