

Launch Your Book:

A Marketing Checklist for (Small-Press) Authors

6-8 MONTHS BEFORE BOOK RELEASE

- If you don't already have an author website, begin creating a simple one now.
- Also create public social media profiles or pages such as a Facebook author page (as distinct from your personal profile), an Instagram account or business account, a Goodreads author profile, and profiles on any other social media accounts you would like to be active on as an author. Begin inviting friends, family, readers and followers to these pages and accounts.
- If you don't already have a newsletter or email mailing list, set up an account with a newsletter marketing platform and start a mailing list (even if you don't know what you'll be doing with it yet). I use Mailchimp; whatever you use should be able to integrate with your author website.
- Ask your publisher to provide a timeline of your book's release. Do they have a release date in mind? When do they expect the cover to be available? Will they be wanting you to record the audio? If they are not able to give you a timeline yet, ask when they will be able to provide this and set a reminder in your calendar to contact them.
- Decide on a hashtag for your book. Find one that is short, clearly connected to the title of your book, and not being used for something else on social media. From now on, use that hashtag in EVERY social media post about your book.
- Get an updated headshot for promotional materials and/or your book cover (if it's not too late).

6 MONTHS BEFORE BOOK RELEASE

- Post a cover reveal across your social media accounts, newsletter platforms, and as a blog post your author website.
- Update your author website to include the synopsis, cover, and expected release date of your book. Also update your "About" page to include your forthcoming book and where it will be published.
- Begin assembling a launch team (via email? A private Facebook group? Your choice) of at least thirty individuals. Things will be quiet for a while, but it's important to set this up so you can keep folks in the loop as the launch begins to unfold. (Expect that about a third or more of these early volunteers will NOT end up reading the book or writing a review--things get busy for them, too. Plan accordingly.)

3 MONTHS BEFORE BOOK RELEASE

- Create an inventory of 10-20 stylized pictures you'll use to market your book. Once you have the cover design of your book, you can create 3-D images of your book (google "create a 3-D book cover") even if your book hasn't actually been printed yet. Having a 3-D image of your book more clearly indicates at a glance that this is a book, not a random graphic. Stage your book with memorable quotes or items that go along with the book. You'll use these throughout the launch but it's nice to prepare them before things get too crazy.
- Begin sending Advance Reader Copies (ARCs) to your launch team (galleys or a final layout pdf is fine; but check first with your publisher) so they can begin reading the book.
- Order new business cards if you've run low, or special business cards with your book on them--you'd be surprised how many people want your contact info once they hear you've written a book.
- Start drafting an outline or two for book talks.

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3 MONTHS BEFORE BOOK RELEASE (CONTINUED)

- Plan some fun things for your launch team: get-to-know-you threads, insider anecdotes about how you wrote the book, etc. Not everyone will want to do much more than read the book and write a review, but for those who share your enthusiasm for the book, it's nice to create a memorable sense of community.
- Query other bloggers and start scheduling and writing guest blog posts that can go out in the weeks following your book launch. I recommend at least five guest posts in the 1-3 weeks following your book launch to generate initial buzz about your book.
- Develop a 1-pg tip sheet for your launch team that contains useful information like the book's hashtag, all your social media handles, thought starters for Amazon reviews, and where else they can post their reviews (e.g. Goodreads, your publisher's website, etc.)

1 MONTH BEFORE BOOK RELEASE

- Begin cooking larger meals and freezing extra portions. You will need them during launch week.
- Start gathering any useful quotes/testimonials from early readers that can be added to graphics and used on social media.
- Begin posting one or two of those stylized graphics you created across social media accounts per week. I use Canva for these graphics and in the corner of each one, put the launch date of my book (e.g. "Coming: October 25!"). Once my book launches, I remove that text so I can continue to use the graphics.
- Map out your launch week: guest posts, social media posts, newsletter mailing, podcast episodes, giveaways, etc. Do as much or as little as you want but have a plan, and craft + schedule as much of the content ahead of time as possible.
- Gather whatever promotional activities are too much to fit into launch week and add them to your one-year plan. Promoting a book is a slow burn and it's important to pace yourself and have a long-term plan.
- Create a promo flyer for your book that includes the synopsis, a testimonial if possible, the ISBN number, book cover image, the Library of Congress Number, expected release date, name of publisher, and your website and social media handles. You can begin sending this out to your contacts, encouraging them to hang it at local bookstores or libraries and requesting their library to order a copy of your book.
- Start writing and/or finishing drafts of the guest blog posts that will go out in the 1-3 weeks after your book's release.
- When you get your author copies, make sure to take pictures and post on your platforms.
- Schedule a relaxing or decompressing activity for the day your book releases--a night out, a spa treatment, or a date with a book you've been looking forward to reading. Despite the excitement, this is often a weirdly depressing time for authors and self-care is important.
- Decide ahead of time whether you'll read your book's reviews on Amazon and elsewhere. Some authors do, some don't. Even an influx of positive reviews can be emotionally daunting.
- If desired, order promotional materials (book marks, stickers, etc.) with your book cover on it to use for giveaways and promo. Make sure to use the high res version of all images.

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DAY/WEEK OF BOOK RELEASE

- Self-care, self-care, self-care. Get enough sleep, food, water, and movement. Resist the urge to troll social media and Amazon.com.
- Implement your launch-week plan as needed.
- Support your launch team. Express gratitude to them early and often. Make sure to supply links as they become live, don't make them search. Remind them of hashtags, provide images for them to use, and ask them what you can do to help them help you. And share your excitement--it's exciting for them, too, to be a part of this.
- Be prepared for lots of basic and sometimes repetitive questions from potential readers, like where they can find the book, what formats it's available in, how they can get it overseas, etc. It helps to copy your response into a separate document so you can paste them to similar questions later and/or make an FAQ page about your book.
- Interact with readers. Be approachable and friendly. Remember that promoting a book is more about creating a sense of community around than "selling" it or getting people to buy it.
- ... But keep good boundaries. I prioritize public messages on feeds over private messages from strangers, for example, and try to keep my answers warm but brief.
- Make sure to celebrate! Whatever that means for you.



Some helpful principles:

- Keep communication as consistent as possible across social media platforms, particularly when it comes to important details like the link to your book or news that a new format has been made available. Don't assume that just because you posted it on Facebook, your followers on Twitter will magically know the same info. Also don't assume that people will get sick of you--they won't if you're sharing engaging, well-crafted content and important information.
- Make the most of your launch team. Let them in on the Why of their work. Be clear and positive on what their purpose is, how helpful launch teams are for authors. Establish the "bare minimums" that are expected of them and what they will receive in return, but also provide opportunities and ideas for folks who want to go above and beyond. Ask them for ideas of where you can submit guest posts to, etc.
- Don't put too much emphasis on the first week of your book launch. It's more important to keep a slow and steady stream of promotion going for the long haul than getting your launch week perfectly right.
- Don't sweat the small stuff, like a negative Amazon review or a lack of reviews early on.
- Acknowledge that once your book is out in the world, it's no longer (just) yours. It's also your readers. They will make of it what they will, and incorporate it into their lives in unexpected ways. Celebrate this rather than let it confuse you.
- For long-term strategies, see the next page...

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MONTH AFTER BOOK RELEASE AND BEYOND

- Make a list of people to send thank you cards to. This should include your editor(s) and anyone else from your publisher you had significant contact with, anyone who wrote a foreword to your book, as well as folks who went above and beyond to help you promote your book early on (I don't send thank you cards to everyone in my launch team, just to those who clearly did more than they had to). Check which of these folks are receiving hard copies of your book from your publisher, and send a copy yourself to those who are not.
- I like to have an extended list of personal contacts and email 1-2 individuals on that list per week until I get to the end of it. I share with them about the publication of my book and ask what's going on in their lives.
- Do a post-mortem on your book release. What did you do well? What did you learn? What will you do differently next time?
- Make arrangements for the audio version of your book to be recorded or check in with your publisher on this.
- Promote any and all new platforms formats as they become available.
- Map out long-term promo efforts and goals. Are there guest blog posts you never got to? Parts of your launch-week plans that fell through? Podcast shows you can guest on? Magazines you can pitch to? Start a long list of ideas you'll continuously add to as they occur to you and try to complete one or two items on this list each month to keep up the momentum of your book promotion.
- Create free, ancillary materials to accompany your book, with your publisher's permission. This could include a study guide, book club materials, an ecourse, an online book discussion group, etc. This keeps your book relevant and useful long into the future.
- Occasionally, check your book's hashtag on all social media platforms and share any posts from others you may have missed.
- Aim to do a free giveaway of your book at least once or twice a year. Switch up the platforms where you offer this giveaway and the criteria to enter (e.g. post likes, book mentions, etc.)
- Keep an eye out for current events and trending stories on social media feeds that pertain to the topic of your book and share/promote accordingly.
- If there are major (or not so major) holidays that connect to your book, schedule calendar reminders a month or two weeks ahead of time to craft and schedule social media posts or campaigns. You'll want to start these campaigns long enough in advance that people can buy your book as a gift for that occasion.
- If you're a first time author, give yourself extra time to do your taxes--you'll be declaring book royalties and that can end up complicating things a little.