

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

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BOOK MARKETING: How to Take the Mystery Out of Promoting Your Book Interview with Sandra Beckwith

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, and ideas and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.

Today, my special guest mentor of the week is book marketing coach Sandra Beckwith. Sandra is a former national award-winning publicist who now teaches authors how to be their own book publicist. She works as a book marketing coach, publishes the free Build Book Buzz e-zine, teaches an e-course on book publicity and promotion, and offers educational products that help authors become more successful. She's the author of publicity how-to books: Build Book Buzz Publicity Forms and Templates; Publicity for Non-Profits and Streetwise Complete Publicity Plans: How to Create Publicity That Will Spark Media, Exposure, and Excitement. I know she's going to bring a lot of excitement to this show, so Sandra, welcome and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Sandra Beckwith: Thank you, Susan. I'm thrilled to be here, and I know we will enjoy this conversation.

Susan Friedmann: I know that, too. Let's talk about building buzz with your book since this is something I know that's near and dear to your heart. When should an author start laying the groundwork and begin marketing and promoting their book?

Sandra Beckwith: That's a great question and I'm glad you asked it. That is because too many authors wait until the book is done and published and up for sale before they think about the marketing. The reason you don't want to wait that long is because your book will be most successful if you've got a ready audience just waiting to buy it as soon as it's available. To make sure you've got that ready audience just waiting, just waiting to buy it, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, you have to lay the groundwork early. The latest I want you to start is 6 months before your publication date. Ideally, you'd be starting as much as a year and you'll be doing things while you're writing the book to build that platform that you need to find the natural audience

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for your book.

Susan, that platform might be ... It's an email list of people who opt-in because they're interested in what you write about, so you've got an email list that you stay in touch with regularly. It could be public speaking on your topic. It can be media interviews. It can be blogging for your own site and maybe even doing some guest blogging on other sites as well. It can be your social media followers, connecting with the right people on Twitter, and that's important. You don't think in terms of "How can I sell on Twitter?" It's more, "How can I connect with the right influential people who might be in a position to help me spread the word about my book." Likewise on Facebook. The right connections on Facebook and getting a Facebook page up and getting those likes there and loading it on a regular basis with content that's relevant to your book no matter what type of book you write. If it's a business book, you want to have a good profile on LinkedIn and not just the profile with your picture and your work history, but the right connections and you want to be active in the right groups and maybe even form your own group on LinkedIn if it's a business book.

There are lots of things that you can and should be doing well before your books is available for purchase to build that platform that will drive sales when it's available. As I said, no later than 6 months before your publication date and sooner than that if you can.

Susan Friedmann: I know that many authors feel very apprehensive about putting information out there before the book is out. You say something like a media interview. If they don't have the book yet, how would they go about having an interview then?

Sandra Beckwith: Let me ask you a question, and I probably should have asked it sooner. Are your listeners fiction, non-fiction, or both?

Susan Friedmann: They tend to be primarily non-fiction, but we have a smattering of fiction authors and then with some children's books as well.

Sandra Beckwith: Let's just zero in on non-fiction books for this particular answer. If you are writing a non-fiction book about a subject that you know a lot about, which, of course, is why you're writing the book, you need to be doing media interviews, not about the book, but about the topic in the book so that by the time the book is available, you are positioned with your target audience as an expert and as an authority. Depending on the topic, you might be writing bylined articles for trade magazines, or, again, guest blogging for blogs that reach your target audience and are about the topic that your book is about.

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The reason you want to be doing these kinds of interviews is you don't do the interview and say, "I am writing a book called ..." and then the title of the book. You're doing those interviews as a way to build your authority and you can get those interviews without having a book to your credit, just because of your expertise. If you know enough to write a book on a subject, you have got a resume of sorts that says you know enough to write a book about that topic. You're well credentialed for media interviews. Again, it's not "I'm writing a book, and this is the title," but let's talk about that. It's you're doing interviews on the topic of your book without even referencing your book. Building your credibility and your authority.

Susan Friedmann: Along with that also goes the word "branding" with the book and then maybe building a business around the book. Can you address that topic?

Sandra Beckwith: Building a business around a book is more relevant, again, for non-fiction than for fiction. The issue with fiction is really building a fan-base, of people who love your writing style and will buy whatever you write because they love what you write. With non-fiction, and authority plays into this ... With non-fiction, there are so many opportunities related to your book as ... If you think of your book as a giant business card, a thick business card, you can really see the potential. I will tell you that with ... I have 3 non-fiction books that have been traditionally published. Two are publicity topics that you mentioned, Small Business Publicity and Non-Profit Publicity, but my first book was a humor book about man.

I will tell you, with all 3 books, I got nice advances from the publishers, but I earned just as much as my advanced and many times more through other opportunities that came to me through my non-fiction books. That's paid public speaking and it's consulting. In one case, for my humor book about men, I was a paid media spokesperson for a couple of consumer brands and that's very lucrative work, and for me, it was very fun work. I got to talk to the press all over the country about why men do what they do or say what they say and throw a little humor into it and have fun, and to be well-paid for that is a blessing, believe me.

With a non-fiction book, you've got all these other opportunities: speaking, online training. You can take your book and convert it into an online workshop or an in-person workshop. There's the training piece of it. Again, consulting, and for the right topic, if there's a link to consumer products, you could also be a paid media spokesperson. So lots of ways to make money off of a non-fiction book, besides book sales.

Susan Friedmann: That's exciting. That's very exciting.

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Sandra Beckwith: Yeah.

Susan Friedmann: Let's go back and talk about some essential tools that a first time author can use to promote that book.

Sandra Beckwith: Yeah. That's such a great question and I try to put myself in the shoes of a first time author. When I answer questions like this and I am in momentary panic mode, because first time authors are probably not book marketers. They probably are not marketers at all. They probably don't really understand publicity, promotion, marketing, those kinds of terms, so I try to help them focus on what makes the most sense for their book. For all books, there's not a lot that applies to all books but there is one tool that's essential, and that is your press release that announces the book, the book announcement press release.

Here's why it's essential. Everybody wants reviews of their book and most books deserve reviews, to be honest. When you send your books out for review whether it's a digital version or a printed version, when you send it out to, for example, the media, whether it's your local newspaper or whether it's a trade publication that once in a while has references to new books and gives a quick write-up of them, you need to send a book announcement press release with it that describes the book and tells readers what they will get from the book, and has a little bit of information about the author and the author's credentials.

Book announcement press release has to go out with every review copy. Now, this is trade ... They call them trade literary or media reviews. You don't send them out with reader review copies, but that's ... Reader reviews are more like reader comments. They're not true literary reviews, but when you want conventional literary reviews, you need that book announcement press release. That's one function of it. You can also put it in your press room on your website because then you're boosting your site's SEO because your press release will include some of the terms that people will search for when they're looking for a book like yours.

By having that press release in your website press room, you're going to help attract visitors and should people like me who are always looking for authors to interview for articles, because I also work as a freelance writer who gets article assignments for newsletters, magazines, all kinds of publications, many times, depending on the topic, I want to interview an author. Well, I will go into Google and type in author and then what I'm looking for specifically, and if you've got your book announcement press release on your website, there's a good chance that that page will show up

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in my search results and I will find you on your own website.

In addition, but wait, there's more, you can send these out with paid press release distribution services. There are several of them online. My favorites are eReleases.com and PRWeb, and actually I've got links to those on my resource page on my Build Book Buzz site. Those are paid press release distribution services. There are also free services. The free sites do not push your press release out to the media, they house your press release on their website and they wait for people to find it there. There's a good chance the reporter is not going to find it there, but that's okay. The value to you is that your press release will have a link to your website and so let's just call it freepressreleases.com.

I don't think that exists but as an example, your book announcement press release will be up on freepressreleases.com, it will have a link to your own website and just that one link on that site will help contribute to your search engine optimization, that SEO, which is a reflection on how easily your website gets found in an online search, having that link back to your site boost your search engine optimization because the more links you have out there coming back to your site, the more seriously Google and other search engines take your site, and so the higher up in the search results your site will move for relevant search terms.

I know that's a lot, but the bottom line is use the free press release distribution sites just to get links back to your own site because it will make it easier for your readers to find your site.

Susan Friedmann: That's some great information. Something that you said right at the beginning of that, Sandra, was with regard to writing in the press release what the book is about. I think this is something that I found that many authors struggle with. That is really being able to give a synopsis of their book in just a few sentences. Are there some tricks of the trade to be able to do that more effectively?

Sandra Beckwith: Yes, there are. The tricks tend to focus on what you shouldn't do as much as what you should do. As you've mentioned, in terms of what you should do, you want your book description to be just a few sentences. Now, that book description goes on the back of your book if you have printed books. It goes in your book announcement press release and it also goes on your retail sales page online whether you're using Amazon or Smashwords or barnesandnoble.com, wherever you sell it online. Let's be honest, Amazon sell 75% of all books purchased online so you do want to have it on Amazon.

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The mistakes that authors make the most with this is that they struggle, first of all, to answer that question, "What is the book about?" If you've figured it out for the back of your book cover, you want to use that in other locations, but you need to be able to distill it down to a couple of sentences. My best advice for that is to pretend you're talking to your mother. She'll say, "Honey, what is your book about?" or that's what she'll say if she sounds like my mother. "Honey, what is your book about? Tell me about your book. Your brother told me you're writing a book but I don't know anything about it."

What would you say to your mother about the book? Again, if it's a business book or technical book, you probably wouldn't use really technical language with your mother and that's okay. That's not a bad thing. The more accessible your book description is, the more likely you are to get people engaged in purchasing it. Pretend you're talking to somebody in your family, whether it's your mother, a sibling, a neighbor, a friend who is outside your industry. Pretend you're explaining it to them and work on getting it down to a few sentences, and then test it with other people. Test it. Send out your paragraph book description to two people who you can trust to be honest, and that might be only two people, but that's okay. Take advantage of them.

You want them to give you honest feedback, give it to them and say, "Do you understand what this book is about? Then come back to me and say what's your understanding of what the book is about without repeating my language." Focus on explaining it to somebody who isn't aware and then test what you've got. Also, be careful to have the right information in there. I have read book descriptions, especially sometimes with people like coach who take one of my courses and I have to go back to them and say, "I don't know if your book is fiction or a memoir" or "I can't tell if your book is fiction or non-fiction."

I just was contacted recently by an author, and I don't want to say the title because I don't want him to be identified but he told me, "Here's the title of my book. Here's what it's about." I'm thinking, "Okay non-fiction. Got it." Then over the weekend, I see a Facebook ad for his book and the ad is written like the book is fiction. Well, now, I'm really confused. Is it fiction or non-fiction? I shouldn't be confused. It should be really clear. Make sure it is really clear and make sure that it's accurate. That's really important.

Then what are the common mistakes I see? This, of course, is more in self-published books than those that are traditionally published, is that they have spelling mistakes, they have punctuation mistakes. They have grammar mistakes. The most common mistake is capitalizing words that

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shouldn't be capitalized. If your book description is written in a way that says to me, "This person doesn't read books, and therefore, doesn't understand grammar, punctuation, capitalization, things like that, I'm going to think that the book isn't very good." I might be wrong. Your book might be amazing, but if your description is loaded with clues that you aren't a writer, naturally a writer and you don't read books, I'm going to walk away from your book and that might be a mistake on my part, but it's a mistake that hurts you as much as it hurts me.

Make sure you have it professionally edited just as you've hopefully had your entire book professionally edited.

Susan Friedmann: I'm just taking it all in and I'm drinking out of the fire hose here, so thank you.

Sandra Beckwith: Do you want me to turn down the water a little bit?

Susan Friedmann: Not at all, not at all. You've mentioned a few mistakes that authors make. Let's talk about in more general the common mistakes overall with regard to a marketing and promotion that you found that authors make.

Sandra Beckwith: Okay, I'll start with one that's big. It's really big. Many, many authors don't know who their target audience is for their book. They don't know who is most likely to buy their book. I will say, "Well, who's the audience for your book?" and they will say, "Well, all women over the age of 21." Eeh! That's not right. It's rarely all women over the age of 21. Sometimes I even hear, "Well, everyone. Everyone could benefit from my book." Well, probably not. Even though a lot of people could benefit from your book, it is most likely that a much smaller subset of everyone is most likely to buy and love your book. You have to take some effort to really figure out who is your natural reader.

Now, if you wrote cozy mysteries, you can do research online to find out who reads cozy mysteries and then do what it takes to get your book title in front of those people. If you write maybe a self-help book for women, chances are that you can narrow your audience down. It's a self-help book for women, but it's probably women of a certain age. Maybe they're married or not married. Maybe they're empty nesters. Maybe they live in the country but not in the city. There's a lot of work that needs to be done so that you understand who is most likely to love your book. The reason you want to do that is the more specific you are with your target audience, the more likely you are to reach them and then therefore, the more likely you are to sell books.

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That's one is not knowing enough about your audience and not doing the work it takes to know who your audience is. Another common mistake is relying completely on social media for book promotion just because you can, because social media is out there. The reason you don't want to do that is because when many people do that, they're spending a little time here, a little time there, a little there and a little time somewhere else. They spread very thin over many social networks, and because they don't know who their audience is, they don't know what networks their audience is using.

A lot of people put all their effort into Twitter. Well, if your target audience is a female empty nester, for example, you're probably not going to find her on Twitter. You should be over on Pinterest. That's where she's hanging out. Just using social media alone is probably going to spread you too thin and in the wrong places, but you also ... There are so many other options out there. Susan, when I first started writing and publishing books, there was no social media. I had to do things like speaking which is still valid; events, still valid; publicity, again, still valid. There are so many other things you can do beyond social media that include ... I would call guest blogging a non-social media activity because it's not Twitter, Facebook, that sort of thing.

I don't think a blog is social network, although I think some people might label it that way. I think once you know who your audience is, then you know, should you be doing radio interviews? Or should you be on, again, Pinterest, instead of Twitter? Once you know who your audience is, you will know more about where to reach them and that's not necessarily on social media. Then I'll give you just one more and that is too many authors copy what they see other authors doing without giving any thought as to whether that approach is the best one for their book.

Book marketing is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Your book marketing approach needs to be built around where you will find the natural readers for your book. Susan, the natural reader for your book is probably not the same natural reader as my book, so I shouldn't necessarily do what you're doing just because I think you're wonderful. I need to be doing what's right for my book. If you're going to copy somebody, the best advice I could give you is to copy somebody who is in your genre and who is very successful. Don't copy somebody in your writing group who is in your genre and hasn't sold any books because they probably haven't figured that out yet. Find somebody who's successful and let them be in your niche or your genre. Make sure they're targeting the same audience as you and copy them.

The other side of that is that maybe that person is doing a lot of speaking

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and maybe you don't want to do a lot of speaking or you aren't in a position to. You have to realize that what works for them is not going to be the best fit for you. You do need to take yourself into account. How much time do you have? How much money do you have? What comes easily and naturally to you and what do you enjoy doing? I'm a writer, so I will guest blog until the cows come home because that's who I am, but I have to remind myself that I should be doing things other than guest blogging and I do. That's what comes easily and naturally to me so I am more likely to do that than I am to do something else.

Susan Friedmann: That's so true, because I gravitate to things that I enjoy doing and maybe that isn't ... I'm leaving some things out that I should do. Any event, I love the idea of saying that marketing your book is not a one-size-fits-all, which is perfect, because I say that and finding your natural reader, finding who that natural reader really is and where they hang out is excellent.

What's the best way for our listeners to contact you, Sandra? You've got such a wealth of information I'm sure they want to find out more.

Sandra Beckwith: Thank you. I always recommend that people subscribe to my free newsletter. It comes out once a week, every Wednesday morning. It always has lots of free tips and advice and discounts and all kinds of other great information. When you subscribe, you can also get a free copy of my favorite resource, my top 5 free book promotion resources. The way to get that and to get on the newsletter email list is just to go to BuildBookBuzz.com/gift. That's BuildBookBuzz.com/gift and to reach me by email, it's my first initials, SB, S as in Sandra, B as in Beckwith, [@BuildBookBuzz.com](mailto:sb@buildbookbuzz.com), sb@buildbookbuzz.com.

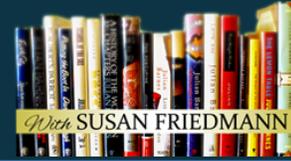
Susan Friedmann: If you could leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be, Sandra?

Sandra Beckwith: Ooh, I hope it's golden and not silver or bronze, but that nugget would be start looking into building an email list if you aren't doing it already. If you aren't doing it yet, you could be a little intimidated by it and what I'd like you to do if you aren't doing it yet, but even if you are, is start adding yourself to the email list of other people. The reason I suggest that is because there are lots of ways to handle email, and there are right ways and there are wrong ways and there are okay ways. In order for you to understand how you want to handle email for your books, it really helps to see how others are doing it.

Once you get on a lot of lists and start to study how other people do it, you start to form your own thoughts about what you're comfortable with and

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what might work for you based on what you know about your readers. Ease into it by lurking, by looking at what other people are doing, using that to guide your opinions, and then moving forward with the whole start your list process once you feel comfortable with the idea of how you will stay in touch with your fans.

Susan Friedmann: Thank you. Thank you for all that dynamite information, exciting as I knew it would be. Thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview and I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.