

PUBLICITY Q&As

Writers tend to be an introverted lot. The thought of emerging from the writing cave and actually interacting with flesh-and-blood people is scary enough to most. Ask them to promote themselves and their work too, and you've got a scenario worthy of a Stephen King novel. However, if you self-publish, you can't avoid having to do your own promotion. But even if you go traditional, many publishers are only able to do so much. Chances are, the writer will be expected to help with publicity.

These are questions directed at Janet with regard to publicity, and her insightful answers. I have re-framed and abbreviated the questions. The answers are as they appeared on the blog verbatim.

Is it okay to bring in an outside publicist to help promote my book, even if my publisher has a publicity department working on promotion?

Publicists prioritize what they work on. If your book got a gazillion dollar advance and they're going to be calling the Today Show to pitch your book, that's terrific.

Except that means they're NOT going to be doing some other things, like sending ARCs to bloggers you are friends with. Resources are finite, as is their time.

A publicist working for you does the stuff the in-house publicity folks can't or won't because they need to prioritize. The savvy author talks to his/her in-house publicist about bringing in an outside publicist as early as possible, and asks them to coordinate.

You bring in outside help by asking first what the in-house PR folks reasonably expect to do, and promise you're not going to get in a snit over things that don't happen. Then you say you're bringing in some help to cover the things they don't expect to get to.

Most publicists are fully aware of how much they can't do. It gnaws on them too.

But on a larger note the idea that the publicity department might not be happy shouldn't even factor into your thinking. So what if they are? This is YOUR book, and YOUR career, and when Publicity moves on to Winter 18 books, you're still going to have a Fall 17 book that needs attention.

If your book tanks nothing happens to the publicity department. Your career might very well be over.

Jessica Lamb added in the comments:

I work as a publicist for a division of the Big 5. I want to reiterate what's already been said: communication with us is key! The earlier you mention your desire to hire an outside publicist, the better. We'll talk with an outside person to be sure we aren't

duplicating our efforts with media contacts so that everyone can focus on what they do best. If you are considerate in your approach, and can communicate your desire to finance an additional resource as opposed to trying to suggest we are incompetent, why would we raise a fuss?

Please have conversations with your marketing and publicity team about what we are planning for your books and what you are personally planning to do. At the end of the day, you need to do what you feel is best for your book, but I've spent a lot of time cleaning up after rogue authors that could have been spent focused on securing publicity.

Would \$15k be kind of a standard amount to pay for additional publicity?

Before you shell out thousands of dollars you'll want to find out how many books your publisher is printing, and what stores will be stocking it.

The real question is are there going to be enough books in print that a publicity campaign can make a difference? And by publicity campaign, I mean publicity that a publicist arranges.

If your publisher is only printing a few thousand, or is printing on demand as orders come in, you're MUCH better off hiring a publicist only for consulting. Let her draw up a list of things you can do yourself.

Consulting on an hourly basis is much more cost effective for debut novelists and/or authors with smaller print runs no matter who the publisher is.

You'd need to sell fifteen THOUSAND additional books to recoup the cost of the publicist mentioned above (ballpark figures). Additional books means books on top of the ones you'd sell without a publicist.

If you don't know anything about how to do publicity, and the very thought of it terrifies you into immobility, take an online seminar, reads some books on PR and talk to your writer pals.

Publicity is daunting, no two ways about it, but even the shyest, most terrified writer can learn some good ways to self-promote. Yes it will be scary; do it anyway.

Research continues to substantiate that people buy books based on recommendations from other people. The most tried and true method of promoting books is a newsletter from an author. You don't need a publicist with access to Stephen Colbert's booker to do those things.

Bottom line: think about your goals. Learn as much as you can as early as you can. Invest with a cold eye toward the bottom line, not the eye that sees through rose-colored glasses.

I got a good review from Kirkus. Should I buy a Kirkus ad?

First, congrats on a good review from Kirkus. Those aren't easy to come by. I love reading Kirkus' reviews cause they are blunt to the point of being eligible to swim with the sharks.

Buying an ad in the Kirkus magazine is a terrible idea. Kirkus is a TRADE publication. Bookstore buyers and librarians are their target audience. NOT agents. Certainly not editors. We do read it but mostly to see what's been published and the reviews for books we sold or recognize. We do NOT read it to find projects to work on. (That is what the incoming queries are for)

Given Kirkus is for bookstores and librarians, I went to your publisher's website. It's clear they don't work in the wholesale market at all. There's no information for bookstores or libraries on how to place an order; there's no mention of discounts or terms. In other words, if you did place an ad, and a librarian wanted your book, there's no information on the publisher's website about how to get it.

Orders for your book are MUCH more likely to be generated by readers asking for the book, either at the bookstore or from their local library.

Thus, any outreach should be to READERS not retailers. If you're hellbent on spending \$1000 research Facebook ads or google ads, or other places that a reader will see.

If you want to snag an agent's attention, your focus now is finding readers for this book. You'll find those people on Twitter, Facebook, and Goodreads. You will not find them via advertising. You'll find them via conversation.

Use your Amazon author page; use GoodReads. I've said it before, I'll say it again now: books are most often sold by word of mouth. The best thing you can do for book is make friends.