

THE OPERATING SYSTEM' s
AS-PAINLESS-AS-POSSIBLE

****HUSTLE GUIDE****

a.k.a. book/self promotion resources & FAQ's

by OS Founder / Creative Director

Lynne DeSilva-Johnson (with a little help)



You = STAR!

LET' s BE HONEST HERE:

NO ONE LIKES MARKETING & PROMOTION!!!

ESPECIALLY OF (Y)OUR OWN WORK

(WE HATE IT AS MUCH AS YOU DO, TBH)

BUT, IF YOU WANT YOUR BOOK IN PEOPLE' S HANDS

IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE YOU MUST DO CERTAIN THINGS

(OR YOU' RE DOING YOURSELF, AND YOUR PRESS, A DISSERVICE)

SOOOO we made a handy guide to help you out.



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1. Introduction

There's no magic formula for having a "successful" book, and thinking about what "success" even means to you as early on in the publishing process as possible will go a long way as you make decisions about expenditure of time, money, labor, etc. as well as how you interface with spaces, people, organizations, and so on.

So, how do *you* quantify "success"? How may this differ both for you and for others in the long and short term? What would determine a book or project having been successful, for you? Here are some things that might be helpful to consider.

ACCESS / AUDIENCE / ARCHIVE

For the OS, this is our central trifecta.

Our goal is always to allow the most access for most people to the work, so that it may reach the most audiences / communities / classrooms / organizations, and so that it has the greatest chance of entering permanent archives and having a long life beyond our possible imaginings, wherein the content of the text or project remains available for future generations to read, teach, learn from, and be inspired by.

So, one measure of success might be: how many people are getting to experience the work, and how much impact is it having, both right now and potentially in years to come? How are diverse, differently resourced communities able to access and use it?

Getting creative work in people's hands is something that can be increased exponentially through the availability of that work in libraries and public collections. Of course, the nature of that is changing, via Open Source / Open Access technologies. Check out "[Radical Open Access and the Future of Libraries](#)" which I wrote for Boog City in Spring 2018 for more on this.

But even beyond centralized holdings and access points, the ways individuals find out about you and your work have also changed radically due to our networked lives. The way in which any creative person "builds their platform" is central to access and audience, and a major factor in not only work's success but organizations and publishers determination of an project's viability, culturally and commercially.

CASHMONEY

Here at the OS we think it's high time we abandon the starving artist trope. We are SUPER INTO you and your bank account experiencing free flowing abundance, and if the form that takes is wads of Cash (or bitcoin, sure), get down with your bad self.

However. We would be remiss if we didn't openly and directly address the relationship between considerations of "success" and the financial ramifications (or illusions) on the table.

Though some might find this surprising, there is still a very pervasive (or maybe, aspired-to) mythology around what a publishing contact means or should mean for an author.

Well-meaning folks warn fellow authors about what their expectations should be vis-a-vis what sorts of royalties or upfront financial remuneration they "should" be receiving from a publisher. There sometimes is confusion around the notion that their work being selected for publication means ipso facto that an organization or publisher stands to earn any money beyond costs of production.

Many writers with no social media presence to speak of whose work is not well known or who are publishing their first book might like to believe that by merit of the work alone it is then the publishers job to develop and find an audience and that automatically this will result in royalties but this couldn't be farther from the case.

More and more, independent presses and organizations like ours are able to offer publishing contracts to lesser known, experimental, radical, risk-taking creators, because digital tools make this financially viable and possible on a workable scale that wasn't previously available.

Many of these publishers, though, are doing this to work AGAINST the trends in the industry that kowtow to commercial safe-bets, to shift the canon despite the fact that these books may not sell (or may not sell *now,* but perhaps are ahead of their time.) In cases like these, the publisher can be taking a financial risk and potentially taking a loss on producing the work at all, which is why places like Zero Books now have different contract arrangements based on how risky a book is to publish. You can see how those work, [here, in their User Manual](#).

So. Whether or not a contract promises a certain previously assumed financial payout is not necessarily a measure of a work's success. It has to be gauged alongside many other factors, and one also has to consider whether the organization is privately or institutionally funded. Things often aren't what they seem, and differences in the field of what kind of compensation you are offered is often based on financials you haven't considered.

The financial "payout" of having a book, I'd say, is best understood to be a long game. Having a book is a sort of capital that you can use to your advantage in countless ways. You may get jobs based on it. You can get invitations to participate in events, to perform or teach. You may find yourself solicited for interviews, publications, anthologies. This is where all the choices you make around your platform and using this process to your advantage really make or break how much you can benefit from publication -- and, ultimately, how much it benefits you financially.

BEWARE THE HOLOGRAM: THE DANGER OF COMPARISON AND ASSUMPTION

While your daily, personal, inner critic might tell you "Oh my god, all my friends are more successful, happier, and better looking than me," or at least so sayeth social media, there is an equally insidious version of this around professional successes.

And now that we're in a period of highly analyzed, carefully curated marketing and publicity using these "personal" tools, you have to be careful not to compare yourself to the often illusory fictions around "personal" successes and stories on social media in particular.

Just like you shouldn't assume that a press or organization has money, you shouldn't assume that someone else's press, or someone else, does not. Unbelievable amounts of money and labor are put into making some books successful, often by agents, PR people, or by publishing companies with big budgets (who are probably banking on people who are already successful to start with).

A book that's on best lists or winning contests or being reviewed a lot may well have had a huge amount of help and resources behind it that are utterly not transparent. Contest costs are often incredibly high. Submitting hard copies (sometimes ten or more) for contests, especially many contests, is a huge financial expenditure. It's not an equal playing field, although the way that books are talked about suggests and likes to think itself part of meritocracy.

Some people are spending thousands and thousands to get their book out there. Some people can afford to take time off work to travel and promote and send emails and network. Many of us don't. Luckily, a lot of what we're about to tell you is cheap or free. Strategy strategy strategy! And -- be present. You may want to write or make art alone in an attic, but know that your chances of sales in our personality-driven economy are slim.

2. Building a Platform



You may or may not already be familiar with the concept of an "author platform." Jane Friedman, author of *The Business of Being a Writer*, defines it as "an ability to sell books because of who you are or who you can reach." (She's also got a whole post about it [here](#).)

Basically, though, what's important to understand is that (like it or not) your book is not going to get into hands primarily because it has value (which is subjective, anyway), but because people have become aware of you and/or your work.

In the current climate, even big publishers and agents are usually looking for authors who already demonstrate an established platform as evidence that the work has a built in audience / customer base.

Luckily, establishing that "platform" is more than ever something that you can begin to do on your own, for free, with perhaps less labor than you might imagine it takes. And with little to no "experience."

Who's 'trained' in social media? Maybe someone, but *not us*.

The ones of us writing this guide came of age pre-internet. We taught ourselves how to use social media and how to build websites using the power of google, message boards, DIY instructions and how-to pages. You can do it! We promise.

This section focuses on immediately actionable steps you can take asap to help build (and/or solidify) a public author platform - which will help **any** future project's viability and success, we promise!

Build a platform around yourself -- not a product for sale. Connect with and support others and their work, and they'll want to know more and support you. Be authentic!

BUILDING & MAINTAINING A WEBSITE



Your website is basically, well, YOU, as far as the internet is concerned. It is the official repository for information about you, your life and your work.

If you have a book, or a creative practice, you should have a website. Period. Anyone who reads a review, sees you perform, meets you professionally, etc., should be able to search for you online and immediately be able to find out the salient information needed to learn about you and your work. This person may want to book you, give you a job, a grant, or a residency! Being able to find this information gives you and your work a sort of legitimacy that can make supporting you feel like less of a risk.

This central space is curated by you, and so you can tell your story **yourself**, which is part of the magic of platform building: people want to get to know (or feel like they know) YOU -- not only your output, but YOU, and you get to choose the language and images to frame your story the way that best suits your purposes. You can always change it later!

DON'T feel like you need to overcomplicate things. Many authors

have a really bare-bones website, with a link to order a book, links to reviews, a bio and photo, and maybe links to reviews or excerpts. Start there, if you are doing it primarily to promote a book. It's far better to have a simple website than none at all. Just bite the bullet.

We recommend using a DIY, template-based service such as [SQUARESPACE](#), [WIX](#), or [STRIKINGLY](#).

- [Peter Milne Greiner's website](#), made for the launch of *Lost City Hydrothermal Field* was made with Squarespace
- [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson's digital CV](#) with calendar, publications, videos, links, etc, lives on Strikingly
- [Erick Sáenz's website](#) was also made with Squarespace

In many cases you can even make one of these websites for FREE, but we do recommend eventually getting a hosted website with a unique URL that you choose yourself. The costs are minimal.

I'm often asked whether you should start a blog, or have a blog on your website -- and at this point, based on media saturation, I would say no. If you want to produce original content, I'd recommend getting an account on [Medium](#), which is shared and aggregated socially. You can always write for [the OS's platform on Medium!](#) But starting any sort of blog or content production is really giving yourself another job. Better no blog than sporadic blog that you post on a few times then never again.

You can also post some original content to social media and/or via your newsletter, which brings us to:

[USING SOCIAL MEDIA & WHAT TO DO THERE](#)

Facebook, instagram, twitter. Do you need them? Do you need all of them? Is it going to suck your time and life away? Well, I mean, they can. But it's sort of like anything else you do that you learn to draw boundaries on. Social media, used with intention, is a great tool, and even a necessary one for platform building. Like it or not, perhaps even more than the

existence of a website, your *social* presence online (or lack thereof) is a huge part of whether or not you are able to establish the community / network aspect of your platform.



How should I use each of these platforms to my best advantage? Do I need to use them all?

Be strategic! The first thing to know is that you can use one, primarily,

that automatically posts to all three. If you post on Instagram it can immediately post FOR YOU, with no extra work, on Twitter and Facebook. So you don't, ultimately, even have to maintain all three accounts.

But if you want to approach it with more finesse, there's a lot more to think about. The OS maintains linked accounts on all platforms.

Joanna Valente (social media superuser / OS author) advises:

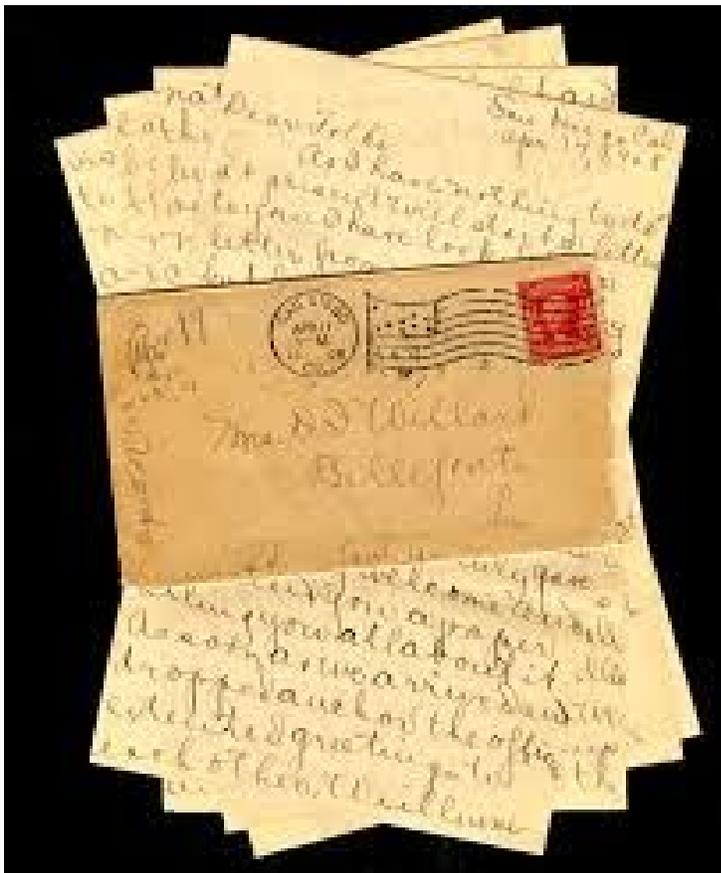
Facebook: While FB seems to be "dying out," it's still good for discussions and having conversations and being active in that way as a writer is important. Because writers are thinkers, and it's important to engage with people who are reading your work.

Twitter: Like FB, Twitter is all about discussions. But it's easier to reshare and retweet things, which has really strengthened the lit world. I love using Twitter for writing-related stuff. It happens to build buzz around your work, and you rightly should! You can also post images on it now, which makes it easy and fun.

Instagram: I love Instagram, because it's like a personal diary and people feel inclined to read work by someone they feel close to. You can also take pictures of your work and share them - and also share others' work! Sharing others' work is important to supporting others, which is just as important IMO as sharing your own work. [OS Ed. Note: YESSSS TO THIS]

I use my social media to connect with people, to allow them to get to know me, and get them to know my writing. It's not just about sharing what I do, but also engaging with people in a real way - and showing vulnerability as much as I can- because people relate to authenticity, not just bragging.

You might also consider...



CREATING A NEWSLETTER

In the last few years you may have noticed various folks in your circles (and even certain brands) moving away from the blog and towards the newsletter format to send more personalized content and periodical announcement.

A lot of authors in particular are using [Tiny Letter](#), which we recommend for its ease and simplicity, if you're interested in trying this out. Here's a [NYTimes article](#) about TL

eclipsing the blog, [the Guardian](#) gushing that it could 'save modern poetry,' and Verge saying it's a '[perfect platform](#).'

A great idea, too, is to see what other folks are doing with their Tiny Letter series. Though you certainly can, and many people do, you may want to consider posting links to OTHER FOLKS' work and events as well as your own. It feels a little less solely self-promotional, which can be a turn off. Also, legit, hopefully you actually care about supporting others in the community!

For this too let's hear what Joanna Valente, who maintains [an active TinyLetter](#), has to say:

Like Instagram, newsletters are a personal way to engage with people who care about you and your work. A lot of these platforms do tend to be cross-posted, so it's also okay to use them for the same reasons. It's also a great way to catalogue your own journey and work - I use it as a sort of public diary.

I find doing it weekly, or having some kind of assigned deadline, not only makes it easier to do, but allows followers to come to expect and be excited about something. Making it personal, like I said above about social media, also gives people a reason to want to follow you, as opposed to just copying and pasting a poem. Write something that they can't find elsewhere, even if it's just about a movie you saw. The more personal, in a healthy way, the better. You don't have to talk about your deepest and darkest secrets if you don't want, but think of it as a friendship, a give and take.

If you want to check out some author TinyLetter accounts, maybe start at Catapult, where they feature a community [TinyLetter of the Month](#).

3. Getting Your Book Out There



HEYYYY I HAVE A NEW BOOK!

This is a multi-faceted process that shouldn't be considered as separate from the above. Of course, while a lot of building your platform may be book-related, for it to be genuine and meaningful, it should only be a small percentage of what you do there. (With the exception of making a website specifically for an individual book which is an option; we'd recommend a more broadly focused one but you many still choose to do this.)

A lot of marketing your book specifically and effectively will have to do with reiterative, sustained contact, announcements, and relationship building. Again: a long game.

REVIEWS, BOOK LISTS & PUBLICITY OUTLETS

How do I get my book reviewed and in book lists and magazines?

Firstly, we recommend you start this process by realizing that

1) reviews are not necessary or equal to and definitely do not ensure a book's success, in any category

2) not all books get reviewed and you don't "need" them

3) if your friends / colleagues / community members are writers, even if they've never reviewed before, if you're not getting bites ask folks in your network to write a review and look for places to pitch it.

(Conversely: if you think that none of the reviews you see are happening through friend or social networks, disavow yourself of that notion immediately. USE YOUR PEOPLE.)

Secondly: If you have a book coming out on the OS, we will automatically send a press/release linked to a pdf and to the reviewers on [this list](#) as well as automatically submit your manuscript to be reviewed by Publishers Weekly (we have a very good track record there)! There's also some reviewers and review outlets (like Entropy) who often look to the OS for titles to review, so we'll send personal emails to those folks as well. However, the more titles we publish, the less likely those folks are able to review multiple titles in succession.

Beyond this, here's some suggestions for any and all of you:

- Be part of your local scene / community, as well as be active in the online writing community. Support other people's projects and readings, and be familiar with and supportive of magazines you like. When you make and sustain connections with people, they often genuinely want to

support your book. Send emails, DM's on social media, talk up your book (gently, when appropriate) when out in community, let people know you would really like their feedback and like their work. If you get to know editors, and you like the sort of reviews a magazine publishes, let them know. Write to the editors or to the reviewer directly, and let them know you're actually paying attention. Real presence will go much farther than shallow pandering -- people can smell that from a mile away.

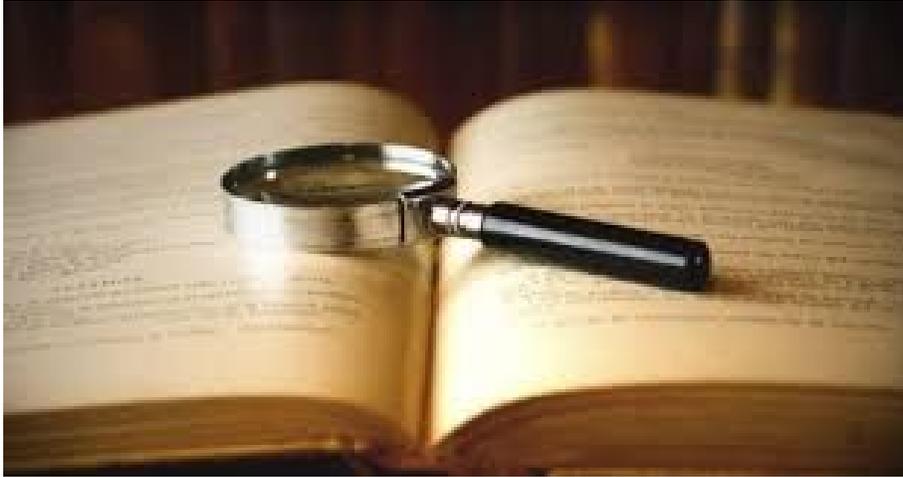
- Even if they're not reviewers, if your friends are also in the community they may either be willing to write a review for you or may know someone who is. It's a good idea to already be prepared with a list of magazines that accept submissions of reviews that are already written, and provide folks with that list.
- If you have a dream list of places you want to be reviewed, spend some time reading reviews there. What do you like about how things are handled? Is there anyone in particular writing reviews there that you really admire? This isn't the time to be shy. Send an email, with your press release, a link to a PDF for review on dropbox or drive, and a PERSONAL NOTE to that person or their review email.

Hard Copies for Review:

This is a tough one. A lot of people like hard copies, but if you've ever worked for a magazine (or bookstore) Advance Review Copies (ARC's) can also be considered a nuisance, and there's many that never get seen, and just get pawned off on interns so they don't pile up in the office.

You should have a sense from someone that they genuinely intend to write a review before sending a hard copy, unless you feel like it is a good gesture or the stakes are high. That's your decision. But reviewers know this is costly. PDF's are usually fine. It's nice to send a hard copy if they do write a nice review, though, with a thank you. PERSONAL TOUCHES COUNT!

THE CHANGING ROLE OF REVIEWS



Joanna Valente writes: "more and more places are reviewing less and less long reviews, so don't be too sad if you aren't getting a million reviews. Reviews can also come out after the book comes out. There are more lists and communal reviews than there used to be."

Exactly. Don't worry about when a review comes out. Don't freak out about getting a book to reviewers (except in VERY specific instances) before it hits the shelves. We've often had reviews come out for books *years* after their publication date, simply because someone found the book and was moved by it, and wanted to write about the book.

And don't worry about how many you get or if they're short or part of a list. Visibility goes a long way. Not as many people are reading reviews, which is why not as many people are writing them and/or including them in their publications.

I urge you to consider this a positive change. Who are we allowing to be the gatekeepers and tastemakers? The critics? Scaring us with it being "too late" to review? Holding a book's fate in their often bitter and biased eyes and keyboard? No thanks. Bye Felicia.

More and more, the role of the PLATFORM is the key here. If your friends have lots of followers on social media, give them free copies and let them know how much you'd appreciate it if they put your book up there.

And, you know: carry copies with you at all times as soon as you have them on hand. You never know who you're going to meet! You might meet a reviewer who gets excited about your book at a coffee shop -- be prepared to say, "here, take a copy."

GOOD READS & AMAZON

I admit to being a bit overwhelmed by the email updates I get for [Goodreads](#). Even as an avid social media user, despite being a big book nerd, this has been one platform too many for me to maintain.

However, lots of folks use Goodreads actively, and many authors (and publishers) integrate a Goodreads giveaway or other activity into their marketing strategy.

So, I also admit to not being the best person to advise you how to use it or if its effective. Luckily, here's a great and detailed post on [how to promote your book using Goodreads](#).

There's a variety of scales and steps contained therein. Have at it! Fair warning, though: I did a mini poll of folks who'd tried Goodreads giveaways and the feedback was ALL NEGATIVE! Across the board, indie press authors say, "not worth it." Remember, it's not targeted, and the folks who get your book may not at all be a good match for the, uh, OS niche, and reviews may end up being terrible, despite them getting a free copy! Better to target audiences who actually like this sort of book.

As far as the complicated and somewhat reviled behemoth that is Amazon -- well -- here's a place to have absolutely NO SHAME.

Seriously. This is for the masses. Ask your friends to post a review on amazon about the book if they're willing.

Most other strategies for Amazon marketing you'll find online are focused on those self-publishing through Amazon's programs and are built on buying ads, banners, and other strategies that use the site's pre-scripted offers.

(Necessary political / social justice pitch: of course, while we would never discourage you getting and having good reviews on Amazon (anything helps) we strongly recommend you urging folks to always buy independently, even if buying online. Buying through [Indiebound](#), connecting to local bookstores that can order the book for you online even if it's not in stock, is a great choice.)

NAVIGATING DIRECT EMAIL & OTHER FORMS OF CONTACT LIBRARIES, CLASSROOMS, ETC

It's hard to email our friends, colleagues, and communities about what's going on in our lives and ask them to support these things, and even harder to do so repeatedly. And yet? If you want people (especially folks who may not be avid social media users) to know and support your work, this is what you need to do. However, there's a way to do it without being slimy, and it's important to see this practice as part of a larger being in community and in the world -- just like no one likes a fair-weather friend, no one likes a colleague or friend who just emails when they have an event or book to support / attend.

Direct emails (or other direct contact or tagging on social media or in private online groups), ultimately, can have the biggest impact of anything you do, because it's less subject to the whims of the algorithm. Many of us send cold emails not only to friends, mailing lists, colleagues, etc but also to publications, bookstores, etc (we can share some of these lists with you) -- but without a platform and commitment to being in

community in a genuine sustained way well before this, this is unlikely to have as substantive an impact. As with many of the suggestions above, we recommend framing your asks within a larger practice of supporting OTHERS, as frequently as you're able.

The fact is: it's challenging and harder for those with disability, those with multiple jobs, raising children, or those facing other difficulty to sustain a social media presence, platform, or to engage socially in person in the creative community, and yet engagement in this way continues to be a primary motivating factor in raising your visibility and other's awareness of you in a way that feels, and maybe really IS *personal* -- that challenge is one of the many reasons that those with means pay other people so much money to do PR. It's not something that happens because of the value of the work itself! It plays a role, but far less than these other factors.

The OS sends emails about our general catalog, as well as individual book announcements and PDF review to libraries, collections, bookstores, and reviewers for adoption / consideration, but you can also think about putting together a list of people in your world who work in these fields and/or who teach. Reaching out to educators with an offer of a desk copy or at the very least a PDF is a great way to get your book into hands and into classrooms!



[We're almost done! Hang in there!]

4. Creating a Media Kit / Promotional Materials

As with any of what we've discussed, the scale to which you engage with a process like that of creating promotional materials is entirely up to you.

For a lot of OS books, yours is a pretty 'niche' market, so while the social media strategies of building a genuine following who want to be supportive of *you* and your work, I don't know how much the strategies of sinking money and time into creating promotional materials is worthwhile, unless it's fun and interesting to you. Again, however: these will work best when they land on an *already existing* platform, not in the hands of total strangers. Too much competition!

That said. A few more specific notes:

CREATING A "SELL SHEET"

Something that we often create to help promote titles is what's known as a 'sell sheet.' [Here's one](#) for Johnny Damm's "The Science of Things Familiar." A Sell Sheet is sort of a visual press release - it has both the info that booksellers need (ISBN #, price, length, etc) as well as all the promo material (blurbs, bio, photo, cover image, etc.)

We're now sending all this info via email for each title directly to all our mailing lists (bookstores, libraries, etc), but it doesn't hurt to make or have something similar.

There's a bunch of places on the interwebs where the merits of sell sheets (and other strategies) have been written about AT LENGTH, including [here at "creativindie"](#) - there's also some free templates for microsoft word if you don't use photoshop.

BUSINESS CARDS, POSTCARDS, ETC.

If you don't have **business cards** yet, please make some! Some people make them specifically for their book - I don't think that's necessary, but ideally this is something you can hand ANYONE -- a barista, your seatmate on the airplane, someone you meet at a reading, and so on -- that you get to talking about your work. It can go in their wallet, or a notebook pocket, easily. Don't fall for weird shapes - they'll lose it.

This should lead the holder, ideally, to that website that we talked about before (even if it's a free one-page site from Squarespace or Wix) from which they can easily click over to info about you, your work, links, and pre-order or order of your book, depending on what part of the process you're at.

These up the ante of your professionalism immediately. When I first made my own I couldn't believe how much I gave them out, and how much I wish I'd made them sooner.

Also, they are seriously cheap, and you don't have to be a designer to get some nice ones. [MOO](#) has great templates, but is a little pricier; [Vistaprint](#) is a great, cheap standby; even [Staples](#) does a decent job and in a pinch you can order them online and pick them up next day at a store near you. In case you're worried about cost I'm seeing a quote at Staples for 500 for \$12.99. So, that settles it.

You can also give it a QR code so people can immediately get to your website on their phones but who actually uses QR codes...?

As far as postcards, bookmarks, buttons, or other swag goes -- ask yourself if any of this stuff (available en masse especially from big publishers with huge budgets at bookfairs) has ever led YOU to actually purchase a book. If not, I think that may be your answer.

However, you can fit an excerpt on a postcard, or some graphic that makes the person want to save it, hang it up, etc. But

that's a lot harder to create. It's not a terrible thing to do, but it's time and money and a risk -- it's just not necessarily going to make a dent. If you did an actual snail-mail campaign? Maybe -- but again, that's up to you.



Merch like t-shirts or mugs or skateboards (basically anything) can now be made easily in conjunction with your book release via sites like [Zazzle](#), and can be a super fun thing to do, especially if you want to sell them at an event. I made these mugs for the "Exhibit A" show at Launchpad a few years ago [using CafePress](#). BUT: you have to know that there's an audience / customer base out there, and be ready to put the money out upfront. If you want to do a Print on Demand thing for shirts or hats or something, you could use a site like [Printful](#) but the retail price is pretty high. Totebags are super popular and sell well, and you can [make them very cheaply](#), but the upfront initial cost is harder to do and you'll have lots of stock. We've loved having totebags, and you might too -- it is good free advertising, besides.

Basically: if you have a good platform, and especially if you book a bunch of events, you're likely to be able to sell merch or other promotional products, which in turn will help build your platform further and spread the news about your work.

5. Booking Events / Launches / Public Appearances



And, speaking of events (see what we did there?...

OS HOSTED EVENTS

If you're based in NY or travelling through, the OS will do our best to either organize and host an event for you, and/or to hook you up with venues and other readers, as well as help promote the event through local channels. Whenever possible we're also willing to create a facebook event for you. This will cost you nothing, but know that the OS will have our own table and sell books ourselves to recoup costs if we are hosting. We will also invite you to sign books at and/or organize readings or events in conjunction with regional and national events, conferences, and festivals like AWP, NOLA Poetry Fest, the Brooklyn Book Fest, Philalalia, etc.

BOOKING YOUR OWN EVENTS

You are encouraged to book as many of your own events as you can, being careful not to oversaturate small communities with too many events too close to each other.

Use the OS facebook group to connect with OS authors in cities to which you might like to travel and don't necessarily know folks -- you may find that people are also willing to put you up! We can also help you connect with venues in areas you don't know as well, by sending an "official" email from the publisher, which some people like. Just give us lead time!

Actually: give **everyone** lead time. A few months, if you can. Some places have calendars that are booked far, far in advance. Always better to ask early. You can start planning a mini book tour as soon as you know your scheduled launch date. (And, conversely: knowing events are already booked means everyone is super careful about deadlines, including yourself!)

Having an active event calendar is its own reward -- this, too, should be on your website, and your CV. It will help you book more events, is impressive in job searches, and, hell, in NYC can get you a discounted "artist" membership at MoMA.

If you feel uncomfortable reaching out, ask other folks in the OS group how they went about it -- they'll have lots of suggestions -- do be yourself and not overly formal! Send a query with as much info as possible, concisely stated: a few possible dates, readers and bios, info on the book, links to reviews or excerpts, etc. If you don't know the venue well, do your homework! Make sure you are able to speak knowledgeably about what they do, their programming, even history, if it comes up. They'll be more responsive if they feel you appreciate them.

STOCKING BOOKS FOR and SELLING BOOKS at EVENTS / OTHER \$\$\$ THOUGHTS

It's important to remember that certain venues (like bookstores) will want a cut of book sales, and or will sell the books themselves, taking the after-wholesale-cost profits. Some will want to charge for entry and/or ask for payment for use of the space -- but in general you should be able to find free space.

In terms of stocking books, this can happen a number of ways: some bookstores will order the books directly from SPD or Ingram, or the OS. Alternately, we (or you) can bring books directly to a venue out of our own stock, which then are sold either by you / us / the venue, with most of the remainder taken back at the end of the event.

Some bookstores will want to consign books with you, which basically means that they don't buy them from you upfront -- you leave copies there which then after a given period of time they either return or pay you for whatever sold. We encourage you to do this with your own stock at local bookstores, who may want to support local talent. Do offer to sign them!

A standard consignment rate is the same as the standard wholesale rate: 60/40. So, if the bookstore sells a book at \$10, you get 6. (Or the OS gets 6 -- or the distributor gets 6... you see how if a book gets sold through a bookstore and through a distributor or other third parties by the time there's a 'profit' it's basically \$1?)

You'd think that bookstores would be on top of stocking but sometimes they aren't! So here's another reason to plan an event in advance. Especially if you're on SPD (not POD), if both SPD and the OS and you are low in stock, it could take a month to reprint and ship to your venue. Make sure to ask if they need copies and by when! Bookstores will often want copies a week or two ahead to help promote the upcoming event.

6. Contests

We love you and your work and we hope you win all the monies and are always supported and adequately compensated. However, in general I see contests the way I see "best of" lists: highly flawed, deeply illusory, and reinforcing of inequalities already dividing this community unfairly.

Contests judging the 'best' are of course, even at *their* best, highly subjective. But they are also often highly EXPENSIVE!

Like Rachel Mennies wrote in "[Paying to Play](#)," both submission fees and contest fees can be seen as problematic, exploitative practices favoring the financially comfortable.

What writers may not be as familiar with is that contest fees that presses submit to are often exorbitant, and coupled with a requirement to send many books to panels of judges. The National Book Award, for instance, is a \$135 fee to start, plus 6 books. I see that the conditional promotional fee for presses with income under 1 million has recently been waived, but there is an expectation that a press will be able to pour money into contests, in many cases, as well -- an impossible strain on smaller presses like the OS.

Do we send poems or books to Pushcart? Sorry, no. Highschool literary mags can nominate for Pushcart. The 'nomination' process has so little critical value as to be absurdist. Sure, yes, we can nominate everyone and then you can all call yourselves nominated, but what does that even MEAN?

However, we love and submit to awards that help bring visibility to communities we support, like the LAMBDA awards, or translation awards. We'll work with you one on one with costs for awards, depending on book sales and other factors.

Congratulations, Graduate!



YOU MADE IT!

We hope you found this guide helpful, and we hope you feel prepared to be your own best PR firm / guru / event planner / marketing expert / social media intern ever.

As always, the OS provides these resources to the community FREE and encourages you to share and disseminate them widely!

However, if you found value in this guide and feel you'd like to show your support for this and other free materials like this, we wouldn't say no [to a small donation!](#)

Now go kick some book-selling, creative promotional ass.