

Developing an Internet Presence: Self-Promotion

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Authors have an amazing power at their fingertips and it's not a magical wand. It's called the Internet, but what he or she does with it is the make or break difference in their success to reach a global audience. Let's say the author has a website, a blog and a book on Amazon -- that's not enough. They must network to gain global exposure. Think of it as multi-level marketing. She tells ten people about her book, they tell ten people, and so on and so forth. The obvious difference between the standard concept of word of mouth, face to face communication, and the internet is that one person has the potential to reach millions of people with a few key strokes.

One of the easiest, cost effective, and most immediate forms of communication, of course, is e-mail. Build a mailing list of friends, family, and referrals. When you have a book signing, ask those who buy your book to sign a guest book and provide you with an e-mail address for updates about your writing. Send out periodic announcements to your fans about signings, contests, appearances, and other milestones in your writing career. Make it personal by maintaining a land mailing address list and mail out signed postcards announcing the launch and pertinent information about your new book. You'll be out of the cost of printing and postage but the returns can be magical.

Author/reader groups and forums. Word of mouth is still the number one best way to sell your book even if "word of mouth" takes on a different form of communication. The Internet is overflowing with groups that bring authors and readers together. Don't limit yourself to one or two groups. Social networks, forums, critique groups, and professional writers' groups are key to today's Internet marketing. Many sites will allow members to create a profile page that offers the capability to post book covers, the author's photographs, bios, book trailers, and blogs. Some groups also include forums for the exchange of information and ideas. They're a great way to meet others who have similar interests and will often lead many positive connections.

The interactions we have with one another are the cornerstones of relationships. Therefore, the key to success in these groups is to give as much as you receive. Make it a point to respond not only to the messages posted on your page, but get in the habit of interacting with the other members via their posts. Get involved in group discussions whether they are related to writing/publishing or not. Few authors have the luxury of writing full-time which means they work outside the home and often are highly skilled in other areas of expertise. Share your know-how, when applicable, with others. Members will support fellow members they have come to know. I belong to a number of author/reader groups and have found each through links that members from other sites have shared or invited me into. In return, I invite them into my groups and also pay it forward. Eventually your base of contacts will grow into a wonderfully diverse set of cyber friends. After a while, you'll start seeing familiar faces at the different sites who by now have met new contacts for you to contact.

One argument against social networks is the amount of time required to keep active; some can be quite demanding of your time and expect you to post on a regular basis. Blogs and forums can become addictive if you let them. Let's face it, if you're blogging, you're not writing. Fortunately, you're in control of your time, right? Allow yourself say, 20-30 minutes a day to visit a select group of sites. If you don't make it into all of the groups, visit the next set of groups the following days, but don't exceed your allotted time on the blogs. Review the posts, respond to those you are interested in, certainly support the member who have been supportive of you, and get out. Set your e-mail preferences to daily or weekly digest which will only send out one e-mail listing that day's or week's activity for you to select from and read.

Join a professional writers' organization. Organizations are as varied as there are genres; Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, Romance Writers of America are just a few.

Some membership fees are hefty and carry a minimum criterion for acceptance into the group. Do your homework and see which one best fits your needs. The advantages of a membership in a professional writers' organization are that:

- 1) active participation in a professional group, reflects the level of time and financial commitment an author is willing to make in his or her writing career.
- 2) these organizations provides support for authors by promoting the author's work to the membership and others in the publishing business, provide a networking system, announce upcoming events, contests, and other opportunities, and pass on valuable information about current publishing trends to the members.

Conferences are another great way to connect with others in the publishing business as well as readers. If you are fortunate enough to be invited to

speak on a panel and/or have a book signing, make sure you have ample bookmarks to pass out that include your website and e-mail information along with a picture of your book cover and blurb. The costs of some events can be prohibiting. Plan ahead and select one or two key conferences per year to make those critical connections.

Send press releases to the major newspapers and radio stations in your state and ask for an interview – not a review. Most newspapers no longer write book reviews. Follow up with a phone call to the appropriate editor to make sure he or she received it and to check if additional information is needed. Continue to focus your marketing to posting articles in high traffic blogs. Journalists often go to web sites to find their next story. Here are some useful links:

<http://newslink.org/statnews.html>

<http://www.free-press-release.com> (free)

<http://www.pressbox.co.uk>

<http://www.i-newswire.com> (free)

<http://www.pr9.net>

<http://www.pr-inside.com>

<http://www.newswire.ca/>

Create a blog on Amazon and take advantage of all the features Amazon offers to help get your book in front of readers. One important feature is the tags that the author may type in to help readers in their search. Shoot for a minimum of 60 – the more the better.

Set up a Google Alert. This is a free feature through Google that will e-mail the author when someone does a search by the key words the author has stipulated (i.e.: book title, author’s name, genre, etc.). It’s best to create very specific key words like romance novels [your last name]. Otherwise, if you use only the word romance, you will receive an e-mail every time someone searches on that word. To give you an example, I recently launched an author’s group blog called, MURDER BY 4 and thus created an alert using those exact words. I not only get alerts each time someone searches for the blog, but I also receive links to articles about murder cases that include the number four in them. Sometimes it I feel inundated with alerts. On the up side, I’ve found numerous blog posts about me and my books, quotes from my articles, reviews of my book, etc., that I wouldn’t have known about without the alerts.

A questionable promotional tool is the flyer. Choose your target audience carefully. If the intend is to mail flyers to bookstore owners, be sure to include a picture of the book cover, author’s picture, bio, book blurb, publisher, ISBN, cost, distributors, and author and publisher contact information. These are most effective if sent to local bookstores owners who know you and will be more inclined respond to your mailing. The chances for a response from bookstores who are not familiar with you or your work outside your immediate area, diminishes drastically. Mailing lists can be purchased. Read the fine print for the minimum number available and the cost. These can run up a tidy bill of thousands of dollars without a guaranteed return in sales. This expense is in addition to the cost of printing and postage. I acquired a list of mystery bookstores located in the US and Canada through a writer’s organization. Although the list was free to members, most of the 200-300 envelopes were returned marked undeliverable. Live and learn.

The use of e-mail addresses will give the sender immediate notification if the address is invalid. Although this method will eliminate costly printing and postage expenses, it still doesn’t offer a guaranteed response. Unsolicited mails might be considered spam and automatically deleted. My suggestions on the use of flyers is to do the homework and proceed with caution.

Marta Stephens is a crime/mystery author of *SILENCED CRY* (2007) and *THE BLACK PEARL* (2008)

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About the Author

Marta Stephens writes crime mystery/suspense novels. Her debut book, [SILENCED CRY](#), was released by BeWrite Books (UK) in April 2007. Look for the next in the Sam Harper Crime Mystery series, *THE BLACK PEARL* in 2008. Stephens resides with her family in the US Midwest.

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