



How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs



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HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR BOOK THROUGH (*OTHER PEOPLE'S*) BLOGS¹

A Bit of History

Once upon a time and for many years, blogs were called “essays” or “articles” and appeared only on paper. Writers of these actually got paid for their work if publishers felt it merited broad distribution.

Then, not so very long ago, a few people began publishing their essays and articles on nothing but electronic impulses in a format called a “Web Log.” On the bright side (some might say), broad distribution was available without any need for publisher acceptance. On the darker side, no publisher usually means no money and no vetting.

Other people generally found these online short works appealing, gave them the nickname “Blogs,” and coined a new verb—we no longer write; we “blog.”

Good people write blogs. But so do many others, whose motives may not be as authentic or altruistic.

More (and more) people began blogging, either to express themselves or, increasingly, to promote themselves or their services. Corporations got into the act. “Writing” transformed into “content.” Content experts, marketing experts, social media experts, and other not-always-so-expert-experts began blogging about blogging, usually to promote their own services.² Blogs now even roam in packs, called “Multi-Author Blogs” (MABs).

Things have gotten very crowded out there. With crowds come confusion, yes—and great opportunities for authors.

¹ Writers of course also often run their own blogs—you won't learn how to create your own blog here. But if you already have your own blog, you'll find some of these suggestions much easier to implement.

² Sort of what we're doing, ummm, here.



Basic Vocab

You'll find this article easier to follow with an understanding of these key concepts.

Blogs vs. Websites

Think of blogs as:

- 1.) **Websites or parts of websites** where
- 2.) **Real people post essays and/or book reviews** and other material fairly frequently, and
- 3.) **Readers can easily communicate** with blog writers and other readers online, and
- 4.) The **communication is visible** to other readers.

All blogs are on websites (by definition). But not all websites include a blog.

Big Picture Blog Promotion Options

Authors can promote their books on other people's blogs through one or more of the following general means:

- 1.) **Book reviews**
- 2.) **Guest Posts**
- 3.) Getting written **about**
- 4.) Getting **linked to**



Blogs and Books are Personal

What do blogs and books have in common? Ok, wise people, yes, they each have lots of words. What else? From a marketing standpoint, they share one essential element: Blogs and books are personal.

A blog, usually, expresses one point of view, one voice, one theme. People consciously or subconsciously identify with the blogs they read. "I'm a progressive, so I read *Daily Koz*" "I'm a literary type so I read [The Millions](#)."³ "I love romance, so I'm drawn to [All About Romance](#)."

People identify with books in the same ways.

Books are difficult to market because each book is a different product, with a unique audience. People may say they "love books," but in fact only **buy** a few books a year, and the books they buy are specific, not general. People who love romances buy romances, not business books. People who are into home decorating buy books on home decorating, not on Nascar.

Publishers and individuals who try to use general strategies to market specific books generally fail. Throughout my career as an acquisitions editor at major publishers in New York, I watched non-book-business mucky-mucks take over publishing houses, talk about books in sales meetings as "units," and attempt to create bestsellers by asking staff to "just do what you did on that last bestseller, and make another one."

It always failed. What has always worked in book promotion is grassroots promotion. Now people call it community-building or relationship marketing.

What has always proven most effective in book promotion is grassroots promotion, not over-the-top big bucks advertising.

It doesn't matter what you call it or where you do it—the formula remains straightforward: You sell books by finding the people who are already

³ I love *The Millions*.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

interested in your subject and style, and getting them excited about your book in particular.

Blogs are Today's Grassroots Communities

The author of *Thirty Years of Model Airplane Adventures: A Memoir* no longer has to go to the local hobby store to chat up model airplane enthusiasts eager to buy his book. He can find his readers on blogs like the [Academy of Model Aeronautics Blog](#) and talk with them, swap stories, make friends, find other groups of people who share his passion, and, eventually, ask them to buy his book.

You can, too. You can find your grassroots book-buying community online, in a blog. And, if you treat them exactly the same way you would treat the friendly folks at your local hobby store—with courtesy, respect, attention, and sincerity—they will not only want to buy your book, they'll want to share your work with others.

Here's how.

25 Ways to Effectively Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

Stage One: Think it Through

1. Perfect Before You Promote

No blogger or reviewer will promote you or your book without first doing a background check on you. If your initial approach intrigues [them at all](#), the first thing they'll do is research you online. Be ready. You must have a professional-looking presence online. (We can design a nice site for you at www.authorplanet.com, or you can use free tools like www.wordpress.org, or a do-it-yourself-with-a-little-help-and-cool-templates-website builder like www.squarespace.com or www.wix.com .) You don't have to write your own blog,⁴ but you have to be visible and, most importantly, credible. The links on your website must work. Your site should be error-free, easy to read, and clean.

⁴ It's better if you do write a blog, but blog-writing isn't for everyone. My own blog comes and goes. Most people who start writing blogs drop them pretty soon.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

Some writers use Facebook as their primary web presence; that's fine. Same thing holds—your Facebook page must be [impressive and professional](#). Google yourself and your online listings as if you were new to you. Better yet, ask a friend or hire a professional to review your online presence and provide a list of suggested improvements. Fill in any holes you can find. We're all sloppy online. It's the nature of the continually changing beast—so easy to pop something up, so hard and exhausting to keep everything thing error-free.

But you must. People will promote you if they trust you, and they'll gauge your trustworthiness online. Every broken link, goofy comment, and inappropriate Facebook posting can get in the way of getting your book sold.

2. Don't Fish Without a Net

Create a way to capture potential book-buyers' emails. What does this have to do with promoting your book on blogs? Everything. Your mailing list is your goal; appearing on other people's blogs is the means. Most people won't buy your book the first time they read about it. We're all skeptical consumers. We're all forgetful. We're all bombarded by information.

An appearance on an influencer's blog is a wonderful thing, but the impression it makes is soon forgotten. If you're able to get people from the influencer's site back to yours, and into your mailing list, you can gently remind them from time to time that you and your books exist. Pop a button on your site that allows people to "subscribe" for more info. Give people something for clicking—perhaps an excerpt from your book or a white paper (*hint: like the one you're reading now*). Be honest about what you're doing. If ten people are intrigued enough to sign up, you can write those ten people six months from now when something exciting happens (like a great review), or when you offer a discount. Those ten people may be the first ten buyers of your next book! Wherever your book is reviewed, wherever you write a guest post or a comment, include a link to your site.

Stage Two: Plan Smart

3. Devise Your Blog Promotion Strategy Months in Advance of Its Implementation⁵.

Blog promotion done well takes time. Time to experiment with small blogs and time to work with blogs that have long lead times. Time to write your guest posts in advance, and time to craft and revise your strategies. Time to plan calendar-based promotions (like tie-ins with holidays and events related to your topic). These things can't happen overnight.

4. Review Lead Times on Several Types of Blogs (How Long They Take to Run an Article or Review).

Take a look at the guidelines on a few book review sites and at a few general blogging sites that post guest blogs. Note the lead time they request, and keep these general guidelines in mind as you craft your blog promotion strategy.

5. Practice Small.

Before your big promotion push, test the waters by interacting with a few smaller blogs, perhaps one or two a month. When you're ready for your big push, you'll want to be comfortable with online engagement.

6. Tie Your Approach to Events.

Human time and attention is limited. You are much more likely to get attention on someone else's blog if you help them with a hook—a strong reason to believe promoting *you* will get *them* attention:

- Your “publication” date. While personal bloggers are more flexible, much traditional media views a book's publication as news that fits in a specific time slot only. They will run stories about you and review your book only when the book is “new.” Be aware of this, and plan your big push to tie in with your book's publication, even if you are self-publishing.
- Holidays. If your book appeals to dads, find a Father's Day tie in. Offer discounts for the holidays or after the holidays.

⁵OK, none of us live in an ideal world—advance planning is a goal, not a requirement. Of course you can do this stuff by the seat of your pants, without a plan. Most authors do. Don't beat yourself up about it.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

- Calendar Events. Gain attention through lesser-known hooks. If you write military history, relate articles to key historical dates.
- Create reasons for bloggers to feel good about promoting your work. Offer exclusive discounts only to their members.
- Go for the snowball. After you've practiced on the smaller blogs, target several large blogs to approach simultaneously. As Danny Iny, co-founder of Firepole Marketing⁶, notes in his excellent advice on online marketing, (www.engagementfromscratch.com) two concurrent guest posts are better than guest posts timed a few weeks apart, and the value grows exponentially with each simultaneous post. That's for a couple reasons: first, consumers need to hear about products often before they buy them. Have you noticed that TV advertisers have gotten smart about that lately? Often the same commercial airs throughout one TV show.

Think of online promo as a giant pyramid scheme. The more people view, click and share, the more people they reach who will view, click and share.

7. Create a Tracker

Here's a great way to procrastinate on those days you face "Book Marketer's Block:" Waste a few hours trying to figure out how to construct a spreadsheet to track your marketing efforts. It will make you crazy enough to get back to writing.

It's pretty much impossible, especially the first time, to set up a spreadsheet that will match your marketing efforts while you're still formulating and refining those efforts.

Do it anyway.

But only spend 10 or 15 minutes on it. Use Excel or make a table in Word or use a yellow notepad.

⁶ Download his helpful free book!

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

Find a place to jot down quick and useful information. Here's a system that works for me, with a couple sample entries.

Website URL	How Might I Use This Site?	Did I Contact?/ Should I Contact? When?	Other Notes
http://readersfavorite.com/	Book reviews and contests	Need 3 months to review books, express reviews cost \$\$	Seems reputable at a glance, look further.
http://teddyrose.blogspot.com/	Reviews in my genre, I can possibly write a guest blog	Haven't checked yet	Very personal but lots of followers

Eventually you may want to create more streamlined tracking sheets. But in the meantime, even during your earliest stages of research, you'll find blogs you want to remember. Keep them in one place.⁷

8. Know Thy Reader

Close your eyes. No, wait—read this, then close your eyes. Picture your book in the hands of an eager book buyer. Who is she? What categories of books does she like to read? What kind of websites does he like to visit? What hobbies does he have? What other authors does she enjoy? What magazines does he read? Open your eyes. List your answers. This then becomes your “Reader Profile.”

⁷ You can also use simple online tools to keep track of websites you like, such as Google bookmarks. Doesn't work for me—I never remember where I've filed which site. But if you know ahead of time how you want to manage your bookmarks, go for it.

EXAMPLE: MY READER PROFILE

My book:	<i>Snow Outside my Window; Cat on my Feet</i> ⁸
My reader:	Middle-aged white woman, upper-middle class, married, mom, church-going
Categories she reads:	Commercial fiction, women's fiction, animal stories
Websites:	Goodreads, Amazon, Parenting, not sure
Hobbies:	Reading, Pets,

9. Don't Give Away the Store

Think about the value of your work as you plan your blog-related promotion. Guest blogs, articles, and book excerpts are essentially intellectual property that you are giving away free in the hope that the promotional value exceeds the value of your time and expertise. There's nothing inherently wrong with this, but be aware of the value of your own work.

In some cases, you may be able to offer articles and blog posts to other blogs for a one-time license. In other cases, bloggers may demand all rights to anything you write for their sites. Be aware: this means those bloggers could pull your work into a collection that they later sell and for which you will not be compensated.

Obviously, I recommend using other people's blogs to promote your work. I also recommend doing so with open eyes and common sense. Nuff said.

Stage Three: Seed Your Market

10. Go Where Your Readers Go (Target Your Blogs)

- Use www.writersblogfinder.com to find websites your readers are likely to visit.
- Do Google searches using keywords and concepts related to the Reader Profile you just created.

⁸ Yes, there is snow outside my window and a cat is on my feet. Hey, we all find inspiration where we live!

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People’s) Blogs

- Check out the blogs recommended by the blogs you find. (You’ll find such blogs on “Blogrolls” or “Recommended Blogs” often on the lower right sidebar of the site.)

11. Be a Blog Snob

Ask yourself one question when you find a blog where your readers might be: “Will I be proud to have my name on this site?”

There are many ways you can formally assess the popularity—the “traffic” of any website. I love the tools on www.seoquake.com; I sometimes use www.technorati.com or www.alex.com.

You can check out the blogger’s popularity on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media. We used all of these tools to determine which blogs to list on the www.WritersBlogFinder.com.

Of course, it’s helpful to know how many people actually visit the site on which you might want to promote your book. Yet I believe in your gut and you should too.

If the site looks unprofessional, hard to read, ungrammatical, inappropriate or distasteful in any way, move on. There are many other blogfish in the Internet sea.

12. Converse before Converting

As noted, blogs are the grassroots communities of today. Just as you wouldn’t (I hope) ask favors of strangers before you form a relationship, don’t ask favors of bloggers before becoming a trustworthy online “friend” or, at least, a credible colleague. You’ll find this advice everywhere—and everywhere you’ll still find people asking online strangers to buy or promote their books. The golden rule remains golden—do you want bloggers to view you the way you view a telemarketer?

Treat bloggers as thou wisheth to be treated. Unless thou wisheth to be treated as a self-interested telemarketer.

13. Write Comments on Your Targeted Blogs

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

This can be scary. It sounds so simple, but even after you've found a few blogs on which you'd like to comment, you may be stymied by the technological demands. "Sign in through Facebook? Twitter? Use Disqus? Enter your User ID." You thought all you needed to do was draft a witty remark, and suddenly you're asked how you want to be identified and what software to use. Each blog is different, so my advice is: **choose one system**, write it down so you don't forget, and go with it consistently. Also, **choose one username**, preferably your own name and not "muffinkittykins." Whenever you're given the option to link back to your site in the sign-in stage, do so. **DO NOT PROMOTE YOUR OWN BOOK OR YOUR SITE IN YOUR COMMENTS.**

If you can't think of a comment, don't write one. The point is to engage in a conversation in which you have expertise or interest.

Read comments others have written—note which ones strike you as appropriate and which ones make you cringe. Emulate the good ones.

14. Write Reviews on Review Sites.

If the blog on which you want to be reviewed asks for reader reviews, contribute. You can usually find such invitations on the site's "review policies" or "about" page. (Here's an example from [The Book Vixen](#).) Otherwise, review sites sometimes offer forums where readers often post their own reviews in addition to general comments.

15. If You Have a Blog, Ask Other Targeted Bloggers to Write a Guest Blog on Your Site.

"What," you ask, "does this have to do with selling my book? Isn't this blog marketing 101, not book promotion?" Well, it is blog marketing 101, but it's a little different here. Your goal isn't to drive people to your site but rather to make an online friend. You have more freedom and, ironically, less self-interest this way, and it will show in the tone of your request.

16. Think of LinkedIn, Goodreads, Facebook, Twitter and Other Social Media as Mini-Blogs.

Each of these social media platforms supports individuals who write long and short essays and book reviews. Research, target, support, review, and interact.

17. If a Targeted Blog Includes a Forum⁹ in Which You Have Interest or Expertise, Participate.

Research, target, support, review, and interact.

18. Ask Permission to Run a Quote or Excerpted Article from Another Blog on Your Website

Another great way to begin a relationship. Whether you have a full-fledged blog or a standard author website, it's likely you'll come across material from someone you admire that you would love to run on your site. Write him and ask! It couldn't hurt, and you may again end up with a new friend you can call on to help you promote your work down the road.

Step Four: Implement Your Plan

19. Cross-link

If you respect someone's blog, let them know. Add the blog to your blogroll and send the blogger an email about it. In your own words, in your own voice, write honestly, compliment genuinely: "Dear xxx, just wanted to let you know I love your blog and want to spread the word about it, so I've added it to my blogroll. If you'd like to see it on my site, and even (hope so hope so) want to send people my way, I'd be forever grateful. But in any case, I think you're super keen. Having you on my site makes me look smart."

If you prefer, you can even write the blogger and ask for permission to include his blog in your blogroll. That's super flattering. If you do that, don't also ask him to check out your site or reciprocate. One nice thing about asking permission: you may end up with a very pleasant email correspondence.

(Do link to other blogs all over

Generic submissions are surefire recipes for generic rejections.

⁹ A "forum" is a place where people communicate with one another online in a visible back and forth, on a single subject. I always find forums a little daunting; I think everyone else must see something different than I do on my computer whenever I land in a forum. They can be hard to navigate, but on the other hand, the people who use forums are often heavily engaged and very technologically savvy.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

your website (where appropriate). You don't need to write the blogger every time you link; most bloggers will automatically get a notice when their blogs have been linked.)

20. Get Reviews

You've targeted the review sites on which you would like to appear (and you found our free [Writers' BlogFinder](#) very helpful in this, I hope!) popped them into your tracker, noted their lead times and planned your promo period (I hope). Now it's time to ask for reviews. Some tips:

- Follow the rules. Any reputable book review site includes instructions (sometimes a little hard to find, which is why we've highlighted those pages in the [Writers' BlogFinder](#) for you). Some sites only accept ebooks; some only print. One romance site only reviews books with happy endings! Don't waste the reviewer's time or your own.
- Go for concurrent reviews, if possible. Submit to many sites at once.
- If you're traditionally published, make sure to get your publicist's OK before soliciting any reviews, and coordinate your promotion with theirs.
- If your book is reviewed, say thank you. If people comment on the review, and it's appropriate for you to respond, do so.
- NEVER argue with a negative review. Always take the high road.

Bloggers are far more open to guest bloggers than you might think.

21. Write Guest Posts

A guest post or guest blog is simply an article, by you, that appears on someone else's site. Hint: Bloggers are far more open to guest bloggers than you might think. Blogging is a pain! Running engaging essays written by authoritative people helps the blogger often as much as it helps you. So—as you have perfected your online presence and planted your seeds—contact with confidence. Some tips:

- Try a few Google searches to churn up blogs in your target market that encourage guest blogging. Use a keyword your readers would search (for example, "cats") along with the words "guest blog" or "guest post" and see what pops up. As

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

are so many things in life, finding the “rules” for guest posting is much easier in the doing than in the imagining. Blogs that encourage guest posts often list guidelines right on their sites. **Use those guidelines not only to write to the sites in question, but also to inform your writing style as you approach other blogs.**

- **“I wish I wrote this” dept.:** Hands down the clearest and most helpful article I’ve seen on guest blogging is <http://blog.kissmetrics.com/guide-to-guest-blogging/>. I’m going to take my own advice and send them a compliment right after I finish this article.
- Target your submission to the blog in both style and substance. Freelance writers, note this advice holds true for any writing submission, including query letters to magazines and op-ed submissions. Generic submissions are surefire recipes for generic rejections.

22. Solicit Articles

One of the tougher promotional coups are “news” articles about you posted by other bloggers. On the other hand, if a major blog finds something about you or your book newsworthy, this is also one of the most effective promotional tools for any book, traditionally or self-published. We called these “off the book page” stories when I worked for Bantam/Doubleday/Dell (now Penguin Random House). More than reviews, more than guest blogs, the tacit endorsement and customer interest generated by an “impartial” story can be invaluable. Other places often pick up such stories as well. A couple ways to generate such press from blogs:

- Write a newsworthy blog yourself. Something that is the result of your original scholarship (a survey, a discovery, research, synthesis, useful tool). Send an excerpt from your blog in a personal email to bloggers with similar interests, introducing yourself and your story. Open your letter with something like “Your blog readers might find my discovery interesting, and I’d enjoy chatting with you about it further.” Include a tip sheet with bullet points about your research and results. You can go as far as writing a press release, but I find press releases not produced by PR agencies often backfire.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

- Send a story idea (just one per blog) to a blog you admire, again offering to participate in a Q&A about the topic. Generic story ideas won't work; you are sharing your expertise and "news" that is truly of interest to the blog's readership. (Don't forget those holiday and calendar tie-in opportunities.)
- Remember every email you send makes an impression. People will remember you, even if they don't run your blog. Always be professional and courteous, and always be aware of the style and content of the blogs you approach.
- THE PUBLICATION OF YOUR BOOK IS NOT NEWSWORTHY IN AND OF ITSELF! If you're Stephen King or J. K. Rowling, yes—any release is news to share. Otherwise, no blogger will find your launch newsworthy; you must find an angle that is engaging to both the blogger and her audience.

23. Consider a “Blog Tour”

A “blog tour” is a coordinated group of book reviews, interviews and guest blogs, usually timed to coincide with the launch of a book. Professionals differ in their opinions on the efficacy of a blog tour, but like anything else, blog tours aren't good or bad in themselves. As noted, if you and your book appear concurrently on many blogs, your exposure increases exponentially. If those blogs are tiny, with no followers, you end up with great practice writing guest blogs and that's about it.

You can create your own “blog tour” and promote it as such or hire others to run it for you. Whether you create it or others run it, you still have to write the requested guest blogs, thank the bloggers, and engage with the process. Some tips:

- Hire cautiously. There are circles within circles out there on the interwebs, especially among book bloggers. You may find yourself on a “tour” of very small sites (often abroad), all with personal connections to the publicist, and small audiences.
- The “blog tour” itself isn't newsworthy unless you are so well known you have a readership eager for your next book. Even within a blog tour, you'll still need to target your market and personalize your proposed articles to each blog.

How to Promote Your Book Through (Other People's) Blogs

- Blog tour participants often ask for targeted Q&A articles that you write, and they run below their review of your book. Q&As are pretty fun and easy to write, even if they aren't requested.
- Offer excerpts, giveaways, or discounts to entice blog tour participants.

24. Let All Your Blogging Friends Know about Your Book Launch.

Not just those who you might approach to write a guest blog, but all those people you have linked to, blog rolled, reprinted, and gotten to know in other ways. They may want to write ABOUT you instead of quoting from you.

25. Play Nice

Most people, I believe, prefer to be gracious, even in today's informal 140-character culture. Often, though, we don't know how. We can feel shy and even intrusive when we say "Thank you." Yet appreciation is not something to overlook. Do remember to send a sincere and grateful note for any response, even the negative ones. We can burn bridges so easily with an accidentally inappropriate email--it's much easier to burn bridges than to build or re-build them.



Do you have any thoughts or questions about this article or Writers'BlogFinder? If you found these tools useful, we would be delighted and grateful to reprint your positive comments on our sites. If you have any concerns, please let us know as well. Please write us at info@authorplanet.org. Thank you!

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