

The Importance of Book Marketing

Would you bake a delicious cake and not even eat it? Would you revise for important exams and not bother sitting them? Would you book an exotic vacation only to stay at home, wasting that precious deposit? You wouldn't do any of these things if you wanted to enjoy the fruits of your labour, would you? So then why do so many talented writers go to the enormous effort of lovingly crafting their manuscript and publishing their novel, only to do absolutely nothing to market it?

Despite the increasing connectedness of our world, combined with the sledgehammer of consumerism which batters us daily - demanding we choose, buy, share, like and vote for the things we want in our lives -there are still plenty of authors out there who think that the news of their new book's publication will somehow subliminally transplant itself into the minds of the masses. If you're thinking about promoting your book there really is only one question you need to ask yourself: how will anyone know my book exists if I don't shout it from the rooftops? And that's all any good marketing campaign ever is; it's about engaging the public with the story that you have to tell, inspiring them enough to buy a copy and tell their friends about it, and letting the quality speak for itself.

In many ways, the most important aspect of the 21st century publishing world is the marketability - and indeed the marketing campaign - of the work itself. This may cause literature lovers to shudder and recoil in disgust, but it's true. It's realism, pure and simple; publishers, literary agents *et al* have to make money, now more so than ever, and unless a firm can rest on the laurels of a well-paying heritage estate, they have to take a pretty cut-throat approach. Is there an audience out there for this story? Will this book sell? If not, what will? We've all received those miserable literary agent rejection letters criticizing our book's apparent lack of 'commercial viability'. So what can we, as readers and writers, do to give our books a fighting chance in a market already saturated with self-indulgent celebrity memoirs, ghost-written children's stories and groaningly, predictably thematic commercial fiction?

Well for starters, we must employ the same realism as our agent and publisher partners. My top tips for marketing your book into a success are:

1. Pick the things you can do well (that you have the time and expertise to fulfil) and the tasks where you need professional help.
2. Ensure that your manuscript is edited and cut to a reasonable length. Bloated books don't sell.
3. Pay attention to book cover design. Research the competition, exploring graphics and images. One of the biggest problems we encounter with authors is how low they set the bar when it comes to the visual appeal of their books. Unless you are a graphic designer, don't create the cover yourself.
4. Work out what makes your book special. Don't take the word of your friends who will only pay you lip service. You need to analyze the story like a journalist, working out what its unique selling point is and why readers should care about it. Highlight this when you're marketing it.
5. Make social media work for you. A slick online profile, such as a personalized Facebook page, combined with hard work on your part to connect with other users and promote your book online will pay dividends. Consumers and book buyers have become very demanding, a basic online presence will not be enough, it needs to be professionally designed!
6. Broaden your media appeal. This is where you need professional book marketing help. It's very difficult for an author to get themselves into the media (newspapers, radio, TV etc.); even authors with journalistic skills or marketing experience will struggle, because ultimately the journalists you will contact do not want to deal with authors directly. They don't speak to Dan Brown, they won't expect to hear from you either. Don't just focus on book reviews, think about how else you can get your book in the media in a more dynamic way. Do you have a personal story that is separate

from your book that might interest the press and that you could take advantage of in order to promote the book?

7. Be prepared to work for it. If you don't have the force of a publishing goliath behind you, you need to be tenacious, creative and dedicated in pursuit of your marketing goals. Get involved with book groups, offer your time, for free, to schools and community literacy centres. Tour your book, talking about your writing wherever and whenever possible.
8. If you can build a platform for your writing through the course of your campaign then you need to hold on to it so that your future books can benefit. Write freelance articles or review other books for a local magazine in order to keep your name in the public consciousness.

The best piece of advice for any writer is to embrace the idea of marketing. If in this day and age the idea of being interviewed, of having to promote yourself, of having to be bold and inventive in order to sell the story of your book to a wider audience, appals you, then you are likely to condemn your book to that place where unloved and unread novels go to die; the garage, the loft, a lonely warehouse where they'll grow mouldy. Ultimately, if you want people to read your novel you first have to tell them you've written it!

Originally published as a blog post by Gareth Howard, founder and CEO, Authoright PR