

How to sell out your book in two months flat

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In 2007, I had a book accepted for commercial publication. And it all went downhill from there. (video)

As a new author, I had no understanding of what went into making books successful and, essentially, I waited for the publishers to tell me what to do. They didn't. They did assign a marketing manager to me but I never met him. I once inquired about the possibility of a book launch and the marketing manager that I never met told me that they don't do that sort of thing anymore.

That was the extent of the marketing support that I received.



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And so, when my next manuscript, *Own Your Industry*, was accepted by a new publisher, in this case Penguin Books, I vowed not to let it happen to me again.

Firstly, a part of me feared that a commercial failure with so significant a publishing house might be somewhat final; why would any publisher ever accept me again if this one didn't cut it? Secondly, the core message of the book itself was about standing out in the market and generating publicity. To rise above hypocrisy, the book *had* to be able to succeed using its own principles.

Sold out!

Two months after it hit the bookstands, *Own Your Industry - How to Position Yourself as an Expert*, completely sold out. I received a deeply satisfying letter from Penguin Books congratulating me on its success; a letter which I read again a few times that evening while sipping something dark red and expensive.

The book is now poised for a second print-run and I'm devoted to ensuring that it becomes a bestseller. So what was different this time around?

There were at least 13 things that I did differently. I offer them as a blue-print for new authors:

1. Take ownership from Day One:

Start with the right outlook. This is *your* baby. The more deeply involved you are willing to get with the sales and marketing process, the greater your chances of success. Don't relinquish the fate of your book to the publishers. Be part of it.

2. Meet the team:

As soon as the project was well under way, I offered to drop by the publisher's offices and present a quick talk for the staff. My goal was to build good will, to strengthen relationships and to put a face to this particular project.

This is a valuable step, considering that publishers release a number of new titles every single month. Fail to position yourself as a memorable character in their minds and you will simply have been 'one of the five from last April.'

3. Offer to get involved as much as possible:

Most authors don't take the initiative and mention their willingness to be involved in PR. Publishers will generally ask, and even recommend that you do get involved, but once again, if you are one of six new authors published that month alone, there are limits to how assertively they will push the point.

Take charge by asking exactly *how* they might be able to use you. And keep on doing so. I spoke at one book fair, hosted a panel discussion at another, and attended a series of events, all set up by the publisher, simply because I signified my willingness to do so. I set up my own events as well, but these well-targeted appearances would never have happened had I not worked in conjunction with the publisher.

4. Approach the media with the right arguments:

Media coverage is arguably the most potent tool in your promotions mix. The more coverage you get, the better your book will do. Most publishers already have a sizeable list of media contacts and will gladly send copies of your book to all of them, but once again, don't rely on this as your only source of publicity.

My publisher did an excellent job getting my book to the media, but I've managed to more-or-less triple the total media coverage by getting heavily involved as well. Consider that point for a moment: Good media coverage from the publisher's efforts. But triple the total amount because of author-involvement.

And it's not hard to do. Contact every imaginable radio show, TV show, newspaper, magazine, trade publication, newsletter, blog or source of courier pigeons that might conceivably publicise the title.

In each case, make a compelling argument for the relevance of your material to their particular market. Be creative in finding angles. If they cater to young businesswomen, find a reason to appeal to that market. If their readers are retired men, think of a creative way to play up angles that will work for them.

5. Orient your message around their gain

PR is infinitely more effective when you discuss 'what they get', rather than 'what you've written'. The same holds true for most forms of communication. A good speech, for instance, is oriented around value for the audience, rather than around the speaker's knowledge or delivery. So whenever you publicise your book, try to lead with 'what they get'.

6. Maximise each instance of publicity:

Think creatively, and you can get much more than just one instance of publicity out of each media hit. Take a TV interview for example. Before it happens, announce through your various social channels that you've been accepted as a guest on the show. Later, announce the upcoming date. Then take some photos at the studio and post those online. Then mention when it will be aired. Then record the airing and upload it to YouTube and post the link. If you're shameless, you can even take screen-shots from the interview and post those at a later date.

Turn each interview into a running narrative, a compelling storyline, and you will radically increase your return each time.

Not only should you maximise the mileage you get out of each media appearance, but you should also use each one to help secure the next one. You now have a YouTube link to an interview? Send it to the producer of another show on which you'd like to appear, and so on.

And why not get multiple appearances with each media source? If there is a new development in the book's sales cycle - for instance, it becomes a bestseller, or it is included into the curriculum of a business school - go back to those same media outlets and offer a second, follow-up story.

7. Think big...and small:

Big media appearances are extremely flattering and often very effective, but don't forget that your local newspapers, local radio station or even your school or workplace publication may be keen to hoist up their champion. Every appearance counts, as you strive for weight of numbers.

8. Turn your content into article-samples:

Not all publicity has to be 'about' the book. Some of it can actually *be* the book. Creating articles based on chapters from your book is a great way to give free value and entice readers to want more. Similarly, you can offer interviews to the media based on specific chapters or ideas, rather than basing them upon the book as a whole. Done cleverly, this can result in a series of articles, rather than a single promotional piece.

9. Use the publisher's social media:

Publishers have their own social media outlets, and they generally have greater numbers of followers than authors might. Whenever you tweet or post about an instance of publicity, or an idea from your book, be sure to use their channels as well. Post to their page (with permission, of course), or use their Twitter handle. Send useful content to their PR person to post on your behalf. Give them the content and visuals with which to promote you.

10. Use networks:

Are you a member of any social groups? Online business communities? Posting into these groups (tactfully) can be very effective. And don't stop at simply post your own content; ask the editor or the owner of the group whether they might consider a feature on your new book. Or, again, turn chapters into articles and continually submit content.

11. Be visual:

Whenever you promote your book, particularly on social media, try to think of ways to be as visually interesting as possible. Can you include high-resolution photos of the cover, of yourself, of a novel background? Can you link it to some video? You can even pay digital animation specialists (usually an amount of around \$15), to create a small animation, based on your book cover, like this:

One of my most shared tweets featured me sitting cross-legged on top of my car's bonnet, surrounded by copies of

the book. Novel. Unusual. Strange. And broadly shared.

Consider changing your social media banners, profile photos and landing pages to show the book cover as well.

12. Sell directly:

Do you have any clients who might be willing to order in bulk? Sales of a couple of hundred here and there add up quickly. Provided your book meets a specific need, conference conveners are often very willing to buy your books as gifts for delegates. A useful book is actually a more valuable gift than, say, a branded folder.

13. Speak anywhere that they will have you:

Speaking about your book at events is a great way to:

- Publicise them; and
- Sell them directly

Professional speakers have an advantage in this area, but the option is open to any author willing to appear at an event. Offer to speak anywhere about your book. Chambers of commerce and business networking events are particularly good, but you can also seek out any form of club or network with an interest in your topic matter.

Some publishers will support you by going along to handle live sales at the event on your behalf. But it is a reasonably simple matter to do it yourself, even if the publishers are not involved. Try to organise a speed-point in order to accept credit cards.

Also, try to create hype for the book before the event. One way to do this is to film a small video promo, in which you greet members of that particularly society and mention that you are looking forward to speaking for them at their upcoming event. Send this video to the convener for use. Here is an example:

Once again, lead with value. Tell them what they will get out of your presentation.

Think of your book as a rolling snowball. The more publicity you get for it, the more publicity will come to you. Every event, every tweet, every feature and every interview is well worth your while.

The number of sales from each in isolation may seem tiny, but your total reputation is growing. Keep rolling it down the hill

and, with the collaboration and help of your publisher, you could end up with an avalanche on your hands! Above all, remember this: It's your baby. Be responsible for its ultimate success.

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