



Promote Yourself!

25 Ways to Promote Your Work, Whether You're an Artist, Author, or Small Publisher

By Patricia Fry

I've been writing and talking about book promotion for years. Every edition of the *SPAWN Market Update* includes tips and ideas for promoting your book. With or without my nagging, authors learn, at some point in their careers, that in order to sell their books, they must promote them. And as distasteful as promotion is to some of us, the truth is that those who promote, sell and those who don't, don't. It's as simple and as complicated as that. And this is also true for artists and crafters.

I've written books on promoting books, but whether you are promoting your art or a book, many concepts and specific activities are the same. So here's a guide with 25 tips that can help you turn your passion for art, crafting, or books into a more lucrative career.

Keep in mind, however, with these tips that I may be offering you a rose garden, but whether it flourishes or dies is up to you!

1. Set Goals

Do you know what you want to accomplish through your art or your writing? Do you want to see one of your paintings hung in the Smithsonian during your lifetime? Or would you be happy earning enough money through your art, crafts, photography or writing so that you can spend all of your days in creation mode? How much time can you carve out of your life for the sake of your art? And here's an important question that I'd like you to ponder: What are you willing to give up? Few worthwhile endeavors come without sacrifice.

Most artists and authors stay pretty closely attached to their comfort zones—rarely daring to step outside familiar territory. While there is some promotion that you can do from your cozy, safe place, most of the work necessary to reaching your goal comes with challenges. In order to succeed, you must stretch.

Keep in mind that the level of your achievements as a career artist or published author will be in direct alignment with your level of commitment.

2. Meet the Needs of Your Public

Successful artists continually work at their art. They keep seeking ways to improve. They keep learning. And they cater to their public. Rather than trying to sell something that people don't seem to want, they adapt. They find out what sells, they experiment and they take risks. This concept is a no-brainer, but it seems to escape those of us who are attached to our words and our art. Sometimes all that's necessary in order to turn a ho hum item into a popular one is a minor shift in design.

Maybe you can't get anyone to purchase your lovely get well cards. But when you add birthday greetings and blank notes to your line, sales pick up.

Perhaps your prints aren't selling, but when you design handmade frames for them and raise the price, you sell out at every art and craft show.

It may take some experimenting to discover what you can add successfully to the marketplace. Before you develop your definitive plan, attend local craft fairs and art shows or book festivals. Talk to the vendors and find out what's selling and what's not. Visit artists' and authors' Web sites and galleries.

I live in a touristy town and have noticed for years that anything with Ojai printed or painted or sewn on it and placed in stores frequented by tourists, will sell. This includes note cards with photographs of Ojai, small posters, calendars, tee shirts, paintings, pottery and, yes, my books on local history.

If you look long enough and think hard enough, you're bound to come up with something that people want and that you enjoy creating. Tap into the pet market, for example. Surely, you can sell your dramatic photographs or paintings of dogs, cats, birds and horses posing with unusual objects such as a piano, an old woody station wagon or wearing a variety of different hats, for example. Sell these delightful pieces at art shows and through galleries, of course. But also consider making them available at dog shows, pet shops and veterinarian offices.

Once you've decided on a medium and a topic, work on it diligently. Some professional artists paint (sculpt, craft, draw) every day—every single day. Constantly create.

3. Keep Promoting! (Your Mindset Matters)

One thing you will learn at some point as a career artist or author is that, in order to keep selling, you have to keep promoting. Those who believe that they can give their promotional efforts a lick and a promise are living a fantasy. Once you enter into the world of entrepreneurship, promotion will be part of your lifestyle forevermore.

Yes, you heard me right. Once you decide to sell your art, crafts or writings, you've become an entrepreneur. You've entered into a business. It is now necessary to act and think like a businessperson. And since, presumably, you don't have a storefront, you must create an aura of business everywhere you go. Think of the world as your marketplace and take advantage of all that it offers.

Here's the mindset you really should adopt.

- Talk about your art or book everywhere you go.
- Hand out brochures with examples of your work.

- Carry samples with you, if practical, and show them off.
- Schedule time slots each week for promotion.
- Try at least one new promotional activity each month.

4. Improve Your Skills

Artists and authors are generally good at what they do, but some are not very good at marketing/promotion. I tell authors, if you want to sell your books, you must improve your promotional skills. Artists can and should follow the same advice. Here are some ideas:

- Join a Toastmasters club in order to become more comfortable talking about your work.
- Write a sales pitch and memorize it so you'll be prepared when the opportunity arises.
- Network: Talk to other artists or authors to find out what sort of promotion works for them.
- Enroll in marketing seminars and/or hire a marketing consultant or publicist.
- Ask someone from the Small Business Administration to help you develop a business plan. It's free.

Maybe you have a friend who is an excellent promoter. Ask this person to work for you on commission. Or barter for the services that you need. Trade a painting for six hours of marketing consultation or promotion. Or trade housecleaning services to someone who's not afraid to make cold calls to galleries nationwide. Other services you might use in bartering for this work are art lessons, dog grooming and meal preparation, for example.

5. Get Noticed

In order to make sales, you must be noticed. Artists, like authors, love their work and prefer to spend all of their available hours writing/painting, etc. When you decide to become a career artist, however, you must leave the studio from time to time and go where you can get exposure for yourself and your art.

- Join art groups and associations and participate. (SPAWN is the perfect organization for both artists and authors.) <http://www.spawn.org>.
- Attend arts and craft shows, book signings, book fairs and mingle.
- Subscribe to artists' and authors' magazines and newsletters. (The newsletter from ArtBiz.com comes most highly recommended. <http://www.artbiz.com>.) The SPAWN Market Update, in the member area of the SPAWN website, keeps authors and artists informed on these issues.
- Visit artists' and authors' websites and study the message boards.
- Join the local Chamber of Commerce.
- Network, network, network.

Connect with another artist or crafter who has a similar or a complimentary product. Your handcrafted wooden wine rack would be compatible with hand-painted and decorated wine glasses. Your folk art paintings would be complimentary to decorative furniture.

6. Find a Buddy

Sometimes it's easier to work in tandem when you're involved in something rather foreign such as promotion. The two of you could become marketing buddies. You can brainstorm about ways to promote your products and share in the actual work. You could travel to shows and fairs together. You might stop at gift shops and other appropriate outlets along the way and see if you can arrange for some consignment agreements.

Promotional ideas don't normally come easily for those of us with an artistic bent. So I suggest that you be observant. What are other artists doing? What's selling and where? Study the way other artists display their arts and crafts. You can learn a lot by watching others. But I also want you to act on your own ideas.

A New York artist, Jenny Krasner, went out on a limb and tried something quite unconventional. She got tired of being an unknown starving artist and opened an art gallery on the street. Yes—she set up shop on a busy street corner in her town and she began to sell her art. In fact, she is no longer starving and no longer working her gig on the street. This wild and crazy activity created just the exposure and the buzz that she needed to jumpstart her career as an artist. What gave her the courage to do such a thing? As she said, “The worst that could happen was nothing and that was already happening.”

7. Tell Everyone!

Have you heard the phrase, *build it and they will come*? Well, this concept worked in the movie, but it is the wrong approach to selling books or artwork. The author's or artist's motto or mantra should be: *promote, promote, promote*.

Whether you've landed a big fish in the publishing industry or you decide to jump in and swim with the sharks, it is up to you to promote your work. No one will buy your wonderful book or art if they don't know about it. No one will know about it unless you tell them. And with so many books being published today and readership dwindling, competition is an obstacle that most hopeful authors fail to consider.

This is not to say that selling books or your art is impossible. On the contrary, it just takes creativity, time, energy and the willingness to step outside your comfort zone. A key to selling anything is letting people know it exists.

Let word of mouth drive sales. That is, *your* words coming from *your* mouth. Don't wait for others to start talking about your book. You create the buzz.

Talk about your book or what you do everywhere you go. Carry a copy of your book or photos of your artwork in your purse or briefcase. Place a carton of books in your trunk.

8. Donate Your Work

Have you ever been to a benefit auction? The objects that are auctioned off either at a silent or a live auction are given very good exposure. I recommend that you find out about some of the upcoming events to be held in your community and ask if they are seeking donations. Sometimes the items to be auctioned are publicized in the newspaper and/or included in a well-circulated catalog or on the organization's Web site.

9. Develop a Mailing List

Collect business cards from everyone you meet—especially those who express an interest in your art or books. Periodically, send out flyers, brochures and/or notices announcing an upcoming show or a new line of product. Never underestimate the value of a good mailing list.

If you're an illustrator, locate magazines and books that use art similar to yours. Contact the publishers with samples of your work and a resume. You might land some freelance work with several publishers.

10. Spin Off

Design a spin off—or a related item that you can sell along with your original product. Spin offs create greater opportunities for sales. Your specialty might be water color paintings. Have prints made, make note cards from your paintings, make Christmas tree ornaments or coffee mugs. Maybe you enjoy crafting and painting doll furniture, add birdhouses and just watch your sales increase.

11. Consign Your Work

Offer your art on consignment. Most artists dream of having their work hung in galleries nationwide. And this could happen for you. In the meantime, consider offering your paintings and other art objects for sale through appropriate retail outlets. This might include gift shops, pet stores, bookstores, Christian stores, kitchen stores and/or toy stores.

If you're a book author struggling to get noticed by bookstore owners, consignment is another possible way to get in.

12. Solicit the Indies—Independent Bookstores, Galleries, or Gift Stores

You might be surprised to know that there are still hundreds of independent bookstores around. What is an independent bookstore? It's independently operated. The owner does not have to answer to a big conglomerate. Show an indie owner that you can bring in customers and he or she will carry your book or note cards, for example. Like I said, be willing to leave your products on consignment. That can make the deal more attractive to a bookseller.

Approach booksellers in person. Visit those within your community, throughout your county and then up and down your state. Travel to nearby states for access to more independent bookstores. And always stop in to show off your book to booksellers whenever you're traveling.

Follow up in two ways—by doing your part to initiate sales in these areas and by checking back frequently with the store manager to monitor sales and payment.

13. Make Your Product More Salable

A man came to me once with his self-published book and asked, "Why won't bookstores carry my book?" At first glance, I could tell him several reasons. The book did not have an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) or a bar code. He had not filled out the Advance Book Information form (ABI) thus his book was not listed in *Books In Print* (the main directory through which booksellers order books). And the book had a comb binding. Bookstore owners and librarians are reluctant to stock comb bound and saddle stitched (stapled) books.

This man had also made another universal mistake. He wrote the book as a first step. I tell my clients, readers and audiences to always write a book proposal first. If you compile a complete,

honest and thorough book proposal before ever putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, you will produce a more salable book.

A book proposal is a business plan for your book and, whether you want to believe it or not, your book is a product. Learn more about writing a book proposal by reading, *How to Write a Successful Book Proposal in 8 Days or Less* (Matilija Press).

14. Talk It Up

Arrange speaking engagements. Go out and talk to civic group members, at conferences related to the subject of your book and at writing/publishing conferences. Appropriate venues for your talks might include libraries, schools, churches, synagogues, senior centers, specialty stores and/or businesses for example.

If you have a book on ADHD, you might get gigs at medical conventions and PTA meetings. Schedule talks about your Civil War novel at Daughters of the American Revolution and historical society meetings as well as museums. Promote your book on business management through presentations at corporations, businesses conventions and so forth. If you're an artist, teach classes to show people how you do what you do.

15. Carry Your Message Far and Wide

Arrange book signings and presentations throughout the U.S. Coordinate these with your visit to family in Colorado, your vacation on the east coast and your spouse's business meeting to the northwest. Independent bookstores are usually open to book signings. If you can't get into a bookstore, solicit specialty stores related to your book, coffee houses or other venues.

Before arriving for the event, arrange for a spot on a local talk radio or TV show. Alert at least one bookstore in this city to the fact that you are coming and that you will be promoting your book through radio station XYZ, for example. Knowing this, they will most likely take some of your books on consignment.

Be sure to get newspaper publicity for your presentation. Send press releases to all local newspapers at least 2 ½ weeks prior to your visit and follow up with phone calls.

Visit other bookstores while in the area to see if you can place books with them. If you have managed good coverage for your talk and good publicity for your book, they will probably agree to stock your books.

Produce an interesting, informative, entertaining newsletter. Use it to promote your book, of course, while also giving your readers something of value. How many times have you been told that you must give in order to receive? It's true in book promotion, too. Ask potential customers to request your book directly from bookstores in their areas. As your subscriber list grows, so will your book sales.

16. Get Exposure

Maybe your bank has a rotating art display. Find out what it takes to have your art accepted for display there. Approach corporation and hospital administrators and offer paintings for their lobbies. One pizza parlor in my town hangs photographs by local photographers. And they sell, too. Some cities have money earmarked for art displayed on city property. Inquire at your city hall and see what opportunities are available and how to participate.

17. Get Involved

Start an art appreciation project for your city or lobby to have an art element added to a project that's in the works. This is just one excellent way to build name recognition.

18. Send Press Releases

Send press releases to magazines and newspapers. If you don't have news, make news. Start an art class for homeless kids. Present a workshop for local seniors. Or expand on your talents by adding teaching to your resume. You'll earn money while getting your name and your art out there.

Research newspapers through www.newspaperlinks.com, www.newspapers.com or www.onlinenewspapers.com. Locate columns related to your book topic: cooking, pets, education, fashion, crafts, business, seniors, finance or home and garden, for example. If you've written a novel or historical account set in a particular region, contact newspapers in that geographic area.

19. Write Articles

Write articles for magazines and newsletters. Surely, you can write on some of the techniques you use with your art or a phenomenal new marketing idea that has worked for you. Write about what art means to you or even profile other artists and include your bio at the end. Sell your idea to a magazine, get exposure for your work and earn a little money while you're at it.

Locate appropriate magazines to contact through *Writer's Market*, writersmarket.com or woodenhorsepub.com.

Gale's Directory of Publications lists newsletters whose editors are hungry for new about books such as yours.

20. Make Your Own News!

Make news by doing something noteworthy. Start a charity related to your topic, head up an unusual project and involve hundreds of people or attempt a difficult fete and challenge others to participate. Create stories worth reporting and then send press releases to appropriate media.

Newspaper stories, articles and interviews sell books. If you can get even just one newspaper in each state to run a story about you or to review your book, you could conceivably attract thousands of customers. If your book is listed in *Books in Print*, every bookstore everywhere can order it for their customers who request it.

21. Explore Catalog Sales

Find catalogs that are conducive to your art and contact them about including your paintings or other items. Here's when it comes in handy to capitalize on your most well-received technique or painting. Transfer this painting or a series of paintings onto coffee mugs and coasters. I mean, how famous is the mad blue bird? You see it on all sorts of items and it's always advertised in catalogs.

22. Continue Researching, Studying and Experimenting

When you hit on something that works, build on it. When it isn't working, alter it. It is hard to make it as an artist, but it is not impossible. In fact, art is big business. I wrote an article a few years ago featuring Cheri Blum, Suzan Riggsbee and Joy Marie Heimsoth. All of these artists

have licensed their art to companies who create various items from their designs. All you need in order to become licensed is talent, an endless supply of artwork, excellent promotional skills and a good licensing firm such as Wild Apple Licensing www.wildapple.com or C.P. Licensing Corp. at www.cplicensing.com

23. Explore More Resources

Here are a few resources for working artists and crafters:

www.artistresource.org

www.artbiz.com

www.artbusiness.com

www.craftmarketer.com

24. Understand What Success Means to You

What does it take to become a success through your art? One photographer says it is promotion, promotion, promotion. He suggests starting at home. Join local organizations and get involved in community events. He says, “By putting yourself out there in a positive way, you’re opening up opportunities to promote yourself and you’ll be surprised at how this can sometimes lead to newspaper publicity.”

For one artist, becoming successful means taking risks. She says, “You must be willing to fail—to be rejected and then to start again.”

Think about what success means to you. You don't have to be Picasso to be satisfied with your creative works and the sales you make.

25. Read Market Update Every Month!

At SPAWN, every month we try to go "above and beyond" to bring you opportunities, resources and information you need to market your creative works. Whether you are trying to establish a freelance writing business, you want to see some of your fiction in print, you need book promotion ideas, you're looking for a publisher, you are showing a screenplay around, you want to sell your art or photographs or you just crave a better understanding of the whole publishing scene, the SPAWN Market Update has something for you!

If you're not a member of SPAWN yet, consider joining and seeing all the great benefits you can receive! Vist www.spawn.org to find out more!

About the Author

Patricia Fry is the executive director of SPAWN (Small Publishers, Artists and Writers Network) www.spawn.org and the author of 29 books. Read her hallmark book “The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book,” revised 2nd edition. <http://www.matilijapress.com/rightway.html> If you are struggling to promote a book, order Patricia’s newest ebook, “The Author’s Repair Kit.” http://www.matilijapress.com/author_repairkit.html. Visit her informative publishing blog often at <http://www.matilijapress.com/publishingblog>