

Ten Tips for Getting the Most Out of Your Personal Book Publicist

Navigating the waters of working with a book publicist can be tricky. For many authors it's a first time experience, so they don't really know what to expect. In fact, they don't even really know what a publicist does, if truth be told. Essentially, think of a book publicist as a media agent. Just as a book agent is the *ticket* to a *publisher*, a book publicist is the *ticket* to the *media*.

Even if an author is seasoned, he may never have worked with a personal publicist, but has only worked with an in-house publicist assigned by his publisher. Working with an in-house publicist is not the same thing, generally speaking, as working with an independent publicist. The exception would be that you are the author whose book is top of the heap this season and your publisher is banking on your name and fame and will pull out the stops to promote you. The likelihood that any of you reading this falls into that category is nigh onto, let's just say, extremely unlikely. (There are over 200, 000 books published each year in America. Do the numbers. You are most likely in the majority here.)

Some of what follows will be applicable to working with an in-house publicist, but I must forewarn you that generally speaking most in-house publicists have a huge workload. The sad and not-to-be-understood truth is that some will not even have read your book. They are hired by their publisher to promote (too many) titles each season and the marketing arm of that publisher has designated which titles will get attention and which titles will get, basically, very little. Go figure. But it's true. Hopefully you have written a splendid tome your publisher has high hopes for. But it is not fair to expect that. If you have good editing, good production and good distribution, consider yourself very fortunate and basically be prepared to be accept any efforts made by marketing graciously and cooperatively, and make up for what you are not offered by hiring an independent publicist--my advice after over 25 years in this business. One of my most-often quoted quips is: "Expecting your publisher to promote your book is like giving birth and expecting your obstetrician to raise your child." It ain't gonna happen.

OK, let's say you have found the publicist you want to work with, you've signed your contract and you want to get the most out of the relationship you are going to enjoy for however long you are signed up for. Most publicists out there I believe work on books for a few months. I personally never work on a book for less than one year, because I specialize in print media which takes a long time. Repeat. Print media takes a long time. This is because magazines and journals are working several months out. Those of you who have written for these publications know that. Even once accepted and scheduled it's not uncommon for articles to get

bumped to future issues, so from start to finish can take several months of tracking.

Now, how do you get the most out of the working relationship you now have with a new team member, someone who is dedicated to getting you and your book and message out there? In order to get the most out of your publicist first you have to:

1. **Choose well.** Generally speaking it is not easy to find a good publicist. But they are out there. Ask your publisher to recommend a list. Ask your author friends for recommendations. Go to book marketing guru John Kremer's bookmarket.com. He has a big list, freely available. Call them. Interview them. Find one who feels right.

When authors call me, I'm looking for immediate fits. I usually just know. I'm looking for books I know are right for me, as I very much care about what I promote, and authors who "just click" with me. I'm going to be working with this person for a year or longer. That is no small matter. We become part of each other's daily lives. It has to feel good and feel right. Look for that for yourself.

2. **Understand your contractual obligations.** My contracts with my authors are very simple and very clear. They are not rife with legalize, though they are sound legally. They reiterate precisely what we have mutually agreed to. Business savvy authors understand the terms of their contracts and adhere to those contracts. They know what to expect, and don't expect what's not in the contract. Judy Hilsinger of Hilsinger-Mendelson, Inc., a well-known public relations firms, agrees. "The most important thing is that each of you is clear on the expectations for the work ahead. A good publicist makes certain that the goals and approaches are clearly defined." A wise author makes sure he understands what those are.

3. **Be professional.** I am so lucky that I work primarily with business book authors because business book authors understand business and almost without fail behave professionally, meaning they are savvy about business in general, and these skills apply. This saves lots of wear and tear on the publicist. These authors know I am not their secretary, or their mother. They recognize we each have professional obligations to each other and meeting these means the working relationship can flourish.

4. **Be responsive.** Any responsible publicist is going to keep you abreast of whatever results are coming in. If your publicist emails or calls, respond. It is very hard work being a book publicist. I'm currently working with the publisher of *Forbes*. How busy can he be? Very. Yet he always takes the time, even from his

hand-held Blackberry world to email back an encouraging, “Great!” “Wonderful, Kathryn!” “Great again!” And I feed off of that. When I email results to authors and get no response, energetically it feels like I’m communicating into a black hole. You don’t want your publicist feeling like that. Take the time to respond. Long-time lifestyle publicist Kathlene Carney of Carney & Associates agrees. “Positive feedback works wonders! A client who is grateful for each and every placement really makes me want to work harder. A client who says, ‘Well, that newspaper is okay, but when am I going to get a spread in the *New York Times*?’ is not exactly lighting my fire.”

5. **Meet your deadlines.** If your publicist has arranged for you to write an article for a publication, be impeccable about meeting your deadlines without expecting reminders. [See #3.] If it looks like you cannot meet a deadline, email her or call her with good notice and see if you can change the deadline.

6. **Edit your own stuff.** You are the writer. If you feel you need additional support consider hiring an editor. This frees your publicist to work on what you hired her to do. [See #2.]

7. Which brings up, **Keep your publicist in the loop.** If you are working with an editor your publicist has linked you up with and a new piece of information evolves, it pays to keep your publicist informed. You do not want to put her in the compromising position that she speaks with that editor and unbeknownst to her the topic or publication date was changed and her author has not kept her in the loop. You and your publicist want to present a solid team effort that does not waste an editor’s time explaining some change. You need to be a seamless operation, working in concert. Everybody wins. Adds savvy publicist Hilsinger, “Good communication is key.”

8. **Honor your publicist’s network of media contacts.** I always, always tell my authors that we are here to serve the media, not the other way around. And I consistently put the onus and responsibility on my authors to deliver their best to my contacts. Your publicist has spent (in my case) decades building her network of professional media contacts. By her taking on the promotion of your book you are basically given *entre* to that invaluable hard-earned, hard-won network. Long after your work together is complete, your publicist is going to continue to be working with that same group of (granted, ever changing) network. It is imperative that you as an author bear that in mind and treat her contacts with respect, professionalism and dignity. There is no place here for arrogance, or incompetence. Your publicist is arranging for you to bring your important message to the public via her contacts. She’s setting the stage for you to shine. Be prepared. Be succinct. Be on purpose. Give the media what they are looking for, and they

will remember you in the future. My smartest authors know this, and a few of them are called for literally decades by certain editors who were so impressed with their ability to deliver the goods.

9. ***Pay her on time.*** I think there is nothing that will place more stress on a relationship with a publicist than not ensuring that financial obligations are met in a timely fashion. Conversely, being sure she is not spinning any of her many wheels on an annoying untimely cheque is one of the ways you can guarantee her time and energies are going where you want them--focusing on bringing your book to the attention of the media. Publicist Kathlene Carney agrees. "The clients I am most eager to go all out for are those who treat me with respect, and part of that includes paying on time. I have respect for their work or I wouldn't have accepted their project. In turn, I'd like them to respect me by paying on time and appreciating the hard work I'm doing on their behalf."

In other words, you do not want to alienate your publicist. You don't want her dispirited, angry, disheartened, frustrated or any other combo of time-wasting emotions. You want her happy, feeling valued, inspired, committed and energetic. So in addition to paying her on time, you can...

10. ***Show your gratitude and appreciation.*** As I review my long history as a book publicist undoubtedly one of the loveliest moments was the day a delivery truck pulled up in front of my Sonoma County home office and a man exited carrying a very large and very beautiful bouquet of multi-colored flowers. I was delighted, but I could not imagine why I had received them! Tucked inside the display was a small note from a fairly new client for whom I had already secured several placements that read, "Thank you for being who you say you are." Wow! Stunning thoughtfulness. I can guarantee you my motivation to promote this consultant and his book soared to the top of my priorities. My heart naturally opened and shined in his gentle and creative acknowledgement.

Hopefully these tips have opened your eyes and ears and hearts and minds to considering how you might best have an excellent experience working with an independent book publicist. It is the (sometimes unanticipated) end ride of a long writing journey. My wish for you would be to find a person you can partner with who will guide you through the challenging and sometimes arduous path of book marketing--one who will believe in you and your book and will be willing to work on your behalf to maximize your potential market. I would forewarn you that this journey might not unfold totally fitting your pictures, but hopefully it will propel you forward into being more of who you are and what you can be.

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