

A Romance Author Speaks About Marketing

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Hey, authors, you're going to like my recommendation for your marketing budget next year. How about zero dollars? Learn how this published romance author markets her books for free.

The Best Promos in Life Are Free: A Romance Author Speaks About Book Marketing

Hey, authors, you're going to like my recommendation for your marketing budget next year. How about zero dollars?

You've read plenty of those articles that pound it home to authors that you can't succeed unless you market yourself. I couldn't agree more. I'm just saying you can buy more effective promotion with sweat than with cash.

{sidebar id=9}That's been my experience over the past three years, and from all the advice I read from other experts, I'm not alone in that opinion. In marketing my own erotic romance titles, I've discovered some interesting principles at work. For what it's worth, here's what I've found:

Marketing services are a let-down. I subscribed to a marketing service for a year, which promised to promote me on its website, get my name out in newsletters to an immense list of people, etc. I couldn't discern any results at all. My web tracking showed only a handful of referrals over the year. When the service's newsletters came out I saw no uptick in traffic. I was never featured in any paid advertising. The really sad part was all the work the service required of me, uploading text and graphics to its website, creating contests, writing blurbs...it cost me time as well as money.

Banner ads are a waste of space. One month I experimented with buying banner ads on key romance sites and studied the click-throughs. First of all, be aware that most sites rotate a number of banners in the same spot, so only a portion of site visitors see your ad. And secondly, research shows people ignore banner ads. Don't you? Such ads may get you a little name recognition, but that's it. I saw almost no click-throughs from my campaign.

Online chats just tire out your fingers. Author chats are a popular type of promotion, and more often than not are free (don't ever pay to do one!). Now if you enjoy visiting with readers, by all means, indulge yourself in chats as a social activity. But don't expect them to boost sales. First of all, very few readers participate in online chats; if they have free time, they prefer to read. Secondly, even if they like chatting with you, odds are they won't buy your book.

Even print ads don't pay. I recently advertised in a national magazine and it did not get me a single sale. Other experts share this opinion: I read recently that one author placed a good size ad in the New York Times Book Review, to the tune of a couple thousand dollars, and also reported it didn't sell a single book. Point is, just because you get the exposure doesn't mean your ad will convince anyone to buy.

Go on the radio for fun, not sales. There are an awful lot of internet radio shows soliciting your appearance "for a small fee." Is it worth it? Rarely. I know several people who have tried internet radio and not seen any rush of web traffic or sales as a result. It can be fun to make a media appearance, but with the low numbers of listeners (and the good chance they will simply listen and not buy), your expenditure won't be justified.

Same principle applies to going on the road. If you have the opportunity to appear at a conference or convention, make sure the travel expenses are justified in your mind for reasons other than sales. Unless you already have strong name recognition, new readers will not flock to buy your book because your name was on a convention program. But if you are an extrovert and enjoy such activities, then the trip can be worthwhile for other reasons.

Don't giveaway more than you get. Contests and giveaways are very big in the romance field, and this is another area in which I urge caution. I found out early that there are a lot of people who troll the internet for freebies, and most of your contest entrants will be these types. Use such promos in moderation, and be sure your cash outlay for the giveaways or prizes is not out of proportion to the publicity. Also, giving away your fiction (in ebook downloads or the occasional print book) is smarter than giving out prizes that won't even introduce the winner to your writing.

Media release distribution can be dumb or smart. This is the one expense I may well include in my 2007 budget, but I use it with care. Never pay for someone else to write a press release for you—you are a writer after all. However, paying a small amount for distribution, say the \$40 fee charged by PRWeb, can be a great investment. This service really does get releases placed all over the web, for months and even years. One caveat, though: Say something in your release that is significant. If the headline and summary don't catch readers' interest, you wasted your money.

If it seems I just advised you against virtually all the pay-for-promotion alternatives, you're right. But what kind of promotion can you really get for free? Let me give you some examples.

Nothing is more important than a good website. Your website does cost you some money every month, but it is a key element of all your free promotion. Make sure your site looks professional, is easy to navigate, makes your titles look fascinating, is updated at least weekly, and is linked to by as many external sites as possible.

Get content posted wherever you can. Every time you place some writing somewhere, it's free publicity that will direct people to your site and your books, possibly for years to come. There are lots of websites and publications desperate for good content. They would charge you \$20 for a banner ad for a month, but won't ask a penny to post your content and leave it up long term. This includes columns, essays, interviews, book excerpts, etc.

Utilize all possible avenues for free promotion. Book reviews, news items, new release lists are all posted by romance websites for no charge. Submit every new book you write for a review everywhere you can. Send notices of news to every site that solicits them. Look for sites that have author directories and get yourself listed. Solicit interviews, submit excerpts to contests, do anything appropriate that is fee-free.

Keep a blog. It's just one more free way to get your name out to potential readers. A lot of readers search blogs for topics of interest to them, so it's a great way to reach the demographic you want, and expose them to your writing style at the same time.

Take advantage of promo opps at online retailers. Make sure there is good content on your book pages on the sites that sell your titles. Many of these sites let you post synopses and reviews on your book pages. Amazon offers authors profile/blog pages and a means to send promotional messages to anyone who has bought your titles in the past. Encourage friends and fans to post online reviews on these sites too.

The great thing about all these free kinds of promotion is that they are content-based, and thus actually get people's attention and sell your books. And because they cost you nothing but your time, you really can't lose.

So try a year of promoting for free, and see if your sales don't go up, even while your expenses go down!

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