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Don't Be a Couch Potato.... Publicity for Your New Release

Guess what? You're a published author. Sitting on your couch, it's hard to believe. Publishing is what happens to other people—people who wear black, smoke cigarettes and talk about Kerouac. It doesn't happen to people like YOU, who have day jobs, families, and car loans. Obviously, you're excited. You can already see yourself on the cover of *People* magazine, Pulitzer in hand. You pat yourself on the back—job well done. You can finally relax and wait to become a millionaire. Right?

Wrong.

Your work has just begun, and it's the work of "publicity."

If there is no publicity, no one knows your name. If no one knows your name, no one knows your book. If no one knows your book, it doesn't sell, and it dies on the shelves faster than you can say "backlist." So as an author, what can you do to beat the competition? And no, you should not start harassing managers at Barnes and Noble.

1) The Review

Getting your book reviewed is mainly in the hands of your publisher. However, there are plenty of things that you, as an author, can do to assist in the process and make it more effective. Publishers know about the big dogs. They know *Publishers Weekly*, the *New York Times*, the *LA Times*, etc. However, they don't know the specialists in your field. If your book is about birds, your publisher isn't going to know the most famous ornithologist who just *has* to endorse your book. So think—what contacts do you have? Which of these contacts could be used to the advantage of your book? Pass this on to your publisher, and they will thank you for it! If you are willing to help your publisher, it will pay off. They will be much more willing to focus on you, because you've done your research. You have the names and organizations; all your publisher has to do is send the emails. Think alumni associations, your local media contacts, state reading associations and national topic-specific magazines that would want to know about your book. The opportunities are endless, and it will keep you ahead of the pack.

2) What's your pitch?

In other words, what are you selling? Is your book about a new diet that promises Michael Phelps abs? What about a children's book that can teach kids about ADD? Can you explain the entire theme/mission/importance of your book in five words or less? You need to, because that's about as much time you'll have to impress the random *Oprah* intern who just happens to give you a call. The real question is, can you sell yourself?

Let's face it—in the media and in stores, no one is booking your novel. They are booking you. If you are lacking in passion for your product, they'll know, and your book will suffer. You have to be willing to go out there and get those interviews. Get those events. I suggest selling yourself as a package. Any author can just sit there and sign a book. What about an author who can use her book to teach kids about bullies? What about a different author who can show math teachers a better way to interest students in fractions? You have to make bookstores believe you have something to offer. Make them believe you are the one doing the favor, as opposed to vice versa. You are the main attraction. People will come to see you because you are worthy of seeing. If you don't think so, who will?

3) The Launch

I cannot emphasize how important your book launch is. I have said it over and over and over to authors all over the country. Some believe me, and some don't. Who do you suppose has the better book sales? If you said the ones who don't believe me, I'm glad I'm not your publicist.

Okay, in the publishing world, there is a "publication date." This is when your book is available for purchase to the public. Your launch date should be scheduled around this time. A specific scheduled event should be referred to as your "launch date," in fact, because a definite date makes it tangible to the media, meaning more likely to be covered. The media likes tangible events, as opposed to vague announcements, as in "People can buy my book now! Cool, huh?" No. They don't care. They care, however, when you have a cluster of events coming up where people can actually meet you.

What does a cluster entail? I'm talking fifteen to twenty scheduled events, clustered around a two-week period, with your launch right at the beginning. I realize you probably don't have fifteen to twenty individual bookstores in your hometown. It helps to travel, making it more of an official Author Tour. If your funds require you to stay close to home, no problem! Start with bookstores. Now, what about gift shops and specialty stores whose clientele would relate to your book? What about libraries? If your book is about astronomy, what about planetariums or museums? If it's about salt marshes, what about national parks? The opportunities are endless. You just have to be ready to work. Events sell books. Yes, authors are artists, and your books do mean a lot to you. However, a book—no matter how good it is—dies without sales. Get out there and schedule events. It's the way to turn your book into your career.

Don't mean to be pushy...

The publishing industry is cutthroat. If you're not careful, your book is old news before you've even unwrapped your complimentary copies. You have to retain the passion you had while writing your book through the entire process. Do not let yourself think that once your book is on the shelf, you're done. You cannot sit back and collect royalty checks. Work with your publisher. Give your input, and use your contacts to encourage word of mouth. Believe in yourself, and bookstores will believe in you, too. Finally, always keep those events coming. Stay in the public eye, and your book will, as well. It feels good to be recognized for your work, but it won't happen until you get off the couch and show 'em what you got.

Sara Dobie is the Public Relations Coordinator for Sylvan Dell Publishing in South Carolina. Learn more about Sara and Sylvan Dell Publishing at www.SylvanDellPublishing.com.
