



## Hiring a PR Partner

By Marcia James

With so many promotional options available, how does an author balance writing and PR? Some delegate simple tasks, such as mailing bookmarks to conferences, to spouses or children. Others pay an online promotion site or publicist to do the bulk of their PR chores. It's vital to research what you get for your PR dollars, however, and to speak with those who've traveled this road before you.



When deciding your budget for a PR partner, ask yourself how much your time is worth. "I equate time with money when it comes to PR," Cerridwen Press author and Web designer

**Karen McCullough** said. "There are things you can do like blogging, interviews and chats that cost nothing but time. However, the tradeoff is the time spent on those could be spent writing another book, so there is a cost involved."

### Online Author Promotion Sites

There are a mind-boggling number of online sites that will—for a fee—promote authors by designing and displaying banners, holding chats, doing newsletter interviews, running contests, giving authors access to their readers' loops, and more. Recommendations from other authors can help determine which site is right for you, your books, and your career.

"Author Island has done *so* much for me," Samhain author **Jules Bennett** stated. "Whether you're a *NYT* bestselling author or an e-book author with your first book, [owner] DeNita treats everyone equal. Since promoting through her site, my sales have increased tremendously."

"Romance Divas would be my online promo site of choice," Pocket author **Rhonda Pollero** said. "They aggressively promote their site, it's very

user friendly and professionally done. The other choice would be Fresh Fiction. Their newsletter has a massive enrollment."

Kensington author **Elizabeth Amber** stated, "I've placed banners and/or covers on CoffeeTime Romance, JoyfullyReviewed, and NightOwl Romance, and I saw increases in Amazon sales during the times they ran, so I think they increased awareness."

"As for online communities,...everyone has their favorite little nest," Avon author **Cait London** said, "but I wonder if participating and paying fees in several is overdo? Many onliners visit all of them."



"I promote through Romance Designs/Authors After Dark on a regular basis," Berkley author **Yasmine Galenorn** said, "and I think they've helped my sales." Silhouette author **Susan Vaughan**

agreed that promotion sites can be effective. "My best sales came when I did two things. One, I held contests and a chat on Romance Junkies. And two, I had NovelTalk create a banner ad for my book and I posted it at several sites for low fees."

"I belong to two different Internet promo groups," Amber Quill author **Jane Toombs** said. "One is BooksWeLove [which] offers each author a Web page with 'buy' links for books, plus holds frequent contests where the author is able to view the email of those who enter it...and respond if desired. The cost is under \$100 a year and all the author has to do is provide...info re new books and offer a few books....as prizes. The second group is Jewels Of The Quill. The organizer...sends out monthly newsletters containing info about everyone's new books. She also runs contests [and] has set up Web site pages for...us."

**McCullough's** experience wasn't as positive. "I had my Web site on Writerspace for a while. They do...great promotions that drove a lot of traffic to my site. Unfortunately there was no correlation at all with sales. I think a lot of that was because they have a large community of well-known romance authors, and the traffic came mostly from their fan base, who weren't really interested in a relatively unknown, small-press-published author."

### Publicists & Promotion Companies

When your career is ready for a boost to the next level, a publicist might be a good investment. And hiring a marketing company can help a bestselling author remain on the lists. "I would avoid any company with cookie-cutter programs or mailings," **Pollero** recommended. Otherwise, "I think it can be the best way to spend smart money."

"I hired [publicist] Nancy Berland," Dorchester author **Jenny Gardiner** explained. "They did my bookmarks, they did a large mailing for me, they coordinated efforts with my in-house publicist, and they set up some of my online efforts. I think it was worth it, though I can't precisely calibrate it in sales. It all went toward the bigger picture of generating name recognition for the book. It also generated reviews from some places I'd never have gotten them. For their mailings, they are targeted to booksellers with whom they have groomed relationships."

"I've used COS—Circle of Seven—and *loved* them," Berkley author **Lori Foster** said. "Not only do they create a lot of advertising opportunities, but they're on the cutting edge of it all, and they're very friendly and easy to work with."

Avon author **Jenna Petersen** also tried a publicist. "While I loved the work she did and it was nice to have someone else handling almost everything, I am not sure it affected sales that much. And it was very expensive. I wouldn't do it again until I was higher up the food chain."

### Web Designers & Graphic Artists

For those who want to contract out specific jobs, like Web site design or ad layout, there are specialists ready to step in. Again, word-of-mouth

recommendations can help you choose a reputable business.



"I paid to have my Web site redesigned professionally," Resplendence Publishing author **Jan Scarbrough** said. "I've enjoyed the new look and can update it myself. I had the same designer make

bookmarks for me."

"If I weren't a Web site developer myself, I would definitely pay the money to get a well-designed Web site that was both attractive, intriguing, and easy to use," **McCullough** stated. "A good site...makes it easy for visitors to find information about you and, even more importantly, about your books."

"The most effective promo I've done is excerpt booklets," **Pollero** stated. "I do it the expensive way—have a designer do the layout, then have them printed with the cover in full color. Then I pay someone to mail them to all the conferences requesting...freebie stuff. You don't have to pay for all those things—you can accomplish the same thing on your home computer and do your own mailing."

Kensington author **Susan Lyons** also mails out booklets, along with bookmarks and ARCs. "I get excerpt booklets made—at a cost of about \$1 each—and send those to a number of stores, reader groups and conferences."

### Social Media Site & Book Video Professionals



Many authors set up their own page on a social media site, such as MySpace, while others assign the task to a handy technologically savvy teenager. For the rest of us, there are professionals, such as Scrap Fairy Designs, which will not

only design your site but send out "Friend" requests. Many of these companies will also produce book videos.

“I bought a book trailer for my first book, *Nicholas*,” **Amber** said, “but I think a trailer really needs to stand out from the pack and/or be posted in many venues to be effective.”



“I pay someone roughly \$1K per trailer, so I won’t do one for every book,” **Pollero** said, explaining the videos are “effective for my Finley Tanner Mysteries and not at all effective for my [Silhouette] Intrigues, [which] have a four-week...shelf life and

will not go into second printing, so building buzz by word-of-mouth with a killer trailer isn’t spending smart money.”

### **The Bottom Line**

Do you need a PR partner? Do you have the budget to pay for full-time promotional assistance or just enough to have a professional take a couple PR chores off your hands? For example, I look forward to the day that my reader list is so large I can justify paying a company like Vertical Response to handle my reader newsletters.

Whatever your PR needs, don’t be shy about asking fellow RWAers for recommendations. That’s how I found my Webmistress, **Karen McCullough!**

*Marcia James’ debut comic romantic suspense, AT HER COMMAND, was released in trade paperback last year from Cerridwen Press. In June 2009, she’ll have a short story in TAILS OF LOVE, a Berkley anthology. She offers her 150+ page file of author promotion options to any RWAer who requests it. Just email her through the “Contact Me” page on her Web site: [www.MarciaJames.net](http://www.MarciaJames.net).*