The Book Writing is Done! Now the Promotion Begins.

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Once you’ve turned in your page proofs to the press, you may think it’s time to relax. NO, IT IS NOT.

Or you may think that promotion is untoward, and besmirches the intellectual purity of your book. NO, IT IS/DOES NOT.

So what do you do now to start the promotion process?

Schedule a phone call with your publicist at the press
Do this very soon after you turn in your page proofs. Promotion work should begin long before the book is published, not afterward.

You will both have your Author Questionnaire as a reference, but some elements of it may have changed. Be sure that your publicist knows about any additions, and any events you have already lined up. And then get down to the nitty gritty.

Re: this conversation: results may vary depending on whether you are publishing with a university press (which tends to have fewer resources devoted to marketing and PR, although not always) or a trade press.

What to talk about
Pitching and writing op-eds or features
What current events or anniversaries can your book’s topic (or some element of it) illuminate?
For magazines, you will need to pitch 8–9 months before publication
For online newspapers, you will need to pitch 1–2 months before publication

Pitching to podcasters
Depending on the podcast, you’ll want to send out inquiries anywhere from 6 months to 1 month ahead of your book’s publication

Pitching to museums, archives, and universities to give public talks
Most institutions plan out their speaking schedules 6 months to a year in advance, so reach out as early as you can to schedule a talk. These days, the same is true for the bookstores that are holding online events.

Given the realities of the pandemic, most of these talks will be virtual for the foreseeable future.

• It can be a very strange experience giving a book talk via Zoom. Most are run as webinars, and
you will not be able to see participants—it feels like talking to a room full of ghosts. You will not be able to meet them, sell copies of the book, or sign them.

- The upside: many more people can come to your talk than would have shown up in person. Last year, I had anywhere from 50 to 250 people log in for my virtual talks, when only about 15-20 would have come in real life.

Yes, you really can (and should) email people and ask them to invite you to their universities. Centers and departments often have money to bring scholars and writers in for talks. You can also package these talks with a visit to a grad seminar or other events.

Pitching to local and national public radio
This is where your press’ publicity department will do the heavy lifting. The bookers for these media outlets will pay more attention to their pitches.

Using your social media platforms effectively
Social media is, well, social. Many folks use Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as professional networking sites, but some of your followers could respond negatively if you use your handles exclusively to promote your work.

If you’re not already on social media, set up accounts long before the book is out. Use your presence there to engage in conversations, and promote the work of other scholars and authors. When it comes time to publicize your book, your followers will respond more positively.

Re: all of the above. DO YOUR RESEARCH. Make sure you know what kinds of talks, interviews, features, and topics these folks usually focus on, so you can make your case for appealing to their audiences.

The Big Questions

Which forms of promotion are most worth doing?
You will want to focus most of your energy on the media with the most reach: radio, podcasts, virtual events, newspapers and magazines, and—if you can manage it—TV.

Which forms of promotion are not worth the effort?
Book festivals. Most of these have been cancelled this year. If they have gone virtual, it might be worth investigating. When we get back to in-person events, though, festivals don’t really move the needle in terms of book sales, and your press will not pay for you to go. Same for bookstores, in the after times.

Book trailers. I’ve heard some folks advocate for these, while others think they are a waste of time. If you have the funds to create a professional trailer and your press thinks it is a good idea, go ahead and do it. Otherwise, it probably won’t make a huge difference in sales.
Who is doing what and when?
Usually, the press will want you, the author, to do as much as possible.

If you know the magazine or newspaper editor or podcaster personally, the pitch will be more successful coming directly from you. For the others, your publicist should make the ask.

It is important that you and your publicist are on the same page and that you are organized.

Remember that while you only have one publicist, your publicist has many authors. You don’t want to pitch the same person twice, or forget about a major podcaster because one of you thought the other was going to do it.

Who is paying for what?
Unfortunately, this will be you, the author, most of the time.

If you are publishing with a university press, they usually won’t have a budget to pay for your travel expenses to more than one or two events (if that). Figure out what your own budget is, and what kinds of events will produce the most bang for your buck.

Newspapers, magazines, museums, archives, and universities may pay you for an op-ed or feature, or a public talk. But you’ll have to ask, and negotiate.

Who gets bound galleys, and who gets books after publication?
If you are publishing with a trade press or if you are publishing a crossover book with a university press, they will send out a certain number of bound galleys (or “ARCs”—advance review copies) to newspapers and journals for review.

University presses will also send hardcovers (or paperbacks, if they are publishing both simultaneously) to academic journal book review editors; usually you will provide them with a list of these in your author questionnaire.

Both university and trade presses will also send out hardcovers to book prize committees and academic journals. Touch base with your editor and the marketing team about prizes, in particular. The due dates are often long after the book is published (in the next calendar year), so you need to be on top of the submission deadlines, and make sure the press sends your book out for all applicable prizes.

Also, write up a list of folks who you think would appreciate an ARC or a book. Pass this information along to your publicist. There is a limit to the largesse of the press, however. You may have to send out books from your author copy stash, especially if you receive requests for the book from media folks a few months after the book’s publication.

Are there other opportunities I don’t know about?
An excellent question to ask your publicist—there may be book industry events, book fairs, or other opportunities you have not heard about before.

Hiring outside publicists
If you think your press will not be able to do enough (for whatever reason) to promote your book, you have the option to hire outside publicists.

**Warning:** This will be expensive. I mean, really expensive. Professional publicity campaigns will be five-figure investments.

You will not make that money back in book sales, unless your book is a bestseller. And it’s not usually worth the money if you are publishing an academic book, and its function is to establish your credibility in the field and get you tenure. But if you are looking to launch yourself out there with general readers and think that outside publicists can help you do that, it may be worth it.

**The upshot**

In the end, if you care about reaching more than a handful of readers, the promotion part of the publication process is vital.

**It is up to you** to make sure that this process gets rolling early, and that you and your press do all that you can to promote your book.

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