

30 Creative Book Marketing Ideas

by John Kremer

1. Book Excerpts

To promote an upcoming book to bookstores, libraries, or readers, print an excerpt from your book in pamphlet or booklet form and mail it out to your major customers (or potential customers). To promote Gloria Steinem's book, *Revolution from Within*, Little, Brown reprinted *Bibliotherapy*, a chapter that describes the books the author found helpful in writing her book and living her life. They sent 50,000 copies of this pamphlet to 1,000 of their major bookstore accounts who, in turn, passed them out to customers.

2. Preprint Review Copy Envelopes

Woodbridge Press sends all review copies bulk rate inside envelopes that are preprinted with their address and the legend: "New Book: Review Copy." This message gets the attention of reviewers. Also, because they send the books bulk rate (using their meter imprint), they save money without affecting delivery compared to book rate.

3. Stay Alert to Media Opportunities

Watch for news items that you can use to promote your own books. Also watch for news items about other books that could tie into your own books. At one time, Leonore Fleischer's Talk of the Trade column in *Publishers Weekly* asserted that *How to Profit by Setting Up Your Own Corporation* "holds the record for being in print longer than any other book in its class [non-text business book] in history." She noted that the book had sold 300,000 copies in 6 editions over 13 years.

Well, I knew a book on the same subject that had sold more and been in print longer: Ted Nicholas's *How to Form Your Own Corporation without a Lawyer for Under \$75.00*, which was originally self-published in 1972 and has sold over 900,000 copies. I called the author as well as Dearborn Trade and alerted them to the error. They followed thru and received a notice several weeks later in the same column of *Publishers Weekly*.

4. Feature Booksellers in Your Ads

For a full-page advertisement for Alice Hoffman's novel, *Turtle Moon*, Putnam featured the following headline: "From Moorestown, New Jersey, to Beaverton, Oregon, booksellers are falling in love with..." and a photo of the book jacket. The rest of the ad featured laudatory quotes from major independent bookstores as well as buyers from Waldenbooks, Barnes & Noble, and several wholesalers.

5. Promote Your Differences

When publicizing your books, look for ways that your books are different not only in content, but also in form. For example, Westcliffe recently promoted their line of

calendars by pointing out that their calendars were the first nationally distributed line to be printed on real recycled paper (using at least 14% post consumer waste) — thereby keeping 2,925 pounds of air pollution out of the atmosphere, saving 829 trees, and preventing 147 cubic yards of paper from reaching the landfills.

6. Provide Booksellers with Displays

Provide booksellers with posters, displays, shelf-talkers, or other in-store point-of-purchase material. Provide this material before publication date. The publishers of Sue Grafton's alphabet mystery series sent bookstores a cardboard easel announcing that her latest book in the series, "*I*" *Is for Innocent*, would be arriving on April 6th. The easel featured a full-color reproduction of the book's cover. Since Sue has an avid fan club for the series, the display drew immediate interest.

7. Cut Costs with Postcards

When promoting a new title to your customer list, try sending a postcard. First class postcards are often less expensive than bulk mail—and you get address corrections returned for free! Have one side of the postcard feature a cover of your book, while the other side features your sales copy and a space for the recipients name and address.

To promote the new edition of *Creative Cash*, Barbara Brabec mailed out 5,000 postcards to a customer list that hadn't been cleaned in 18 months. Her cost: \$180.00 for printing plus \$950.00 for postage. As a result, she received 153 orders (over \$2,500.00 in sales) as well as 964 address corrections at no extra cost.

8. Adopt a Library

To commemorate its 25 years in business, Jossey-Bass adopted the San Francisco Public Library by making a commitment to give them a copy of every new book they publish during the coming 25 years. Of course, they made sure other people knew what they did—and received local as well as national publicity for the effort.

9. Get on Oprah!

I realize that most of you already have a great desire to get your authors on Oprah Winfrey's television show, but many of you obviously don't do enough—or you'd be on the show. Be persistent. Send them info at least once every two months. Make sure your news releases and author information target the needs of the audience. Relate the book to a current crisis, problem, or news event that would appeal to *Oprah*.

10. Sponsor a Contest

One way to get publicity is to sponsor a contest. You can even charge a small fee for entering the contest. How about a muffin-baking contest to promote a new cookbook? Or "your most romantic moment" contest to promote a romance novel or a book on relationships? Or the best photo of the Grand Canyon for an Arizona travel book?

The *Wall Street Journal* recently publicized a contest sponsored by Delia's restaurant. Delia's offered a chance to win a fully equipped Manhattan restaurant and one year's paid rent to the person with the best concept for a fantasy restaurant. The entry fee for the contest was \$50.00. Delia's owners expected to have 5,000 entries (that's \$250,000 in application fees), but reserved the right to cancel the contest if that goal wasn't reached. What did Delia's get out of this contest? Well, they might make some money on the contest fees, but they also will get 5,000 new ideas for trendy nightspots.

11. Create Your Own Podcast

Zondervan formed its own radio network to promote its books and authors. It offered radio stations a chance to receive regular audiotapes containing well-produced segments ranging from 60-second news items to 27-minute interviews. 250+ stations signed up for this service to supplement their news and public affairs programming.

12. Create Your Own Ezine

As a supplement to their network, Zondervan also publishes a monthly newsletter of interview ideas called *Producer's Report*. Zondervan's 600 authors can speak not only on religion, but also on parenting, health, literacy, business, sex, politics, current events.

13. Offer Free Copies to Radio/TV Shows

To promote his self-published book on financial planning, *The Wealthy Barber*, Dave Chilton sent 20 free copies to major radio and TV shows. In the letter that accompanied the books, he told the stations to give the copies to their camera people, receptionists, and other employees. As he wrote in the letter, "I guarantee that once they read the book, you'll want me on your show." And he was right. As a result of these media appearances his book became one of the top bestsellers in Canada for two years.

14. Do Talks in Libraries

Libraries are an excellent place to spotlight authors. And do booksignings.

15. Do Bookstore Appearances

You're much more likely to have sales of books if the author does a reading or talk in the bookstore as well as a book signing.

16. This Brochure May Be Photocopied

When sending out order forms and brochures, you could print a handwritten or typeset notice that "This brochure may be photocopied." Verbal Images Press does this on their order forms and has found it to be very successful in getting pass-along orders for their books. You might do the same with your catalog order forms for libraries, your news releases, and any other promotional literature.

17. Encourage Customers to Read Your Chapter

If you send out advance reading copies of your books to booksellers, make sure they read them. How? Here's one way:

When Bantam published *The Original Sin* by Marius Gabriel, it announced a booksellers-only contest with the prize being a trip to Barcelona, Spain, and dinner with the author. How could booksellers win the trip? Well, they had to read the advance copy so they could answer a specific question: "Mercedes was forced to defend her virginity with a pistol. Against whom was she defending herself?" The question alone was sure to spark a lot of interest.

If you can't afford to run a contest, spark booksellers interest by offering a premium with the reading copy. E.g., accompany a travel book with a small item crafted in the region.

18. Explore Different Technologies

One dominant format for info has been CD-ROMs. CD-ROM's capacity and format is very appropriate for many books, but indispensable for directories, manuals, and other reference works. Many libraries offer access to CD-ROM readers. Nowadays the new popular formats are DVDs and MP3s, but that will change to as technology changes.

19. Talk

Talk to your customers, major buyers, media, strangers on the plane. If you talk about your book with the pride and passion you had in writing it, you will attract a surprising amount of attention with little effort. But you can't be afraid to talk. And you absolutely cannot be afraid to feel strongly about your books and to act on that conviction. Word of mouth is the most effective way to market any book. And how do you create word of mouth? Very simple. It has to start somewhere. Why not with your mouth?

20. Promote to Media with Free Offers

One of the most effective ways to get ongoing media notice is to offer their audience something free. It is difficult, almost impossible, to get media to feature a book more than once. But they will feature free offers as often as you come up with them. Plan to start a new promotional campaign at least four times a year for each book you publish.

How do you find something to give away free? Easy. Your books should be full of valuable information that you can excerpt in short 2-page or 4-page brochures that you can offer free to anyone who sends you an SASE or \$1.00 to \$3.00 for postage.

For example, a travel publisher could offer a list of the ten most exciting places in Iowa (if their book was about Iowa). Three months later, the same publisher could offer a report on holiday happenings in Iowa. Three months later, a report on how to plan your next vacation in Iowa. And three months later, a list of 10 major historical sites in Iowa.

21. Call Early

If you want to reach decision makers, try calling them at 8:45 a.m., or earlier. This strategem still works. Why? Because secretaries normally arrive at 9:00 a.m. while many bosses come in earlier to get work done before the hustle bustle of the day begins. If their phone rings, there's a good chance they answer it. And listen to you—if you keep your call short, sweet, and to the point.

22. Offer Media More Information

Make it easy for media to get more information about or from your books. Besides preparing a fact sheet to accompany your news releases, you might offer other options as well (for example, a background sheet about your company or a bio sheet about the author or a list of questions and answers for interviewers). Also, let media know that review copies are readily available just for the asking.

Besides enclosing a postpaid return postcard, Pacific Travellers Press also made this offer: “If you ever plan to do an article on Santa Barbara, we have a lot of data available on a PC disk that you would be free to use in return for a mention of our book.”

23. Get Their Attention Fast

When ICS Press promoted *The Politics of Auto Insurance Reform* to media and major buyers, they always enclosed a bumper sticker with any news release, review copy, or brochure. The bumper sticker read: “Hit Me—I Need the Money!” An attention getter if I've ever saw one. The front of the bumper sticker also featured the title of the book, the author's name, and ICS Press's 800 number. The back of the sticker reproduced the three best paragraphs from the news release for the book.

24. Tie into Special Events

One effective way to promote your books to schools, stores, libraries, and the media is to associate your book promotions with the 18,700 special days, weeks, and months celebrated every year. To celebrate Black History Month, the Schwartz Bookshops in Milwaukee, Wisconsin discounted twenty African-American titles by 15%. Many other bookstores and libraries featured special displays as well during this month.

25. Advertise in the Yellow Pages

More and more manufacturers are advertising direct to consumers via the Yellow Pages. For example, one food company is advertising cents-off coupons for their frozen pizzas under the Pizza listing in the phone book. Some Yellow Pages publishers offer per inquiry deals or split runs to encourage national advertisers to run an ad.

If you publish a foreign travel guide, why not test advertising it in the Yellow Pages under Travel Agencies. Or how about an ad for dog or cat care under Veterinarians. Or an ad for the *Directory of Book Printers* under Book Printers (that's an advertisement I always meant to try but never got around to). Feature a photo of your book in the ad.

26. Get Feedback

No matter who you are promoting to, try to include some way for them to give feedback. Librarians especially are looking for ways to let publishers know what they need. To facilitate such communication, publishers are now including response cards or survey cards in their catalogs or books. Such cards can be a very effective and inexpensive way to find out what new books you should publish and, more importantly, how you can change the books you already publish so they better serve their target audiences.

27. Provide Waiting Room Copies

The Children's Reading Institute sent copies of *Germs Make Me Sick*, to doctors around the country. The book's cover had a special imprint saying, "Waiting Room Copy. Please Do Not Remove." Most doctors, of course, would be happy to display such books if of interest to their patients. What did the Children's Reading Institute get out of the offer? They bound in 20 tear-out postcards that promoted their *Let's Read and Find Out* science book series.

28. Do Something Every Day

Each day, take some marketing action on every active title on your list. Write a letter. Make a phone call. Create a new ad. It need not take much time, but these small actions can keep your books actively selling for years to come.

If you devote just ten minutes of focused marketing time every day on each book you published, I guarantee you will make more sales.

29. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

I once read that it takes an average of 14 media impressions before someone will take the initiative to buy. I've been publishing valuable information for book publishers for fifteen years, yet I still find people who have not heard of me or my books. And, believe me, I've left few stones unturned in alerting publishers about my books.

30. Make Everything Work for You Twice

Whatever you do, always make sure you get double duty out of it. That's how to do a whole lot less and accomplish a whole lot more. For example, when traveling, don't just visit family or friends. Instead, also take time to make important media contacts, do some interviews, visit booksellers, visit wholesalers, talk to librarians, explore alternate markets, and sell your books.

Another example: This report was once a talk I gave at a PMA University. It then became the basis for a feature article in my *Book Marketing Update* newsletter. I then turned the written points into this inexpensive report (which I've sometimes used as a free giveaway to attract publicity). Finally, I have sold tapes of the talk. And, of course, all of these points have found their way into the newest edition of my *1001 Ways to Market Your Books*.

31. Always Give More Than You Promised

If you make it a habit to give your customers more than they expected, they will continue to buy from you. This one piece of advice is the most important of the 50 I've thus far shared with you. Don't underestimate the power of quality products and service. If you publish great books, offer unsurpassed service, and stand by your guarantee, you will attract and keep great customers.