

Special Report

TEN SECRETS ABOUT GETTING BIG ADVANCES FOR YOUR BOOK



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By Vickie K. Sullivan, President Sullivan Speaker Services Inc.

Want to know the inside scoop on getting a big advance for your next book? Below are secrets that Vickie uses when helping her client get big advances for their non-fiction books:

1. It's not about your story.

You've gone through a traumatic experience. After much pain and hard work, you're ready to help others by telling your story and share the lessons learned. Should you center your potential best-selling book on this story? Only if you are a celebrity or a "FOO" (Friend of Oprah.)

Many authors believe that their "rags to riches" story is enough to not only generate interest from a publisher but also to create an empire of speaking, big-advance books and movie deals. The reality: the indomitable human spirit is alive and well in the publishing business. That means publishers have access to very compelling stories of triumph. They've heard a lot of them, so don't bet the farm that your story will be seen as unique.

2. There are new players in the publishing business.

Have you noticed how many executives from successful companies are writing books? How many celebrities have books in the bookstores? Corporate America and Hollywood have also caught the publishing bug. Top executives are hiring ghostwriters and hitting the speaking circuit to position their companies as market leaders. PR firms are making larger retainers by delivering the gigs and publicizing the books. Everybody is happy.

Bottom line: some of your competitors have more resources, more help and more visibility. This is not necessarily bad (remember who won in the David vs. Goliath battle.) Solution: start looking at non-traditional ways you can create a built-in audience.

Key Strategy

Is this bad news? Not if you have these three secret weapons: 1) a steady stream of market intelligence to point out hidden opportunities to create your platform; 2) an objective assessment of your background and book so you have a "lay of the land" and next steps to getting that big advance; and, 3) a systematic approach to getting speaking engagements in front of audiences that can buy your books.

3. Built-in audiences create built-in book sales.

Let's face it: selling books has become more difficult in recent years. Even though the industry had robust sales during the 2003 holidays, adult mass market books are down from last year. And the impact of media has changed too: a Today Show booking in the past could land your book on the bestseller list. Now it's only a spike in sales. An Oprah booking could make you a bona fide phenomenon, now it's a longer spike in sales but far from a sure career-maker. What can an author do to counteract these disappointing trends? Show agents and publishers that sales are already waiting for the book.

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One of the best ways to create demand (and a big advance) is with a substantial speaking calendar. Authors who speak show the market that their ideas are already popular. Their speeches create a platform that results in built-in buyers. This platform makes the book just another “plug and play” element of their empire.

4. Books that are orphans starve to death.

In the good old days, writing a great book was enough. Not anymore. Books that get big advances are now a part of an overall platform in order to create market momentum in many different areas, such as professional service and product sales, media and speaking.

The new role for books is similar to that of a family member: independent yet contributes to an overall platform. Current business models use books to generate interest for other areas, and use other areas to generate interest in books. Bottom line: without a support network for ongoing sales, books by themselves can face slow, painful starvation.

Key Strategy

Two things will help you build a platform that supports your books: 1) package your expertise so that you are seen as a “thought leader”; and, 2) go beyond standard book topics to develop your “manifesto” that can be applied in many ways.

5. “Non-author” authors have glutted the marketplace.

Experts who write books to develop media credibility and to promote their product/service have exploded into the marketplace in recent years. And with good reason, as writing books can transform an ordinary expert into a “guru”. The bad news: a glut of titles has desensitized the marketplace, creating the illusion that anyone can write a book. And that not all books are good ones.

Smart authors will respond to this dynamic by using their book as a cornerstone to promote an overall “manifesto”, showing the marketplace that brilliant thinking and insights can trump “pseudo-authors” with overdone content any day.

6. Traditional book-signing schedules are still around but not as effective. A more popular alternative: book signing sessions after giving a speech.

In the good old days, book stores would drive sales by inviting authors to book signing events. Now, book giants such as Barnes and Noble will set up shop in hotels and conference centers, where authors give keynote addresses to thousands of people. An hour later, the “bookstore” will be swamped with customers lining up for an autographed copy.

How to find the best speaking venues and what makes those audiences buy the most books? Savvy authors use ongoing market intelligence to determine where the best sales are -- and get there first with unique solutions. It's all about being there before your competition ...

7. The author and publisher as partners (well, kind of.)

Think that when a publisher picks up your book, your work is done after the galleys are returned? Think again. Publishers know that they can't do all the heavy lifting of sales, and they expect the author to help with promotion and sales. Publishers are struggling to find new markets, new ways to sell and you need to be the provider of that info. Unfortunately, this can be surprisingly difficult for authors who don't have access to the media or the marketplace.

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The reality of the situation: authors have a bigger stake in the book than the publisher. For authors, big sales of their current book can lead to a big advance for the next. For publishers, it's a three-month push then on to the next title if sales don't take off. Smart authors will see the stake they have and elevate themselves to the level of marketer and salesperson by not only being available to help publishers promote, but by handing them ideas they've never thought of before.

8. The bigger the rolodex, the bigger the advance.

Agents and publishers like authors who have access to advocates. Famous advocates who are willing to write forwards or testimonials are golden in the game of getting big advances.

Many authors are surprised by the power of leverage...the power that access can provide. How do authors get that access? By reaching out and getting outside help from others who have the access. Be aware: there may be times that you have to pay to play. This can be a test to see how serious you are about being a big advance author.

Key Strategy

Market changes have created a whole new game for an author's role in selling books. There is a specific language that telegraphs to the agents and publishers "I'm serious about becoming a best-selling author". Authors who don't know this game will be ignored. Smart authors who have a smart game plan will get the advances (and the promotional help).

9. Big advances don't always go to famous people.

One of the biggest myths in the publishing industry is that big advances only go to famous people. As a result, many authors don't even consider getting an advance because they think that it's impossible.

The reality: big advances go to people who have a platform to sell A LOT of books. The marketplace looks at numbers; so if you have solid evidence (such as a full calendar of speaking engagements, or a database generated from your website) of support for your book, you can get an advance. The "side door" approach: show you have a platform that can sell books in a variety of ways. The more variety you have, the bigger the platform; the bigger the platform, the bigger the advance.

10. Publishers are open to more non-traditional ways to sell books.

Here's a secret that professional speakers know that many authors don't: it doesn't matter where the sales come from, as long as there are sales! Knowing this can open a world of opportunities in selling books in bulk to corporations and organizations to give to their employees and customers.

One thing that has changed the world of bulk book sales: sponsorship! That's right, organizations will buy books by the thousands to distribute at association conferences where their target markets gather and learn. Smart authors will take advantage of bulk sales to leverage their position for getting bigger advances.

Key Strategy

Finding the "side doors" to sell books is the new strategy for authors who want big advances for their books. These secret, non-traditional ways are invisible to the naked eye, but that's a good thing—your competition may not see them either. Your #1 job: create a platform NOW!

About

Vickie Sullivan



**SULLIVAN
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Vickie Sullivan is known worldwide as being the foremost expert on generating revenue for high-end experts. Since 1987 she has worked with thousands of experts in a wide variety of industries to launch their big-fee speaking, professional service and book/product empires in highly lucrative markets. How does she do it? Through customized solutions created with market analysis and research. Vickie's clients report that her market assessments and intelligence gives them a two-year heads-up on the marketplace.

She has been quoted in national publications such as The New York Times, Investor's Business Daily, and Fortune.com....Her articles have been published in Professional Speaker Magazine, Lawyers Weekly, Presentations Magazine and others.

Vickie helps experts find outlets where their messages will sell for the highest fees and get speaking engagements, book deals and professional services assignments that extend their brand and increase revenue and market share in a wide variety of markets and industries.

Vickie speaks internationally on marketing trends and strategies and is the author of Springboard Marketing™, Talking to Strangers™, Speak to Sell™, Speaking in the Strike Zone™, and Your Position of Power™. Her online newsletter Splash and bi-weekly market intelligence updates Tips and Trends are considered a top resource for experts and are distributed throughout the U.S. and in 12 countries.

Vickie graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a BA in Journalism/PR and a minor in Marketing. She and husband Larry Miller reside in Tempe, Arizona, along with two "children" (the kind that meow) Tigger and Jaz.