

Talk to the Press (and Get the Press to Listen) Making the most of mainstream media

Christy Karras (www.christykarras.com)
Emerald City Writers Conference, October 2010

1. The realities of publishing and publicity:

Publishers are printing more books than ever and doing less to publicize them (Is this smart? Maybe not. But that's another discussion). Media outlets are doing more with fewer resources, and book reviewers get hundreds of books a week, including several by local authors. Still, there are good reasons to make approaching the media part of your marketing strategy. The big one: legitimacy.

2. Media Dos and Don'ts

We'll get the Don'ts out of the way first, so we can focus on the positives...

DON'T:

- Think your book is so good no one can resist reading, reviewing, or writing about it. Everyone who contacts the media thinks he or she has a great idea. Even if they're all correct, they're not all going to get covered.
- Do it all yourself—or at least don't appear to be doing everything yourself. Get as much help from your publisher (and friends, and acquaintances, and networks, and maybe hired guns) as possible.
- Think your publisher is going to know how to contact local media, especially smaller outlets (who could be your best friends!).
- Harass reviewers about the book. Reporters are like agents and editors: Feel free to follow up once, but beyond that, they'll get back to you if and when they can.
- Assume you'll get the book back if you send out review copies.
- Get discouraged if at first you don't succeed.

DO:

- Use free media to publicize events. Also, come up with events that go beyond readings and signings.
- Know the difference between a topic and a story. Reporters are looking for stories (and as a fiction writer, this is your forte!).

- Be creative. Give reporters a "hook" or an angle. Examples: an upcoming convention, a certain number of local authors hitting the bestseller list, a remarkable writing partnership or unusual achievement.

- Make it easy. Use AP style for your press releases and put the most important information at the top (inverted pyramid). Make sure you and your publicist are easy to contact. Have a good, professional-looking web site (including correct grammar and punctuation!) and keep it updated.

- Get someone to be your publicist, even if that person isn't a professional. The best route is to go through your publisher, even if you do a lot of the work. Reporters are used to initially dealing with publicists, not writers.

- Understand the biases against certain genres and publishers, online publishing, and self-publishing, so you can better overcome them.

- Make it easy for your publisher by giving the publicist contact information for local media outlets of all types and sizes. Make friends with your publisher's sales/marketing people and publicists! They can be your biggest allies.

- Make yourself an expert on something (even if it's not related to your writing). That increases credibility and boosts your chances of being quoted or having a story written about you.

- Know how the news business works, including the news cycle, wire services, and differences between print, online, radio, and TV. For example, when is the best time—of day, week, month, and year—to pitch a story?

- Realize first impressions matter. Be professional, and look and sound that way. Practice doing interviews (especially for radio/podcasts and TV). This can be a fun writers' group exercise.

Resources:

1st Turning Point (www.1stturningpoint.com): Authors and others talk about book promotion.

Craig Lancaster (<http://craiglancaster.wordpress.com/>): Blog by a self-made author who's also pretty media-savvy (he works in the news business).

Reading Kitsap (<http://pugetsoundblogs.com/readingkitsap/>): Editor Jim Thomsen writes about Kitsap writers. Location-specific, but a good idea of what's possible.

Seattle Times book section (<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/books/>): The Seattle Times has a pretty comprehensive book section, especially compared to most newspapers.

New Day Northwest (www.king5.com/new-day-northwest): The kind of TV talk show you could consider targeting.

KUOW (www.kuow.org): Seattle's main NPR station devotes a lot of time to local talk shows. Public radio covers a lot of topics and is more likely than local TV to go for book-related stories.