

MARKETING YOUR BOOK

By Jen McVeity

Pssst! Want to hear about a secret club for authors and illustrators? One that helps your books be prominently displayed in book shops across the country? Called the Front Face Forward (FFF) club, all you have to do to join is to walk into any book store and see that any books by friends or fellow SCBWI members are placed front face out. It also helps to throw a casual word or two to the people behind the counter or in the store browsing. Something like 'That's a great book, I bet it's selling well...' Both here and in the USA informal networks of friends often support each other in this way. It's fun and it often means one more book sold, one more sold...

The reality is that unless you are Bryce Courtney, publishers don't spend big budgets on marketing a book. They put it in their catalogue, hand it over to the sales reps (who hopefully will read it) and send it out to be reviewed in *Magpie* and *Viewpoint*. After that, it's on its own. Except for you.

'Get to know your sales reps,' says Mary Dalmau, the general manager of Reader's Feast bookshop speaking at a Fellowship of Australian Writers meeting. 'If you don't have a rep's support behind your book at the end of the day your book will have less chance of succeeding.' Ask to attend the annual sales conference and pitch your book to them over a glass of champagne. Or spend a day on the road with a rep when they come to your local area. It does make an enormous difference.

What else can you do? 'School talks are very effective,' says Julie Morgan, (Julie Morgan Marketing) who specializes in promoting books and literary festivals for publishers. 'You get to talk directly to kids, show them your books, share your enthusiasm with them.' 70% of trade books eventually find their way into schools. Send display books ahead of time to teachers (get them back at the end), ask them to copy covers for a bulletin board, provide an order form for students for autographed copies or arrange a local bookseller to come in. Join speaker agencies (e.g. 'Booked Out' and 'Show and Tell' in Melbourne, Nexus) and negotiate a charge for your time at schools.

Is your book non-fiction? Or are there non-fiction elements in the story that can be directed to special interest groups? 'If your book is about a kid with asthma, send it to the Asthma Foundation for a review,' says Julie. 'Or perhaps your protagonist is trying to save a wilderness area. The Wilderness Society might mention it in their magazine.' Local newspapers are always interested in 'local author/illustrator makes good' stories. Give them a ring. The same goes for local radio stations. And although book signings at your local bookshop are not really a big hit, 'band together with a couple of other authors or illustrators and create three times the pulling power and customers,' says Julie. 'Much more interesting - and more fun.'

Finally, don't automatically expect your publisher to officially launch your book. You may have to push for this - or arrange it yourself. Local libraries and councils are always willing participants. Make the launch different. Children's book launches have to be fun, otherwise the audience talks, falls asleep or wanders off. An American SCBWI member launched her book about dogs with the help of the local pet shop - and their adorable puppies. A group of dirty, dishevelled teenagers surprised the audience at my launch of 'Where are the Billabongs?' by taking over the stage and acting out the dramatic title scene from the book. They were drama students from our local school and they used the scripting and acting of the scene as credit towards their VCE. For her *Hippopotamus on the Hospital Roof Eating Cake*, Hazel Edwards had a pink hippo cake, sand and clay for creating hippos, Deborah Niland's original illustrations and a large stuffed pink hippo with a bandage on his ear at Books Illustrated.

Being a writer doesn't end when the book hits the shelves. It's your book, your passion, your creation - and you are the best person to tell people about it. Meanwhile, happy creating on the next book.

Jen McVeity is the author of 23 books and the Australian head of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. The SCBWI is the largest writing organization in the world with over 20,000 members in 17 countries. In 2004, Jen was elected Board Chair of the international SCBWI.

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