ASA Professional Development Seminars

Working with your publisher
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As requested by members, the ASA is providing papers from the professional development seminars in PDF format for downloading. The information that follows summarises the content covered in the seminar and reflects the personal views of the presenter. Please note that the views expressed are not related in any way to ASA opinion or policy.

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Publicity overview

1. The author information form is used to construct a biography for use in the catalogue, on the website, press releases, sales materials, also for establishing what else your publicist can do with you: festival appearances, op ed pieces, eligibility for awards such as the Vogel, SMH Young Novelists. It also gives publicist your ideas for marketing your book – special interest groups, or contacts you have that may be useful.

2. The publicity time line (see Appendix) indicates what the publicist is doing at each stage of the publishing process – from writing press materials and sending out review copies to media contacts, to pitching authors for writers festivals.

3. Frenzied attention is usually paid to a new title for about four to six weeks around publication date, realistically, but the publicist always tries to see new ways of bringing your book to the fore again, i.e. contacting journalists when related news items appear. The period of publicity can vary from four weeks to four years – especially for campaigns like Tim Flannery’s *The Weather Makers* and other books that contribute to public debate.

Knowing the market and making the media pitch

Publishing goes in cycles. Particularly in non-fiction, certain themes receive a lot of attention – such as the spate of God-related or atheist books that came out in the last 18 months, or the current interest in books that address our mortality. Unless your book is a work of completely original genius, the job of the publicity department is to pitch your book to the media in terms of what it adds to the general cultural discussion, and how it differs from other books on similar topics. Your publicist will always try to put your work in a broader social context, and thereby make it current and interesting.

Beyond book signing - presenting your book in interviews and at festivals

- Fix in your head the three points you want to get across, and make sure you get to them.

- Brainstorm likely questions with your publicist – from tricky ones like ‘how much money did you earn from the book?’ to ‘is it really fiction?’ and ones specific to your book.

- Graciousness pays off – to a point.

- Developing a ‘personality’ can take time.

- Email or speak to the event chairperson before the gig.

- Find the format that suits you best – get your publicist to play the bad guy.

- Remember: the audience notices everything.

- MENTION THE BOOK’S TITLE.
• Choose a section to read – and read it, even if you have to twist the topic around to do it.

• Make the most of the opportunity to talk about yourself.

• Keep it lively when speaking to children.

• Mingle with other speakers and make contacts.

The Smell of Fresh Ink - what happens after the euphoria has worn off

1. One author said before publication ‘I feel like it’s almost Christmas!’ – but the reality is that but Santa Claus doesn’t exist. After publication there is no great wave of fame or relief: it’s the beginning of another period of hard work.

2. Develop your media skills and agree to all interviews – big or small. You can undertake media training if you’re really concerned about performing well, but often there’s no need – your passion for your book should be enough to make you a media star.

3. Bookscan. Yes, your publisher probably has the sales figures. But they’re reluctant to tell you as it means you’ll be comparing your book’s success from week to week – and often it’s completely arbitrary and doesn’t relate to your recent media coverage or any amount of hard work on the author’s part. Some books take months or even years before they ‘take off’ – don’t be drawn into the idea of immediate success, as it’s rarely the case.

4. If you’re not satisfied with the publicity you’ve received, schedule a meeting and go through your marketing ideas with your publicist. Don’t ring the publicist to ask if anything’s happening! Send an email or request a meeting instead.

5. Writers’ Festival invitations may or may not follow. To build your public speaking skills, give talks to community groups, libraries (they pay $285 for an hour), schools etc. These can be arranged either by your publicist or by yourself, or you may want to explore the possibility of signing up to a speaker’s agency such as Booked Out or Saxon’s.


Advice to first time authors

1. Be kind to yourself – make your expectations realistic and don’t compare yourself to authors who have been published for years or who have a higher profile than you.

2. Ask your publicist to book you the low-rating interviews first.

3. Be aware that large newspaper profiles are a rare thing for first time writers.

4. Be aware that fiction is hard to do on radio.

5. Write op ed pieces to raise your profile.

6. Don’t go into bookshops if you’re not prepared for the truth – your book is one of thousands and it won’t be handled as the special object it is to you and your family and friends!

7. Talk to other writers, not unpublished friends, so your expectations of your publisher are fair.

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**Appendix: Publicity Timeline**

1. Part way through the editorial process you’ll be sent an author information form to complete
   - 16 weeks from publication date
2. Publicist sends sales materials to reps (book jacket, blurb, marketing points, author bio)
   - 16 weeks from pub date
3. Blurbs about you and book begin to appear in publisher’s catalogue, website, newsletters
   - 12 weeks from pub date
4. Publicist sends pages/proof copies (galleys) to long lead magazines, booksellers
   - 12 weeks from pub date
5. Books arrive in the office. Publicist sends copies with PR to reviewers, interviewers, festival directors, influential readers
   - 6-4 weeks from pub date
6. You’ll receive copies of published book on the same day they reach your publisher
   - 6-4 weeks from pub date
7. Publicist makes follow-up calls and emails about your book, constructs publicity schedule of interviews and reviews
   - 4 weeks before-4 weeks after pub date
8. Publicist accompanies author to first interviews
   - 1 week before-2 weeks after pub date
9. Stock arrives in bookshops around the country
   - 4 days before pub date
10. First reviews and profiles appear
    - 2 days before pub date
11. Publicist arranges launch party – increasingly rare though – and organises launcher
    - Held in pub month
12. Festival invitations may come in – from interstate and local events, occasionally overseas
    - Anytime within year of publication
13. Author signings in bookshops
14. Returns start to come in and an accurate sales picture is formed
    - Pub week, and for 8 weeks after
15. Publicist tries to find new ways of bringing your book to the fore again, ie contacting journalists when related news items appear
    - Up to three years after pub date
16. Publicist organises on-going talks at public libraries, seminars, schools
    - Up to one year after pub date

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