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## Marketing Your Work



### *Promoting Your Book with a Publicist*

**Maryglenn McCombs**

Whether you are an experienced author or a new author, you probably know you have to create awareness in order to create demand for a book. To create awareness, you have to promote your book. Some authors prefer to do their own promotion, while others prefer to seek out a publicist to represent them and their book.

#### **What Exactly Does a Book Publicist Do?**

A book publicist's job is to create awareness for your book, whether through book reviews, articles, feature stories, mentions, or radio and television interviews. Publicists work as a liaison between the author and the media with the goal of generating coverage of an author and his or her work. Publicists who are accustomed to working with books understand how to promote a book effectively, and also understand the importance of timing. Moreover, a good book publicist has strong contacts with the media.

#### **Why Should I Consider Hiring a Book Publicist?**

If you're uncomfortable with trying to promote yourself and your own product, consider hiring a publicist to do the promotion for you. Some authors are terrific promoters but freeze at the thought of trying to promote their own books. That's entirely understandable—and extremely common. If you feel uneasy about trying to do your own promotions, by all means: consider hiring someone else to do it for you.

Also, if your time is extremely limited and you don't feel you would have the necessary time to devote to promoting your book effectively, definitely consider hiring a publicist. Book promotion can be extremely time-consuming—and even more so if you don't know where to start.

## **What Do I Need To Do Before I Decide Whether To Hire a Publicist?**

Whether you decide to do your own promotion or hire a publicist to do the work for you, it's important that you understand the importance of timing.

Before you start to look for a publicist or put together your own plan of book promotion, you should start by setting a publication date for your book. There is a great deal of confusion about what a publication date (“pub date”) really is.

A pub date is an “official release” —usually at least six weeks after a book comes off press. In some ways, this is a phantom date, as it is an approximate date when books will be available in stores. A pub date is an important part of planning a PR Campaign for your books, as it facilitates coordinating media placements and in-store availability. The pub date functions as a means of tying the book promotion and distribution together.

Regardless of when you or your publisher decide to set your book's pub date, just make sure you have plenty of time to lay the necessary groundwork to ensure that your book is a success.

## **When Should I Start To Look For a Publicist?**

Start looking for a publicist as soon as possible. In the book business, timing really is everything. Having plenty of lead time is essential when launching a new book. The PR wheels start to turn long before a book ever makes it to a bookstore shelf. In fact, many PR campaigns begin before the final edits are complete and before the final touches have been made to a book's cover design.

A great deal of advance planning goes in to the making of a PR campaign for a book. Unedited bound proofs of a book, either galleys or ARCs (“Advance Review Copies”), are widely distributed before a book is released. These ARCs make their way into reviewers' hands well in advance of when a book will be available in stores.

*Publishers Weekly*, one of the leading publishing industry trades, “forecasts” books by providing advance reviews of noteworthy titles. This particular magazine, and many like it, requests that advance review copies be received at least four-to-five months in advance of when a book is in stores.

Longer lead glossy monthly magazines typically operate on a four-to-six month (or longer) advance schedule. For example, come December many magazines are well into working on articles and stories that will appear the following summer.

Here is a sample timeline for a PR campaign for an as-yet-to-be-released book:

Date Range	Action Items
6-8 months in advance of pub date (or longer if possible)	Solicit long lead magazine coverage (glossy monthly magazines, journals, quarterlies)
4-6 months in advance of pub date	Solicit coverage with trade/sell-in publications (primarily book and library trade magazines), major reviewers, and larger major national shows
1-2 months in advance of pub date thru post-publication	Work to obtain shorter lead print media coverage in newspapers, news services, newsletters, Internet media, as well as broadcast (radio and television) media

The PR campaign for your book should be centered on when your book will actually be available for purchase. Media coverage creates demand, and it is imperative that there is supply to match the demand.

To hire a publicist or not to hire a publicist? That is the question.

### How Do I Approach a Publicist?

Now that you understand the importance of timing, you are either prepared to put together your own promotion plan, or start the process of finding a publicist.

If you choose the latter, how do you find a publicist to represent your book? Often, the best place to start is to ask other authors or publishing industry professionals for recommendations.

When approaching a publicist, keep in mind that a publicist only needs the basic information about your book—title, publication date, publisher, and a brief synopsis. A publicist may request a copy of the manuscript or advance review copy of your book, but please do not demand that the publicist read your book in its entirety before arranging a time to talk about the project. Provide them with the basics, but understand that the publicist's time is valuable and that he or she is simply not able to read every book by every potential client that comes his or her way.

Once you have found a potential publicist, arrange a time to talk to the publicist about your project. Whatever you do, prepare for the call in advance, and do not be afraid to ask lots of questions, such as:

- What can I expect?
- What will it cost?

- How long will it take?
- When can you start to work on my project?
- Have you ever worked on a similar book before?
- Are you comfortable with the subject matter of my book?
- Do you feel your contacts align with my book's subject matter?
- How often can I expect to hear from you?
- What exactly will you be doing, and when?
- What will be expected of me?

The publicist, too, should ask questions of you, such as:

- What are your expectations?
- When is your book scheduled for publication?
- What are your plans for the distribution of your book?
- What are your goals?
- What is your availability?
- What types of media coverage would you most like to have?

Be realistic about what you are looking for, what your expectations are, and what you can afford to spend. If you know that a particular publicist's rates are more than you can budget, be upfront about what you can—or are willing to—spend. If you know you can't afford to hire a particular publicist, tell them; do not ask for a proposal from them. They will appreciate your honesty.

Expect the same honesty in return from the publicists you consider. If a publicist decides to pass on your project, do not take it personally. Often, schedules and timing are to blame, and occasionally, a publicist will decline a project because he or she doesn't have experience in working with your book's subject matter and isn't comfortable taking on the project.

### **How Do I Complete the Hiring Process?**

Once you have found a publicist you consider to be a good fit, have a thorough understanding of what the process is, and understand what services will—and won't—be provided, ask for a written proposal. Most publicists are happy to put together proposals that outline the services they'll provide, along with the cost of those services. When asking for a proposal, you should also ask the publicist for references. Contact those references and do not be afraid to ask more questions.

Before you agree to hire a particular publicist for the job, make sure that you feel comfortable with the person you're hiring. If you feel uneasy in any way, or

don't feel that you have gotten answers to the questions you've asked, it might be a good idea to keep looking.

When screening publicists, there are several red flags to watch out for. Proceed with caution:

- if a publicist agrees to take on your project before he or she knows what the project is about;
- if the publicist offers guarantees on media placements he or she promises to generate;
- if the publicist does not deliver materials, such as a proposal, on time;
- if the publicist is hesitant to give out referrals;
- if the publicist is not specific about what a PR campaign will cost, or how long the PR campaign will last;
- if the publicist refuses to put into writing the services he or she will provide; or
- if the publicist isn't able to give satisfactory answers to your questions.

Make sure you are comfortable with your decision before you sign a contract. After all, you need to trust your publicist with your book, and if you don't feel that you can do that, there is no reason to proceed.

### **So What Happens If I Don't Decide to Hire a Publicist?**

If there is one primary downside to working with a publicist, it's easily this: cost. Book promotion is time-consuming, and there is value in a publicist's time and experience. For that reason, book promotion campaigns can be costly.

If you don't have the budget to hire a publicist, don't despair; many authors have been extremely successful at promoting their own books

If you decide to do your own book promotion, start by putting together a plan or timeline.

When you are ready to put the wheels in motion for your book's PR campaign, the first step is selecting your target media. Finding your target media requires a candid assessment of your book. Who would be interested in reading it? Make lists of potential book buyers – who they are, where they are, what topics and issues both concern and interest them, what in your book is relevant to them, and then find those potential buyers. Research magazines these potential buyers read, newspaper columns that cover issues of interest and importance to them, radio and television shows they listen to and watch, and use this information as your guide.

The more specific you can be, the better your likelihood of reaching these potential buyers.

Your book may appeal to a wide variety of different groups and you should endeavor to reach them all. Once you have an idea of who your target media is, you need to find them. Media research databases can be a terrific source of information. However, they can also be terrifically expensive. Don't despair if a yearly subscription to a media research service is cost prohibitive, as there are plenty of other ways to find media contact information. Visit your favorite bookstore, library, or newsstand and look for magazines, newspapers, and journals that might afford an opportunity for book coverage. Find magazines, journals, and outlets you think would be interested in your book.

The Internet is a wonderful source of information on specific media. Research media outlets by visiting their Web sites – read what they are writing about, note the focus of their publication or show, and research what topics specific journalists are covering. Most Web sites will include contact information for editors, writers, and staff. In addition, many Web sites even include guidelines for submitting.

Now that you've found them, it is time to make contact. Making initial contact with a member of the media can be accomplished in several ways. You can meet face-to-face, call them on the phone, write a letter, or send an email. Please do bear in mind that journalists and producers are often working on tight deadlines and may not want to disruption of a phone call. Believe me – you will know if you have caught a journalist at a bad time! On balance, email is less intrusive, as the journalist has the luxury of reading—and responding—at his or her convenience.

If you do prefer to call, be polite. Introduce yourself and ask if this is a good time for them to talk. If not, ask when might be a better time. Be brief. Explain exactly why you are calling, and offer to send more information. Use your discretion, but sometimes a follow up email thanking the journalist for his or her time, and recapping the conversation can be useful.

You've made contact, now keep in touch. Following up is crucial. Know that it sometimes takes more than one follow-up to get a response. After initial contact has been made, and you have sent the requested material, follow up in 7-10 days to confirm receipt, and offer more information or an interview. If you do not hear back within 7-10 days, follow up again. Be persistent, but follow the guideline of seven-ten days, with the exception of breaking news that relates to your book.

Whatever you do, *know thy media*. One of the most important parts of pitching successfully is researching the media outlet before you pitch. Watch for

articles and columns that the journalist has written, guests the host or producer has booked on a show, and mention them when you pitch—particularly when these relate to your book. By establishing this connection, you are letting the journalist know you have taken the time to do your research and you have an understanding of what he or she is looking for. It also signals to the journalist or producer that you may be offering a great lead on an upcoming story, show or article. Doing the research does take time, but it is time well spent.

Give yourself more time than you think you'll ever need. Too often, authors rush through the process and miss important opportunities along the way. Slow down, relax and enjoy the process.

### **About the Author**

A graduate of Vanderbilt University, Maryglenn McCombs has worked in the book publishing industry since 1993, and has been involved in the publication and promotion of hundreds of books. She specializes in offering targeted book publicity campaigns for publishers and authors. For more information, please visit [www.maryglenn.com](http://www.maryglenn.com) or email Maryglenn at: [maryglenn@maryglenn.com](mailto:maryglenn@maryglenn.com)

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## ***Branding: It's a Book Thing, Too***

**Paul McNeese**

Isn't it funny how societal changes kind of sneak up on you? One day, there you are, prospect or a client, a customer or a user of a product or a service—and the next day (at least it seems to happen this quickly) you are a “consumer.” You've been redefined, re-categorized, branded—but in a negative and minimizing way! Yesterday you were a person, today you're a number, one of many in an un-individuated, anonymous (but sharply defined) “group” or subset within a larger collection of statistical numbers. It's a bit terrifying (de-humanizing?) for me to think about that—and I hope you're a bit worried, too—but this chapter will look at how and why this has happened and what certain ideas about branding mean—in a very positive way—to authors who want to distinguish their creative work by differentiating their book from everyone else's.

The subject is “Branding,” a concept that was developed in the advertising industry to help identify and distinguish one product from other similar items and to make it easier for people to focus on the branded item—to create an opportunity for what has become known as an “impulse buy” in the short run and a continuing loyalty over the longer term. The success of the idea is confirmed by the increasing number of products that are generically identified by their brand names; Coke, Xerox, Q-Tips, for instance, and today, hundreds of others.

Of course, there's much more to branding than simple recognition—or even the larger objective, loyalty—and we'll get there. But first, a basic definition of the word “Brand” might be helpful. Here's one that I've synthesized from a number of disparate sources but that seems to summarize the elements of the word and its application to life in today's world: **A unified, memorable name or message that communicates uniqueness, focus and values.**

As you can see, this broad definition encompasses a number of distinct notions, so let's look at each element of it and see first what it has come to mean as related to the brands you are so familiar with—names like Cheerios and such—and then we'll look at how you can apply the accumulated knowledge of some very bright people to your own marketing effort.