

Like a rolling stone



Famed publicist **Meryl Moss** shares her best tips for gaining marketing momentum in an overcrowded publishing landscape.

By K. L. Romo

At some point, a writer realizes that while writing a novel is hard, getting people to notice it might be even harder.

Even the most brilliant story, told with mesmerizing prose, won't gain any traction if no one reads it. Famed publicist Meryl Moss is keenly aware of this, too. That's why her company, Meryl Moss Media (merylmossmedia.com), and her related website, BookTrib – an online community “Where Readers and Writers Meet” – is a marketing engine for authors and a discovery zone for readers, with a particular focus on debut authors and writers not yet in the limelight.

After 25 years of helping authors navigate the marketplace, and propelling the careers of such popular writers like Steve Berry (the Cotton Malone series), Mike Bond (best-selling thriller

writer), Robert Kiyosaki (*Rich Dad Poor Dad*), Rebecca Wells (*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*), and Nancy Koehn (*Forged In Crisis: The Making of Five Courageous Leaders*), Moss and her team blend vision, experience, creativity, and business expertise to launch and sustain successful branding and media campaigns.

Early in her career, Moss learned that the key to a successful campaign is to learn all you can about the author's process and backstory, asking about their short- and long-term goals, and then utilize their book to create a custom publicity strategy. She's hyper-aware that most authors consider their books their “babies;” she knows they are passionate and sensitive about the creations that have taken years to write. But Moss also knows selling books is a business.

With more than a million books self-published alone in 2017, effective marketing is more crucial now than ever. Brand, platform, and social media are all essential parts of a writer's marketing arsenal. We asked Moss about some of the strategies she uses to help authors build their media muscle – gaining notice in the marketplace and creating a fan base of readers who will return time and time again. Whether authors decide to hire a publicity firm or self-promote their work, they can all use the wealth of suggestions Moss shared.

What is the most important thing writers should do to build their brand and platform?

Identify a unique niche for your book and the audience to which it will appeal. Although what I'm about to say sounds like a no-brainer, when someone asks you "What is your book about?," you must be able to deliver a short, concise, memorable "elevator pitch" that answers this question with confidence and excitement. This sounds easier than it is. Work on it and perfect it. A great tip to help potential readers visualize and remember you is to compare two well-known books to yours: "It's *Harry Potter* meets *Gone Girl*." Or, as [my client] *New York Times* best-selling author Andrew Gross describes his new book, *Button Man*, "*The Godfather* meets *Great Expectations*." This creates an unforgettable mental image. From there, expand upon the subject of your book on social media and your website with fun facts, stories, and ideas that make up your characters and locations in the book and tie it all into the overall theme.

When should writers start building their platform?

If you haven't started, you are already late. That translates into *immediately*. Start building your platform and online persona from the very onset of your writing career. That might sound counterintuitive, but the truth is it won't happen overnight – it takes time, effort, and some monetary considerations to properly build social channels.

Why is building your platform prior to publishing so important?

First, it helps if you are already engaged in conversations with potential readers. To get involved, look for appropriate and/or interesting conversations on social media and start participating by commenting. It also helps if you have a simple but professional-looking website – once you start joining in on conversations, people need a place to go to check you out.

You are a writer, so better yet, create a blog and start a newsletter on your website. This gives people a taste of your writing and personality, and it establishes a vehicle through which they can "subscribe" and follow you. The email [addresses] you collect are incredibly valuable because they are *your* people; build on this concept. Share your favorite writers, places, foods, etc. It's all about making friends. Having a presence prior to

publishing is particularly important if you are looking for an agent or publisher – they will want to see that you have already jump-started your brand with the ideas above.

How is marketing a nonfiction book different from marketing fiction?

Nonfiction is inherently more connectable to the vast amount of news we live with. To secure interviews for authors, one must skillfully connect the dots and add value for producers, editors, and reporters by moving a story forward with something relatable from the authors' credentials and messages. We have several clients in the political arena, and we are keeping them very busy with the current news cycle.

What are mediagenic stories and pitches, and why are they important?

Mediagenic stories and pitches are those that are newsworthy – both content-wise and visually – and have a human-interest angle. It's not enough to pitch the media with the simple fact that you have a new book. You should examine the current trends – what people are talking about and caring about – then find an idea or angle that would provide the media with a credible and different point of view, one that will advance your personal brand first and, should enough people want more, your book second.

As an example, the pitch for *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* by Rebecca Wells addressed our fear in the early 1990s that technology was taking over our lives to the point of making it difficult to establish friendships. Look at us now! For *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman, publicity focused on climate change, science, and the environmental assessment of humanity's impact on our planet. Books on fitness and health can tie into the news, and those on mental illness and financial security also have long legs for publicity. It's finding the right angles and then continuously finding new ones.

Meryl Moss: Literary matchmaker

"I love literary fiction and books that win prizes. Having said that, I always like to discover an author. There are so many talented writers out there who excel at their craft who are relatively unknown. I love picking up something from an author I've never read before, totally enjoying it, and then being the one to tell my friends about someone they don't know but who I really think they'll like. It's like making a good match between two people you really like. I love being the matchmaker!"

How important is social media?

It's very important because it allows authors to communicate with their audience in an unfiltered way to develop a relationship. Think of it as a social "friendship." But like any friendship, it is doomed to failure if you are always talking about yourself. The best way to nurture social media followers is to use the 80/20 rule – 80 percent of posts should contain subjects of interest to the audience and only 20 percent should include something related to you. But be humble and careful not to over-toot your own horn. This strategy will be rewarded. Follow your favorite writers and write about why you like their work. Follow organizations and groups that are full of people interested in your subject area. Consistency and authenticity are critical.

How did BookTrib come about, and how can authors make use of a similar program?

Several years ago, book reviewers started reducing their book coverage. This was unfortunate for the industry as a whole and particularly for new and emerging writers trying to make a mark. We decided to put a stake in the ground by creating a website where a community of readers could get a wealth of information and insights about new titles from debut and up-and-coming authors. BookTrib's tagline is "Where Readers and Writers Meet" – a discovery zone for readers and a marketing and exposure engine for writers.

BookTrib helps authors in a variety of ways: We review their book, interview them for a profile on the website, interview them for our YouTube channel that currently has more than 750 author interview videos, create an Author Profile Page on

the "Meet the Authors" section on our website, promote their stories in our weekly newsletter, and share their book with more than 50,000 readers and social media followers. It's important for new writers to be where the readers are.

Authors should approach outlets that can showcase them and their work. Book reviewers' blogs and websites are a great way to get noticed, as are the websites and related blogs for writers' organizations that you might belong to.

How can authors use partnership development to promote themselves and their books?

Any time you can connect with an organization whose interests are similar to yours and whose members would like to hear about your work, you should pursue it aggressively. Aligning with an appropriate organization can take different forms: one, you can simply join the group and participate as much as you can, or two, you can develop a stronger relationship that allows you to produce content for the group, and the group in turn will share and promote your content. The latter takes more work, but it is worth it.

What should authors know about self-publishing?

It's a viable strategy if you have a platform already built, but it's quite difficult if you are a fiction author without much of a network. In either case, be very careful and don't go in blindly; ask around and talk to people in the industry. Unfortunately, there are many services out there that just can't deliver a book that can compete in the marketplace. Publishing is a business; it has rules and style guidelines that must be followed for success. We started a concierge publishing division several years ago to help authors with a hands-on approach in creating a professional book that can compete with the big publishing houses. Make sure the service you choose provides quality editing, formatting, and excellent cover design. Book covers are incredibly important – you must use a graphic designer that has a history of creating book covers. Do not skimp on this. 📖

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word *normal*. Visit her at KLRomo.com or @klromo.