

STRAIGHT TALK: From Librarians to Writers Getting & Keeping *Your Book in Our Libraries*

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*One of the goals of any Readers' Advisory Librarian is to link our readers to authors and vice versa.
We are professionals – do not try this at home.*

Be aware that there are many types of libraries – not all of which are potential buyers of your books:

Academic (2- and 4-year institutions) – although some community colleges may have small popular fiction collections
Special / Corporate
Public

How do I GET my book(s) in your library?

1. Write a book. Write a good book. Write a very good book.
2. Get your book reviewed – **but**, get it reviewed in the professional journals read by collection development librarians:

<i>Booklist</i>	Local and/or national newspapers
<i>Library Journal</i>	Genre-specific publications
<i>Kirkus Reviews</i>	(e.g., <i>RT BookClub</i> , <i>Mystery Scene</i>)
<i>Publishers Weekly</i>	Genre websites

 - *Reader reviews on Amazon.com don't count.*
3. Join organizations (e.g., RWA, Sisters In Crime, etc.) – groups such as these often send out lists of members' current and upcoming titles.
4. Set up your web site for potential readers/buyers ; create a newsletter to establish a mailing list to send information to potential fan base.
Note: Your email should link to *you*, not to a webmaster.
 - Have a *highly* visible link to your book lists, *in series order* and list series name
 - Many readers want to read series books in order
 - Note (*prominently*) if your books are available in:
 - Large Print (not a bad idea to bring such copies to signings) – some patrons read *only* large print titles
 - audiobooks
 - electronically (Kindle or download-compatible)
5. Most importantly, **MEET US!**
 - Visit your local library – face to face meetings
 - Ask who to ask for! (not everyone who works in the library – or even those who work at an RA Desk – has a Masters degree in Library Science or is responsible for buying the books)
 - Never be afraid to ask for information or assistance at a library – it's our **JOB!**

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How do I GET my book(s) in your library? (continued)

- Visit your local library – face to face meetings (continued)
 - Web site, phone call, letter/postcards, emails
 - We receive many solicitations to purchase titles for our collection. On the last page of this handout, we display two sample of *actual* emails (one good, one very, very poorly done) sent to the Schaumburg Township District Library by authors
 - When you make contact with the selector(s), have your information at the ready:
 - When/where was the book published?
 - Bibliographic data – date of publication, price, ISBN (-10 or -13, edition statement, type of binding (mass market or trade paperback, hardcover)
 - Available as an audiobook? In large print?
 - Where can the library obtain the book?
 - Ingram, Brodart, Baker & Taylor , or another distributor that offers great discounts to libraries
 - Does your publisher make special accommodations for library purchases?
 - Marketing your book to the library
 - What is your book about – be brief and pithy
 - Why does the library need it in the collection (include your reviews)
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - Who are you? If applicable, did you mention that you are a LOCAL author (including surrounding metro areas? the state?)
 - Bookstore signings (we'll often introduce ourselves, so don't try to pick us out of the crowd)
 - Conferences, especially if you're giving a presentation or on a panel
 - Book Fairs (e.g., Chicago's Printers' Row)
6. If available, send us a galley (or advanced reading) copy of your book -- librarians don't make the big bucks
7. Questions selectors consider before making our final selections:
- Cost --
 - Is the book available from one of our jobbers who provide nice discounts to us?
 - Paperback vs. hardcover
 - Patron requests (dependent on cost, reviews, etc.)
 - Residency – some libraries automatically buy books by their local authors
8. Set up an author visit (see section on author programs)
- Libraries will purchase the book(s) of the visiting author

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Once the Library has purchased my book(s), how do I KEEP my book(s) in your library?

It's a sad fact of life that libraries only have so much space and, unless the taxpayers who support the library are generous enough to constantly pay for new additions or new buildings, we must weed our collections on a regular basis.

Questions we consider before we make the decision to remove (aka, "weed" or "de-select") a title from our collection:

1. When did the book last circulate?
 - Depending on the library's collection development policy, a fiction collection may only include what is popular or what has circulated within the last year
2. What is the *total* number of circs on the book? (over the lifetime in our collection)
 - Every library defines its own criteria for de-selection of materials, often based on:
 - General size of the collection
 - Amount of available space in the section (including room for growth)
 - Patron usage of the collection
 - Mission statement of the library
 - Get friends and family members to check out your book, or do-it-yourself
 - It is a common misconception that librarians look at who last checked the book out. The short answer is "no," we don't -- we look at when it last circulated.
3. Is the book part of a series?
 - Librarians are more likely to keep the run of a series together than keep individual single titles by an author
4. Is the title still in print? Is it cost-prohibitive to purchase another copy?
5. What is the condition of the item?
 - Pages falling out, tossed in the bathtub, chewed by the puppy (or child) – we've seen it all, and some conditions you would *not* want to fathom
 - Depending on last circ date and the number of times it's circulated, we may buy a replacement copy or repair/rebind the existing copy (when possible)
6. Is the book (or series) issued as paperback original(s)?
 - More likely to weed paperbacks for authors in hardcover or large print
7. Does the author have a new book (especially in the case of series) coming out soon?

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A Word (or Two) on Author Programs

Join forces with other author(s) to offer a panel for your presentation

- *Heartbreakers*
- *Red Hot Mammias*
- *The Deadly Divas*
- *Minnesota Crime Wave*
 - Please note that a group “name” is not necessarily required – it just lends marquee value
 - Invite other authors/writers for a panel discussion
 - patrons are more likely to come see a group of authors rather than one author of whom they are not aware

Attend other author events to see what seems to work and what doesn't and, without plagiarizing, make it work for you

- Don't be afraid to be different
 - Set the stage with music, costuming, interesting clothing or dramatic readings
 - Generate audience interest
- Think of unique ways to draw an audience

Things to consider for your “talk”:

- Group “trademark” (e.g., hats, costumes, candy)
- Refrain from calling it a “reading” although, depending on the “talk,” you might read certain sections
 - Keep it brief ; read several shorter selections instead of one long one
 - Before you read a selection, develop a short introduction
 - Go for the EMOTION – something memorable
 - Some words of warning:
 - Be brutally honest with yourself . . . are you a *good* reader or Stephen King?
 - If you can't do your own material justice, consider inviting an actor-friend to help out
- Find something you're good at:
 - Promise the “secret” on how to get published, or talk on the writing process (lots of not-yet-published patrons may come to get some hints)
 - Take advantage of your hobbies and interests
- Questions to ask yourself:
 - What made you write this book?
 - Is there something unique about your character?
 - What did you learn about yourself as you wrote this book?
 - Did you bring personal experience into the story?
- Avoid the “talking head” syndrome
- Offer to participate in discussion groups by being available for call-in, blog-in, email, etc.
 - One such program at Lisle (IL) Library turned into an invitation (and honorarium) to come speak
- Make it fun and interesting
- **Always** leave room for Q&A and signing

A Word (or Two) on Author Programs

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(continued)

Press kits or publicity packets (do *not* rely solely on your publicist – or publisher – to get the word out)

- Keep it professional ; it doesn't have to be flashy, just informative
- Be sure to include:
 - Book cover
 - Author photo (preferably .jpg or .tif files, minimum of 300 dpi ; full size preferable if we want to enlarge it for a poster)
 - Author bio
 - Short (and long) description of your book – depending on where we can advertise, we might be able to use one or the other
 - Reviews
 - Business card

Never expect to sell a large number of books at a library event – library patrons want to check out the materials from the library (especially if you are a new name to them)

- Your visit will be, however, the key to building a fan base
- Depending on the venue, a library may:
 - Bring in a bookseller (from a chain or an independent bookseller)
 - Once arrangements have been made, it's a good idea for the author to contact the bookseller to make certain they can *get* copies of your book
 - Buy limited copies to sell (on the condition that unsold items can be returned)
 - Allow you to sell your own copies

Benefits of appearing at a library:

- Introducing yourself to a new group of readers who will now be familiar with your and your books
 - Especially if you give them something to take away with your name and your book title(s) on it
- Ask the librarian for copies of any promotional materials they may have created for your talk to create your own portfolio

How libraries promote their author programs:

- Promotions that don't cost us money (many libraries work within severely limited budgets)
 - Library newsletters (print and online)
 - Sent to all residences within the library's district, or to a specific mailing list, and this is often the best source to promote a program
 - The 'lead time' for these publications may be long (2- to 3-months), so if you arrange a program within the month, you may not be listed in this kind of publication
 - Flyers and posters created in-house or library website
 - In-house book displays, especially if author(s) are multi-published
 - Library cable stations, in-house electronic displays (e.g., electronic signage, PowerPoint)
 - Spreading the word among other local libraries (.pdf of flyer emailed/sent)
 - Knowing our own readers and providing personal recommendations
 - Sending press releases to local media in the hopes that they will pick up a story idea

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How libraries promote their author programs (continued):

- When libraries have monetary means:
 - Newspaper ads (mostly local papers), but this can be quite costly and is not frequently done. Using the example of an ad in the *Chicago Tribune's* Sunday *Books* section (when it was available; the figures below are from 2007):
 - Ads without photo (5-line minimum) = \$65; each additional line is \$9
 - Ads with photos (35 line minimum, includes 28 lines for the photo) = \$228.75; each additional line is \$6.25

Caveats

- Consider the library's budget
 - Most libraries cannot afford honorariums
 - Be willing to compromise
- Space considerations
 - Library meeting rooms are open to public bookings (association groups, clubs, etc.)
 - "official" library programs are often booked before access is open to outside groups
 - Once the rooms are gone, they're gone!
 - *Plan ahead* – the longer the lead time the better, especially in terms of publicity ; don't assume you can "drop" in and have good attendance at your program

Websites

- Make sure you have one!
- Be professional
 - Research other sites that you admire or enjoy visiting, and make notes
 - Consider colors, design and artwork
- Understand how a web site is designed, even if you don't want to do it yourself
- The "do's":
 - Make certain your promotional information is easy to find and in the correct format
 - Pictures should be at least 300 dpi, and in .jpg or .tif format
- Avoid:
 - "Splash" pages
 - Annoying music (can be annoying after the twelfth repeat)
 - Black backgrounds with white text (or other combinations that make it difficult to read)

Other things you can do:

- Ask your library to schedule more writing program and author events
- Help make your local library "writer friendly" by helping to create "writing centers"
 - Donate your old issues of *RWR*
 - Request other resource materials if they don't already have them (e.g., subscription to *Writers Digest*, *RT BookClub*, *Publishers Weekly*)
- Ask your library to be a site for National Novel Writing Month (typically in November, but could be scheduled at any time)
 - Teach a workshop

Other things you can do (continued):

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- Volunteer
 - Teach free classes at the library on writing
 - Organize a “Romance Readers” book club
 - Join the Library’s “Friends” organization
 - Help edit their newsletter (if one is produced)
 - To help with fundraisers
 - Library Book Discussion groups
 - Volunteer to attend the meeting
 - If the library is not local, suggest a “phone-in” meeting or email forum
 - Send them promotional materials
 - Create study questions about your book
 - Make them available on your website
- Be NICE, (even when you don’t want to be)

Librarians want to be nice to new authors, especially.

- We hope that, when you hit the \$1M advance, you’ll remember how nice and accommodating we were and you won’t charge us an outrageous appearance fee

A final note: Always be *nice* (even when you don’t want to be).

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Actual Samples of Emails Received at the Schaumburg Township District Library

An Excellent Example to Follow:

Emma Librarian

From: author@isp-email.com
Sent: Thursday, July 16, 2009, 3:49 PM
To: Ima Librarian
Subject: My first book

Dear Ms. Librarian,

We met at last year's LIM conference. My first novel, *Insert Book Title Here* published by [Publisher Name], was just this month.

The book tells the story of.... The action is set mainly in.....

I invite you to check out the book at my website (www.authorswebsite.com). It is being distributed through Ingrams, Baker & Taylor [or other distributors] and, of course, Amazon.com. You can also purchase it directly through [the Publisher] at order@publisherinfo.com.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,
Authors Name
Insert Book Title Here
Publisher, ISBN-13

[This author also made sure to include excerpts from reviews, too.]

An Example of What is Sneaky and Unprofessional: (actual email sent through STDL's email Reference system)

-----Generated by Web Page-----

Please contact the following patron by *E-mail* using a *Adult* communication level:

Name: Supposed Patron
Library card number: [intentionally left blank]
Contact phone number: [intentionally left blank]
Contact e-mail address: fakename@generalemailaccount.com

The patron has the following comments/Questions:

I would like the library to order a copy of *Insert Name of Book Here*. It is a terrific book and I'm sure many people will want to read it.

-and/or-

Similarly disguised purchase requests emailed to any/all staff members whose email(s) they can find!