

Self-promotion for Writers

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At some point over the years, 'self-promotion' has been given a bad name. We associate it with narcissism and arrogance. You do not need to be narcissistic or arrogant to be a good self-promoter, and it is an essential part of being a writer. You are a creative person. You have written a book. You like the book. The book is being published. You are the expert on your book. You've spent months, maybe years, researching, writing and editing it. Now you need to tell people about the book – do not let it fall on deaf ears!

If you're a musician – whether or not you produce your own work or are signed to a big label – you go out there and sing; whether you busk or sell out the o2 stadium, you stand up and perform and remind your audience why they like you. Selling yourself as a writer isn't dissimilar, but people might take more convincing, because reading is time-consuming and active, while listening to music takes less time and is passive.

Firstly, some cold hard facts. However your work is published, you need to be the driving force behind the marketing of your book. Even if you have a big publishing deal and a lot of money put behind marketing, this is short-term, and very soon another 'hot book' is going to come out. Don't let people forget about your writing and your work. Publishers are more stretched than they have ever been – often they'll have little or no marketing budget to put behind you and your book. Sure, it's not ideal, but that's the reality. Unless you're a celebrity, an award-winning podcaster, or an 'influencer', it is unlikely you'll get an extensive book tour, displays in big high-street shops and multiple TV and radio appearances. That's not to say you absolutely won't, but it's unlikely because those things are very costly, and publishing companies have targets to reach and financial constraints like everyone else. The books we see advertised and on display are the select few that publishers can afford to advertise in this way, and they are rarely new authors, because the risk is too great. That's why it's so important for you to take the lead when marketing your book, and to be persistent. You can't assume anyone has heard about it unless you make sure they know.

There are four things that can help you become a better self-promoter. These are: **establishing your brand, building an audience, using social media effectively** and **local promotion**. I'm hoping

that the questions and prompts here will be useful in getting you started on your journey of self-promotion (and literary world domination).

1. Establish your author brand.

What kind of book have you written? What kind of author do you want to be?

If you've written a thriller, look up other thriller writers and see how they present themselves online and beyond (the crime and thriller writing community is notably kind to new writers). If you've written a sci-fi novel, do likewise— how do writers of sci-fi describe themselves and their work? Which online platforms do they use? How you feel about these authors will be how people will likely feel about you. Work out what version of yourself you'd like to associate with your author 'brand'.

2. Build your audience and get to know them.

You will have written your book with some sort of audience in mind even if you may not realise it. What are the themes, or areas of interest? What style is it written in? What genre is it? Who do you imagine reading your work? Find these people and think about how to communicate your message to them. Once you have them, think about how to keep their interest.

3. Use social media effectively.

Are you on social media? If so, that's great. If not, don't panic and think you have to sign up for them all at once. Choose one or two platforms (to start at least) and run them well. The writing community is great on both Twitter and Facebook and building rapidly on Instagram. The most important things to remember here are the following: have conversations, connect with writing communities and writers, respond to compliments and comments, and don't just talk about yourself. Imagine you're at a party or networking event – you need to make the conversation flow. No one *only* wants to hear about you and your book, they also want to talk about common interests and their own projects. What are you reading? What gigs or events have you been to? Have you made good progress or are you struggling? Tell your followers. Include the occasional snippet about your daily life, too – or post animal pictures – these are always popular.

4. Utilise local promotional opportunities.

Where do you live? Is there a local bookshop that you can get behind your book? Is there a local community of writers you can join? Are there book clubs you can speak at? Is there a local

literature festival? Are there schools or colleges that might welcome a visiting writer? Is there a local paper you can pitch a story to? Is there a library with a small event space that you can organise a reading at? Don't underestimate the power of local promotion. National coverage is not easy to get, especially for general fiction (non-fiction can be easier), but local papers and radio stations are likely to be happy to hear your story. Just make sure you're professional in your approach and have at least three good pitches up your sleeve. 'Local Author Delves in to Archives to Unearth an Unsolved Crime', or 'Sussex-based Author Inspired by West Pier to Write Dystopian Novel' sounds a lot better than 'Local Writer Writes Book', doesn't it?

Think about your contacts. People you know are likely interested in the fact that you've written a book. Why not send an email to a list of people in your address book with links to your newsletter, website and social media handles? Organise a launch and invite people. This can be as low or high cost as you like; in your local pub, or bookshop, or even at your house! It's worth thinking about what favours you can call in. Do you have friends in the media? Or that you could collaborate with? For example, do you know someone who runs a pub where you could host a launch? Do you have a friend in a book club where you could arrange a reading? Don't be afraid to ask for help and support – just make sure you reciprocate.

In summary, be proactive in marketing your writing project. Communicate clearly with your intended audience, and make best use of the platforms and opportunities available to you. Be sociable - throw yourself into being part of a vibrant writing community, support your peers as they support you, and communicate with your readers. Above all, create and maintain a clear and consistent writer identity, or 'brand'. Below are a few useful resources that may help you get started.

Good luck!

Useful resources

Newsletter: MailChimp

Mailchimp is a great resource to build a newsletter subscriber list. You can create sub-lists in here, for example: General Subscribers, Book Reviewers, Friends and Family. You can send newsletters to everyone, or choose a specific group.

Twitter: Tweetdeck

Tweetdeck can be used to schedule content that comes from your Twitter account. This can be a great way to keep your profile looking busy without having to be posting 'live' all the time. This works especially well if you're promoting events you're speaking at, or if your book is reduced on Kindle, i.e. content that you can repeat. Make sure you're also responding and tweeting as things happen to keep your profile current.

Design: Canva

Canva is a wonderful free resource to make visuals that can be used on social media. For example, Facebook and Twitter cover photos, website banners and posts for a wide range of social media platforms.

Website: Wix, Squarespace, Wordpress

It doesn't need to be too difficult to set up your own website. These resources can be great when setting up your author website. Note that you'll need to purchase your domain name. This should be your name rather than the name of your book – so that it has a lifespan beyond this book or writing project.

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