

INTRODUCTION

Book Marketing Basics

Writers need to be marketers. No one really tells us that in the beginning. The glamour of being a published author and the seduction of an unstructured career from home (after all, aren't most writers introverted?) overshadow the fact that we must become masters at selling our work. In fact, I'd speculate that if most aspiring writers realized how much work was involved in getting published and marketing their work, the multitudes of would-be writers would be whittled down to a brave few.

Who would have known that as authors, we'd have to take on so many different roles: article writer, newsletter editor, discussion board moderator, online content publisher, distance learning program developer, teleseminar conductor, webinar coordinator, radio guest, television guest, magazine columnist, public speaker, seminar/workshop leader, consultant, coach, product developer/manufacturer, promoter, conference attendant, Internet radio host, blogger, specialty market seller, seed planter, grassroots marketer, strategic partner, web marketer, etc. Indeed, the responsibilities of a successful author are very diverse.

A plethora of marketing strategies abound that an author can implement to generate additional exposure for his or her book. Some might seem perfect for your platform. Others may not be applicable to your particular situation. Still others may simply not appeal to you. To complicate matters, it may be difficult to track the effectiveness of strategies you implement. (There are two exceptions to this rule: (1) accessing BookScan, which is covered in "The Tools" section of this e-book, and (2) on the web, savvy Internet marketers can unlock statistics on just about anything. For instance, when you do a radio interview for Clear Channel, you can go to Amazon.com and observe the sales ranking of your book rise.) Trying different strategies—virtually unguaranteed—is the nature of the book business. Publishers fly blind, too. The only metrics they really

have is book sales, and as you know or will soon discover, even these numbers can be deceiving.

The Spark

Your efforts to promote and sell your book are, in effect, attempts to spark a flame by hitting two rocks together. And at the heart of your book project is a bundle of TNT explosives. Although these explosives are highly flammable, starting the fire by striking two rocks together is a formidable task. If only you had the proverbial lighter fluid or golden match!

Unfortunately, a secret match does not exist. If it did, there would be more bestsellers on the market. Alas, the secret is in striking the stones together: Send out a new press release. Smack! Do another radio interview. Bam! Get an article published in a major magazine. Crack! Your book lands in the hands of an influential person. Wham!

And one day, God willing, your book makes it into the hands of Oprah Winfrey, Regis Philbin, David Letterman, a CNN producer, or the right *New York Times* reporter and ... KABOOM!!!

“Overnight,” your book becomes a national bestseller, topping all of the lists. Barnes & Noble dedicates an entire table to your book. Your book hits the top five on Amazon.com and stays there. Book clubs order thousands of units. Magazine editors reference it in their articles. Your book is translated into dozens of languages. Publishing offers flood in for your next project. You’re asked to speak at universities and conventions around the country. Bulk orders for your book are placed from different organizations across varying industries. You reach celebrity status as the author of a best-selling book.

And it was all from one spark. That one clash of two rocks created media frenzy and launched you into stardom—creating a seemingly overnight success. But what went into

creating that spark? From the outside, the success seemed “overnight” because of a “big break”; the truth is very different. Shows like *Behind the Music* reveal that most “overnight” success stories are the result of decades of work. The same is true for authors: The path to success is often maniacal, painful, costly, and uncertain. Endless hours, tens of thousands (possibly hundreds of thousands) of dollars, and unwavering persistence can still yield dismal results. Sound promising?

You’ll often hear people on the “outside” suggest, “You know, you should go on *Oprah*.” Or they’ll ask, “Why isn’t your book available in Wal-Mart? Or sold in bulk at Costco or Sam’s Club?” These well-meaning, ignorant people aren’t aware that Oprah has nine producers who field hundreds of thousand of queries annually, or that the decision makers at Wal-Mart are unpublished, inundated, and usually unreachable. But don’t get discouraged. A select few authors do, in fact, serendipitously find their way through the labyrinth of gatekeepers to their “big break.”

Striking a Chord

Certain books simply resonate with a critical mass of people. These are the books publishing houses generally take credit for marketing, even though there really isn’t any “traditional marketing” driving sales. For example, Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003) resonated with readers around the world. Before Brown’s book sold ten million copies, you could find stacks of *The Da Vinci Code* in major bookstores like Barnes & Noble and wholesale warehouses like Sam’s Club. You couldn’t walk through a café without hearing at least one conversation about the book and its controversial topic. The National Geographic Channel even did a documentary on the plausibility of Brown’s account.

So what was the secret? What was Brown’s powerful marketing strategy? What did Random House do to ensure *The Da Vinci Code* was the most talked-about book of the year? Frankly, it’s inconsequential. There may have been a catalyst, a trigger that ignited the sales flame, but sales were ultimately driven by buzz: the all-powerful, word-

of-mouth marketing that can't be bought or manufactured. (And if there's a part of you that thinks, *Surely, there's something more*, consider Mr. Brown's previous five books, which didn't generate the same sales.) And Mr. Brown's "luck" doesn't end there. We're likely to see an entirely new level of book sales via word of mouth when Columbia Tristar releases the first trailer for the film.

What's the lesson here? Write a book worth talking about. It doesn't have to become an international sensation; it can simply be a book that moves the reader to pass it on to a coworker, friend, or family member.