

9 Steps to Hosting a Book Launch Party

Follow these 9 steps to host an event that will launch your book on the path to success.

by LELA DAVIDSON

It's a fact: An outstanding book launch party can attract publicity, engage readers and drive sales. My self-published book, *Blacklisted From the PTA*, debuted last year in, of all places, a trendy hotel bar. Music bumped, stilettos clicked, and I signed books for two hours straight to push launch-period sales over 500 copies—not bad for a self-published title. In the following weeks, I sold enough books to break even. Whether you're calling all the shots on your indie book or working with a publisher to promote your release, the secret is the same: shifting into sales mode to create a memorable and profitable book launch. Here's how to do it.

1. Set measurable objectives.

A launch party is more than a celebration. It's an important component of a book's business plan. So before you print those invitations, ask for input from trusted advisers (published authors, event planners, business-savvy pals) who can see your project objectively. Work to create concrete strategies for a launch that will not only attract guests, but entice them to spread the word about your book. You want to give would-be readers a reason to show up and give them something to talk about. Set targets for attendance, sales and media impressions—targets that are realistic based on your reach and topic, but ambitious enough to make the event worth your while.

2. Connect book, event and audience.

Aim for your launch party to feature a fun spin on your topic that will appeal to your target readers.

My audience consists of moms who need a break from family and community obligations. Playing off the book's cover image of a stiletto

and shopping cart, we planned a girls'-night-out experience complete with VIP nightclub passes and PTA Pinkitini drink specials. The night of the party, my closest girlfriends helped set the tone in matching hot-pink heels.

3. Employ the social network.

Word of mouth sells, one mouth (or keyboard) at a time. Social media engages and empowers your supporters. To drive attendance at tour stops for her latest book, *MOM, Incorporated*, Aliza Sherman used her online networks to spread the word to friends and followers in cities across the country. This drove attendance at each stop. Don't be afraid to come on strong during the time surrounding your launch. Too much is just enough.

4. Court local media.

Book publicist Jocelyn Kelley says the keys to traditional media coverage are newsworthiness and a unique angle. So take the distinctive concept you've developed to connect your event to your book and audience, and write a simple press release about the upcoming launch party and your new book. Then, send it to newspapers, TV and radio stations, magazines and other media in your area. Your hometown press loves a good local success story—and the event will give your book a nice newsworthy hook.

5. Create a fun atmosphere.

Guests at my launch party got a chance to snap photos in and around a shopping cart like the one on the cover of the book. Then they posted those photos—scores of them—on Facebook. Would fans of your international thriller don spy gear and ham it up in front of a poster of Venice? Would your audience of shameless romantics strike bodice-ripper poses with a hunky model? Tying the theme of your book to an interactive experience at your event will create unforgettable photo opportunities people are excited to share—and if a picture is worth a thousand words, exponentially more word-of-mouth about your book will follow.

6. Offer incentives.

The night of the launch, we covered the sales tax and gave price breaks for multi-copy sales. We also provided door prizes and party favors—false eyelashes and artificial fingernails—to tie in with the night-out theme. All the swag was donated by vendors who share the book's target market—women who want to have fun. Getting the goodies wasn't dif-

difficult; we posted a request on Facebook. You can also visit small businesses and boutiques in person to invite them to participate.

7. Make buying easy.

Make it convenient for your guests to buy your book. Think through the logistics of accepting all payment methods. Have ample cash on hand to make change, and check out the low-cost options for accepting credit cards. At my launch we used Square, a free reader that can process credit cards on an iPhone. Also, be sure to make it clear that your book is available everywhere your audience might want it—in stores, online and in person.

8. Rally your party guests.

Your supporters might want to help you out, but often don't know how. We set up computers and posted signs around the party, asking guests to do specific things like post a review on Amazon, send an e-mail to a friend and mention the book on social networks. Once they got home, we reminded them again via e-mail, a newsletter and social media.

9. Go virtual.

If you don't have the time/resources to hold a physical event, or if you want to pair your launch party with an online component, it's easy to host a virtual launch. Author and writing teacher Christina Katz' readers are scattered all over the world. For her new title *The Writer's Workout* (WD Books), she plans to stage a global online launch. "Instead of a party happening at a concrete time of day, my online book launch will run for 24 hours," she says. Katz will offer mini-classes in a backstage, password-protected area of her website during the launch party period. Book purchasers can participate, regardless of physical location.

Once you've launched, your real work has begun. Sherman encourages authors to go back to social networks and feature everything they can from launch events. "A book is no longer just a book," she says, "but a community builder." Use photos, videos and anything else at your disposal to continue the dialogue with your audience as your book begins to thrive.