



## ▶ Marketing 101: Leveraging an often overlooked marketing tool



By Kristina Blank Makansi

Holding your newly published book in your hands is an exhilarating feeling. Now, you think, I'm a published author! While that feeling is wonderful, it won't last too long if your book doesn't sell. And that's where marketing comes in.

Marketing your book begins long before you crack open your first copy. In today's connected world, authors and publishers can use social media tools to help build sales even as they build relationships.

But there is one critical marketing tool that I believe is often overlooked—the book cover. How, you may ask, is a cover a marketing tool? First of all, your cover will be front and center in all your other marketing material. It will be featured on retailer websites, catalogs, and any reviews from bloggers you may receive. I would answer that, other than a well written manuscript, a book cover is one of the primary marketing tools an author has. If a cover is bad, amateurish, or poorly executed, or if it doesn't evoke the theme of the book, it can potentially cancel out every other marketing tool in the author's arsenal.

To date, Blank Slate Press has published four books and we have two more coming out in December. With each book, I learn something new and meet new people and develop new marketing contacts. And with each book, I receive feedback on our book covers. Most of the time it is overwhelmingly positive, but not always. In fact, although we won the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) Bill Fisher Award for Best First Book: Fiction in 2011 for our debut novel, *The Samaritan*, when I received the judges' feedback, I discovered that one of them felt that our cover looked "self-published." And that, as the judge's rating confirmed, is code for bad.

The good news for authors who are self-publishing is that they have total control over their book cover. They can hire a professional designer, peruse online reviews, and learn what elements the experts believe make a great cover. They can poll their friends or even set up an online poll and ask followers to vote on their favorite cover concepts. They can let go of their own preconceived notions of what they think their book should look like and allow the designer to push them toward different and often better-conceived designs.

On the other hand, authors who are not self-publishing must almost always cede decision-making on the cover to the publisher. In our case, we work closely with each author to try to incorporate their vision into the final cover concept. But sometimes, you just have to say, "no." Authors are not, usually, graphic designers and even if they are, it is best to bring in new ideas to the conceiving phase. And graphic designers may be great at what they do, but they may not understand the book trade. While you can't come up with a great final design by committee, feedback from the author, the designer, the publisher, the distributor, a few readers, and even a few book-sellers will guarantee that you avoid a design that fails to sell your book.

So what are some of the design dos and don'ts that make a good cover? Here are a few general rules:

- Great design doesn't always make a great book. Even though we may like very clean designs with stark white or black backgrounds, they can be prob-

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## ▶ Readers Cross Genres



By Therese Patrick

Our primary message at Author Marketing 101 is to distill your Author Persona into a presentation of YOU - so a reader is engaged at First Glance and buys your books. Our secondary message is to have FUN with your marketing. Cross-marketing is good, as revealed in the post *Cross-Marketing: Help a sistah (or brotha) out!*, because readers don't spend all their time in one genre.

Authors are encouraged to write in a specific genre - but readers cross those lines in the blink of an eye. To expand your audience potential, novelists need to cross market across a targeted spectrum of interests, locations, and lifestyles.

At a recent local author fair, we encouraged a few authors to team up for their marketing. Their books are; field guides, hiking paths, local delicacies, historical attractions, and trains, in Oregon. These books can be marketed together because the readers of these topics are explorers of their home state. Add local authors and novels based in Oregon to a single brochure and you've increased your reader potential.

When I travel I see racks of brochures for local attractions everywhere, but there are none marketing local authors. Imagine a tri-fold brochure that features six different books/authors in those display racks. This is one example of how authors can help each other, share the expenses, and multiply their promotions. The objective of an effective marketing plan is to BE SEEN by your target audience. Your readers need to find you to buy your books. Then all they need is your QR code direct to your website and your engaging Author Persona.

As you network through your Twitter feeds, at conferences and writer events, read other authors' books to see if there is a connection. If you like them, and genuinely want to promote their work, start a conversation about cross-marketing. Note: Cross-marketing is an important business deal, be very careful how you choose to cross market with other authors. Keep it professional and mutually beneficial.

Authors of today are no longer limited to being found only on bookshelves. Readers have a variety of interests, carry book apps, and use Wi-Fi. While it is a stretch to cross market nature field guides with stock car racing - have fun with it, you never know when a reader will be interested in both.

*Therese Patrick is the author of Terri Patrick's Blog, a contributor to Oregon Women's Report, and writes memoir and romances. A former business consultant, she teamed up with C. Morgan Kennedy to create Author Marketing 101 to help novelists understand how to market themselves easily and with a professional flare.*

## ▶ What's Ahead: November 14, 2012

Join us as we explore important considerations for launching your website presence. Jason Schoenig, a professional website designer and founder of Show Me Webcenters presents: **Blogs and Websites: What to Look for Before You Leap.** Jason will discuss domain names, platform options and what it takes to switch from one to another, what to look for in a hosting provider, costs of DIY vs. hiring a designer, website security and SEO analytics. We'll take a behind-the-scenes glimpse at a Wordpress website/blog.

## ► News You Can Use

The following is a selection of articles, resources, and information to help you CREATE, PRODUCE, and MARKET your books. Visit the SLPA website at [www.stlouispublishers.org](http://www.stlouispublishers.org) to find the live links!

### CREATE

#### A Writer's Best Friend

By Mark Nichol, September 2012

"...no editing role — certainly not copyediting — involves revisions of writers' expressions of their beliefs or judgments."

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/a-writers-best-friend/>

### PRODUCE

#### Self-Publishing Basics: Print on Demand ("POD")--- What Is It?

By Joel Friedlander, October 2009

"When the idea of Print on Demand broke into publishing consciousness, it was to herald a new era in book production. Or was it to herald a new era in book distribution? And this is where the confusion started."

<http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2009/10/self-publishing-basics-print-on-demand/>

### MARKET

#### Why Facebook's Valuation Shouldn't Worry Marketers

By Doug Schumacher, September 25th, 2012

"It looks like there are currently two views around the value of Facebook -- Wall Street's view and the view of marketers actually using Facebook to promote their businesses."

<http://www.imediainconnection.com/content/32748.asp> 

## ► The SLPA Mission

The St. Louis Publishers Association empowers authors and publishers to create and market quality products and books. A nationally recognized organization, the SLPA provides educational, informational resources on publishing. Through its monthly meetings, the organization provides networking opportunities for people involved in all aspects of the publishing industry. 

## ► SLPA Meetings

SLPA meets on the second Wednesday of the month:  
Brentwood Community Center  
2505 S. Brentwood Blvd., Room 101  
Brentwood, MO 63144  
(Enter through the door closest to the flagpole)

Doors open for networking at 6:30pm and meeting begins at 7pm. The formal meeting concludes at about 8:30pm with networking continuing after the meeting.

Our regular meetings are free to members. Guests – \$10 at the door, cash or check only. 

## ► Questions about SLPA?

#### Contact Membership Chair:

Kim Wolterman, [membership@stlouispublishers.org](mailto:membership@stlouispublishers.org)

SLPA News & Views is produced and distributed by the **Communications Committee:**

Interim Manager: Maria Rodgers O'Rourke

Designer: Cathy Davis, [cathy@daviscreative.com](mailto:cathy@daviscreative.com)

Content Coordinator: Tim Hill, [thjoethecrab@gmail.com](mailto:thjoethecrab@gmail.com)

PR: Linda (Louie) Louis-Van Reed, [louie@miraclecanyon.com](mailto:louie@miraclecanyon.com)

**Members:** Get your article featured in the SLPA newsletter and posted on our blog. E-mail Maria Rodgers O'Rourke at [vp@stlouispublishers.org](mailto:vp@stlouispublishers.org) for more information. 



*"Today there are more options for publishing than ever before.*

*There is no single way to publish a book, which is a clear advantage for new authors." — Lynne Klippel*

[http://thefutureofink.com/5-digital-publishing-pathways/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+tfai+%28The+Future+of+Ink%29](http://thefutureofink.com/5-digital-publishing-pathways/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+tfai+%28The+Future+of+Ink%29)

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lematic when printed. In general, stay away from solid white backgrounds or black and white photography unless offset by bold colors. Often these covers are perceived as "self-published" and, therefore, unprofessional. And stay away from solid black covers because, while they may look great in the design phase, when printed, they show every little scuff and wear quickly. Buyers won't buy a "worn" book and bookstores will return them.

- The same yet different. Follow the trends in your genre, yet develop a style to help you stand out. Even though you want your book to stand out, your cover should be consistent with the overall trends—don't put a woman with a heaving bosom caught in an embrace by a muscle-bound man on a mystery novel.
- Less is more. Think of your cover as a road-side billboard and pull out one or at most two elements or themes from the book to carry the design. Less clutter makes your cover more eye-catching.
- A unified theme. Make sure the elements you choose—whether typography, photography, or illustration, go together and reflect the essence of the book. And then make sure these elements are all pulled together in a unified design.

The bottom line is that the author doesn't always know best. But, the publisher doesn't always know best, either, so authors should push back if the cover is bad. Your cover is your book's face to the world and the best "first glance" marketing and sales tool for the story within. You owe it to yourself to make sure it is professionally conceived and professionally executed. In today's crowded marketplace, no amount of Facebooking or Twittering can overcome a cover that sends the message that either the author or the publisher just didn't care enough to make it great. And besides, when you hold your book in your hands, whether for the first time or the thousandth time, you want to be able to look at the cover and love it.

*Kristina Blank Makansi, a writer who is working on editing and revising her historical mystery set in Ancient Greece and is also writing, along with her two daughters, a futuristic Young Adult trilogy. In 2010, she co-founded Blank Slate Press with the mission to discover, nurture, publish and promote new authors from the greater St. Louis region and beyond. Blank Slate Press has now published three novels, has two more due out before Christmas, one due out in late Spring 2013, and has its first non-fiction title due out in October. <http://blankslatepress.com/> *