

The New Marketing Model

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Children's book marketing and publicity have changed substantially in recent years. With more publishers, authors, illustrators and books as well as stiff competition from other media for consumer spending and education and library budgets there's an increased need to keep one's name and books prominent. For those fortunate enough to have had specific books chosen for star treatment in-house or who have built a significant track record that has earned them on-going support from the publisher's marketing team, the work is in balancing marketing time with the creative time. For many more who are striving to achieve that level, the challenge is to figure out what will help raise and sustain awareness of their books and their "brand" both among publishers and in the marketplace to generate demand.

With new books often spread out over a long publishing process and changing seasons as publishing schedules shift, it's difficult to plan marketing based primarily on publicity for new titles. Deciding what to do between new books and how to appeal to different segments of the market takes creativity and persistence, and for that reason authors and illustrators are taking increasingly active roles in marketing themselves and their books, both front- and backlist.

Traditionally, that has taken the form of speaking at schools and libraries, arranging signings at bookstores, and working to get on the convention circuit – first regionally, then nationally. Author and illustrator websites, particularly destination sites that provide specialized information such as Jennifer Armstrong's new history-based website www.jennifer-armstrong.com, or those that provide "how-to" write or illustrate information like Robert Sabuda's pop-up making instructions at www.robertsabuda.com, provide teachers, librarians and booksellers reasons to remember and refer kids to a particular site. For a master site in this area, visit Jan Brett's site at www.janbrett.com, which is an amazing compendium of creative ideas.

Now, with blogs, e-newsletters, web marketing and other interactive mechanisms for reaching booksellers, educators, librarians and consumers, the question is how to make sure you and your books become part of the fabric of the industry. The first step is to determine how you want to portray yourself and your body of work. For some, the "who they are" becomes the primary focus, and this can work well if that's consistent with the voice in their books. For others, "what they know" is more important to convey, and that is exemplified by showcasing expertise.

But with all of this said, the real trick to succeeding in this business is to ensure that your books sell. As a new author or illustrator, one without a large body of work, or as in the case with many who have limitations on the time they can devote, this can be a daunting task. So, creative authors and illustrators are coming up with new solutions to gain ground more quickly.

One this past year was the establishment of the Class of 2k7, a group of thirty-nine first-time middle-grade and young adult fiction authors with debut novels to be published in 2007. Their mission was to target booksellers, librarians and teachers and raise awareness of their books. The group, led by Greg R. Fishbone, Heather Tomlinson, Carrie Jones and Joni Sensel, started a

website, www.classof2k7.com, a newsletter, a blog and a discussion forum, which provide a showcase for the members and for their work. In addition, group members are encouraged to read manuscripts by other 2k7 members, and to co-promote each other's books. As part of that, members living near each other have approached local bookstores and libraries to set up group appearances, which have proven more effective than trying to convince the venues that a single new author would generate enough traffic for a successful event. The Class of 2k7 has also been helping other start up groups seeking advice on setting up their own consortiums. Those who wanted to join, but whose books were scheduled in later (or were moved to later dates), plan to be part of the Class of 2k8.

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