

Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 14: Got Fame?

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There you are. That book you have given to two marriages, a full half carload of ice cream, and enough Prozac to fill two bathtubs, is finally published and in the stores. You have your final installment of your advance, and you are ready to see that royalty appear magically and incessantly. But, instead, it's just another Wednesday afternoon, and neither Oprah nor Jerry Springer has called to invite you to chat. You are in the publicity black hole.

Marketing is required of all authors, whether a stringer at the local paper or a novelist with six books on best sellers lists. Publicity, however, is an art form. What's the difference? Marketing means you or a product is ready to be sold. Publicity means YOU are going to be remembered, whether you have a product to peddle or not. In the long run, Publicity is what will get you farther.

When I worked in the motion picture industry, I was fortunate enough to befriend several Publicity Directors for studios. During dinners, or lunch, I'd listen intently at the methods used to get a star or a picture in the press. Some of these ideas are perfect for authors.

1. **ANY public location is a location for publicity.** Create stickers, bumper stickers, or even flyers. For writers, I recommend creating bookmarks. Make sure your name or idea is PROMINENTLY displayed on the item. Leave these in public information locations such as libraries, church or organizational meeting locations, and schools. (Please don't be ill-mannered by plastering stickers on buildings or light posts. You'll gain attention from the police, but not necessarily a future reading public.)

2. **Start a Fan Club.** An actor friend of mine started a fan club for himself back when he first came to Hollywood. Everywhere he went, he asked people to sign up for his fan club. Before he landed his first television role, he had over 800 people signed up on his mailing list. He kept doing theater, and finally got small roles on television. When this happened, he asked these people to write to the show he was on, and tell the producers and directors how much they liked his work. After this happened five or six times, and the number of fan club members hit over 2000, he was given a television series on the Sci-Fi channel. His fan club members still get mailings, but now, they number in the 15 thousand range, and he gets to meet them at convention signings.
3. **Learn the Art of Press Releases.** A press release is a simple document. It contains a date, key points of information, and contact information. By posting press releases every time you do anything that may help your career, you build recognition of your name to those who receive it. Keeping it relevant to your work shows the editors, or story producers that you are active.

I'm a key example of how press releases can work to benefit a career. As a rat trainer, I need to keep my name in the heads of television and film executives. I also need to keep current articles about my work so filmmakers around the country think of me as a source. Every time any of the animals I train has a new trick, I send a release. When I get any work, no matter how small it is, there is a note to the local and regional papers, as well as those sent to national and international newswires. For every 20 press releases I send, I generally get one or two new jobs. For fifteen minutes of effort, that means about \$1500-3500 of work I get.

4. **Appearances!** Public speaking horrifies some, while others enjoy face to face meetings with anyone who will be potential readers. A

recent article in Men's Health stated that those who ate yogurt and nuts took in enough of a certain chemical that stage fright disappeared. That snack alone is worth making the effort to meet with civic groups, church groups, children's clubs, and writer's groups. Selling yourself through public speaking increases name recognition. Try to schedule at least one event a month, presenting a fifteen minute chat. If you keep your topics to those similar to your books, your chance of selling more goes up. When you are giving your talk, be sure to tell your audience you can offer other topics, and hand out business cards.

5. **Catch Phrases.** When I changed my business name from "Rats on the Road" to "Cat, the Rat Girl" and "Cat's Rats", my business went from an occasional visit to a class room to an on-call position for CSI: Las Vegas. Using smart phrases, tag lines, hooks show not only your skill with words, but your ability to lure people into your world. Reporters enjoy saying "Cat's Rats", so I get called a lot for interviews.
6. **Newsletters, Blogs and Websites:** Creating a living document allows you to keep up-to-date information in one location for your readers, and potential readers. Blogs, short for web logs, are journals, and nothing more. Some writers have taken blogs to the next level of Journalism. Newsletters exist both in print and online. The idea is you are keeping your readers interested in what you have to say by offering little bits and pieces when you want to, and that does much to bolster your readership. Stephen King attributes his own website and newsletter for bringing some of his older works out of the attic and back into readers hands. Some blogs are so well-read, they've made impressions on US News and World Reports and Time Magazines lists of reliable news sources. Websites, for the cost, are the best marketing device available for ANY reason to ANY body.

7. **Be a Celebrity.** The best way to be considered a celebrity is to behave as one. Provide weekly readings at a local library or book store from books that inspire you. Offer to host a weekly one minute segment on the local news stations regarding your pet topic. If you are able to access local cable, set up your own weekly or monthly television show. Radio time is bought easily. You can purchase three and four hour blocks on standard air. If you are on a budget, consider Podcasting. Using a simple microphone and a home computer, you can create MP3 radio broadcasts downloadable by anyone with a player.
8. **Piggy-back Celebrity.** If you look around you, you may be better connected than you think. There are other published authors, local television stars, and even politicians who enjoy the limelight and make public appearances. If you ONLY went where Mayor Goodman, of Las Vegas, goes for example, you'd end up at openings of museum programs, hotel events, and even food related events. Most of these events are opportunities for you to present yourself to the guests as 'ANOTHER LOCAL HERO'. As a child, Brooke Shields did several events at a local hotel where I lived. I showed up at each one, handing out some copies of my chapbooks to anyone who asked for one. It helped me get my first agent.
9. **Where there's Press, there's opportunity.** Each week, see if there are events or conferences scheduled that interest you, or which appear to mirror some thoughts in your work. At SXSW in Austin Texas, many who aren't necessarily registered for the Music, Media, and Film event end up in sound bytes for national television reports, or even in local papers for hitting the right reporter with the right materials. One tried and true method to this is placing your flyers, stickers, or what not in all of the areas of a

convention hall serving as information booths. A Grammy Award™ Winning singer/songwriter ended up with a record deal after showing up a few times near the press room of a conference playing his own music and acting like he was about to host a forum at an event. The reporters had to pass him each time they entered the press room, and some stopped to talk to him. Before long, he had seven stories written and printed by several key music sources, and his music was heard by Sony/Elektra soon afterwards.

Publicity comes from those who make an effort to be seen. It comes from a lot of work, and a lot of homework. If you aren't sure where to start, then take the baby steps first. Write some press releases about yourself or your work. Send them out to your alumni associations of your high schools or colleges. As you start to build listings, send out more releases to bigger and better publications or sources. The more your name is read, the better it will be recognized. Next time, I'll tell you how to put together a Press Package.

Here are a few resources of where to send press materials. But keep in mind, ANY periodical, website, or even newsgroup which reflects your work or your interests is a good place to submit materials:

Regional:

Las Vegas Weekly: <http://www.lasvegasweekly.com/staff.html>

City Life: http://www.lasvegascitylife.com/about_us/

Review Journal: <http://www.reviewjournal.com/about/print/press/>

UNLV Rebel Yell:

<http://www.ryunlv.com/home/index.cfm?event=viewCustomPage&name=rystaff>

International/National:

AP: http://www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact_pr.html

UPI: <http://about.upi.com/>

Reuters: <http://www.about.reuters.com/pressoffice/contacts.asp>

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