

BUILD BOOK BUZZ SPECIAL REPORT


# **Beyond the Press Release: 10 Exciting Book Buzz Ideas That Will Take You to the Top**

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# What you need to know about this special report.

When we think about publicity, many of us – even those who have professional PR experience – think first of press releases. As you might know, a press release is a news announcement tool that does a good job of getting the word out when used properly. But it's not the only tool you can use to generate exciting buzz for your book and it's not always the right tool for the best buzz-building ideas.

This free report offers 10 exciting – yet practical – ideas you can use to get publicity – that valuable free media exposure – for your book now and later. I hope you'll use these ideas and the implementation tips with them to jumpstart your book publicity plan and get excited about your book's promotion potential.

Please note that some of the ideas in this report can be supported with press releases, some might be supported with other media relations tools, and still others need no tool other than your computer keyboard or telephone. Detailed instructions for many of the media relations tools referenced are available in *Build Book Buzz: Publicity Forms & Templates*, a workbook that helps authors generate maximum excitement in both traditional and online media outlets. The open book –  – icon displayed throughout these pages tells you that the tool discussed is explained in the workbook. For more information about that, please go to <http://www.buildbookbuzz.com/workbook/index.htm>.

Finally, don't hesitate to contact me directly at [sb@buildbookbuzz.com](mailto:sb@buildbookbuzz.com) if I can answer any questions!

***Sandra Beckwith***

Instructor, “Book Publicity 101: How to Build Book Buzz”



## Do a Q&A on someone else's blog.

*This is so easy you'll wonder why you didn't do it before.*

One of the best ways to generate sales of your book through online sites – yours or an Internet retailer's – is through guest interviews on the blogs of others. Blog question and answer sessions provide an opportunity for you to showcase your topic expertise, share interesting information from your novel or nonfiction book, and offer a link to the book for more information or for purchase.

It will be slightly easier for you if you have your own blog and are familiar with how they work – but that firsthand experience isn't necessary. The process is still simple and easy. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- After identifying blogs that reach your target audience, select a handful that seem most appropriate from both a content and traffic standpoint. (The blog's feed subscriber count – if there is one – is a traffic indicator, as is the number of comments on postings as well as the number of other blogs that link to that site.)
- Find the e-mail address of the blogger – sometimes it is readily available and sometimes you have to hunt for it – and send a note (a) suggesting a Q&A, (b) the topic you'd like to discuss, and (c) why it will be of value to the blog's readers. Offer to write the questions yourself – after all, you know which questions get asked the most, right? Unless otherwise directed, offer five questions so the posting isn't too long. 📖
- After agreeing on a topic with the blogger, answer the questions via e-mail. Avoid long-winded answers or readers will lose interest. Answers that are two or three sentences long seem to work well.
- Once your Q&A has been posted, monitor the blog for comments so you can respond in a timely manner.

**Tip**

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## **Create a workshop based on your book's content.**

*This is an especially good tool for people who are passionate about their topic.*

I know the author of a novel about a single woman who makes custom lampshades for a living. I was almost as fascinated by the protagonist's craft as I was by her social life – which is what the book was actually about. If this woman offered a workshop on lampshade making through the Learning Annex or any similar adult education program, I would have signed up for it in a heartbeat and I'll bet others would have too. Once exposed to the art, they would have bought the novel available for purchase in the back of the room. And in many communities, an unusual workshop like this one would attract TV news cameras and newspaper reporters! It doesn't get much better than that.

What can you teach others that will help them discover how to do it better, smarter or faster? Here's how to create a compelling session based on content from your book:

- Select a relevant but narrow topic from your book – perhaps a single chapter from a nonfiction work – and break it down into “here's how to do it” steps. Include activities for participants so they learn by doing (they'll remember more that way, too). Distribute handouts that include your name, book title, and contact information.
- Create a core workshop that can be expanded or contracted to fit the time needs of the situation. Workshop time slots can range from 45 minutes to two hours.
- Find opportunities to present your workshop by searching for calls for proposals from conferences hosted by professional or trade associations that reach your book's audience, partnering with an adult education program, finding a corporate sponsor, or planning your own event.
- Remember to publicize your event to generate registration and general awareness. 📖

**Tip**

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## Sponsor a contest.

*Contests offer multiple buzz-building opportunities – and can even be fun!*

**W**hen promoting my humor book about men, I sponsored a “Worst Gift from a Man” contest, asking people to submit entries in three categories – dumbest gift, most inappropriate gift, and gift he bought for you so he could use it. (Guess which one drew the most entries? The last one.)

I used press releases to announce the contest, remind people to enter by the deadline, and announce the winners. In addition to getting lots of print exposure, I was a guest on a national TV talk show in mid-December, displaying the winning entries and offering viewers tips on how to get a gift they *really* wanted that holiday season. And this was all before the days of the Internet – I can only imagine how this contest might have mushroomed with a viral campaign.

You can do the same thing.

- Get creative with your contest idea. The author of the biography of a well-known individual can host a look-a-like contest while a mystery writer might sponsor a contest for the best alternative ending. For a novel using real locales – well-known scenic areas, restaurants, public places – create a competition for photos of the story’s locations. Every type of book offers contest potential but if you’re stumped, bring in a few creative friends or colleagues to help you brainstorm ideas.
- Some contest ideas lend themselves to celebrity judges and all should include prizes. Network with others targeting the same audience to secure donated prizes. Think big!
- Use multiple tools to announce the contest and entry requirements – press releases, e-mail messages, blog postings, your Web site and e-mail signature, etc. Make sure you announce the winners; if your contest is national, include their hometown media on your media distribution list. 



## Contribute to a forum discussion.

*Show – don't tell – that you're a topic expert.*

**E**stablish yourself as a knowledgeable expert among your target audience by participating in online discussion groups, chat rooms, listservs, etc. Here's how to do it in a way that is productive, meaningful, and safe from “flamers” who attack anyone who appears to be self-promotional.

- Search [www.groups.yahoo.com](http://www.groups.yahoo.com) to find options or type your topic plus the words “discussion group,” “forum” or “listserv” into a search engine. Click around the sites to get a sense of who uses the forums or discussion boards and whether the traffic is regular or occasional. Put your energy into those with lots of users and regular discussion.
- Read several postings to get a feel for the tone and knowledge level. Respond to those messages where you can provide helpful information or help someone solve the stated problem.
- Do not be promotional or appear to be self-serving. You could get attacked – flamed – and that's never fun. Instead, include a signature with your book title, or include a reference to your book as part of your answer: “In my book, ‘Why Would Anyone Want to Skin a Cat Anyway?’, I have a few solutions to that problem but the one I think would help you the most in this situation is ...”.
- Refer posters to your Web site for more information: “There's an article on this topic on my Web site that you might find useful. Here's the link.”
- Offer to answer questions offline. While your ultimate goal is to sell more books, your objective with this tactic is to use your expertise and knowledge to help others, not your book sales.

Maintaining this helpful demeanor is also a great way to attract and impress writers who troll these sites for article sources. And, users who are impressed by your knowledge will tell others about you. The pay-off is there, even though it will be hard to measure.



## Write an op-ed.

*Your book is the credential that will get your essay noticed.*

**T**he challenge associated with op-ed writing is being able to respond quickly enough because op-eds often react to the day's news – not the month's news. The beauty of op-eds is that you can place them in multiple publications in noncompeting markets. While most of us think in terms of daily and weekly newspapers, op-eds can also be found in trade magazines.

Here are a few op-ed writing tips to guide the process:

- **Determine your goal.** What do you want to achieve through your op-ed? Sure, you want your book identified in the author credit at the end, but what's the point of your essay? Do you want to shed light on a topic that's hard to understand or encourage people to behave differently or take a specific action?.
- **Select one message to communicate.** Op-eds are short – typically 800 words or less – so you have room to make just one good point. Stay focused on it.
- **Be controversial.** Editors like essays with strong opinions that will spark conversation. They like it even more when you submit an essay on a subject people are talking about.
- **Illustrate how the topic or issue affects readers.** Put a face on the issue by starting your essay with the story of somebody who has been affected or begin with an attention-getting statistic.
- **Describe the problem and why it exists.** This is often where you can address the opposing viewpoint and explain your expert perspective.
- **Offer your solution to the problem and explain why it's the best option.**
- **Conclude on a strong note** by repeating your message or stating a call to action.
- **Add one or two sentences at the end that describe your credentials** – including your book title – as they relate to the topic.

Send your op-ed in an e-mail message to the publication's op-ed page editor with a brief introduction explaining that you're submitting a timely op-ed, stating the topic, and expressing interest in reworking it if necessary to meet the publication's needs.

**Tip**

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## **Connect with writers who specialize in your topic.**

*Some of the best article ideas come from writer pitches, not editor assignments.*

**I** participate in a forum where talented and experienced journalists inquire regularly about expert sources for specific articles. They often end up interviewing forum colleagues who have written books related to the topic being researched.

If you aren't actively participating in writers' forums or attending conferences for writers, you're missing a great opportunity to connect with journalists who specialize in or otherwise write about your subject. These are people who have the potential to interview you over and over again – for years – on your book's topic, keeping it in front of potential buyers on an ongoing basis. Here are simple steps to take to begin connecting:

- Join the conversation at online writers' forums offered by sites such as MediaBistro.com, AbsoluteWrite.com and FreelanceSuccess.com.
- Investigate specialized writers' groups – there are organizations for all types including medical, science, education, and horror writers as well as groups based on states or regions – and get to know who writes about what. When you meet someone who might be in a position to interview you for a future assignment, suggest saleable article ideas that you can contribute to as an expert resource.
- Study your target publications to see who writes articles in your general area of expertise. Do a little digging to get their e-mail addresses, set-up a database, and contact them individually with article ideas. Note their responses in your database and use that feedback (or lack thereof) to improve your next pitch. 📖



## Create a page on a social networking site.

*Targeting a young demographic? Join them online.*

Irene Levine, PhD, is using her Facebook page to get young women interested in her forthcoming book, *Fractured Friendships*. Levine's book research involves an online survey (<http://tinyurl.com/36swu7>); she was able to generate more than 200 survey responses from a younger demographic using Facebook. Do you think those 200+ women will be interested in the book when it comes out? You bet!

And while teens and 20-somethings were the early adoptors of Facebook and other social networking sites, including MySpace, these sites are now attracting people of all ages interested in exploring how online social networking can expand their professional horizons.

Setting up your Facebook or MySpace page is the easy part – just register and start answering questions. What's harder is making your page work for you in ways that will make a difference. Here are a few ways to capitalize on your page on one of these sites so that you'll make it work for – rather than against – you:

- Invest time in finding and making connections. Determine the types of people you'd like to meet and use each site's search functions to find them.
- Connect with people by asking them to join your network. Send a "friend" request, post appropriate comments on their page (on Facebook, this is called a "wall"), or send private messages through the system.
- When you connect with someone, search their network for other appropriate people to add to your group or network.
- Don't use mass mailings. Make all contacts from your site personal and individual.
- Be helpful. This is just like real life networking – it's not about what they can do for you. It's about how you can help *them*.

## Offer a free booklet.

*Entice customers with a booklet that hints at the quality and depth of your book's content.*

A booklet is one of the best publicity-generating and marketing tools for authors because a booklet:

- Is easy to write – just pull and edit text from your book.
- Showcases your topic expertise.
- Gives you an opportunity to contact the media with a press release offering your freebie to readers and viewers.
- Helps you build a database of people you can contact with information about your book.

Once you create your booklet (I used MS Word's template for manuals to create this special report but you might try the brochure template or one of the MS Publisher design wizards), send out a press release announcing that it's available. Explain why it's useful and tell people how to get a copy (is it a downloadable file available on your Web site or do you need people to send you a stamped, self-addressed envelope [SASE] for a brochure-size document?). 📖

Capture contact information by requiring people to enter their e-mail addresses to download the file or by recording the addresses on the SASE in a database. Then make sure you follow up on the lead with information on your book. If you sell it yourself, make a special offer they can't refuse.

Let others targeting the same market offer your booklet free as an incentive to purchase their products or services, too, so that you reach as many potential book buyers as possible.



## Start your own holiday.


*Whether it's serious or lighthearted, your holiday can be the launch pad for an annual publicity campaign.*

Every year, humor writer Jen Singer generates national publicity for her collection of laugh-out-loud parenting essays, *14 Hours 'Til Bedtime*, through the holiday she created, "Please Take My Children to Work Day."

How can you not smile when you see that title? Whether you're a humorist, a science fiction writer, or a biographer, you can use this technique to generate buzz for your book every year, too. Start by brainstorming ideas for a holiday that is appropriate and relevant to your book but attention-getting, too. A funny holiday will get more attention than a serious one, but a lighthearted concept isn't required. Here are a few examples using books written by a few students in my book publicity course to get you thinking:

- **Visit a Cemetery Day** for *Grave Matters: A Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*
- **Call a Sick Friend Day** for *How to Say it When You Don't Know What to Say: The Right Words for Difficult Times*

Once you've got the right idea, make your holiday official by submitting it to Chase's Calendar of Events (<http://tinyurl.com/268yq9>).

Plan an event or activity – virtual or real world – to celebrate the occasion so that the media has something newsworthy to write about. Make sure you've got a Web site for the holiday or a dedicated page on your existing Web site where people can get more information; include the URL in all media materials and communication relating to the occasion. Send an announcement to the press to generate calendar listings, news items, and feature stories. 

Finally, make sure you follow up with the press to offer additional resources and encourage interviews.



## Pick up the phone and pitch a story idea.

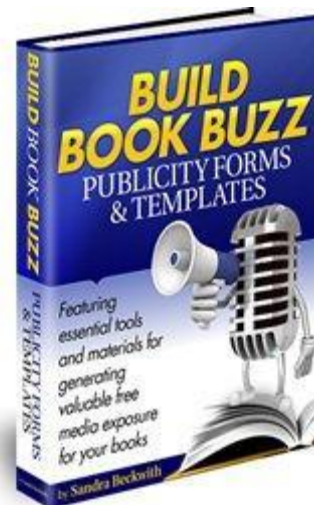
*Sometimes it's better to connect with your voice, not your keyboard.*

I'm the first one to shoot off an e-mail when pitching a story or segment idea that I could contribute to as an expert resource, but sometimes, even in today's electronic era, picking up the phone works better.

Here are a few tips for making phone pitching as painless as possible for you *and* the journalist.

- **Be clear on the goal of the call.** Typically, your goal is to generate enough interest in your idea that the journalist will agree to review a pitch letter that explains the idea in greater detail.
- **Write out your article or segment idea.** Edit it down to no more than three sentences. You want a very brief summary that is clear, compelling, and intriguing.
- **Practice your pitch before calling.** I still do this. I stumble less when I'm familiar with the language I've written. If you can read your pitch without sounding like that's what you're doing and it gives you confidence, then do so.
- **Learn from rejection.** Ask, "Would you mind telling me what doesn't work about this idea so I can make sure the next one is on target?"

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Introducing *Build Book Buzz Publicity Forms & Templates*, an incredible workbook brimming with easy-to-use book publicity forms and templates – and detailed instructions on how to use them so you'll get fantastic results.

Here's just a sampling of what you can do with the media relations tools in this valuable workbook:

- ✓ Generate book reviews
- ✓ Snag valuable interviews with local, regional and national journalists representing all types of media outlets
- ✓ Secure exposure on the blogs of influential thought-leaders
- ✓ Create an attention-getting press kit and online press room containing the most sought after information about your book
- ✓ Generate radio talk show interviews and prepare the host for a thought-provoking, controversial or fascinating conversation with you, the expert
- ✓ Convince a reporter that your credentials make you the ideal expert source for an article
- ✓ Provide media outlets with tips and advice they will use because their audiences need the information only you can provide
- ✓ Syndicate informational articles online
- ✓ Achieve your communications goals with every single media interview
- ✓ Publicize any and all news associated with your book
- ✓ Position yourself as a credentialed expert resource

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