

Positive Publishing Perspectives

Your Guide to Getting the Most Out of Your Publishing Business

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Publishing is Not a Charity

“Look, doctor. I really can’t afford to pay you anything at this time. But if you will perform this surgery for free, I’ll be sure to mention you on my blog, and you’ll get a lot of free publicity.”

“Help Wanted: Attorney to handle complicated divorce. Cannot pay, however will recommend you to the readers of my free magazine.”

“Look, I want to sell this house, but I need to get the roof repaired first. I’d appreciate it if you would repair the roof for free. If you do, I’ll be sure to tell everyone I know about the great work you do, and I’ll even put your company’s bumper sticker on the back of my truck, where a lot of people will see it.”

Can you imagine trying to pull off any of the above scenarios? Can you imagine asking your hairstylist to do your hair for free in exchange for publicity with your friends? Would you expect your mechanic to perform an expensive engine repair for free in exchange for some word-of-mouth promotion to your circle of friends?

Yet every day, in artist and writer forums across the world, people beg, plead, and guilt artists and writers into working for free.

Now to clarify, we aren’t talking about asking for help with a charity project. We aren’t talking about inviting people to participate in a free forum. We aren’t talking about non-profit activities like a high school yearbook looking for cover art or the local library asking for some poetry for a fundraising chapbook. We are talking about projects that you intend to produce for profit.

In short, if you are planning to turn a profit, you have no right to expect people to work for free.

Writers and artists are growing increasingly devalued in our culture, and yet finding a talented, professional writer or artist is like finding gold. These are folks who have worked hard to develop their skills and, like you, want the opportunity to not only have people read their work, but also be appreciated for their efforts.

Writers and artists deserve to be paid, and expecting them to work for free just because you didn’t plan and set up a budget is unfair.

But I can give them exposure!

Exposure is an overused, and overrated, concept. A feature article in *Rolling Stone* magazine is exposure. Giving away a story for free for your new magazine with no readership yet is not.

Before you promise exposure, ask yourself if you can really provide any exposure of value. Remember the lessons of our last issue. Nobody cares about yet another self-published book. What are you really bringing to the table that qualifies as exposure for a new writer? Before you promise exposure, do you even have a plan in place to generate readers? Will the writer’s work be seen, or will it only circulate among your friends to which you give free copies of the publication?

But it will give them a publishing credit!

Will it? Go visit poetry.com. There are millions of poems posted there. No one of them qualifies as a publishing credit. In fact, if someone

tried to list publication at poetry.com as a publishing credit, they would get laughed at. Because everyone in the industry knows that poetry.com has no quality guidelines, doesn’t pay, and that it is in fact one of the biggest scams in the business.

Of course, you aren’t trying to scam anyone. The point is, that unless a publication already has a reputation in the industry, a “publishing credit” with it means very little. Many writer guilds such as Horror Writers of America and others will only accept paid credits for entry. Many author listings only accept writers with paid publishing credits.

It’s experience!

Experience with what...working for free? Unless you are doing more than copying and pasting their work into your publication, the only experience the writer is getting is a devaluing of his or her work. This is another one of those phrases that gets thrown around when people try to solicit free work. It doesn’t mean anything.

But I can’t afford to pay!

If your intent is to run a publishing business and make a profit, you have no right to ask writers or artists to work for free. You have no more right to ask these talented individuals to work for free than you do to ask cooks and waiters to work for free if you were opening a restaurant. You have no more right to ask these skilled craftspeople to work for free than you do to ask mechanics and clerks to work for free if you were opening up an auto repair shop.

And yes, it is the same thing, because publishing is a business. And if your intent is to run a business, you have to think and act like a business.

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Money Isn't Everything

So you have to offer to pay something, but you realistically cannot afford to pay .10 to .20 a word. The good news is, nobody said you have to! Just as you have no right to expect people to work for free, new writers should not expect to get paid the same rates as folks who have been working professionally in the industry for twenty years. The fact is, now that you are an official paying market, that publication credit WILL have some value, and will be something the writer or artist can use for his or her portfolio.

But even if you are only paying .01/word, there are other things you can do to compensate your writers and artists to insure they are valued and get the most bang for their participation.

1. Letter of recommendation: I have worked with a lot of college students trying to break into the art field. Most of these students hope to find a career working in graphic arts with a high-paying company. I have written several letters of recommendation for my artists, which they can

include with their resumes when job hunting. A simple letter from a publisher stating the student's professionalism, attention to detail, and work ethic can prove invaluable to young people trying to compete in the job market.

2. Make sure they get free copies of the work. Make sure they have a professional looking, finished product to hold. There is a special buzz that comes from seeing the finish product with your work in it, particularly when you were paid for it. Make sure they have something to show their parents, spouse, or friends!
3. Plug them in your promotions. Whenever we send out press releases or post new release announcements, we always promote our writers and artists. We include links to their personal sites on our website and in press releases. If you found a wonderful artist at deviantart.com, go into the forums at deviantart.com and tell everyone how happy you are with the artist's work.
4. Offer them additional copies at cost. Many writers will buy additional copies at cost in order to sell them themselves, particularly writers who are active in their local writing communities or attend conventions. They may sell signed copies on eBay or make them available on the Amazon marketplace. And why not? Not only are you compensating your authors, but they are helping you promote the book! Which brings us to...
5. Pay royalties. You may, in fact, end up paying more in the long run by paying royalties than if you paid up

front. But so what? Look at it this way. You asked a writer or artist to trust you with his or her work. Why shouldn't he or she benefit if the project sells well? And as an added bonus, when royalties are involved the writer and artist will often take an active interest in promoting the work. This makes more money for everyone involved. There is nothing wrong with that!

Quid Pro Quo

Not all payment is in money. Sometimes, a more valuable payment is your time. We each have unique skills that we can trade off for services. And if money is tight and you have to find ways to extend your dollar, trading services with others is a good way to do it.

Are you a weak speller, but have some graphic art ability? Offer to design a book cover in exchange for someone proofreading your work. Don't know how to format your document, but know how to create video content? Offer to create a Youtube.com video for someone in exchange for some formatting help.

There is nothing wrong with barter. It is a great way to get quality help with projects while keeping costs down. Just remember:

1. Be careful who you ask for help. Take a look at what they have done. If they produce poor quality work, chances are they will produce poor quality work for you. Don't feel obligated to accept the first offer you get just because you are asking for a trade. Be picky.
2. Spell everything out in writing. Forum posts are one thing, but an informal written agreement is much more important. Protect yourself by writing up an agreement that spells out

what you will be doing, and what the other person is expected to do. Keep it simple, clear, and to the point.

3. Your word is your bond. As an independent publisher, the most important thing you have is your reputation. Don't blow it by rushing through and giving your business partner a sub-par service because you feel you are doing it 'for free.' You aren't doing it for free. You are *paying them* for their service to you.

Cheap Advertising

Banner and link exchanges are a cheap and effective form of advertising. But be careful that your website doesn't become a banner dumping ground. Too many banners and links can clutter your site and make you look like an amateur.

As with everything, the "throw enough crap against the wall" approach is not a good option. You should only link to sites that reflect your business objectives. Linking to a site geared toward soccer moms won't do you much good if your target market is young male metalheads. A few well thought out links will get you better results than three dozen ill-advised ones.

Avoid banner exchanges that seem to encourage the "banner page" syndrome. Someone who is just going to bury your banner on a dump banner page with a hundred others isn't really giving you anything.

The same is true for link exchanges. Ask yourself "what are the chances of the casual browser actually seeing this link?" If it is buried on a poorly organized page with three hundred others, don't waste your time.

Of course, you make your site more attractive for potential link exchanges by watching your own linking behavior as well. When possible integrate links into your actual

content. For example, with our "[Happy Tree](#)" link exchange, the links are placed on a page with an article on POD technology. This places the links within some sort of context that makes them interesting to your visitors, instead of just a bunch of random links.

Be sure to police banner exchanges, particularly if you are using a banner rotation service. While some smaller exchanges do a good job of policing themselves, larger ones often do not. Visit your page and refresh the screen to see what types of banners are appearing on your site. Even if you are not programming the exchange, you ARE responsible for the content that appears on your site. So make sure to quit banner exchanges with questionable sites including in the circulation.

Book Covers as Posters

Credit to [Ron Miller](#), Hugo-Award winner, widely published author, and all-around great guy in the lulu.com forums. But this is perhaps one of the most brilliant statements regarding book cover art that you will ever read.

...a book cover has to be thought of as a kind of mini-poster whose sole purpose is to sell your book.

As much as we hate to think so, people DO judge a book by its cover. Or at least, decide which books to flip through based off the cover. The book cover is what will get them to pick the book up off the table or shelf and flip through the pages to determine if they are going to buy. So you need to put as much thought into your cover as you do any other part of the process.

***Be clear and legible regardless of the image size.** Remember, someone browsing amazon.com is only going to see the thumbnail, not the full size cover. Has does the image look as a thumbnail?

***Clearly set the mood for your story.** If you are trusting the reader

to analyze a highly convoluted, symbolic cover in the hopes that they will want to read the book in order to understand the cover art, you are wrong. Make sure the cover illustration invokes the feel you want for your story.

*** Clearly state your title AND your name.** Sound obvious? You'd be surprised how many folks either leave off their name, or make the title so small it can't be clearly read. If the title can't be clearly read, it won't do you any good. Make sure to use high contrast colors between your text and the illustration so that the title and name can be clearly read.

***Don't forget about the back cover.** The first thing most people do when they pick up a book is flip it over and read the back. Make sure your blurb is clear and readable by avoiding weird fonts that are not easy to read. Don't feel the need to cram too much text on the back cover. Make effective use of "white space." Don't include review quotes from anonymous people or things like, *Jerry, a reader*. When using review quotes, insure that the reviewer's credibility is quickly established. Obviously, a quote from Stephen King requires no additional explanation. But a review from Jane Doe will immediately hold more weight if cited as *Jane Doe, New York Times*.

Want more detailed help? Get a copy of Ron Miller's [Creating Your Bookcover](#). It's a free download!

Your Name on Top or the Title on Top?

Assuming the book cover is a poster, what is going to "sell" the book? Do you have a well-established identity within your genre? Then your name will be what sells the book. Put it on top. Are you struggling to make a name for yourself? Then your title will be what sells the book. Put it at the top. Whichever is more likely to attract the reader's attention is what should lead for the cover.

The Law of Seven

Most marketing pros understand one thing: the typical consumer needs to see something seven times before they will remember it. This is important to understand, because if people don't remember your book, they won't buy it!

This means that it is vitally important to identify your target market and figure out how to hit them multiple times. You cannot depend on them seeing one ad and deciding to buy your book. They will need to see it repeatedly before they make a decision. This also means you need to start BEFORE the book is even released in order to generate buzz.

Pre-release buzz

Are you an expert in something? Use it to your advantage by writing informational releases! You have seen those articles like "ten signs your husband is cheating" or "five ways to lose weight before summer." These are not typically official news stories. These are what are known as informational releases. News media love them because they are good filler pieces. Readers love them because they are short and concise guides to topics they are interested in. And PR pros love them because they are a great way to generate pre-release buzz.

Here is [an example](#) of an informational release. Notice how we were able to plug multiple projects at the same time by folding them into the release as casual examples. The release was picked up by hundreds of news outlets, bloggers, and forums.

There is one exception to the rule regarding writers working for free. If you can find a website, e-zine, or periodical that will publish reprints or excerpts, then do it. Get that opening chapter out there in front of as many readers as possible, particularly when the sites or periodicals are willing to include

links to your site. With this, it is important to make sure you have a good-looking product page for the book. You want readers to be able to go somewhere after they read your story in order to get more information about the book.

Make sure you are constantly updating your site with new information to encourage people to keep coming back. Our content is always changing, as we add new book reviews, contests, sneak peeks, free web enhancements, and more. Give people a reason to keep coming back to your site once you have gotten them to visit.

Build a mailing list, and make it worth their while. We have a free monthly newsletter with an opt-in subscriber base. Each month, besides plugging our own upcoming projects, we include information on what others in the industry are doing, links to interesting articles on the industry, markets for writers, and other interesting stuff. On our website is a sign up box. Each month, we have a chance to remind people who we are and what we are doing, and they want us to do so!

Release Launch

Select two or three websites that fit your target market and promote on them, heavily, for the first month of the release. Contact the websites to offer to do a free book giveaway. Buy banner space. Many independent reader sites have ad packages for as low as \$20 a month. And don't forget to include information on your website about which sites you are doing the book giveaways on.

You want sites that have repeat visitors, not just sites that promote "hits." A site that generates 50,000 hits a month doesn't mean much to you if those are 50,000 different visitors who were simply redirected there by some click-thru service! Better a site that generates 5,000 regular visitors a month who come back regularly to see the news and

updates. Remember, you need to get in front of these people seven times for them to remember you.

Have an event for your release. This doesn't have to be a major fiasco. Releasing a poetry book? Why not hold a poetry reading at a nice restaurant? Many finer restaurants have private rooms, and even allow you to reserve them for free if attendees will be purchasing a la carte. I held several poetry readings at a small pub in my hometown. Folks would show up, buy drinks, and listen to poetry. The pub was happy since everyone was buying drinks, and the poets were happy because they sold books in the process.

Send out a newsworthy press release. Remember, nobody cares about yet another self-published book. You need to tie your book into something newsworthy in order to make editors care. Your press release is not sales copy. You aren't writing it for customers. You are trying to impress one person only: the editor that will decide whether or not to run it.

For help on writing your press release, you may want to grab our short PDF [Marketing 101: Understanding the Press Release](#).

Post Release Promotion

Once the launch is over, don't stop promoting. You may have raised awareness about your product, but you still haven't convinced everyone to buy. In the previous issue, we noted low-cost advertising options. You should continue to use them.

Your Mailing List

- *Give them a reason to join. Have real content people want to read.
- *Keep communication limited. Once a month is ideal. Don't spam your list or you will lose them.
- *Include information on how to join in signature lines and on your website
- *Get them involved with exclusive deals and contests.