

BUILD BOOK BUZZ



Get paid to promote your book!

By Sandra Beckwith

Most authors *spend* money to promote their books, but some get *paid* to do it.

They're media spokespersons, hired by companies and organizations to add credibility to a consumer product or service being promoted through a publicity campaign. They are topic experts who have the credentials to back their expertise. And they are paid \$2,000 to \$3,000 per day to help a company meet its communications objectives by sharing key message points through media interviews, while receiving impressive free media exposure for their books.

The role of a media spokesperson: A media spokesperson has a contract with an organization to fulfill specific obligations, which can range from participating in a satellite media tour to appearing on national or local television talk shows, or doing print or electronic interviews by phone. All of this happens within a designated time frame and for a predetermined fee.

For example, the Soap & Detergent Association (SDA) and its public relations agency recently developed a survey that would generate newsworthy results. The topic was housework: Who's doing it in American homes, men or women? Not surprisingly, the survey revealed that even women who work outside the home are still doing far more than half the housework, and it's causing tension among couples.

The SDA could have quoted a staff member in a press release announcing the findings to the media, but this individual would not be qualified to explain the survey results. So the SDA looked elsewhere for a spokesperson to do newsworthy interviews...and found me.

As the author of *Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman?*, a humorous look at what makes men different from women, I write and speak about the lighter side of gender differences. I have the credentials to explain the survey results, offer tips on how women can get more help around the house and suggest to men simple, easy steps they can take to help more without first getting a domestic engineering degree.

Through its public relations firm, the SDA contracted with me for three months for a range of media-related services, including traveling to New York City and other locations for in-person

interviews and doing telephone interviews from my office.

In addition, I received valuable on-camera practice from a professional media trainer who helped me link my anecdotes and experiences to the client's key message points. My goal, after all, was not to just talk about the survey findings. It was to share specific SDA messages with the public.

How to find spokesperson assignments: Usually, *they* find *you* when a publicist searches bookstores for relevant titles or the Internet for your topic. Some companies rely on organizations such as Spokespersons Plus, which specializes in finding qualified experts. Spokespersons Plus works much like an executive recruiter. The client calls the firm and describes the type of individual it needs; owner Deborah Durham searches her database to identify pre-qualified potential matches. If the right person isn't in her system, she looks elsewhere for the perfect match.

Typically, the spokesperson candidate supplies the client company with materials that verify topic knowledge (your book) and media experience. A videotape with television interviews - even from local talk or news programs - helps the client assess not only your level of interview experience, but your personality, as well. You can be taught how to improve your interview skills, but your inherent demeanor - relaxed, uptight or professorial - can't (and shouldn't) be changed for an assignment.

You can also contact companies marketing consumer products or services with a logical connection to your topic and offer your services as a spokesperson. But have a publicity campaign idea in mind before making the call so it's clear why they might benefit from working with you. Contact Spokespersons Plus, too, but only if you can outline several possible consumer product connections with your topic in a brief note to deb@spokespersons.com.

How a spokesperson is paid: Spokesperson fees vary and are calculated in different ways. Some contracts are based on a day rate while others have fee amounts assigned to specific tasks. Travel days usually earn half the individual's day rate; travel expenses are reimbursed.

Media spokesperson work requires many skills - including an ability to hold your own with hyperactive morning drive time radio personalities - so it's not for everyone. But if you believe you're destined to banter with Matt on "The Today Show" and haven't snagged that interview on your own, consider seeking a spokesperson assignment and letting the pros secure it for you. Then all you'll have to worry about is what to wear!

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