

Should I look for a specialized publicity agency to promote a book with a regional focus?

Q: My new book has a regional focus. Should I look for a publicity agency that specializes in handling that type of book?

It can be beneficial depending on your needs. An agency that is specialized — whether geographically or by subject matter — is often a good choice because it should be able to provide expertise both in presenting the subject matter and in providing you with an assessment before you start the campaign of whether your book is likely to get a good response. You'll want to make sure that the agency staff is also equipped to go broader than the region or niche they're in should the book warrant that, and also that they have good contacts in both traditional and new media (broadcast, print, wire, syndicated, and online — including websites, blogs and social networks).

There are a number of factors to consider when choosing an agency. These include the scope of the project, the resources you need an agency to provide, how well your views mesh with the agency's and whether you think the staff will take a creative approach to your project. It's a close working relationship and it works best when there's cooperation and trust on both sides.

In considering the scope of the project, think about whether you want to limit the work to regional media, or does your book have broader potential. Will you want other kinds of outreach, such as contact with associations, businesses or tourist venues? Do you need the agency to provide on-site support during the campaign, or do you prefer that the staff work independently without requiring a lot of time on your part? This will help determine whether working with an agency that has strong local connections will matter.

In terms of agency's resources, you should consider whether you want to work with an individual or with a team of people. Are you going to want the agency to provide supplementary services, such as consulting, design, and/or copywriting, which would require a company with those resources? The cost of a campaign can vary quite a bit and may be quoted as an hourly rate, on a per project basis, or as a monthly retainer. Out-of-pocket costs may be included in the estimate, or more often be billed back either at cost or with a markup during the campaign.

The time frame will determine the type of follow-up provided and that can vary substantially. Sometimes publicity work is weighted toward advance preparation and the launch of the book, particularly when the focus is on setting up events. In other cases, there will be some advance time for prep work and to allow for contact with long lead media, then a launch period followed by 2-3 months of media contact along with client reporting.

In interviewing a potential agency, it's important to gauge the expertise the staff can bring to the project and to decide whether they have creative ideas you feel can help make you and your book stand out in a crowded marketplace.3:4/09