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The Publicity Puzzle

By Marika Flatt

Four years ago, upon graduating from college, I began my job search in the communications field. I accepted a job as an assistant publicist with Phenix & Phenix Literary Publicists. Inevitably, family and friends would, and still do, ask, "Where are you working?" The next question was/ is always, "What do you do?" I have always had to explain what I do as a literary publicist. And not just to family and friends. Writers do not usually know what a literary publicist does.

It's true... most people do not grow up saying they want to become a book publicist. Mainly because no one knows what one does! However, this wonderfully exciting job is where the heart lies for someone like me who has a passion for books, coupled with a passion for the media. After four promotions, I am now the National Media Director with Phenix & Phenix and believe I have the best job in the world!

Part of my job is to speak to writers' groups at conferences and discuss how to create a stellar publicity campaign for a book. I am no longer amazed that 9 out of 10 people in my workshops are hearing about literary publicity for the first time. I thrive on being able to unlock the mystery of publicity for them. I am easily excited by uncovering one more piece of the book puzzle in their quest for bestseller stardom.

I will now attempt to walk you through the book process.

Writer completes manuscript. Writer finds agent to sell manuscript to publisher. Publisher agrees to publish book. Publisher edits copy, coordinates cover design, organizes production of galleys (review copies) and actual book, coordinates distribution to bookstores and other booksellers and then the publicist takes over.

The best time to secure a literary publicist is three to four months before the publish date, in



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order to allow for maximum amount of time to organize the campaign. However, many authors find a publicist about the same time that their book hits bookshelves. At Phenix & Phenix, a typical campaign lasts six months and is orchestrated in a systemized manner. We spend the first month developing strategy and press materials. Then we begin to contact book industry publications, which require that you send them a book pre-publication. We also begin to contact magazines with the longest lead times. The typical magazine requires a three-month lead-time.

The publicist then begins contacting appropriate editors of daily newspapers and radio and television producers. Online media is typically the last segment of media to be contacted because they move at Internet speed and require little-to-no lead-time. After all appropriate media has been contacted, follow up begins. Follow up is absolutely essential for a publicity campaign. Most media receive hundreds of press releases a day and, typically, following up is the only way to get yours noticed. We spend the final month of every campaign doing what we call "sweeps." This means that we follow up with ALL media that were ever interested in the book or author. We make sure that we leave no stone unturned.

There are many benefits to hiring a publicist. To name a few:

1. A publicist has the media contacts and relationships needed to secure interviews/reviews.
2. A publicist knows how to pitch your book to the media and how each journalist likes to be contacted.
3. Most writers do not have the time to devote to a publicity campaign. It is a full-time job.
4. When an author is pitching his own book, it is typically viewed as being too self-promotional. A publicist is seen as a third party and most journalists are more receptive to discussing a book with a publicist rather than the author.

A publicist's main job is media relations, scheduling interviews, book reviews and feature stories for a client. Occasionally, other services are offered, such as book tour coordination and promotion, media training and development of marketing materials. However, a publicist does not typically find agents, publishers or distributors for the book, schedule speaking engagements or coordinate travel arrangements for a book tour.

Publishers often out-source books to independent publicity firms. Due to the heavy volume of books that a publisher's in-house publicity staff has to promote, by hiring an outside publicist, more time and energy can be devoted to individual titles. Some publishers have even done away with their publicity departments and send all their titles to an outside publicity firm to handle the promotion efforts.

As I said before, the job of literary publicist is ideal for someone who loves the written word and has the desire to help writers have their story told. A recent statistic said that 150,000 books are written each year. Publicity is an integral step for any book that does not want to remain on the bookshelf. A publicist lets the world know that the book exists and why they need it. Not every book can be in Oprah's book club, but we believe that every book we promote has an audience who needs to know about it.

Just remember, publicity is a marathon, not a sprint. We tell authors, "You didn't write your book overnight and you won't become famous overnight either." The process takes time. I hope I have helped solve the mystery of what a literary publicist actually does. Although I

didn't dream of being a publicist when I was growing up, I am very glad I found my calling!

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