

## **Publishing or Self-Publishing, Promotion Takes Work**

By Pamela Waterman

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John Grisholm has it easy. Write the book, sit back, watch the media announce it to the world, and see the book in the front window of every bookstore, grocery store and airport newsstand in the United States and beyond. Ditto for Stephen King and Danielle Steele.

But for the rest of us, the hard-working authors with a first (or third, or fifth) fiction or non-fiction book, the push of that final “save” button actually signals the beginning of the real job at hand: promotion. Whether you’re signed up with a traditional publisher, or the publisher just happens to be yourself, there’s a long list of tasks to be done. Knowing who does what and how is critical to successful book promotion. Are you on the fence about what needs to happen next? This article helps you sort the tasks and get to work.

### **Traditional Path Gives Breadth but Demands Partnership**

Established publishers command a certain presence; they have connections, experience, and varying degrees of clout that both attract authors and gain attention throughout all phases of book promotion. Good publishers know every angle and keep up to date as technology offers new options, but there’s no substitute for authors helping out.

For more than a decade, publishers have required prospective authors to include a marketing plan in their book proposal packet. (Books are available describing just how to put together a winning plan.) You will also be asked to fill out an extensive author questionnaire about your background experiences, media contacts and ties to relevant people and organizations. What may not be clear is just which elements of all that information are accepted and acted upon, and which are the responsibility of the publisher versus the author. The details will vary according to the publisher, but here is an overview of the minimum tasks for a professional project.

Months before the book comes out, publishers send bound galleys for review to such publications as *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal*. They also include the title in their company catalog, write up a sales sheet on each book and brief their sales teams as to the hooks and strong points to be pitched to bookstore buyers. Through their existing relationships, they automatically get your book into the systems of Ingram, Baker and Taylor and other distributors, and list your title on Amazon.com.

These partnerships get your book into major bookstores, but if you’re not John Grisholm, they may be backed up with a minimum of actual promotion. Standard efforts include the publisher faxing press releases or sending emails to radio stations, following up on responses, and letting you know about interview requests. You may or may not have any input to crafting the press release. As evidenced by the comments in an Independent Book Publishers Association (IPBA) Roundtable article (May 2007), many

medium-sized publishers offer strong support by way of website hosting/design assistance, PR coaching, setting up book-signing events, and printing postcards, fliers and bookmarks for your own use.

Other publishers, either large and impersonal or simply not as pro-active, leave these details to you. Strange as it may seem, they may not even be responsive to your offers to help. Press releases, radio interviews and placement in their catalog may be it, and if you only find out after the big release is over, it can be hard or impossible to play catch up. All of these variables point to the need to pin down the specifics of your tasks and their tasks up front at contract-signing time.

### **Self-Publishing: Constant Work, but Complete Control**

If you the author are also the publisher, you are automatically responsible for marketing. You may choose to hire out some tasks, but the success of your book promotion falls most heavily at your doorstep. Take heart, and consider this an endless opportunity. With a traditional publisher, you would be working on many of these elements anyway, and this time you keep all the profits.

Write a marketing plan that includes as many paths to promotion as you can imagine (some may be more fruitful than others, but write them down for later prioritizing). You will come back to this over and over again as you track which efforts have paid off the most, and which back-burnered ideas you are ready to try. Again, books are available to guide you in the specifics, and IBPA members are a great resource, too.

Everything that a traditional publisher might have done, you will need to do, but your advantages include complete control and the ultimate level of enthusiasm. Write your own press releases and target their style and content to different submarket groups. If you can, print galley copies and send them out ahead of time for review. Pitch articles to targeted newspapers, magazines, websites and professional association publications, and make a schedule for those important follow-up phone calls.

Set up a website! This is essential for today's consumers as well as bookstores, newspaper reporters and anyone who needs information on the book at their convenience, not yours. If this is the only job you hire out, do so – it needs to be done well and maintained with vigilance, or your other professional-looking efforts will pale. Go for a coordinated look between the website and all your printed materials, whether business cards, postcards, fliers or giveaways.

Contact radio stations, TV stations, bookstores and community groups, offering to speak on a relevant topic; solve a problem for the listeners, viewers and attendees, and the book sales will follow. Contact independent bookstores and offer attractive sales terms or workshops (if you're local or could travel); bigger publishers may not take the time to do so, but your personal attention may get your books into hundreds of unique stores that many readers prefer over the big chain businesses.

You also have the time and interest to contact alternative sales channels. Depending on your topic, the best places may be pet stores, antique stores, doctors' offices, auto parts stores, catalogs, day-care centers or health clubs. Offer to give a workshop to tie with a store promotion. Come up with a simple giveaway such as a booklet, magnet, or check-sheet; link up with someone who has a related book or product, and share the expenses for a booth at a targeted event.

### **Either Way, Tag, You're It**

The possibilities are endless, and hopefully you, as the author, will have that special, straight-from-the-heart brand of enthusiasm. When you work with a traditional company, it should be a win-win situation: do your best to ask questions, get answers, and support each other's efforts. When you're the one in charge, plan ahead, take chances, and pat yourself on the back all the way to the bank. For either publishing model, try to enjoy the ride.