



# Painless Ways for Authors to Get on the Reader Radar

by Jim Alkon



**S**ome may recall a decade ago when major media outlets radically curtailed their coverage of books. If bestselling authors were going to have to compete hard for coverage, the logic went, what about debut or emerging authors? How would these master wordsmiths with their own great stories to tell possibly get known?

Throw in the statistic that 1 million self-published books hit the market every year, and the dilemma is magnified.

As publishing people know, authors are creative types—not necessarily business types. Many authors believe the journey is over when they have a book to hug and to hold.

Depending on their expectations, this can be a problem. New book euphoria can quickly fall flat if nobody reads it.

Here are some painless ideas to steer authors and their publishers in the right direction when it comes to marketing a book:

**Identify a unique niche.** One of the most important things publishers should do with their authors to build their brand is identify a unique niche for the book and the audience to which it will appeal. Develop the equivalent of a concise, one-sentence “elevator pitch” that answers the question, “What is the book about?” From there, expand upon the theme/platform on social media and in media interviews. A great tip to help

potential fans visualize and remember a book is by comparing it to two well-known books: It's *Harry Potter* Meets *Gone Girl*. That creates quite a mental image.

**Start building your platform immediately.** Start building your platform and online persona from the onset of a writing career. That might sound counterintuitive, but the truth is it won't happen overnight; it takes time, effort, and some monetary considerations to build social channels properly.

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Why is building your platform prior to publishing so important? First, it helps if the author and book are already part of conversations with potential fans in the chosen genre. Look for appropriate conversations and comment on them. It also helps to have a simple but professional-looking website. Once authors start joining in on conversations, people need a place to go to check them out. Better yet, have authors create a blog or newsletter and start posting it on their website. This allows people to get a taste of the writing and establishes a vehicle through which they can “subscribe” and help the author build a database.

**Social media is not a waste.** My thinking on social media is this: 95% of what authors and publishers post will accomplish nothing, but you do it and stay at it for the 5% that will. Every time you post something in the world, there's a chance you'll engage with someone new, attract the attention of a major influencer, and create a meaningful relationship. So, jump in enthusiastically, but with patience.

Social media allows authors and publishers, in an unfiltered way, to communicate with their audience to develop that relationship. Think of it as a social “friendship.” But like any friendship, it is doomed to failure if you are always talking about yourself. The best way to nurture social media followers is to use

the 80/20 rule: 80% of posts on subjects of interest to the audience and 20% of the posts on something to do with you. But be humble and careful about tooting your own horn. This strategy will be rewarded. Follow your favorite writers and write about why you like their work. Follow organizations and groups that are full of people interested in your subject area.

**Book reviews are the Holy Grail**—in more ways than one. Sure, any time an author can score a book review in a community of readers, it can be worth gold. And, sometimes, all the pitches in the world won't get it done. That's why many publicists, who are actually paid to generate earned media for their clients, are open more and more to the idea of paying to garner coverage.

Another strategy is to encourage authors to write reviews themselves—maybe partner with another author who has just published a book. Writing reviews and getting them out there 1) shows off the writing; 2) helps the author build a portfolio of work; and 3) can get picked up and shared by major influencers on social media. The prime interest likely would be the review itself, but it doesn't hurt to be the writer, with a tagline at the end and a link to the author's own website.

**Try to create for your brand mediagenic stories and pitches.** Mediagenic stories and pitches are those that are newsworthy, content-wise and visually, and have a human-interest angle. It's not enough to pitch the media with the simple fact that you have a new book. You have to examine the current trends, what people are talking about and caring about, and then find an idea/angle that would provide the media with a credible and different point of view—one that will advance the author's personal brand first and, should enough people want more, your book second.

Together we are in that magical world of connecting wonderful storytellers with those in search of wonderful stories. Writing a marvelous book is the first step but, as we all know, hardly the last one. ●

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