

BOOK MARKETING TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

twelve ways to maximize your book sales during the greatest consumer spending period of the year.

The holiday season constitutes the peak of sales for all sorts of consumer goods, including books. When you became a published author, you also joined the ranks of small business owners, and navigating the rhythms of the book-buying market became a part of your daily landscape.

In 2013, author and blogger Randy Susan Meyers shared research showing that while the majority of self-published books sell fewer than five hundred copies a year, some self-published books attract so much attention that they become bestsellers. She cites *Fifty Shades of Grey* as one example, but over the last decade, hordes of self-published books have made the bestselling ranks, including K.A. Tucker's *Ten Tiny Breaths*, H.M. Ward's *Damaged*, Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*, and Hugh Howey's *Wool* trilogy. Since Meyers' research also shows that e-books make up about twenty percent of the total market share, that means eighty percent of book sales remain—literally—in readers' capable hands. People continue to purchase physical copies of the stories they love, whether in hardcover or paperback formats. That's good news for you, particularly during the holiday season!

According to the *National Retail Federation*, as much as twenty to forty percent of sales for small and mid-sized businesses takes place in the final two months of the calendar year. As a self-published author, those percentages apply to you, too! But creating an action plan for marketing, no matter what time of year it may be, can be a difficult and time-consuming task. We're here to make the process easier for you, by providing you with twelve ways in which you can develop a holiday marketing plan built around the unique qualities of your book.

1. Chart your own brand

Branding your book and yourself as an author makes it possible for readers of a particular genre to find you. A part of this process involves learning and taking advantage of the constellation of keywords surrounding your book. Know what makes your book special and distinct from other books in its genre *as well as* in what ways your book resonates with other texts. Most readers who hop on a search engine like Google pair both of these elements in their searches; for instance, they might start with a genre they know they like—*romance*, *thriller*, or *young adult*, for example—and add on keywords that are less common—such as *fossils*, *nautical*, or *steampunk*, to name a very few. The more you know about your own book as well as the other books and trends out there on the market, the more you can hone your book's brand. During the holidays in particular, chart the various ways in which both you and your book can take advantage of branding!

2. Generate ebook formats for your book

When your book is available for purchase in Amazon's Kindle, Barnes & Noble's NOOK, or Apple's iBook formats, almost any reader, anywhere, has access to it. Ask your readers to submit reviews for books online. Your readers' opinions not only provide encouragement to potential buyers, but also give you prime quotable material for other promotional efforts. The truly great consequence of creating a new and digital format of your book is how easy it is to link new readers directly to the purchase information—all they need is a link to your Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Apple book listing, and they can buy and download it instantly to their preferred digital device. The Pew Research Center notes that the prevalence of e-readers jumps sharply between September and January of each year. The holidays are a perfect time to launch a new format for your book, as readers routinely look for new material to buy for themselves and others—after all, everyone needs a good book to pair with that beautiful mug of post-turkey spiced apple cider, or to slip under the tree on a pre-loaded digital device.

3. Diversify your digital platform

Even if you're already published as an author, it's not too late to create and utilize a blog or set of websites specifically designed to promote your book. In the realm of social media, readers want to learn more about authors and how their books came into being—they love behind-the-scenes information, and feeling drawn into an author's process. Utilizing social media will help you create a loyal readership, a set of active and energetic followers who will not only buy your books but promote them to their friends and associates. Know where your readers are, and open yourself up to find new target audiences on new social media sites. Consider the following demographic trends: according to the Pew Research Center, Pinterest has a special appeal for female users, LinkedIn has a substantial user base among college graduates, and Twitter as well as Instagram appeal in large part to young and urban users. Other websites appeal to other demographics, but you get the idea! The holiday season is a wonderful time to try something new, and to open up new avenues to reach new readers.

4. Get social

Add photos of your book's cover to your Facebook profiles (or create a fan page specific to your book) and encourage others to 'share' it. Be sure to include a link with each post to where potential buyers can learn more about your book and buy a copy. The trick here is to differentiate your digital presence from those of other, more casual users of Facebook and Twitter and other social platforms. You don't want to strike potential readers as a 'one-note' writer—that is, always posting, tweeting, or sharing the same thing—but rather as someone who genuinely cares about your followers and seeks to engage with them on a regular and individual basis. Learn how to utilize hashtags to make the best use of Twitter, and create content that is easily shared to capitalize on Facebook's setup, and so on. Being 'social' isn't just about having a blog or a presence on social media—it's about knowing how to interact *effectively*. You might consider tapping into or even creating a holiday-themed hashtag, or tweaking your sharable content specifically to the season. Set healthy limits on your time and energy, of course, but tailor your engagement to each platform.

5. Put together a book teaser trailer

A short video clip about your book is an excellent investment! Around the holidays, consider putting together a book teaser trailer that specifically promotes your book as a great gift idea. Post the video to YouTube, and share the link across your various social media platforms, from Twitter to Facebook to your blog. The more places potential readers see your book, the more likely they are to pick up a copy—and this rule holds as true during the holidays as it does at every other time of year! Framing your book teaser trailer as a holiday enterprise, however, will elevate your book from the realm of ordinary luxuries to the pantheon of semi-urgent holiday gift purchases. When readers love your book, they naturally want to share their love with others, and a video may be just the thing to remind them of that fact. Never underestimate the power of the desire to share!

6. Enter your book in awards competitions

Contests are another fantastic way to promote and publicize your book. Winning an award, or even being recognized as a runner-up or participant, will generate lasting benefits. These contests are deadline-sensitive, and many of them are built to coincide with holidays, so be sure to keep your eyes open for these opportunities during the first year after your publication.

7. Go local

For those authors who are comfortable meeting and greeting readers, the holiday season is a perfect time to reach out to libraries, bookstores, and other venues who will occasionally host local authors to read chapters from their books. Asking two or three friends to join you at a reading will attract other store patrons, and before you know it, people will be buying your books and asking for autographs. Be sure to have business cards, postcards, and other promotional materials available to distribute!

One excellent idea for a holiday event is to host a special “Coffee & Tea with the Author” at a private or public venue. Invite your friends, family, neighbors, and other acquaintances. A gathering of this nature is casual enough to hold in your home, or the home of a friend, but you can always look to local restaurants and businesses for sponsorship. Many art galleries, bars, coffee shops, and other non-traditional venues pair their events with readings, especially if the two are somehow topically or aesthetically related. Before the holiday season, check in with your local haunts to see if any of these venues might be interested in co-hosting a reading, and offer to help spread the word. At your party, make sure to set aside a portion of your time to invite your guests to have photos taken with the author!

8. Carry out interviews

Radio interviews are a great way to spread the word about your book's publication. Many smaller radio stations love discovering local artists and authors. During these interviews, radio hosts may allow you to read select passages over the air, pose questions for you to answer, or 'open the lines' to listeners who are interested in interacting with you. A digital update to the traditional interview is the Reddit AMA. It's relatively easy to get yourself onto Reddit, and often the website hosts are happy to set you up for this live post-by-post interaction with your readers. The holiday season provides the perfect opportunity to dive into these opportunities for self-promotion if you haven't already!

9. Give—and receive

Have you ever met other self-published authors or read their books? Entering into collaboration with fellow authors—even if only on the level of casual friendships—can help benefit you, collectively. Consider reaching out to these authors and posting reviews of their books, mentioning them on your Facebook page or on your Twitter feed. If their books are in a similar genre to yours, ask them to read your book and to post reviews for it, as well! The power of a whole community of generous, like-minded individuals is not to be underestimated. The more connections you develop within the self-publishing community, the greater the reach of your network, and the more likely you are to touch the lives of new readers.

10. Keep writing

Don't think of marketing your self-published book as an activity distinct from your natural creative impulse. Every decision you make about content has implications for marketing; whether you're updating your Twitter feed, posting to your blog, emailing an acquaintance, or conducting an interview, every trace you leave in the world as a writer ought to contribute to—rather than detract from—your message and your marketing strategy. To sustain your readers' interest, it's more important to generate regular, high-quality material across your chosen platforms than it is to create a sudden flurry of updates all around the holidays; still, consider boosting your usual engagement by inviting your followers to a few special events or promotions around the holiday season. No matter what you write, just remember to keep at it!

11. Get your book on holiday 'gift guides'

Not only do websites like Amazon and Goodreads host list-making tools which you can use yourself to create a holiday gift guide, but many bloggers, journalists, and other media content writers publish similar lists that are guaranteed to reach new readers. Whether it's your local newspaper, one of your favorite bloggers, or some other source, the key is to be proactive. Reach out, and consider offering copies of your books as an incentive to people interested in listing your book in their gift guides.

12. Set up an 'early-bird promotion'

Whether you're active on Facebook, Twitter, a blog, or some other platform, start reminding people to buy your book as gifts sooner rather than later. Consider including a holiday countdown on your website or as an addition to your email signature. No matter what methods you use, remember that the goal is to remind your readers that your book is out there and available—right around the time when they're considering what to buy their friends and family. If you can drop the price on your book for holiday shoppers, or create a new format for your book (ebook, paperback, hardcover) for the holidays, or in some other way make your book more accessible to new readers, consider doing so—and find ways to let your readers know!

No matter what steps you take to boost your holiday gift sales this season, just remember: you're not in this alone. Outskirts Press can help with all of your book marketing needs. If you're uncertain where to begin in creating a marketing plan for the holidays, visit www.outskirtspress.com/p/pma. Consider setting up an appointment with a Personal Marketing Assistant who can help you develop a comprehensive marketing plan tailored for your book. Then you can soar into the holidays in the confidence that your book will find new readers!

Choosing a self-publishing company poses the same challenges as every other important life decision. Analysis can get you only so far before you have to make a final decision, and sometimes that decision is based on something other than pure logic.

**Do you have questions, or are you ready to get started?
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