

TCI-Smith Publicity

32 Tips, Tricks (and dos and don'ts) of the Book Publicity Trade By Dan Smith, TCI Smith-Publicity

1) It's a book! If you're promoting a novel, and you have a topic or background amenable to broadcast interviews, ALWAYS refer to your novel as "book" in your press releases. Many shows/publications tend to avoid booking/writing about novelists. Often, you may get an interview booked, and they'll later discover it's a novel, but will still keep the interview. Similarly, for non-fiction, call your book an "expose," or something dramatic, if possible.

2) Promote, but don't brag. One of the more common mistakes self-promoters – and publicists – make is to subjectively describe a book. Describing a book as "wonderful," "potential bestseller," "one of the best books ever," etc. is usually a turn off to media, and often a sign of an amateur. There are exceptions, but you generally want to construct press materials in objective terms; presenting the information in a compelling manner, but not over-stating or injecting your own opinions. This can take some time to perfect. However, if you have endorsements from other reviewers or notable people, use them in press materials.

3) Don't use endorsements from unknown people. Far too often, we see books printed with endorsements on the back or front cover listing simply the name of some person, with no credentials. Don't do this – whether on the book or in your press materials; no one will care what unknown people say. DO use endorsements from other well-known authors, people with credentials such as professors, etc., or experts in the field about which you are writing.

4) The Amazon "Backdoor Method" – Amazon.com lists millions of books, so doing anything to raise your profile is wise. One method we've used successfully is to go to popular books on amazon.com related to our client's book – fiction, non-fiction, etc. – and post a review for these books. You don't have to read these books, simply get an idea of what other reviewers are saying, and then create your own. THEN – at the end of the review, write something to the effect of, "If you enjoy this book, I suggest checking out (your book). We've moved authors to almost single digit rankings on amazon.com by doing this extensively.

5) Create controversy – Controversial stories don't simply happen, someone "makes" them happen by declaring a controversy. Why can't you do the same? Think of all the themes in your book and look for potential controversial issues you could promote. This can be done with most books. Think carefully about everything related to your book, your background, etc. and you probably CAN find a controversy, and then promote this.

6) Use Numbers in Headlines – It's a proven fact that producers and other media respond to numerical headlines. They are catchy and easily identifiable. Whenever possible, use number in headlines. Examples are:

- * 5 Surprising Facts About Doctors – Is That Surgery Really Necessary?
- * 10 Proven Ways to Enjoy 5 Erotic Nights a Week with Your Partner
- * 10 Things You Want to Know About Airline Travel But Were Afraid to Ask

7) The Power of Statistics – The media also love statistics. If your book deals with any type of specific topic, do some research and find statistics pertaining to it, and use these in press materials.

8) Trend Pieces Work – One of the favorite types of stories for journalists are “trend pieces” – stories which identify a distinct trend regarding a topic. This can be used for novels as well. If your novel, for example, deals with war, you can do some research and identify the increased numbers of “war” novels, how they portray war, etc. This might give a journalist the idea to do some research on the topic and include you in the story.

9) Using Google – Google pay-per-click campaigns can be very effective at driving people to your book or website. It doesn't always have to be expensive. You can put a cap on spending, and depending on your topic, bidding for top placement may provide a reasonable return-on-investment.

10) Website for Your Book – Whenever possible, develop a website for your book. This is a relatively inexpensive way to have an easy resource for the media and others to learn about your book. Your book website should really be a “virtual press kit” for your book. Pages which should be included are: an informative, well written opening page, “About the Book,” “Press Releases” or “Media Room,” an excerpt (usually no more than 10pages), “About the Author,” and “Contact.” Websites should be professional, clean and not loaded with too many “bells and whistles.” On EVERY page of the site, you should include links to buy the book, which can go directly to amazon.com or wherever you're selling.

11) Selling Books by Giving Them Away – Talk show producers often love to offer book give-aways on the air while they interview an author. Don't hesitate to provide 5 or so books to a show which is interviewing you. It can be a great way to drum up interest in the book from audiences.

12) Don't Fall for the “Oprah Syndrome” – EVERYONE wants to get on Oprah, and for good reason. However, you must realize that the odds of landing on her show are extremely slim. Other publicists may not tell you this, but I will. Getting on Oprah is the longest of all shots, and banking on it is fooling and stupid. You should definitely send material to the shows producers and try your best, however, too many authors get obsessed with only wanting huge shows like Oprah.

To use a sports analogy: Hitting singles, doubles and triples with consistency is better than striking out trying for home runs. Aim high, but don't count on a major “hit.”

13) NEVER make a book announcement or feature press release longer than 2 pages at 1 and ½ spacing.

14) NEVER make an interview release longer than one page at single spacing.

15) DO follow the generally accepted format for press releases; don't try and invent a new version.

16) Stamp Your Books – When sending out review copies ALWAYS stamp books with something to the effect of “For Review Only, Contact _____.” There are two reasons for this:

a) If your book gets separated from press materials, the media still has a means of contacting you.

b) This will help deter, to some degree, the common practice of people selling used copies on places such as amazon.com

- 17) Connect with Book Clubs – There are services available now which will get your book into the hands of book clubs and reading groups; a great promotional tool. Check out www.bookmovement.com for one example.
- 18) Find a bulk-e-mail service to distribute press releases. Bulk e-mails remain an excellent way to distribute mass information. Is it spam? Technically no, because you aren't selling anything; only providing information. There are many resources to assist you with this, and, depending on your own Internet server, you can send bulk e-mails through programs such as Outlook. Make sure a link is included in the e-mail, if possible, allowing the recipient to notify you that they do not want to receive e-mails.
- 19) Research the competition. Do some Internet searches to find books similar to yours. Then, go to the author's websites and find out what media coverage, interviews, etc., they've secured. Since your book is similar, you can then contact those media outlets to try and get interviews or stories.
- 20) Book signings. Generally speaking, book signings – unless you do many of them – are not the best way to sell books. Attendance can range from 0 to many, so be prepared. Get the bookstore to do as much promotion as possible, and make sure you contact your local media. IMPORTANT: Bookstores are usually more receptive to signings if combined with a presentation which would be of interest to people. If possible, always try to pitch for signings by including a presentation.
- 21) Your hook. When developing your “hook” for radio or TV interviews, think of the segues you hear on shows like *Good Morning America* and the *Today Show*. Before they go into break, listen to how they say what's coming up. Example: “After the break, we'll learn the 10 biggest mistakes parents make in disciplining children.”
- 22) There's no crying in publicity. You have entered into a very tough and hyper-competitive business. You must have thick skin, and be able to accept rejection. Persistence is the single most important factor in promotion.
- 23) Whenever possible, develop a “how to” press release, no longer than 2 pages at 1 and ½ spacing. These releases offer the absolute best shot of getting magazine or newspaper coverage because they provide clear, solid information. They are particularly useful for business and self-help books, but with creativity, you can also use them for novels.
- 24) Consider small, low cost ads in niche publications. If your book appeals to ANY specific niche market, research publications which cater to that market, and consider placing small, low-cost ads in them. Although book advertising is rarely cost-effective, niche advertising can provide a positive return on investment.
- 25) Self-promotion can be awkward. If possible, have someone else field inquiries; a friend, family member, etc. This gives a more professional feel to your publicity effort, and makes it easier on you because for most people, self-promotion is awkward and uncomfortable.
- 26) Fed Ex'em – One way to increase the odds your book or materials will be read is if they are Fed Exed or sent through another delivery service either for 1 or 2 day delivery. The person receiving the package will often assume its something important or something they asked for.
- 27) Short headlines rule – In general, the shorter the headline for a press release, the better. Keep headlines as short as possible.

28) Make use of sub-headlines –A sub-headline – the descriptive, smaller text line or two after your headline – is an ideal way to elaborate on the headline and further refine your pitch.

29) Always mark envelopes – For anyone who requests a book or materials, make sure you mark the outside of the envelope “Requested Material.” This will separate your package from the many unsolicited books received. You can also try and do this for ones who didn’t request the material, but be selective.

30) Make responses out of thin air – When sending a letter, e-mail or fax, start it off by saying, “In response to your request ...” Most editors and producers receive and reply to many, many pitches, and they often will forget to whom they sent what. If they think they asked for more information, they’ll likely take the time to read it. If they call you on it, just say you were mistaken. No harm, no foul.

31) Fold press releases so the headline is the first thing someone sees. Ask any direct mail expert, and they’ll tell you that the slightest adjustments in how a piece is packaged can make a difference in response. When mailing a press release, always fold them ‘out’ so the text and headline appears when first opened. Most people open letters from the back, so you want your headline and beginning of your release to be visible as soon as it’s opened.

32) Keep e-mail subject lines as short as possible. Just as a press release headline is better when short, this principle is even more important when it comes to the subject line of e-mails. Never forget that the subject line is the first and often the only thing someone sees when an e-mail comes in. Don’t try and be inventive like spammers do – get right to the point and make it as concise as possible. The most important words of your subject line should always try to be used first.

Example: Bad e-mail subject line:

Renowned Expert and Author Reveals Everything You need to Know About Home Mortgages and Why you shouldn't Pay Them Off

Better subject line:

Finance Expert – Why You Should Love Your Mortgage