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What makes San Francisco's advertising different? Take a good, strategic look.

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FOCUS ON ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Don't make book that your publisher will provide all the publicity you need

BY KATHRYN HALL

So you finally managed to take that time off, cloistered yourself for two precious years, banging away proverbially on the old typewriter, or your Mac, with dust mounting and understanding significant others keeping quietly at bay.

You found an agent, a publisher and after many delays you finally got a "pub date" and B. Dalton and Walden picked up your book. Fabulous. So you're ready for promotion.



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Of course they're going to promote your book. It's your publisher, for goodness sake. You check your contract. You call your editor. Someone from publicity is going to call you back. Right. Ultimately they send out 200 copies somewhere. (It's not their policy to give you the list.)

You have a sinking feeling that no phone calls will ever be made to those ambiguous editors. (You're probably right.)

They set up a few telephone interviews in places (like Gainesville, Ga.) and they get you on "People Are Talking." And that's great. But suddenly your publicist seems really hard to reach and in your gut you know she's moved on to one of 80 books that will cross her desk this year.

So what do you do? What do you do?

You can hire a publicist, or you can do it yourself. What follows is a bottom line overview of each option, both to help you make a wise choice for yourself and to assist you in maximizing that choice.

Deciding whether to hire a personal publicist or not is really a question of your skills and resources. If you are great on the phone, persistent, good with details and extraordinary at follow-through (the kind that requires calling so-and-so at precisely 7:08 a.m. in Dallas on Tuesdays only, and it may take you three weeks to reach him), have lots of time and feel comfortable promoting yourself, then you probably don't need to hire a professional.

In that case what you want to do is the following:

Communicate with your publisher. Clear your intentions with the publicity department of your publisher. Nothing will compromise your promotion efforts more than duplicating her efforts. Work out clear parameters of what she will be doing and what you will be doing and get her approval.

It's really her field and you need to cooperate with her. If you take that stance she will in all likelihood be grateful for whatever you are willing to add to the plan. If she seems inclined, ask her advice. If she's busy, show her the respect she deserves as a professional, don't take it personally, and then find other resources.

Know the nature of the beast. Get clear on the distinction between publicity and advertising. They are two different animals. Publicity is *placement* in the media: radio and television interviews, reviews or interviews in print, i.e., magazines, newspapers or newsletters. It's free.

No money does or should change hands between an author and an editor or a producer. Exception: some cable television channels are beginning to host paid time on commercial business shows that appear to be editorial in nature.

Your overview. Using new mind-mapping or clustering techniques (see Tony Buzan's book "Use Both Sides of Your Brain") create an overview of your promotion picture. Next write out an overall plan for yourself, beginning with your purpose, your goals and an action plan. The last step is to schedule specific activities.

Your overall purpose is an umbrella statement about what it is you want to accomplish. It is intangible. It's why you are doing all this.

Example might be: to reach a maximum receptive audience with information regarding creativity styles in the business setting and to subsequently affect the way departments communicate with one another. You can be lofty. Then get substantive.

Set specific, tangible goals and measurable outcomes — tour five cities in the next three months, get reviews in 20 magazines

and newspapers and sell 100,000 copies of my book and have fun in the process.

Then comes a plan. How will you accomplish those goals? Lastly, schedule the action base of the plan, being most flexible at this stage.

The plan is basic. Develop a press kit that includes all accrued reviews to that point, any articles you may have written that illumine your expertise and credibility, suggested interview questions, a bio and a good cover letter or press release.

You may want to include a black and white glossy 5x7 photo of you or your book. Mail the kit with a copy of your book to editors and producers of shows you've targeted as appropriate.

Some words of advice:

1. Know the shows you're approaching whenever possible.

2. Don't waste the time of busy producers to pitch ideas you know in your heart of hearts is not a fit.

In your follow-up phone calls, a week later, be courteous and professional. If they haven't seen your information cooperate with whatever they say — call in a month or so. Basic sales principles are applicable. Listen for objections and if possible handle them as they come up.

If you schedule the show, follow up with a letter of confirmation. Keep a copy for your records. If you don't get the interview you may want to bear in mind an old Basque adage: Show up. Pay attention. Tell the truth. And don't be attached to outcome.

The interview. Once you know you're going to be on a talk show you may want to consider working with a professional television coach. Shirley Davalos at Orion Express offers this tip: pre-determine three main points you'd want to get across during your time on the air. Don't be afraid to take charge.

It's your time on stage and you should take full advantage of it, all the while being a gracious guest. Study talk shows and find people you admire and copy their skills in your own style.

The other option. Should all the above seem like uncharted territory, and you would appreciate the advantages of finding a pleasant voice on your answering machine advising you of yet another interview scheduled on your behalf, and your budget allows for hiring that kind of support, you might want to then consider adding a professional publicist to your team.

In that case check "Literary Marketplace" for listings and interview several until you find one who is aligned with your message and budget. Good luck!

Kathryn Hall is a Mill Valley publicist who has worked with authors and corporate consultants since 1979. She is former publicity director of New World Library.