
Spin-It-Yourself Author PR

A publicist's how-to overview



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The importance of marketing your title

During the recent extensive policy changes at MightyWords and Fatbrain.com, General Manager Judy Kirkpatrick told *Publishers Weekly* in November (*PW Daily*, 11/9/2000) of their decision to reduce the number of titles for sale from 10,000 to 2,500.

She said, "As a company, we can't do a perfect job promoting self-published titles and we had to stop offering these books for sale because the authors didn't do enough to participate in the process of marketing and promoting their titles themselves. Because they didn't do anything to help the books, the books didn't sell."

Jack Canfield, renowned speaker, author, and co-creator of the Chicken soup for the Soul series had inordinate hurdles getting published – over 100 rejections from large publishers. Finally, after a mind-numbing amount of effort at an ABA convention where they approached and were rejected by over 100 more publishers, they were signed with a small press in Florida. Then came their next obstacle. "Once

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So, your baby - your first book, the fruit of your intellectual loins so to speak is finally being published, 'eh? Well, heartiest kudos to you! Only trouble is, there will be between 50-80,000 of your fellow authors' "babies" born this year too.

As a writer, when you conceived the subject matter for this wondrous tome, you were simply taken with the sheer brilliance of it. And, good news, you found a publisher who agreed with that assessment. But the reality of the book business is that it is just that – a business. And, whether you intended to or not, you've now been baptized into the ranks of marketers because your publisher will be expecting you to participate in givin' that baby of yours legs in the competitive marketplace.

It comes as a surprise to many new authors just how the book biz actually works from the publisher's vantage point. In brief, a good initial PR launch of a title will look something like this:

- galley sent out to acquire reviews to Kirkus, Publishers Weekly, etc., along with targeted publications determined by the subject matter of your book (e.g. a new compendium of beauty tips sent to *Glamour*, *Elle*, et al.)
- display ads in relevant publications including perhaps the *American Library Journal*, et al. (the library market is just a wee bit behind the trade market in annual book purchases nationwide, by the way)
- multi-city book tour for the author for a major release.
- Regional tour of 1-3 cities for author of a minor release focusing on metro areas closest to his/her residence.
- Selected nationwide pitches for national broadcast, print, and/or radio interview bookings.

Now this, m'friend, is the **best case** scenario. Often, in these days of reduced profitability due to heavy trade discounting (think Amazon, B&N, Crown Books, etc.), the ability of a publisher to not only provide you a decent advance but also bankroll a large PR push has diminished significantly.

And, even if you're fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of all of the above, a normal publisher push (utilizing either in-house or outsourced PR professionals) will only last about 4 months generally and then.....yup, baby better be ably be ready to crawl and hopefully walk soon on its own.

So, here's what YOU can do to initiate or augment efforts to market your own title:

1. Determine your overarching goal for the book. This sounds silly because your liable to say "money" or the usual author's response "I wanna be on Oprah." That's not what we're talking about here. Instead, do you want to perhaps, raise your professional profile as you are also available for speaking engagements or conducting corporate workshops? Or, do you have another book in the works and want to lay the groundwork for future book sales? Unless your last name is Grisham, you won't likely be quitting your day job anytime soon just because you've had one book published — so make its release as beneficial to you *in the largest possible framework*.
2. Determine your re\$ource\$ - both time and money. Make out a list of everyone you know who may possibly have media connections also. Be realistic about what you can do so that you don't initiate efforts and then drop the ball mid-stream. And when allocating any financial resources (printing costs, buying copies of your title from the publisher, etc.), DO keep in mind your overarching goal to make certain your efforts will "pencil out."
3. Map strategy and timelines. To be most effective you will need to work methodically. It may be helpful to use a spreadsheet or wipe-off wall calendar to chart the timelines you create after you've selected media goals. This timeline should also include calendaring personal mailings as well as follow-up calls/faxes/e-mails you will need to make in order to secure and confirm bookings.

Baby steps first – planning a local media tour

Even if you've garnered some national print or broadcast exposure while in your publisher's care, you may acquire more coverage and valuable experience by taking advantage of the opportunities in your own backyard. Now that you're the one handling the booking attempts, etc., starting "small" will allow you to hone your skills and gain more media savvy — increasing both your composure as well as garnering more on-air or print clips for your press kit.

Here, then, are some timelines that will help you in coordinating a local "media tour." First, select the best bookstore in your area – whether it be a chain or independent. Borders and Barnes & Noble's use the title Community Resource Coordinator (CRC) for the individual responsible for booking authors but you can just ask to speak with the individual who oversees the author bookings when you phone. Be aware that bookstores generally book about 2 months out which is why this date is the first one you need to secure. Do NOT shortchange yourself by taking some impending filler slot as this will result in your omission from their monthly newsletter/flyer announcing all upcoming author events.

Print/broadcast lead-times

(approximate)

- Monthly magazine - 2 mos.
- Weekly paper - 3 weeks
- Daily paper - 1-2 weeks
- TV weekly show - 3 weeks
- TV daily show - 1-2 weeks
- Radio - same as TV

The CRC will tell you exactly what you need to provide. Be certain they have all ordering data for your title (including distributor information), a brief [marketing oriented!] synopsis of the book, digital file of your cover artwork, and a good color head shot of yourself – 5 x7 color or larger. Ideally, they'll make use of all four in promoting your signing.

I personally find it much easier to secure TV and radio bookings than print. For all media, be aware that having a specific event date provides a framework and urgency to their decision-making. Without this, your request might languish in their in-box indefinitely.

Doing your homework is invaluable. Your local library should have a copy of Bacon's MediaSource (book format as well as CD's) which lists pertinent contact data for all media nationwide (and may even direct you to some you weren't aware of via keywords). Don't, however, rely on printed resources for contact data. Instead, phone the station and ask for the producer or "guest contact" (or "booker") for such-n-such show. Obtain the correct spelling (and gender if relevant – I *hate* being sent something addressed to Mr. Jernigan!) of both their first and last name, phone extension, *best* fax number to use for them and e-mail address if available. Also, be certain you know the name of the on-air host(s). Better yet, watch or listen to one or two broadcasts to be certain you're a good fit as a guest.

To pitch the media, it is best to be concise and brief. You can always give them more information/materials on an as-needed basis (far better, in fact! I actually use this as a strategy and then mark "requested materials" on the packaging when sent).

So, for your local media event, prepare a 1-pg. bio, a 1-pg. flyer for the book (incl. cover artwork, quotes, and ordering information) and a 1-pg. *customized* pitch cover letter. These materials should be housed in a colored folder with your book's jacket cover on the front. Mail or hand-deliver to the station. Make certain everything is professionally rendered as, yes, the appearance of your materials *does* count.

In your cover piece, along with introducing yourself as an area writer, indicate that you have an upcoming event at the XYZ bookstore locally and that you would, therefore, be available the week beforehand (or week of) for an interview. Again, DO play up the fact that you're a local resident and the more ties to the community you have, the better (and now is *not* the time to be shy about your accomplishments, etc.) Also, DO emphasize the date and bill the event as an in-store reading or topical discussion (vs. a signing) which can sound more compelling yet for would-be attendees.

It is critical that you establish a *reason* why the media's audience would find this of interest and highlight accordingly. This is why it's so much easier for nonfiction authors to get bookings, generically speaking, i.e. you have information to pass along which is new and noteworthy. Fiction's a much tougher sell unless you can find a local and/or news angle to tie it to.

Be methodical in your pitch follow-ups but be courteous and patient as well. Understand that you may not receive any response whatsoever to your queries. The media are inundated with pitches daily so DO wait at least several days in between follow-up attempts and mix it up via communication method e.g. a call, followed by a fax, followed by an e-mail, etc.

Ideally, your booksigning would be on, say, a Thursday evening at the local Barnes & Noble. You would appear as a guest on one or two radio shows earlier that same week. The local daily paper would list your author event in their events section the weekend before minimally. And perhaps the monthly business publication in your area would run a profile piece on you, timed to drive traffic to the booksigning. Lastly, you would appear on at least one local TV program (maybe a morning show, or your local news) in the days just prior to your B&N date. It's

definitely nerve-wracking to coordinate – but well worth the effort

Also, be advised that it's a darned good plan to send out a large list of your own invitations (postcards with your book jacket on the front work well, for example) to your personal roster of friends, acquaintances, neighbors, relatives, ex-boyfriends, and anyone you want to surreptitiously impress (wink!) to *ensure* good attendance at the book signing. Nothing's worse than a poorly attended in-store event – so “packing the house” should be part of your overall strategy for success. **DO** ask a friend who's a skilled photographer to snap pictures of you at the event, too. You can always package this photo with a follow-up profile piece for your local paper depending on how much coverage they gave you initially.

As the goal is obviously to **\$ell** books at the event, **DO** offer to autograph alllllll the copies of your title that the bookstore orders in for the signing. While they can still technically be returned to the publisher if unsold within the allotted contractual timeframe, the store is far less likely to do so. And if they don't already have a “local authors” section, suggest they add it and feature yours (with a placard indicating “signed by the author”).

Document *everything*. Lay press clippings out neatly on letter or legal paper along with the publication's mast-head and date of article and produce a quality master. Make copies of the B&N or store's newsletter announcing your signing. Acquire tapes of TV and radio interviews as this is what you'll need to create the caliber of press kit geared toward higher tiered media.

DO remember to send thank you notes to the producers, on-air talent, staff writers or editors, and the CRC who provided bookings/interviews for you. This far-too-often overlooked nicety may also serve you well down the road when you re-contact them after your agent has landed you a 2-book deal with a high profile publisher because your first title did so well. And having acquired some valuable experience with the local media, you'll be armed with more poise and credibility in approaching regional and/or national media in the months and years to come.

Lastly, when you are out there talking about your title, highlight why individuals would find your book interesting or of merit – vs. talking about yourself or how “being published has changed your life.” Remember, you're in marketing now – keep your focus on why someone would love your baby. And, let's face it, it probably won't be because its “Mom” just had one of her fondest dreams realized. So **good luck** and go get 'em. After all, you of all people know just how special that kid of yours is...!

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the book was printed we had to get the word out so people would come into the bookstore to buy it. We gave away literally thousands of free books. We sent them all over the country.

“We did everything we could to promote the book. We asked hundreds of famous people to give us testimonial quotes. We called all of the major newspapers and asked them to print articles about and stories from the book . We hired Deepak Chopra’s public relations person to help us. We tried to get on every TV show we could – especially national shows. We did mailings to thousands of people to advertise our book and gave away thousands of free review copies. We wrote articles for every newspaper, magazine and newsletter we could. We sent review copies to all of the people that contributed to the book and asked them to sell it whenever they were out speaking. We did book signings in every bookstore we could get to. We did radio talk shows by phone at all hours of the day and night. We sold the books in nontraditional places like gas stations, beauty salons, food stores and other places where people are not used to seeing books. We felt if it was the only book in the store they would buy it! And they did.

“Eventually, word of mouth took off, and we finally made the New York Times bestseller list...” (*Writers Market, 1999*)

Suggested Resources

“1001 Ways to Market Your Books” by John Kremer, Open Horizons, ISBN: 0912411481

“Guerrilla P.R.: How You Can Wage an Effective Publicity Campaign...Without Going Broke” by Michael Levine, Harperbusiness; ISBN: 0887306640 (authored pre-www in 1994 – but well written basic data that all still holds true).

Any relevant title by marketing guru Jay Conrad Levinson