

How to Market a Book Without Getting on Oprah

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Many people have a book marketing plan that consists of getting on Oprah. Fat chance. Here's what you really should be doing.

Book Marketing - The Phantom of the Oprah

[Editor's Note: Brian Jud is a book marketing consultant with quite a bit of experience. You'll be reading a number of his articles on this site in the coming months. We'll also provide random notes and sidebars to point you in the right direction and provide book marketing resources that go hand-in-hand with some of the great tips Brian provides. Enjoy.]

As a book marketing consultant, people come to me with their marketing plans in hand, asking how I can help them implement it. Unfortunately, in many cases their entire marketing plan consists of getting on the Oprah Winfrey Show. "Once I'm there," they dream, "the people in her audience will love my book and I'll sell millions of them."

This kind of fantasy marketing can cause authors to fail. First of all, an appearance on The Oprah Winfrey Show (or any show) does not guarantee sales. If the guest does not perform properly the exposure is lost. And the "millions of books" must be on hand. That requires printing them and getting them on the shelves before your performance.

There is no quick fix when it comes to selling books. Consumers take their time making decisions about what they will buy, and they must reach a certain comfort level before they will part with their money. It is not enough for them to see you or hear about your title one time. People have to be reminded about it by being exposed to your message repeatedly.

A consistent, coordinated communication program will help speed this along. As potential customers hear about your book more frequently, they will recognize (and buy) it in airport stores, bookstores, book clubs, mail-order catalogs or supermarkets. This process takes time to unfold, but your efforts will succeed if you tell enough people frequently that your book is available and why they should buy it. In the end, you realistically can sell many books, more profitably.

Media Promotion: Promote with an array of devices and media

Book promotion is like being an archer with four arrows in your quiver. The likelihood of hitting the target is four times greater than it is with one arrow. The four arrows in the book-marketer's quiver are publicity, advertising, sales promotion and personal selling.

Book Publicity

Publicity can spread a message quickly and at low cost. Although most authors use publicity primarily to get on the air, you can also use publicity effectively to reposition a product, enter a new market, introduce a new product, extend a limited promotion budget, repetitively inform target audiences about the benefits of your titles, create company and brand identity and loyalty, and publicize events to attract more people.

Advertising

Advertising can reach many consumers simultaneously with the same message, with a relatively low cost per exposure. It can increase awareness of your titles and educate people about why they should buy them. In general, the return on your advertising expenditure is not immediate. One ad will usually not pay for itself, since the benefits of advertising accrue over time as readers are reminded repeatedly about your titles.

There are different types of advertising to consider. Awareness advertising alerts consumers that your title is available and directs them to places in which they can purchase it. Direct-response advertising provides a means to purchase your books directly. Cooperative advertising is a joint promotion that can reduce your costs.

Book Sales Promotion

Sales promotion includes useful items that serve as a constant, favorable reminder of your titles. Typical examples are bookmarks, giveaways (key chains, pens, etc.), brochures, games, point-of-purchase displays and coupons for generating awareness and stimulating demand through short-term price campaigns.

Personal selling of your book

Personal selling is having one-on-one contact with prospective buyers. This occurs at trade shows, book signings, during personal presentations, networking at BEA or other association meetings and by participating in an online discussion group. In special-sales marketing you are heavily involved in selling directly to people with purchasing power. This may be a buyer at a museum, a drug store, an association or a large company.

You can use these four promotional tools at different times to accomplish your goals. Your job is to determine when and how to use each to optimize your sales. For example, suppose your author is about to conduct a promotional tour. It will be more successful if you accompany the events with an awareness campaign. This might include an enlargement of the book's cover featured in bookstores (sales promotion), press releases sent to the local media (publicity); post cards mailed to prospective customers (advertising) or media appearances promoting the occasion (personal selling). Success using this synergistic approach is more likely if you match your activities to:

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The life-cycle stage of each title. If your title is in its introductory stage, mass communication techniques should be emphasized. Initially, people need to know it is available. In the growth stage, they need to be reminded about why it is in their best interest to purchase it.

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The personality of your authors. Authors who loathe media appearances might be better suited to a promotional mix heavy in direct mail, publicity and advertising. Others may thrive on national exposure and excel in performing on the air and in personal presentations.

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The nature of your product line. A list heavy in fiction lends itself to a mix weighted toward sales promotion, publicity and

advertising where mass communication's low cost per exposure stimulates demand most efficiently.

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The nature of your markets. A nonfiction title destined for a tightly defined market niche profits from personal communication, perhaps augmented with a targeted campaign of direct mail, publicity and advertising.

You have many marketing strategies and actions at your disposal. These can be manipulated and applied in many different combinations with varying results. That is the good news. The bad news is that these can be manipulated and applied in different combinations with varying results. There is no one best promotional strategy that works all the time for everyone. Experiment with a variety of strategies and actions to determine what works best for you, for your unique product line at this particular time. Try different approaches, evaluate the result and make corrections as necessary. Then try something else. Eventually your efforts will pay off and you may even sell as many books as if you had appeared on Oprah.

About the Author

Brian Jud is a book-marketing consultant and the author of *Beyond the Bookstore* (a Publishers Weekly book) and *The Marketing Planning CD-ROM* describing new ways to sell more books to special-sales buyers. Contact Brian at P. O. Box 715, Avon, CT 06001; (800) 562-4357; brianjud@bookmarketing.com, blog at <http://blog.bookmarketing.com> or <http://www.bookmarketing.com>.