



Liz Jasper

mystery author

Things authors do to promote their books... (that they can admit to in public)

The interviews are raw data, unedited, straight from the author's mouths--er, keyboards. Be warned, it's unprimed (i.e. I didn't spend time making it pretty.) But, there's lots of cool stuff to be found. Happy hunting!

MARCIA JAMES

1. *What's your name/pen name, e-book title(s), website? When did/will the book drop?*

My pen name is Marcia James, which is a combination of my first name and my husband's first name. My 2006 Cerridwen Press (CP) e-book is **AT HER COMMAND**. It is now available in trade paperback as well as e-book. My Web site is www.MarciaJames.net.

2. *What kinds of promotions have you done to get the word out about your ebook? If there's some you plan on doing, list those too, but identify them as "to do's." e.g. maintain a website, join chat rooms, join sites dedicated to authors, join writers groups, interview or be interviewed, hold contests, donate books, send out arcs, teach writing classes, buy ads, make and send out bookmarks or postcards, hand out business cards, notify your alma maters, notify your local paper, blog, put it in your email signature, walk around holding a sign, clutching strangers' legs as they pass by on the street, etc.*

The first thing I did after selling was create my "author brand" – my Web site, my slogan ("Hot, Humorous Romances"), my logo (a Chinese Crested hairless dog, like the ones in my books), the tone of all of my PR materials (sexy and funny). Note: I HIGHLY recommend making some decisions about one's author brand BEFORE selling!

I hired a CP author who is also an IT person, Karen McCullough, to do my Web site and maintain it. She set up a blog-like page for me to use as a Sex Advice column "written" by the sex therapist heroine of my work-in-progress, as a way to promote my as-yet-unsold mystery series. The column is true to my author brand – sexy and funny.

I hold a monthly contest on my Web site. The people who enter are asked how they heard about my site (as a way to track my PR efforts). Entrants are also given an option of joining my email announcement list. (I send out once-a-month emails with booksigning and blogging info, excerpts from my reviews, details about my Web site contest, etc.) I choose jewelry as contest prizes because I often have winners who live outside the U.S. and jewelry is relatively inexpensive to mail. I don't like to use my book as a prize since the object of a lot of my promotional efforts is selling, not giving away, the book. Contest prizes are displayed on my site by my dog logo, who also crops up on other site pages. The first five contest entrants each month get one of my PR items – a thumbcuff keychain (which ties into the law enforcement protagonists and kinky sex in **AT HER COMMAND**).

In addition to my Web site and e-newsletter, I have promotional postcards printed with my logo, slogan, pen name, and Web site on the front and a blurb about my book on the back. I send these to Romance Writers of America (RWA) conferences and other conferences to be put in the goody bags of attendees. I also donate a raffle prize when there is a conference fundraiser for a charity, such as abused women or literacy. Usually the prize is either a stuffed dog (ties into my dog logo) wearing some piece of jewelry or a tote bag of dog- and romance-themed items. I don't have bookmarks of my book cover printed, since my goal is to promote my brand vs. promoting this specific book.

I am a member of several RWA chapters and try to participate on their email loops, as well as the CP and Ellora's Cave email loops. PASIC, RWA's Published Author Special Interest Chapter, is a wealth of information about all aspects of publishing – including PR. I also attend the RWA national conference, the RT BOOKreviews conference, and – this year – will be signing copies of my book at the RWA booth at the American Library Association's conference in June.

I have participated as a guest blogger on several blogs, have taken part in chats, and have been interviewed by publications, such as The Motivated Writer. All of these things were free, and I hope to continue doing them. And whenever an author puts out a call stating that she wants quotes from authors for an article she is writing, I try to respond. ;-) I haven't paid any author promotion Web site to promote me through banners, chats, etc. I'm not sure I ever will, unless I start getting great advances from my publisher(s). I prefer to use my PR dollars in other ways.

For example, my critique partner, Kensington author Patricia Sargeant, and I took a half-page ad in *RT BOOKreviews* together, and that way, my e-book was reviewed. (It received a 4-star review.) Now that my book is available in print, I've paid to be in the summer issue of RWA's *Romance Sells*, a publication aimed at booksellers and librarians. In addition, I'm considering taking an ad out in RWA's member magazine, *Romance Writers Report*.

I also sent 700 of my PR keychains to *RT BOOKreviews* and paid to have them sent to the booksellers who participate in their Bookstores That Care program. In the future, I plan to purchase Pat Rouse's bookclub list and send PR materials to the bookclubs that enjoy "hot, humorous romances."

I have also done the basic things, such as sending announcements to my alumni publications and adding my book title and URL to my email signatures. I've introduced myself to local booksellers and librarians, which has led to several book signings and to a local university event during which I read aloud from my book. I have an online press kit on my site, as well as a print version that I've sent to local newspapers.

And I've pitched – sometimes alone and sometimes with other authors – doing workshops on PR at RWA and other conferences. Patricia Sargeant and I are presenting a PR workshop September 29th at the Central Ohio Fiction Writers' conference.

3. *What, if any, promo activities do you consider absolutely essential when a book first drops? Why?*

I might not be the best person to ask about this because I'm more focused on branding myself and promoting my brand than on promoting a book. I think getting the book reviewed and getting news of it out there through guest-blogging, chatting, email loops, etc., is the best way to promote a book – at least to the romance-reading community. Personally, I would like to do more to grow that community and "convert" readers who have disdained romance up to this point. I would also like to introduce e-books to more print readers.

4. *What's the best promotion you've ever done?*

Handing out my thumbcuff keychains and chatting potential readers up one person at a time is probably has the best payoff to my PR efforts. I realize that not all authors are outgoing, but since I am, I find it an effective way to get my name out there.

5. *Have you done any promotion you've regretted? C'mon, let's hear the horror story.*

When I read aloud from my book to local university students, I deliberately picked the tamest scene in my R-rated book. When I joked around about that, they pressured me to read one of the sex scenes. I got about halfway through it when I had to stop. I felt like I was corrupting minors! They thought it was hilarious. Despite that, I think they will definitely check out my book.

6. *IYO, what's the biggest promo bang for the buck?*

I think this is different from book to book. For example, despite my book being a Cerridwen and not an Ellora's Cave release, it's set in a sex club and was reviewed by *RT BOOKreviews* under the Erotica section! Given the premise of my book, there are PR things I can't do. For example, I can't do tie-ins with local pet stores because while they might like my dog character, they won't want to do a cross-promotion with an R-rated book filled with kinky hijinks.

But every author can look for elements in her book that would lend themselves to niche marketing. For example, if your heroine drives a Corvette, you can look into a resource like the Encyclopedia of Associations, find groups of Corvette aficionados, and send them a press release. I have my Chinese Crested hairless dog character, so I joined a message board for cresties. When my sex therapist mystery is released, I'll send a press release to the professional association for sex therapists.

7. *When Raelene Gorlinsky told me I'd have to "develop an online presence," I went straight to the kitchen, made a double batch of chocolate chip cookies, and ate them. What have you done to get your name out on the web?*

LOL! As I mentioned earlier, I have developed a Web site, had my books reviewed by a number of sites, guest-blogged, and participated in chats. All of these will get your pen name Google hits. (If you want to know when your name crops up on the Internet, set up a Google Alert that emails you when Google sees a new reference to you or your book title.) Another easy way to get Google hits is to comment on other blogs using your pen name. For example, Patricia Sargeant is part of the multi-author Pink Ladies Blog, and I comment regularly on the blog's entries. This will get you Google hits, despite the fact that you are only commenting, not blogging.

I also occasionally write pro-romance articles for my local weekly newspaper, and I have pdf files of those articles on my Web site. Since those articles include interviews with bestselling authors, like Nora Roberts and Jennifer Crusie, my name comes up with someone is searching for those authors online.

8. *Virtual book signing. Is it possible (even for those who don't write paranormal)? Have you tried it?*

I haven't done this and don't know a lot about it. Sorry. ;-(

9. *What do you do to keep your web site interesting?*

As I mentioned, I have my sex therapist's Sex Advice column, my dog logo, and my contest. I also have a list of interesting facts about me, called Inside Scoop. And my PR photo is tongue-in-cheek. In the future, I hope to add a Members' Only page to my site -- where readers who have signed up for my e-newsletter can read free stories, jokes, etc. -- and a book trailer.

10. *You've published your e-book – yay! Now, how do you convince Aunt Martha to buy it, even though she's never read an e-book before? We can all cite the e-book advantages listed on the CP web site, but what do you tell people? Not just Aunt Martha -- we all know she's going to buy it anyway-- but, say, your hairdresser, who can't help but be interested after you try out your blurb on her?*

I'm afraid the resistance of print readers to reading an e-book probably isn't going to go away anytime soon unless Apple comes out with an inexpensive and trendy IReader e-book reader. In my opinion, the best pool of potential e-book readers to target (besides those who are already into e-books) would be English-speaking people overseas, where they might have difficulty finding many English-language books. Reaching those people – especially the younger ones who aren't technically challenged – is tough. MySpace and YouTube are two ways that might work.

11. *How do you think promoting an e-book is different from a promoting a print book? If your e-book has gone to print, are there promotional activities you've had to add? Or plan to add?*

Once my book went to print, I spent more time promoting my book vs. promoting my author brand. I did more print advertising and more promotion targeted to booksellers and librarians vs. readers. I've also set up booksignings.

12. *How do you know your promotion efforts are doing any good?*

I know just from reader recognition that my author branding promotion is going well. My e-book promotion hasn't paid off in huge sales, but my print book promotion has been more successful. Adding the question "Where did you hear about my Web site?" to my contest entry form, has helped me track how some site visitors found me. That doesn't mean they are all buying my book, however.

13. *Do you have any advice for new e-book authors? Anything you wish someone had told you?*

I wish I had realized just how much happens and how fast after you sell. I would have had my Web site up and running before I sold. Even if an aspiring author doesn't want to have her site up before The Call, she can at least surf other authors' sites and design her own future site on paper. She can make decisions about her author branding, her slogan, etc. vs. having to deal with all of that along with publisher contracts, book revisions, and the rest of PR after she makes the sale.