

Melissa Alvarez ~ Ariana Dupre

Engaging Paranormal Romantic Suspense

Melissa writes nonfiction under her real name and Paranormal Romantic Suspense and Psychic Fiction under the pen name Ariana Dupré.

THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 2008



Guest blogger Marcia James

My guest-blogger today is Marcia James, an author of “hot, humorous romances”. Her debut comic romantic suspense, *AT HER COMMAND*, was released in trade paperback and e-book last year from Cerridwen Press. In June 2009, she’ll have a short story in a Berkley charity anthology with nine other authors. After a career in marketing and advertising, she enjoys PR almost as much as writing love scenes. Marcia offers her 150+ file of author promotion information to any author who requests it. Just email her through the “Contact Me” page on her Web site: <http://www.marciajames.net/>.

Please join me in welcoming Marcia. Here’s her guest blog post:

When I was offered the chance to guest-blog on Melissa/Ariana’s blog, I asked her if I could talk about my favorite topic: author promotion. I never get tired of chatting up readers and authors about their favorite types of PR. I would love to hear opinions and suggestions from posters on this blog. ;-) Readers, what types of promotional items—bookmarks, excerpt booklets, autographed book plates, trinkets?—do you like to receive from authors? Authors, what are your favorite or most effective promotional efforts—blogs, chats, paid ads, book signings, workshop presentations? Readers and authors, which PR things do you dislike? For example, I’m not a fan of public speaking, although I make myself present PR workshops to get my name out there. I also write PR articles, and the following is one from my Web site’s Articles page. I hope you enjoy it! – Marcia

THE PR BUDDY SYSTEM: The Benefits of Author Cross- and Co-Promotion

By Marcia James

Self-promotion. Say the word aloud in a room full of authors and watch a fingernails-on-the-blackboard shudder run through the crowd. Promotion can be a scary drain on time and finances. For this reason, savvy self-promoters are joining forces with other authors to share the expense and effort—a sort of PR buddy system.

The simplest form of cross-promotion is reciprocal links—authors posting each other’s URL links on their own sites. Cerridwen Press author Paige Cuccaro added a clever hook, posting both links and photos of other authors’ offices on her Web site’s popular “[Writer’s Cave](#)” page. And debut Samhain author Janie Mason has a [Happily Ever Afters](#) page with links and photos of authors and their spouses.



Another form of cross-promotion is guest-blogging, a free and easy way to introduce yourself to another author’s readers and vice-versa. Melissa/Ariana offers many guest-bloggers this opportunity. {{Thanks!}} Another example is Kensington author Shirley Jump, who has featured guest-bloggers on her recipe-filled “[Eating My Words](#)” blog. She even offered me, a non-cook, a shot at posting on my Avocado Body Paint recipe. It was a fun PR opportunity that cost nothing and required only a short commitment of time.

Interviews are another enjoyable way to cross-promote. Each month for my Web site’s “[James Gang](#)” page, I interview an author who has “James” in his or her name. The monthly “James Ganger” brings traffic to my site by announcing the interview to readers and email loops, while my fans learn about the featured author. And the interviews themselves can be used by the James Gang’ authors as part of their print and online press kits.

Co-promoting with other authors is another smart PR move. Many writers are banding together to do co-op ads or form group blogs. One example is the [Vamps & Scamps](#) blog. Kensington’s Dianne Castell, one of their ten authors, said, “The Vamps and Scamps loves guest-bloggers, too—both authors and readers. It’s fun to discuss books from both viewpoints.”

Authors can co-promote through a variety of joint ventures. For example, a group of Ohio authors, under the leadership of Berkley author Lori Foster, has a [MySpace](#) page. As one of these authors, I was able to dip a technically challenged toe into the MySpace pool without jumping in—possibly over my head—with the time commitment of my own page.

Another way authors can co-promote is conducting workshops together at conferences. Taking it a step further, Dianne Castell has joined her best friend Lori Foster to host their own conference, their annual Readers & Authors Get-Together in Cincinnati. “It’s a fun, relaxed weekend of readers and authors, and now agents and editors and publishers,” Castell said.

Creativity is part of a writer's "toolbox", and many are putting it to good use in cross-promotion. For example, Ellora's Cave/Cheek author [Michele Pillow](#) sometimes does scavenger hunts, in which readers search authors' Web sites, then answer quiz questions or locate hidden logos to win prizes. "I participated in the Halloween Scavenger Hunt," Jenna Black said, "and my Web site hits [went] up hugely."

Sourcebooks/Samhain author [Terry Spear](#) has turned her talent at making award-winning teddy bears into an author PR op. "I've been making specialty bears for authors' books," Terry said. "When they have their contests, I advertise their books and the contests on all my loops and my sites." She also teaches online workshops, using examples from other authors' books in the courses.

Mira author [Brenda Novak](#) is an amazing promotional role model. Her well-publicized, annual online auction for diabetes research offers an opportunity to join other authors, readers and industry professionals for a wonderful cause. "Everyone gives great stuff, but those who get creative and really run with it get spotlighted in my newsletter, [which] goes out to 22,000, and on the front page of my Web site," Novak explained. In addition, she's co-promoted her books. For example, she joined three other authors to produce a poster for bookstores when they all had a book coming out at the same time.

These examples of pro-active co- and cross-promotion are just a fraction of the opportunities available today. So the next time you hear the dreaded "self-promotion" word, don't cringe. Instead, connect with other authors. The possibilities are endless.

Posted by Melissa Alvarez at [5:20 AM](#)

Labels: [Book Promotion](#), [Brenda Novak's online auction for diabetes Research](#), [Dianne Castell](#), [Lori Foster](#), [Marcia James](#), [Michele Pillow](#), [MySpace](#), [Shirley Jump](#), [Terry Spear](#)

18 comments:

[Melissa Alvarez said...](#)

Thanks so much for being here today Marcia!

Here's a question for you. What is the single best thing an author can do to promote themselves? If they could only choose one thing that would work the best what would it be?

Smiles,

Melissa/Ariana

[Jun 26, 2008 7:52:00 AM](#)

[Marcia James said...](#)

Hi, Melissa! Thanks for having me here! As for the single best PR option, it has to be an author's Web site. I've interviewed many successful authors for the PR articles I've written, and they all agree: an author's Web site is the one thing an author has control of that can truly make a difference. Wide distribution of your book and a publisher's marketing support can affect sales tremendously, but an author has little say in that. An informative, professional, and entertaining Web site IS something we can do to promote ourselves and our books.

I'm revamping the front page of my Web site next month to keep it fresh and to begin promoting a 2009 Berkley charity anthology I'm part of. But I plan on keeping the basic design of my site -- the online press kit, the Contest page, the Books page, the Schedule page, the Links page, and the About Me bio page are all standard author Web site components. Then I have several fun pages: my James Gang page (which features interviews of authors with "James" in their pen names); my Photos page (which includes an album of photos taken with celebrities); and the Sex Q&A advice column (which is "written" by a sex therapist character of mine). And I have a Kudos page of review quotes and an Articles page that includes my PR articles. The articles support my PR workshops and are of interest to other writers.

This is probably a longer answer than you wanted, but I LOVE discussing PR. ;-D

-- Marcia ;-)

[Jun 26, 2008 8:43:00 AM](#)

[PaigeC said...](#)

Thanks for having such an informative guest, Melissa! Great post Marcia! I don't know anyone who knows as much about PR and marketing or understands the subtleties of it as well as you. Thanks for the nod and for the other excellent examples!

~Paige :)

~*~ Alison Paige~*~

* SOUL OF THE SEA * June 6 2008 Ellora's Cave

<http://www.alisonpaige.net>

[Jun 26, 2008 9:50:00 AM](#)

[Marcia James said...](#)

Hi, Paige! Thanks for dropping by! I hope blog readers will check out your "Writer's Cave" Web site page (the link is in my guest blog post) to see the many photos of authors' offices. It's really interesting and fun to see where our favorite authors create their novels.

-- Marcia ;-)

[Jun 26, 2008 10:12:00 AM](#)

[Marcia James said...](#)

Harlequin SuperRomance author, Kay Stockham, had some trouble posting here, so she emailed me the following question: "My question is: beyond an author's website, what are your top five recommendations?"

Kay, there's a saying in advertising that 50 percent of all marketing/promotional efforts work...and no one knows which 50 percent. Plus there is no way anyone can afford the time and money to take advantage of all the PR options out there. So the best advice I can give is to look for PR options that match you personally -- your budget, your schedule, your product, and your personality.

The budget and time constraints are pretty clear. Your product means what type of book, genre, and sensuality level you write; whether it's an e-book or a print book; its distribution, etc. Your personality means the things you are good at (such as graphic design or public speaking) and the things you like and dislike. PR is most effective when an author is enjoying it vs. forcing herself, for example, to power schmooze if she's an introvert or learn Web site design if she hates technological stuff (like me!).

That's why my PR file is helpful, because it contains so many things authors can choose from when deciding what promotional efforts are right for them. I also have several PR articles on my Web site in which authors offer advice on different aspects of PR.

Sorry there isn't a definitive answer to your question!

-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 26, 2008 11:27:00 AM

Melissa Alvarez said...

That's great advice Marcia. I agree that a website is VERY important in an author's PR. I can't wait to see your updated site. I love the one you have now but these changes sound fun. I have website redesign on my to do list as well.

No, it's not too long. I love discussing PR too. Thanks so much for such great information!

Paige - You're very welcome! Marcia is a lot of fun.

I'm sorry Kay had a hard time posting. This is a great question Kay and a very informative answer Marcia. Thanks!

Smiles,

Melissa/Ariana

Jun 26, 2008 11:37:00 AM

Nancy said...

Hi Melissa/Ariana and Marcia!

Marcia, you've given wonderful advice. I admit I'm still feeling my way thru the promo maze. I've done a few things, including a fair number of blogs. (And was a guest on Melissa/ Ariana's former radio show - what a gas!)

Here's a question. If one is a fiction writer without any particular nonfiction expertise (such as PR), how might one establish a platform? I ask because I think it would be much easier for me to do blogs if I had some consistent subject to write about. As it is, I spend more time writing a 400-600 word blog than I do that many words in a manuscript!

Thanks for any advice!

Light,

Nancy Haddock

La Vida Vampire

Jun 26, 2008 3:51:00 PM

Shelley Munro said...

Hi Melissa and Marcia,

Great post. I must admit that promotion is something I don't do nearly enough of. I tend to do the things I enjoy, which is my blog and website and let the other things slide. I find promotion a challenge because I live in New Zealand and most of my promo is restricted to online. Do you have any suggestions for me?

Jun 26, 2008 4:06:00 PM

Marcia James said...

Hi, Nancy! I was fortunate enough to be interviewed on Melissa's former radio show, too. Wasn't that fun (if a little scary)? ;-D

The tricky thing about most blogs is they are often read by both writers and romance readers, so if you have a platform like my PR one that appeals more to writers, you could lose the interest of the romance readers who stop by your guest blogs. So it's actually better to have a platform that ties into your author brand.

For example, my brand is "Hot, Humorous Romances". I can do blog posts on sex and humor, which are two of my favorite topics! ;-D I also have Chinese Crested hairless dogs in my books and as my logo, so I can talk about dogs, books with animals in them, no-kill animal shelters, anything of interest to readers who might also enjoy my books. I'm part of a multi-author MySpace page (<http://www.myspace.com/romanceauthors>), and I usually post dog-themed humor when I blog on that site.

I went to your Web site (very nice!) and saw your wonderful headlines ("Beach Books With a Bite" and "She's Gidget with Fangs?"). Obviously, you can speak on humor and paranormal topics, as well as other aspects of your author brand. It's great to use guest-blogging to promote a specific book, but it's even better if you can use guest-blogging to reinforce your brand so readers will know what they are getting when they buy a Nancy Haddock book.

Here's another hint - you can tie guest blogs into events or holidays. For example, there is a National Spay or Neuter Your Pet

day. I could reinforce my logo and brand, while supporting this important day, by guest-blogging on that topic on that day. You could Google national holidays that fit your author brand. You would not believe all of the interesting and crazy holidays that are out there. ;-)

Also, if you're posting on topics that tie into your brand, they're probably topics that would interest you, too. So if you have to do a little research to write the blog post, it probably wouldn't be wasted research, but probably something you could eventually use in a book, a press release, an article, etc.

Happy blogging!

-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 26, 2008 4:24:00 PM

Marcia James said...

Hi, Shelley! I also enjoyed visiting your Web site! ;-) You have quite an impressive number of books out from Cerridwen Press (CP) and Ellora's Cave (EC). Even though you are "geographically challenged" a bit when it comes to doing in-person things like workshop presentations and booksignings in places other than New Zealand, you have books that are available as downloads, so they can be read by anyone in the world who wants a great English-language romance. ;-)

Now, how do you reach those people around the world who read English and are not too technologically intimidated to buy an e-book? Since my first book came out from CP, I've given some thought to this problem. Obviously, countries like New Zealand, Australia, the British Isles, Canada and America are open to your books, and you can get your name and book release information out to author groups and reader loops in those countries. But what about English-speaking people in countries that get very little distribution of English-language books? These people are hungry for English-language books. And the ideal audience would be English-speaking, technologically literate young people – such as those who attend American Universities in countries other than America.

I've done some research into how to promote e-books to this "target audience", but I haven't found a way – for example – to advertise in the school newspapers at these colleges. But it would be a great joint PR project for CP and EC authors to take on. ;-)

There are also author promotion sites, like Author Island and Writerspace, that can do some of the promotional work for you – if you have the budget for it. But while romance readers are voracious, instead of all authors trying for a piece of that romance reader pie, I think we should help "build the market" by turning readers who haven't tried romances into Happily Ever After addicts.

In that vein, one thing you might try is to identify elements in your books that might appeal to a niche audience. For example, since my books have Chinese Crested hairless dogs in them, I joined an international message board about "cresties" to chat with people who not only are great subject matter experts when I need detailed information on cresties, but are also interested in buying books that feature the breed.

You might have a hero who collects vintage cars, and there are groups of vintage car owners out there. Or maybe you have a heroine who is special events coordinator, and there is a professional association for those in that career. So you have to see what elements you can use from your stories to promote them.

There are library reference books, like The Encyclopedia of Associations, that offer information (contact name, email address, etc) for every conceivable type of association, club, etc. And some of these reference books are available online through library Web sites. Most of these groups would be happy to hear from an author who has written a book of interest to their members. This does work better, however, for CP books than for EC's erotic romances, because the sensuality levels of the latter books might be beyond what certain groups are willing to promote to their members.

Hope that's helpful!

Happy promoting!

-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 26, 2008 4:56:00 PM

Marcia James said...

Apparently the Google Blogger gremlins are acting up today because several other authors emailed me privately to say they had trouble commenting. ;-(But to answer their questions about cost- and time-saving PR options, I suggest author co-promotion and cross-promotion. I have an article about this, The PR Buddy System, on my Web site (<http://www.marciajames.net/articles.html>), but here it is in a nutshell:

Cross-promotion can be as simple as swapping Web site URL links with other authors, which can increase your Web site's hits on search engines. Or you can cross-promote by writing articles like I do that quote (and promote) other authors. Those authors send their readers to my Web site to read the articles. And guest-blogging is a form of cross-promotion: my readers will learn about Melissa since I've promoted the guest blog to them, and Melissa's readers will learn about me from being on her blog.

Co-promotion is when authors come together to do a joint venture to promote themselves. For example, multi-author blogs, author panels at conferences, multi-author booksignings and online chats, etc. This saves not only money (such as in multi-author ads in Romantic Times) but time (sharing blogging responsibilities with other authors vs. blogging every day by yourself).

There's very few negatives, if any, to co- and cross-promotion.
-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 26, 2008 5:16:00 PM

Melissa Alvarez said...

Hi everyone! Thanks for posting great questions for Marcia. and Marcia, thanks for giving such detailed answers. I don't know what's going on with blogger. I'm sorry some people are having problems posting.

We've had ridiculously crazy thunderstorms all afternoon and I haven't been able to get online until now.

It's been great having you here today. And if anyone hasn't taken advantage of Marcia's promo file - visit her website and request a copy. It's great!

Smiles,

Melissa/Ariana

<http://melissaa.com>

<http://apsychichaven.com>

Jun 26, 2008 9:28:00 PM

Marcia James said...

Thanks again, Melissa for the opportunity to guest blog. I had a great time!

-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 26, 2008 10:01:00 PM

Melissa Alvarez said...

You're very welcome! It's been great having you here. Anytime you want to come back for another visit just let me know!

Smiles,

Melissa/Ariana

Jun 26, 2008 10:05:00 PM

Anita Birt said...

How I wish I could find how to promote e-books in Canada. E-readers are not available here. In my opinion - not always worth a lot - print books are much easier to promote than e-books. Book signings, etc. However, I do my very best to promote my e-books. I guess blog and do all the things you have suggested. Sales are creeping up so I can see light at the end of the tunnel.

Jun 26, 2008 10:13:00 PM

patricia sargeant said...

Great post, Marcia! Thanks for the informative tips. Using the buddy system for promotion does make the time and monetary commitments easier to handle. :)

Best!

Patricia

Jun 27, 2008 5:49:00 AM

Marcia James said...

Hi, Anita! I dropped by to see if there were any new posts, and there was yours. ;-) Nice to hear from a fellow Cerridwen author!

I agree that e-books are harder to promote than print books and will be until a larger portion of the reading population embraces the format. Having an affordable e-reader available everywhere would be a great step in that direction. Unfortunately the Kindle and Sony e-readers are still too pricey. And not everyone wants to read a book on their computer, Palm Pilot or cell phone. Right now, the only group of readers who aggressively buy e-books are those who read erotic romance/erotica, due to the privacy of purchasing such downloadable books.

I'm very glad to hear that your sales are increasing, even if it's slowly. Keep in mind that most print books go out of print and fans of print authors looking for their backlists purchase the books used, which means no royalties go to the authors. E-books don't go out of print for years (depending on one's contracts), so people who discover your newer releases can purchase your entire backlist, too, with the royalties going to you. So that is one e-book benefit that might make up somewhat for the PR and distribution challenges of e-books.

Because readers who participate in online communities, chats and blogs aren't as intimidated by technology as many print readers, going the online PR route is a good idea for e-books. Also, look for elements in your books that allow you to promote them to niche markets. And put your Web site URL out there whenever possible, including after your name in blog comments, if the blog software allows URLs. ;-)

Happy promoting!

-- Marcia ;-)

Jun 27, 2008 2:21:00 PM

Marcia James said...

Hi, Patricia! Thanks for stopping by! As someone who participates in several multi-author blogs or "globs", you have first-hand experience with their benefits.

-- Marcia ;-)