

## Introduction

No matter what kind of book you have, its success depends on two things: It must tell a good story, and you must find an audience for it. Easier said than done, but you might take a page from master storyteller Hans Christian Andersen.

As legend has it, schoolchildren in Andersen's 19th-century Danish town played hooky from school just to hear him spin his tales. Each time he felt like telling another one, Andersen signaled his desire by flying his kite. When the kite rose, word spread quickly, and the crowd gathered.

Can it be that simple in today's world? Can the modern author build an audience solely through community word of mouth?

Yes, you can, and you don't even need to leave your backyard. Today's authors can launch their kites to potentially huge audiences by participating in Internet communities. The big difference is, your online community isn't limited to your neighborhood—it can span the globe if you invest in some string.

More than ever, authors and readers are networking, even collaborating on books as peers. With simple Internet tools, determined writers—even beginners working on obscure projects—can find their audience. Using online communities, authors can bond with readers intimately, inspiring deep loyalty.

Internet social networking has handed authors their most powerful tool since the invention of paper. In the Networked Age, the stock of gatekeepers is going down, and the power of authors and readers is soaring.

Word of mouth is the only thing that can make a book really successful. And this has always been the challenge: How can the author break through? Until recently, it usually required “pull”—connections with powerful allies in the publishing food chain. Today, creative writers can connect with readers directly. The only requirements are a link to the Internet and the will to plug in.

## Taking control of your book sales

This year, 150,000 authors will finish their masterpiece, but most of them will be horribly disappointed with their sales—only about one-third of new titles sell more than 100 copies. Most books fail in the marketplace simply because they never had a chance: Nobody ever heard about them.

Traditional marketing and advertising is less effective than ever; people aren't paying attention to it. But *free* advertising is alive and well. The catch is, you can't manufacture free advertising; you must get it the old-fashioned way—by earning it.

Now for the first time, authors and readers can ignite word of mouth using online communities to spread the word about good books. Anyone with the skills to write an e-mail can publicize their book worldwide, effectively and economically.

Internet publicity isn't the only way to promote your book, but it's a great way to start—it can open doors you never dreamed of. The real value of online publicity is that it endures, and spawns more publicity, the kind that can't be bought. More than ever, journalists and producers of radio and television programs use the Internet to find expert commentators and new story ideas.

## One big caveat

Not every song is a hit, and not every ballplayer makes it to the Hall of Fame. Likewise, an online campaign won't make a bad book successful.

On the Internet, word of mouth is amplified and accelerated. Thanks to online communities, it's getting easier to sell good books, but it's getting harder to sell mediocre ones. Word gets around. For the strategies in this book to work, your book needs to be strong, because your best competitors are online, too.

Internet word of mouth depends on an educated consumer. You're asking the reader to help promote your book, and this requires a *very good* book, according to your audience. *Bad* word of mouth will hurt your sales. Online marketing only helps a bad book fail faster.

The beginning sections of this book explain the basics of online book promotion, techniques that provide the most bang for your effort. As we proceed, some of the methods will be more complicated, requiring more skill and resources. Perhaps not everything discussed here will be practical for your book.

Your job is to select which promotional techniques might work best with your audience, and then use them aggressively and tirelessly. Online publicity works particularly well with nonfiction, but can be applied to fiction, too. The more techniques you try, the better your chances of success. A single strategy won't work, but a combined effort will produce results, and the effect will be cumulative.

Many author Web sites are mentioned in this book. Take time to view these sites, instead of skimming ahead. Consider what you like and don't like about what other authors have done, and apply the best ideas to your own efforts.

This book is not a quick-fix plan; there is no such thing as overnight success. It might require a year or more of steady work to see appreciable results. If that seems like a gamble and lots of work, it is. But I assure you, it's nothing compared with what it took to write your book.

Read through this entire book once. Then read it again, selecting and prioritizing what you'll tackle first. Mark on a calendar when you'll start each phase of your plan. Then get to it. Evaluate your progress after three months. Determine what's been successful, and redouble your efforts there. Then try something new.

Your freedom to use all the techniques described here might depend on how your book was published. Self-published authors who own the ISBN and online rights for their book can promote it however they please. Trade-published authors should confer with their publisher's marketing department and get approval for their plans.

One more bit of housekeeping: Just in case anyone is curious, I have no personal connection or financial interest in any of the companies, services or persons mentioned here. There is no advertising or product placement in this book.

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