SPREADING THE WORD
by Sage Cohen

THE PRODUCTIVE WRITER PROMOTES EFFECTIVELY BY:

• Having a presence online where you can be easily found.

• Establishing and nurturing a vibrant social network for communicating and collaborating with people in your field.

• Reaching out regularly to the audiences who will benefit from what you are offering.

• Sending respectful, clear messages designed to offer value to the people receiving them.

• Creating a daily rhythm for moving toward big-picture goals.

• Having press kit material templates on hand.

If people don’t know who you are or what you’re doing, they are unlikely to read what you write, hire you, or seek out your expertise. That’s why The Productive Writer communicates regularly with interested audiences, clients, prospects, and media to offer them news of her appearances, publications, classes, services, and other offerings.

Many creative writers imagine self-promotion to be an obnoxious bogeyman; they confess this to me under their breath, as if even the word promotion were a dirty one. My experience has been the opposite. Self-promotion can be friendly and fun, and it offers a meaningful opportunity to connect with people who are excited about what excites you. It’s a way to make the leap from monologue (writing life) to dialogue (public life). And every writer preparing for success has to make that leap at some point. So why not now, on your own terms?

Effective, sustainable promotion happens when you establish foundational systems that can be easily repeated, and then modified over time and for specific purposes. Are you more of a “wizard behind the curtain” type of promoter? No problem. With all of the communication forums available to you in the online world, you can have your quiet, authentic life while simultaneously being in the (virtual) public eye.

Following are the basic tools you’ll want to have at your fingertips to make you more visible, more professional, and more memorable.
STOCKING YOUR ARSENAL

Whether you are a creative writer promoting appearances and publications or a business writer promoting your services to potential clients, you’ll want to have some basic promotional tools in place and at the ready for when it’s time to spread the word. The general idea is that you have a presence online where you can be easily found, a well-established social network for communicating and collaborating with people in your field, and systems in place for reaching the audiences who will benefit from what you are offering. These are today’s tools of the trade that can help take you there:

- **FULLY ARTICULATED (AND NAMED) PLATFORM.**

- **WEBSITE:** An online “shingle” where you share your expertise, credentials, services, and offerings. It should give readers an authentic sense of your voice and spirit.

- **BLOG:** A flexible and interactive website that allows you to post regular entries and generate community conversation through comments. You can use a blog as a forum for reinforcing your expertise by sharing your work and wisdom regularly.

- **MAILING LIST:** A list of people who have given you their contact information so you can keep them in the loop about your activities.

- **MEDIA LIST:** Contact information for publications, websites, and blogs that report on your area of expertise. List can be segmented by geography and market type as it grows over time.

- **PRESS KIT.**

- **FACEBOOK:** Connect with colleagues, students, and friends in a social forum where you can share knowledge, resources, offers, and opportunities targeted to the interests and needs of your audience. Your presence here will ideally be integrated both with who you are, your public image as a writer, and your platform(s).

- **TWITTER:** Like Facebook, but in the space of a thimble.

- **LINKEDIN:** Keep your profile current with a résumé and latest accomplishments so colleagues can stay appraised of your experience and expertise. Keep in touch with people and exchange authentic testimonials to help paint a personal picture of your results and spirit. Stay engaged with the changes and successes of peers you would like to
continue to work with in the future.

Have these in place? Good! A daily rhythm of just fifteen minutes a day can create a momentum of communication that grows your visibility and your reputation. Concerned about balancing the mix of writing and social media? You should be!

GROWING A CONTACT LIST: WHY AND HOW
Your contact list is the lifeblood of your promotion efforts. The more you can keep in touch with people in a way that offers them real value, at reasonable intervals, the more likely you are to establish mutually beneficial long-term relationships. Here some tips for growing yours.

MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO JOIN
Offer an easy way for folks to sign up to receive information from you online. You can do this on your blog or website with an autoresponder—software that allows you to collect contact information automatically. Viewers will see an invitation to “join my mailing list” and a field for entering their e-mail address; when they do, their information will be added to your contact database. (Autoresponders also make it easy to craft personalized e-mails that look good, and they can be scheduled in advance and measured to see if they’re connecting with readers.)

GROUP YOUR CONTACTS BY TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP
General messages about what you’re doing may actually hurt your relationships and your image. You may not want to share the news of your story just published in Mothering or Playboy with your contacts in high-tech marketing departments. And you don’t need to alert people who subscribe to your poetry zine (from all over the world) about the marketing copy class you’re offering businesses in your hometown.

The simple rule is: Give people what they want, and they’re far more likely to stick around. The more specific you can be about what you’re saying to whom, the more people are going to pay attention. You can prepare for these relevant communications by developing targeted sublists of contacts that reflect various interest groups. Here are a few examples from my own contact database:

• SAGE BELIEVERS: People who know and love me, who don’t necessarily give a hoot about the stuff I write about but are happy to hear my good news.

• CURRENT STUDENTS: These are grouped by class.
• PAST STUDENTS: These are grouped by type of class, so I can continue to send pertinent information to each group about publishing opportunities, inspiring information, and new classes offered.

• MEDIA (BY LOCALE/REGION): Contacts to whom I send press releases about events or offerings that are relevant to their audiences.

• READING SERIES FOLKS: People who have signed up to receive announcements about the monthly reading series I host.

• POETRY PEOPLE: People I know through my poetry teaching, lecturing, and community building—both peers and colleagues.

• WRITING COLLEAGUES: These are people in my creative community I exchange wisdom and ideas with.

• WTLP ZINE: People who have signed up specifically to receive my free monthly Writing the Life Poetic zine.

• BIZ COLLEAGUES: People I work with (and have worked with) in my day job as a marketing communications writer.

• PROSPECTS: Any people or organizations I am building relationships with but who are not yet clients or colleagues.

Know why you are communicating with each group and the value you have to offer them. Make sure your message is specific and relevant for readers, providing the information they have requested.

The purpose of communicating with groups of people is to offer something of value that they specifically requested to receive. When you send them this information, they will be reminded of how fabulous you are. And when they next think of [insert your area of passion/expertise here], you will likely come to mind.

If you want them to buy something from you or take some specific action, show them why or how this choice will benefit them. And make it easy for them to do what you are asking.

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TO GROUPS**

**RESPECTING PRIVACY**

• Always use a bcc function to ensure privacy for group sends. No one appreciates seeing their name on an e-mail that was distributed to eight hundred people. In fact, such a mistake will guarantee people opting out of your list.
• Make sure that there is no way for a recipient to Reply All—ever. Some e-mail group administration services seem to default to this option. I recently experienced absolute anarchy when someone sent a personal note to a musician whose list I subscribe to. This triggered hundreds of angry people in a chain reaction, sending e-mails to the entire list saying they wanted to be removed. You don’t want to make your mailing list angry. So don’t give subscribers access to each other.

OFFERING AN OPT-OUT OPTION
Not everyone who is on your list today is going to want to hear from you forever. Give people an easy out. If you use an e-mail marketing service like ConstantContact.com, folks can simply use the link at the bottom of every e-mail you send to unsubscribe themselves from your list.

DON’T WEAR OUT YOUR WELCOME
Use restraint when communicating with your peeps. Offer information that is useful, meaningful, timely, informative, or inspiring, and honor any communication time intervals you have promised.

MEASURE AND MODIFY
If you’re using a service like ConstantContact.com, you can track opens and click-throughs for each communication you send. This will help you know what people are responding to and what they’re not. You can modify messaging based on the results you’re getting.

THE PRESTO PRESS KIT
A press kit is a composite of the information and images you share with the press to make it easy for a journalist to tell your story. You share it when you have something specific and newsworthy to offer, with the intention of having this news made public by someone other than you.

If you have all of the pieces of your press kit in good working order, you can respond to opportunities as they arise. Following are the components I recommend that you develop and make easily accessible:

PRESS KIT ESSENTIALS
• A PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE for telling a particular story that can get versioned per event, location, publication, region, or theme. The main point of the press release is to communicate with clarity: who you are, what you are offering right now, for which audiences, and why those audiences should be excited about it.
- LATEST BIO. Includes key publications, recognition, awards, community service, and biographical information that relates to your writing/author identity. Sometimes bios include personal information about the writer's/author's family and where he lives. This is a personal choice. Update regularly either once a month or each time you have a significant change in status to add.

- PROFESSIONAL AUTHOR PHOTO. One high-res and one low-res version ready to go.

- BOOK COVER IMAGE. One high-res and one low-res version.

- COPIES (OR CLIPS) OF ALL INTERVIEWS, REVIEWS, FEATURES, AND MENTIONS OF YOU AND YOUR WORK. Make these available via links or downloadable PDFs whenever possible, and keep hard-copy clips for publications that prefer this option.

- SAMPLE(S) OF YOUR WORK. Keep clips of published pieces of work, both digital and hard copy.

- ATTRACTIVE FOLDER. (When sending the press kit via snail mail.)

NICE TO HAVE SOMEDAY

- VIRTUAL INTRODUCTION. YouTube clips or podcasts featuring you reading, lecturing, teaching, or presenting to an audience.

- BOOK (OR PROJECT) VIDEO TRAILER. Give people a multimedia experience of your book and you. This is a fun way to establish a little intrigue about your work and get folks excited to learn more.

   To keep things simple you can provide all of media kit components on a single page on your website. This allows you to send a press release in the body of an e-mail, and simply link to your media page for the rest. You should also keep a well-organized supply of hard-copy materials (clips, interviews, and publicity) on hand to include in press kits that you send by snail mail. These will also come in handy if you are applying for grants, scholarships, residencies, or funding.

THE PRODUCTIVE PROMOTION CHECKLIST

As you go, make note of the strategies, materials, and communications that seem most effective, as well as the ones that don’t. Note what worked, and how you’ll continue this momentum.

Visit WritersDigest.com/article/productive-writer-downloads for a
productive promotion checklist template.