

# Successfully Promoting a Book: Lessons Learned from Authors Who Have Been There

By Giles Pettingell

In terms of book promotion, there is no singular path to success. There are innumerable methods that exist to promote books, and exactly zero that can guarantee absolute success. In a business of seeming uncertainty, two nuggets of advice are generally agreed upon: don't expect anything from your publisher, and don't expect sales without tireless self-promotion. The key is to diversify your promoting tactics and to find what works for you.

While conducting a survey of emersongroup client thoughtleaders and associates who have either been book authors or involved in book publishing and promotion, I was able to answer the question of what the most successful book promotion tactic is: there isn't one! After compiling information provided by more than 20 authors, publishers, and book promoters, I found little decisive evidence that pointed to any one fool-proof method. Tactics that raked in success for some resulted only in utter failure for others. Thus, conclusions were hard to draw and contradictions omnipresent. With that

said, a few suggestions did seem to stand out more than others.

Speaking engagements, for example, was a popular answer to the question of the most successful promotion tactic. Some respondents even cited speaking engagements as a method that gives birth to new books and vice versa. Speaking gives authors a platform to promote themselves as well as their work, providing the audience with the intimate details of what makes their book so worthwhile. In addition to speaking, the use of the Internet was seen as a useful tool, trumping the importance of traditional PR (which according to WBiz book publisher Arthur Chou is the least successful book promotion tactic). As was pointed out by some respondents, online ad space is far easier to come by than printed space, and comes at a reduced price. The rise of the Internet and its capabilities for promoting a book was seen as the greatest change in today's book promotion environment. By allowing your book to be purchased online, say via Amazon, one can quickly circulate it more widely than by



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allowing it to just sit on a bookstore shelf. Use of social networking sites is skyrocketing too, and taming these new domains seems essential to keeping up with the changing online market.

But while utilizing today's technology is essential, keeping a personal connection with customers and partners is just as vital, our survey showed. In today's market, sending a promotional email or link requires little time and effort, which in turn cuts down on the impact it has on

people. Methods like direct mailing and personal letters can make all the difference and produce results. As Rosalie Hamilton, author of “The Expert Witness Marketing Book: How to Promote Your Forensic Practice in a Professional and Cost-Effective Manner”, put it, “Hand-written notes, even if one can only send out a few, are received with stunned amazement and produce a very high rate of sales.” This notion goes back to the basic principle that success can’t be reached through one specific method, and so diversifying book promotion is a way to find out what works. One survey participant, Stephanie Bennett Vogt, author of “Your Spacious Self: Clear Your Clutter and Discover Who You Are”, attributed poor Internet sales to the possibility that her “particular audience is not all that savvy or comfortable with computers.” This conclusion could of course sway potential authors towards more hands-on promotion.

However, when asked about the least successful book promotion tactic, Suzanne Bates, author of best-seller “Motivate Like a CEO: Communicate Your Strategic Vision and Inspire People to Act!” replied “Book signings in book stores!” This may be is the most hands-on approach there is! These contradicting accounts thus demonstrate that what works for some, may not work for others, making diversity the name of the game.

The singular response I received that seemed universal was to not expect anything from a publisher. Business development guru John Doerr, who spent many years heading a major

division at book publishing firm AMACOM Books, declared, “The biggest changes that I see around are how little the publisher does for the author. There is very little assistance from the publisher. In fact, they expect you to buy books as often as not! Editing and development help is not existent as well, so you had better be an excellent writer too.” This harps on the same reoccurring message I continued to receive, that successful book promotion comes only from ceaseless work by the author him/herself. From what I’ve also been able to pick up from this survey, that endless promotion can be turned into success at a higher rate if careful planning pre-dates a book release.

After contemplating all the results, this survey’s responses have driven me to conclude the following formula for success: Before releasing your book, come up with a target audience list. Who is this book intended for? And who will be most likely to purchase it? Answering such questions can help authors come up with a target promotion list outlining the best methods to use for promoting your particular book.

Make sure too that some of this promotion is done before your book comes out so that anticipation and media presence can build around its release. From here on, according to our survey, everything seems to become a matter of trial and error. Dabble in different areas to find what works for you. Research books similar to your own and see whom they target and how they are being promoted. A solid mix of traditional PR and unique or even unproven

online marketing seems necessary, so don’t be afraid to introduce an element of creativity.

One last piece of the puzzle seems to be timing. A book about barbecuing wouldn’t sell very well during a mad cow disease scare, nor would a guide to purchasing aircraft sell well following a major airplane crash. This element is obviously unpredictable and impossible to control. However, it is nonetheless something to keep in mind when planning a book release.

In the end, the world of book promotion can’t be understood and conquered overnight. It takes constant work to keep up with changing technology and trends. No two promotional campaigns produce the same results even if they utilize the exact same methods. It therefore all comes down to finding your own way and constantly working to improve your selling techniques. The road to book promotion success may seem long but progress can only be achieved, our respondents suggest, by learning from failure.