

# MARKETING YOUR BOOK BEFORE IT COMES OUT THIRTY CREATIVE, LOW COST IDEAS

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## HELP YOUR BOOK BUILD AN AUDIENCE.

Many aspiring writers I know seem to think that only self-published writers have to market their books. They work on the assumption that once they sell their novel the publisher is going to do the rest for them. Unfortunately, this myth is perpetuated by writing support groups across the country. I learned this *wasn't* true even before I sold my novel. My first tip off was when an acquaintance of mine, who had just sold her first book to a large fantasy publisher, made her own bookmarks and began attending conventions six full months before her book's scheduled release date. Her publisher did provide her with the bookmarks. But before she got them, she used MS Word and a template, and took her "generic" bookmark down to her local Kinko's and had about fifty of them printed up.

Her reasoning, "My publisher's marketing material won't be out for a few more months, so if I didn't make my own, I would have squandered an opportunity. The publisher will be placing ads in some of the big genre magazines, helping my book get pro reviews and getting some big name writers to blurb my book. Otherwise, most of the marketing is up to me. The publishers use the bulk of their marketing budget on the big names. I was advised by others to do some foot work on my own, so I am."

Well before I even sold my first novel, I started a list, with the help of more experienced writers, of inexpensive marketing ideas to get the ball rolling and to get my name out there. Once I sold the novel, I got in gear and started marketing myself. You can do most of this before your book is even out. Some of the items on this list require computer skills. Other parts require that you just get out there a little more. **Don't worry if you're shy or reclusive.** You won't have to become more social unless you want to. You just have to get involved, accept help from enthusiastic friends who want to help you out, and turn everyday social activities into a positive situation for you and your novel by, in the very least, talking to people. You'd be amazed at how easily "How are you today?" can turn into "When is your book coming out?" – even when you're talking to the clerk at the post office.

## PROMOTIONAL IDEAS:

- Start writing articles and submit them to writer's magazines, e-zines, and newsletters. That way you can mention your book in your bio and get your name out there.
- Learn HTML, or get a WYSIWYG web page creation program like Microsoft's FrontPage and build yourself a website if you already haven't.
- Buy [www.yourname.com](http://www.yourname.com) and use it. You can usually park your domain on top of your existing URL for as little as \$1 a month.

- Build banners for your book at <http://www.addesigner.com/> or other free banner site, then seek out relative banner exchange programs and join them.
- Join WebRings. (If you think this will take up too much space on your website or make it look less than professional, make a page specifically for these links)
- Trade links with other authors and your friends. Add your links to as many link lists you can find. Especially those genre related under the author section.
- List yourself in author directories like [www.writers.net](http://www.writers.net)
- Start an online blog:
  - [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)
  - [www.journalspace.com](http://www.journalspace.com)
  - [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)
- Use a site like Author's Den <http://www.authorsden.com/> to post articles, list published work, list your bio, etc... They also have an inexpensive press release service, newsletter option, and bookstore.
- Make it a point to keep writing and submitting short fiction to genre magazines. Make sure to tell them you are the author of a forthcoming novel. Many readers find new authors by reading their shorter work in online and print magazines.
- Start looking for names of reviewers in your genre and make a list. This way you won't be scrambling for reviewers when your book comes out. Also start looking for opportunities for interviews (print/radio/TV).
- Utilize any local writing group, especially if they offer support and recognition for published members. My local group, Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, has a Published Author's Liaison that helps generate publicity, and they offer a mailing list of all their members. Plus, the member authors are often invited to participate in local events. If you don't have a group like this in your area, you might consider starting one. All it takes is a few hours a month and a few well placed ads where other writers will notice them.
- Start maintaining a list of all the bookstores within a thirty-mile radius with their phone numbers. Visit them and talk to the managers, mention that your book is coming out and when the time comes, you'd really love to do book signings. That way, when you finally approach them with your press kit, they'll already know you.
- Get actively involved in writers e-lists, online forums, and communities if you already aren't. The more people who know who you are, the more potential readers for your work. Plus, never underestimate the power of networking with other writers. Opportunities for article and story publication often arise from networking.

- Start planning a publication party for your family and friends. Make invitations, and build a guest list. Hold the party 2-3 weeks after your book comes out, and send your invitations two weeks before the event. Serve crackers, cheese, sandwich wedges, soda, and juice. It doesn't have to be black tie, catered, etc. Have it on a weekend afternoon for a four hour period where people can just stop by, or stay for the whole thing. The more convenient it is for your guests, the more likely most people who were invited will show up. Tell them to bring their friends if they want. Make sure you have a small supply of books on hand, plenty of bookmarks and cards, and also make sure you tell people, on the invitation, to get a copy of your book ahead of time and bring it with them so you can sign it.
- Make generic bookmarks for your book, carry them around, and pass them out when the opportunity arises. Trade bookmarks with other authors (local or national) so you can pass out yours and theirs, and they will do the same for you. This can double your exposure and cover more ground with the same amount of time invested.
- Start going to conventions that cater to your genre, and attend writer's conferences if only to get a feel for them. While you're there, hand out bookmarks and business cards when the opportunity arises, and be sure to introduce yourself to event coordinators and other authors.
- Use a service like [www.cafepress.com](http://www.cafepress.com) to have t-shirts, mugs, stickers, and other advertising stuff made up. (You'll need to know how to make your own graphics, but you can do it with MSWord, Paint, and/or MS Publisher, which are standard on most computers nowadays.) You will get a great discount, you can link it to your website so fans of your work can buy the items after your book comes out (you make a small commission), AND it's the easy way to buy low volume advertising gear on an as needed basis. Hold contests etc... to give away this stuff. You can even start planning to host fiction writing contests at local high schools, offering a copy of your novel, a t-shirt, and a \$25 gift certificate from a local bookstore as the grand prize.
- Start planning a mailing campaign to send postcards and e-mail to people you know, announcing your books release. Once you start attending book signings, leave a pen and the list on the table where people can sign up for your mailing or e-list. Free e-list services can be found at Authors Den [www.authorsden.com](http://www.authorsden.com), <http://lists.topica.com>, and [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and can easily be added to your web page so fans can sign up.
- Make yourself business cards, on your home computer, to hand out.
- Utilize websites like [www.classmates.com](http://www.classmates.com) to herald your accomplishments as a writer. I have gotten over 50 hits on my website in three months from my listing there. Chances are some of my old classmates will buy my book when it comes out. (Don't worry if you weren't popular when you were in high school. I wasn't.)
- When you have your family holiday photos done, ask the photographer if (s)he will take several pictures of you by yourself. This way you save on sitting fees and time, and end up with a professional photo of yourself for use on your websites, listings,

bookmarks etc... You may also get lucky and find a photographer looking to build his portfolio in which case you can get free pictures in exchange for letting the photographer use your picture. (S)he may also link to your site since (s)he has photographed someone “famous” if you return the link in kind.

- Utilize your signature files in newsgroup settings, and e-mail to announce your forthcoming book. That way every time you send an e-mail or post to a newsgroup, you are advertising yourself.
- If possible, contact your college writing professors, or your high school English teacher and tell them about your book. Mention that you would be willing to come talk to their classes or attend a career day event. Don't forget to thank them for the inspiration and encouragement they provided you. If they are no longer there, you can still contact teachers and tell them that you went to that high school or college and would like to offer to speak. High schools are usually thrilled when one of their students turns out successful because it's a positive mark for them. For colleges, utilize your alumni association's publication to announce your book's release. They may even want to interview you for a feature article.
- Give out a few generic bookmarks and business cards to your more “social” friends and family members, and ask them to pass out the materials if the opportunity arises. I have a friend who is very social and travels in circles where the majority of the people read fantasy. She agreed to help me spread the word by passing out cards and bookmarks, and even agreed to help cater my publication party. So if you have an enthusiastic friend who offers to help, gladly accept!
- Start looking into the costs of buying small ad spaces on genre related websites and/or magazines, Especially those ran by fans of the genre. They're usually VERY inexpensive.
- Get involved with your community by teaching a writing class to seniors, or volunteering to help at local festivals. The more you get yourself out there, the more people you meet, the more people who know about your book, the more people who will want to read it. Plus, you may be invited to other events as a result.
- Support local literacy programs and get to know the librarians at your local library.
- Mentor other aspiring writers in your local/online writing groups and pay forward. Aspiring writers know many other aspiring writers. Word of your kindness will spread and you'll build a reputation. More people will recognize your name when they see it.
- Always take the opportunity to attend parties, and events hosted by groups of people who read in your genre. For example, many fantasy fans tend toward clubs like the SCA (a medieval re-creationist group), Renaissance fairs, and certain types of music. You can hand out bookmarks, cards, and just talk to people while you're there having a good time. Also, for my genre specifically, a vast majority of readers are into

alternative religions. I often frequent stores catering to the metaphysical, not only because I share the same interests my readers do, but because it gives me a chance to meet with my potential readers. What are your readers interested in?

### **A FINAL WORD:**

Always keep your eyes open for opportunities to herald your forthcoming novel, but don't push it on anyone. Let the opportunity present itself (and it will!). Once your book is finally out, you'll be busy with book signings, conventions, and interviews before you know it, but only if you start finding and listing possible sources for all of this now.

Be creative and have fun. None of this stuff takes as much time as you would think it does. It's not that hard, especially when you use the internet for research. Even five hours a week can get results, and anything is better than nothing. You can be the key to your book's success regardless the size of your publisher or the size of your marketing budget.