

Successful Booksignings

by Leigh Bale

www.LeighBale.com

You've sold a book. Bravo! But the hard work isn't finished. Marketing your book can be time consuming and costly. Booksignings are a great way to sell your book and meet new readers without spending a lot of money on marketing. Approximately 5-6 months prior to the release of your new book, you will want to begin the process of setting up a booksigning. Outlined below are a few suggestions and pointers gleaned from my own experience and also from other veteran authors. Use what works for you and create your own techniques.

Approaching booksellers

Dress and act professionally when you approach the manager of a bookstore. Remember, this is the “business side” of your writing career. Take business cards and bookmarks along with you. Be polite even if they aren't. Don't be upset if the bookseller asks you for your picture ID to prove you really are the author. Booksellers can make or break your book. Remember they have the power to pull your book off their shelves!

Organization

a. Three months before your book is released, make a list of bookstores and distributors in your area who will carry your book. Call to find out who the managers, assistant manager, or head of the genre you are writing for. Then, go in to the store and pay them a visit to see about setting up a date and time for a booksigning, whether they will order extra copies of your book for you to sticker and sign, etc. Don't forget to take some bookmarks and business cards along.

b. Start making a mailing list of people to notify about your booksigning. Include everyone on it you ever met since you were born. Christmas lists, people in your congregation, former employers and co-workers, your dentist and hair dresser, your husband's second cousin in Detroit, etc.

c. Consider having a booksigning with a published friend. More authors can pull in more people to buy books. Booksellers will love this. BUT signings with multiple authors can also backfire on you. If your published friend is outgoing and you are more reserved, your friend may sell lots of books while you sell few. If you are a wall flower, consider having a stout talk with yourself about being outgoing just for your booksigning. Remember this is a business and you want to sell the books you worked so hard to write.

d. Re-think having a booksigning in a shopping mall. Sometimes they are successful, sometimes they are not. Ask friends who may have already held a signing at your local shopping mall if it worked well for them. Many times shoppers are so busy heading for the dress store that they don't want to stop at a booksigning. Of course, my most successful signing was...you guessed it. In a shopping mall! Check with other possible sources, including Wal Mart, Grocery Stores, and bookstores not associated with a shopping mall. A busy store often provides lots of traffic to

your signing table!

e. No matter how tempting, do not hand out early copies of your book to friends and family even if you can. Tell them they can get a copy of your book at your signing. Then, they will be more likely to show up and help create a bigger success for your booksigning, which will also please the manager of the bookstore.

f. Three months before your book is released, order "autographed copy" stickers. Readers love having this little seal on the front cover of a book you have signed for them. It makes the book more special to them, and you want readers to remember your name so they'll buy your next book.

g. Three months before your book is released, order or create bookmarks to include with your book. Be sure to sign the bookmark. People are less likely to throw away things that have been autographed by the author.

h. Have a number of publicity photos prepared to attach to the display signs and be sure to collect them and/or provide SASE's for their return before you leave the booksigning. They are expensive, so you won't want to abandon them.

Selling the idea of a Booksigning to Booksellers and Distributors

a. Be confident! Be professional! When you meet with booksellers, dress appropriately. They'll soon respect you for your professional behavior and be more willing to work with you in the future.

b. Booksellers love to hear that you are a local author and/or the setting of your story is local. Mention any bookmarks you are planning to include in your booksigning or other giveaway items and goodies you will provide. Make the booksigning as easy and painless for the bookseller as possible so they will be more willing to invite you in.

c. If your book is coming out on Mother's Day, Valentines, Christmas, or another special holiday and your story has a special theme, be sure to mention that to the bookseller. If it's in the month of December, have a sign prepared to sit on the table that says, "Great Christmas gifts!" (Look for fun ways to draw attention to your signing table without coming across as wierd.)

d. Ask the bookseller if they have a reader mailing list. Some stores like to personally invite their readers to signings and it's at their expense! Other stores make up fliers, which they hand out to customers. This is free publicity for you. If you teach writing workshops, be sure to mention that as it adds appeal to readers. Maybe a reader will invite you to speak to their church group, women's organization, or library reading club. If the store will be sending out a newsletter, suggest they include a sentence like, "If you can't make it to the booksigning, we would be happy to take your personal order by phone for an autographed copy."

e. Contact local papers, radio stations and TV talk shows to promote your name and mention your upcoming booksigning event. Be sure to stress anything local about your book; i.e. the

setting, inspiration for your plot, etc. Also, if there is something else interesting about your story, be sure to mention it. My first book dealt with a child suffering from an inoperable brain tumor and I happened to have a daughter who is currently the top child in the world for survivorship of her type of brain tumor. I mentioned this connection and the fact that the setting for my book was right in my home town. Give the newspaper and TV program a reason viewers/readers will be interested in your book. Don't forget to include a Media Press Kit, too.

f. Once your booksignings are scheduled, prepare fliers or a mailing postcard to send out to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people in your congregation, your writer's group, etc. Carry these in your car and purse so you have them on hand. (Note: Don't have hurt feelings if someone from your writer's group doesn't show up for your signing. They may be busy that day and buy a copy of your book later. Always carry extra copies of your book to meetings for those people who forgot or were too busy to buy one, but would like a copy now.) AND you can offer to pick up a book for any friends or family members who can't make it to the signing, but they want your book. This will boost your sales.

Setting Up the Booksigning

a. Ask the manager of the bookstore when the largest romance readership shows up at their store to buy books. Saturday is usually a great day to sign in a mall or grocery store, and an all-day event (10am-4pm) will result in higher sales. Yes, it can be boring, unless you stand up and greet people and become interactive in selling your book. Don't just sit there!!! By all means, get involved! Friday and Thursday nights can also work well. If a store suggests a lunchtime signing, do it. If you sell twenty books, you're doing great! Even if you only sell a handful of books, you've reached some new readers and your name recognition will grow. Maybe your second book will sell better. Who knows? No matter what, be gracious and professional during all steps involved in your booksigning.

b. Ask your bookseller if you will need to plan on handling money for the purchase of your books. This is not preferable since it looks rather tacky. If this happens to you, be gracious and bring an attractive container to hold change. (Leave the old metal box at home. Remember, look professional and nice at all times.)

c. Tell your bookseller that you'll arrive a half-hour before the signing to set up and you'll stay late if sales are going well. Remember, you want to sell books. Don't dash out the door if you still have people standing in line.

d. Be sure to have your signing table out front of the store so you can make eye contact with readers. This is no time to be a wall flower! You've written a beautiful book, so force yourself to be outgoing and sell it! If sales are lagging, then stand up, smile, and greet people as they walk by. Come on, you can do it!

e. Ask for a skirt to be put on the table. If the bookseller doesn't have one, go buy one at a party store or Wal Mart. You can color coordinate it with the cover of your book. (And you don't want readers looking at your ugly boxes tucked under the table or your feet.)

f. Your bookseller should know how many copies of your book to order, but it could be the first one they've done. Too many books will look intimidating. Too few books will look pathetic. Between 30-40 books is a good, round number. It's doable. If you have any books leftover, be sure to autograph and sticker them so the bookseller can sell them later. It's also a good idea to have an extra stack of books tucked away in your car in case your bookseller runs out. Send your spouse or sister out to the car to retrieve them.

g. Be careful not to spend so much time talking to the bookseller and their staff that you aren't making eye contact and smiling at readers coming into the store. Explain beforehand to the staff that you hope they won't think you are rude if you suddenly look away from them or start talking with a reader. They usually understand you are there to sell books and must not neglect the buyers.

h. Listen to your bookseller's ideas. People like giveaways and, if there is food involved, readers will come and browse. So, include a goodie tray at your signing, and ask your mother or spouse to keep it filled. Crumbs never look inviting and you can usually freeze the leftovers.

i. As readers line up to buy your book, have them put their name, email and address on a paper for a drawing. (You could have a friend or family member offer this to people while you sign the books.) Then, at the end of your booksigning, have the bookseller draw out a name to win a pretty basket filled with your books, a bookmark, a box of chocolates, bath salts, a candle, etc. This not only draws readers in, but it also gives you a list of people who can now be added to your newsletter/ mailing list for future books.

Your Presentation

a. Readers expect a novelist to have a certain image. Many readers have the misconception that writers are filthy rich and live a charmed life. The fact that your book has been deemed worthy of being marketed by a publisher is a tremendous achievement. Use these preconceptions to your advantage by dressing the part, depending on the tone and genre of your book. Dress nicely and have an attractive display on your table. Include a big poster with the cover of your book, flowers, bookmarks, and a nice pile of your books and gold "autographed copy" stickers, and a basket of candy or tray of cookies to hand out. If you don't have a big poster, get a clear, plastic stand from an office supply store and print off a nice, color copy of your book cover to sit on the table. Smile and chat with people. If you don't know what to say to these strangers, and you're frightened out of your wits, prepare a list of comments before the signing and memorize them. Ask questions such as: "What kinds of books do you like to read?" (If your book is a romance and they like to read action books, point out that your book has a very compelling story with a lot of action in it.) "Are you from this town? The setting of my story is here also."

b. Choose booksigning outfits that will set you apart and draw attention to you in a nice way. Yes, most authors prefer working alone in their office while wearing their fuzzy slippers, but now you need to be in the spotlight. At a booksigning, you are a professional and need to ensure your hair, makeup, nails and clothing are the best they can be. Don't forget, your appearance will be forever in the memories of those readers who buy your book. And you want them to buy your second book, and your third. Get a manicure. People look at your hands while you're signing

books.

c. Don't use cardboard boxes to carry all your supplies to your booksigning. You can purchase attractive, inexpensive containers with lids from Wal Mart. Pick some colorful gift bags or an attractive basket with ribbon for the drawing you plan at the end of your signing.

d. Get a nice pen to sign with. It's all about image. Carry a few extra "autographed copy" stickers in your purse just in case someone asks for a last minute autograph of your book.

e. Be sure to include "local author" on your author bio. Readers love to know the book they just bought was written by someone living right there in their home town. It makes the book more special to them to imagine their ho-hum city has a genuine author living there.

The Signing Table

a. Remember we already discussed asking the bookseller if they have a skirt for the table? You better also ask if they have a table. If not, tell the bookseller not to worry about it; you will bring something just in case. This is why you arrive half-an-hour early for your signing ... to ensure everything is ready. But don't rely on the bookseller to have everything you need. Plan just in case. Your bookseller will be both relieved and impressed with your organization and more likely to invite you back for your next book.

b. If you don't like the bookseller's faded tablecloth, just whip yours out of your bag. Don't forget to bring some tape and scissors in case you need them, too.

c. For very little money, you can purchase small leaves to trim little baskets for the candy and bookmarks, or whatever else you might be offering as a giveaway. Depending on the tone of your book and the time of year you are signing, you can decorate your table around a "theme." For instance, if you are signing in February, a Valentines theme might work well. If you are signing in December, ribbons and bows might help people get in the mood to buy your book. Be creative without being weird.

Enjoy your success!