

Promoting your book

1. Your book is a product

Of course, we write because we are burning to tell a story, relate our experience or showcase our obsession. Some of us are impelled by the muse, for others it's a route to self-expression or a job which generates income. But whatever the creative aspects, a finished book that you wish to sell is a product. If you are going to persuade readers to part with hard earned cash, your book must be as perfect as possible or you will commit that fateful blunder of disappointing the consumer. Quality is therefore indispensable: properly designed cover, well-edited and proofed text, professional interior design and an enticing back cover blurb. No amount of clever marketing will save a poorly presented book.

2. Becoming public

If you publish a book, whether for a close circle, for yourself and friends, or to achieve recognition and/or commercial success, you should realise that your thoughts, opinions, story and imaginings are out in the public. And you have become a public person. You can set privacy parameters on social media but not on your life.

Readers 'buy' the author as well as the book. You don't need to adopt a different persona – you shouldn't, as nobody likes fakes – but do think about how you may appear to your public. And it's rather thrilling when somebody recognises you and asks you to sign your book for them.

3. Who are you writing the book for?

Before or as you write your book, think about your target audience. Jot down a few lines describing your Ideal Reader (IR). They aren't necessarily like you!

What is the age, sex, ethnicity of your readers? Education level? Occupation?
Are they married? Do they have children?
What generation are they? Baby boomer? Gen X? Gen Y?
Nationality, background, social class?
What type of lifestyle do they maintain? Urban or rural environment?
What are your readers' goals, beliefs, interests, habits, values and attitudes? Any subconscious emotional associations? What occasions are important to your reader?
Are they already fans of your genre/topic? What are their buying patterns – impulse, value, particular content? How do they read – mobile, ebook or print?

This seems a daunting list to answer, but try to pick out some general aspects and it will help focus the finished book.

If you've already written your book and even published it, do the same exercise as identifying and targeting your audience is critical to marketing success.

4. Promotion is a long haul

Shocking as it may seem, nobody cares as much about your book as you do. Unless it's a 'kiss and tell' about a prominent footballer or a royal, you won't sell a million books in the first month, or even a hundred. If, as an unknown author, you sell ten copies after your book launch outside your family and friends' circle in the first three or four

weeks you will have done well. However, with ebooks and print on demand, your book will stay available forever. My first novel, published in 2013, is still selling well and continues to garner new reviews, so don't be too disheartened if your monthly sales stay in two figures for a while.

5. Grabbing your audience

If you've done the audience identification exercise at 3. above, think about where you can find your Ideal Reader (IR).

Online, what blogs would IR read? What papers and magazines would they read? Approach these blogs and publications with an article about your book (but not just a sales piece). Join Facebook groups with interests in your field (history, pets, romance, sport, thrillers) and contribute so that your name becomes known. As an example, I belong to Roman, crime, thriller and history groups.

Ask bloggers who review fiction in your genre to review your book (You may have to wait a few months). Talk to other authors in your genre – many are happy to share tips about what works and what doesn't – and possibly suggest other promotional activities.

Look for opportunities and events likely to appeal to your IR (fetes, library talks, conferences). Go to one first and ask the organiser if you can speak at the next one.

6. Reviews

Reviews will make your book more visible in the sales charts as well as give your book (and you) social credit. Rope in your friends, fellow authors, your social circle to read an advance copy, if possible, or one as soon as possible after publication date and write an *honest* review. I stress 'honest'. A string of five star reviews saying your book was the best thing since sliced bread looks fake. Leave a note at the back of your book asking for a review and be prepared to give or send free copies to genuine reviewers and book bloggers. But email them first with your book details.

7. There is no silver bullet

Promotion is a mix of techniques and hard work. It needs a plan; a list will do as a start. That plan should be reviewed every six months because you will get better at it, you will discover new things and the market will change.

But the good news is that there is such a large range of techniques that you can find ones to suit you, your time and abilities. I would urge you to have a website and/or blog and a Facebook account as a minimum. More people find out about and buy books online than in shops. If you are a computer nerd (like me!), you can branch out to Goodreads, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and beyond!

Think about materials like bookmarks and postcards to give away and leave in places your IR is likely to be. Carry a few with you at all times.

Giving live talks is one of my favourite ways of interacting with readers, whether in bookshops, libraries, at conferences, litfests, to small association groups or just one-to-one at a book signing.