

Promoting Your Book with a Small Press

You've spent the last few years drafting and polishing your book. Now you've signed on with a small publisher and gone through the arduous editing process on your manuscript. There's even a cover and a release date. While you've accomplished a lot, there's still one step left in the process. It's time to promote your book!

These days, as small presses operate with truly small teams and budgets, authors have a large role to play in the promotion of their new releases. Below are some suggestions of how to collaborate with your publisher to grow awareness and readership of your work.

Make a Marketing Plan Early

Interest in most new titles will begin to die down a few weeks or a few months after their release. That's why it's crucial to speak with your publisher and develop your marketing plan in advance, so you can hit the ground running from day one.

Take some time to **think about your target audience**, so you can plan events around them. For example, since author Jane Doucet's novel *Fishnets & Fantasies* is set in Nova Scotia, she made sure to visit bookstores around Halifax to sign copies and chat with staff, adding a personal touch that could make folks more likely to recommend her books to readers. She also made sure to stop off at locations that appear in her book, such as Lunenburg and Halifax's Venus Envy, to help drum up local support.

Different authors have different strengths. Perhaps you're great speaking off the cuff to a crowd but struggle to use social media consistently. **Speak with your publisher about the kinds of events you feel comfortable doing** so that, together, you can build a marketing plan that works for you. It's in everyone's best interest to have the author fully onboard with promotion.

Crucially, make sure not to burn out on the promotion trail! It may not be realistic to squeeze that fourth event into the week when you're also taking care of your kids and working a day job. Get yourself out there, certainly, but look for ways to **plan fewer events with greater impact** rather than running yourself ragged across the province and trying to hit too many places at once.

Author Website

Googling is second nature these days, and if folks hear about your book through the media or word of mouth they'll likely want to look you up to. Creating **an author website, even a simple one, can help you control what potential readers find.**

The most **effective author websites are clean and spare**, making use of a consistent font and white space; they guide a user's attention by avoiding overcrowded visuals and text. The key author website elements are a high-resolution author photo, a short author bio, information about your book, and a link to the publisher's page or another pre-order website. When launching a new book, help people connect with you by providing a separate 'upcoming events' page and a contact page (including an email address created specifically for your writing or, to prevent spam, a contact form). You can also share any links to your social media pages.

While you can hire a professional web designer, a number of website platforms offer simple and easy-to-use templates. Wix.com offers drag and drop options, while WordPress.org has a lower price point.

Promoting Your Book with a Small Press

Social Media

While not *required* for all authors, it must be said that social media offers **the potential to reach a large audience with free advertising for yourself and for your book**. But always be sure to coordinate your social media strategy with your publisher so you aren't duplicating work or setting a tone that clashes with theirs.

While your book is forthcoming, you can post content such as a reveal of the cover, advanced praise that you and your publisher have solicited for the book, real-life locations that inspired certain scenes, and details about upcoming launch and reading events. A giveaway contest (offering a signed copy of your book in exchange for people liking and sharing your post) can help raise your profile.

The **technical aspects of social media posts are often overlooked** but are crucial considerations. Canva.com offers intuitive, free tools to create professional-quality social media posts. It's also a good idea to research popular hashtags you can include in your posts, such as #bookstagram on Instagram. Platforms such as Facebook can also boost event ads to a larger audience for a modest fee.

Be sure to **strike a balance between self-promotional content and genuine engagement with readers and other writers**. If you create new accounts to promote your book, you are entering established communities and ongoing conversations: as in real life, there's nothing tackier than the person who shows up late to the party and talks loudly only about themselves.

Frequency of posting also deserves your attention: **blitzing your followers with too much content will result in their unfollowing you or muting your posts**. On most social media platforms, two or three posts per week in the month leading up to your book launch should be enough to catch your audience's attention.

Book Trailers

If you have a bit of technical skill (such as experience with iMovie and a YouTube account), a video trailer (or two) can be a fun and highly engaging way to share news of your book across several social media platforms. Many readers expect book trailers to have a crafty feel, so you don't need to be Da Vinci with a video editor.

Keep the video short (between 5 and 20 seconds) to accommodate for the shorter viewing times that most social media users are accustomed to. Include the cover of your book, information about the release date, and a sample of the narration or of the themes or imagery central to your book.

There are an abundance of book trailers on YouTube to help with your brainstorming—and if you have the cash, you or your publisher can also hire a company to produce a trailer for you.

Promoting Your Book with a Small Press

Advance Sales and Reviews

If you have social media, a website, or (even better) an e-newsletter with an engaged readership, **encourage your audience to contact their local bookstore and pre-order of your book.** If five or ten people reach out to the shop, creating buzz about your book, the shop may bring in extra stock. You can make it easier for people to pre-order through brick-and-mortar shops by including your book's International Standard Book Number (ISBN), along with the title and the name you've published under. If you are unsure of your ISBN, ask your publisher.

Encourage friends, family, and followers to place a pre-order. All **pre-order purchases are included in your first week of sales and can result in you making a local bestseller list**, which will draw more attention to your book. While you're at it, encourage them to post positive reviews on sites such as Amazon, Goodreads, and Indigo. Reviews have tangible impacts on the interest in your book outside your own social circle.

Events

In preparation for **in-person events**, ask your publisher (or a kind, local friend) if they are available to look after logistical aspects like seating and food. When reading, plan brief sections (5 – 10 minutes, maximum) that are easily understood without a lot of set up. Plan breaks between sections to offer (loosely scripted) personal anecdotes about the inspiration and writing process. To broaden your event's appeal and expand your writerly network, invite other local writers to read before you.

When signing books, it's a good idea to come up with a standardized message you can include with your signature, and be sure to have someone pass out a pen and sticky notes so audience members can write their own name down before they reach your table. There's nothing worse than signing a book to "Sheryl" when it should have gone to "Shannon"—or "Kailee" when it should have gone to "Ceilidh"!

The good news about a post-COVID world is that many more people are now familiar with video conferencing tools such as Zoom, making it easier to attract a wider audience to **online book launches**. Video conferencing events are a cost-effective way for you to reach readers that would otherwise be inaccessible due to travel budget constraints.

If you will be doing a number of online events, it is a good idea to invest in a ring light (which ensures strong, consistent, shadowless lighting on your face) and a good quality microphone and web camera. Try to find a backdrop that shows a little personality. Bookshelves work well, or a space with a few pieces of art behind you. If you do not have a ring light, make sure you are sitting near to the main source of lighting in the room, and be sure to cover any windows that might appear behind you so that outdoor light conditions don't wash out or dim the video you're broadcasting.

As with in-person events, it's incredibly helpful to have an assistant moderating the logistical aspects of a virtual event, such monitoring the chat, directing discussion topics, and addressing technical difficulties that may emerge. If broadcasting from a home you share with other, ask them to refrain from using the internet during your event to reduce the chance of lagging video.

Promoting Your Book with a Small Press

Interviews

If you're both hardworking and lucky, you'll find opportunities to promote your book via podcasts, blogs, newspaper articles, literary festivals, or local radio and TV spots.

Prepare answers to questions commonly asked of authors, such as "Tell us about yourself," "What was your inspiration for this project," and "Describe your book for our audience." Verbally practice giving clear and concise answers about your book and your writing practice.

Develop an awareness of your speech habits and body language to ensure you can project your preferred image and personality. You practice delivering answers while sitting in front of a mirror, film yourself speaking with your phone, or ask a friend or family member to watch you for any unconscious nervous tics. While it may be a painful experience, it will be less painful than the existence of an audio or video record in which you're not your best self.

Prepare a media kit file or folder that you can easily email to inquiring journalists and interviewers. Your publisher can provide assistance assembling the media kit, which should include your contact information, a high-resolution author photo, a brief bio, and a synopsis of your book.

Swag and Promotional items

Not everyone who attends a book launch or sees you signing books at your local bookstore will want to buy your book on the spot. It's a good idea to have some free promotional items, such as bookmarks, that undecided readers can take away from these encounters. These will help **keep your title top-of-mind the next time readers are shopping for a good book**. Your publisher may be able to assist with design and/or printing costs. For those financing swag on their own, Vistaprint offers some easy templates and decent pricing. For those confident in their design skills, the national chain The Printing House offers low-priced, high-quality printing services.

Book Clubs

If you are open to discussing your book with members of book clubs, be sure to **state this on your website, social media accounts, and promotional items**. Most clubs do not offer compensation—though hopefully everyone has bought a copy of your book! However, if you are asked to travel more than 45 minutes from your home, you could ask for a mileage fee or offer to meet with the book club via videoconferencing.

To encourage book clubs to consider your work, you could develop a reading guide for your book and provide it for free through website. The bread-and-butter of reading guides are discussion questions, but you can make yours stand out by also including, for instance, a relevant film recommendation; a thought-exercise, physical activity, or game; or a drink pairing or recipe that relates back to your story in some way.