

FEATURE TOPIC: PR from the adult point of view

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Children's and young adult books are a tough sell to the media if you're not a celebrity or haven't just won a major award. So, what would it be like to be on the adult side, and what can we learn from someone who has a bigger ballpark to play in?

Rick Freshman, president of Planned Television Arts www.plannedtvarts.com and co-author of *Guerrilla Marketing for Writers: 100 Weapons for Selling Your Work* and *Guerrilla Publicity: Hundreds of Sure-Fire Tactics to Get Maximum Sales for Minimum Dollars*, has handled campaigns for former Presidents, top newsmakers, Hollywood stars, and many authors – both famous and those aspiring to be famous. From his vantage point, it's tougher than ever to get attention.

“When it comes to the top national television shows, there are very few opportunities for anyone who is not a celebrity or a top expert in a given field. We often tell authors that, while they may have a terrific book and be very well-versed in their topic, they're not likely to be chosen unless they have significant credentials (i.e. a top expert from Harvard or a medical expert on a hot news topic). The secondary shows like CNBC or Fox are sometimes possible but still very tough. We're also very selective about whom we present to the media and what stories we pitch because it will cost us our credibility later when things don't work out. We also recommend that most authors get media training and we do that for clients and on a project basis for others, in person or by phone.” Rick also runs seminars for authors and illustrators, and information can be found at his website at www.rickfrishman.com.

“One of the big changes I've seen in recent years is that editors are recommending that authors hire their own PR firm because there's a limit to what the publishing house can do. That's fine as long as authors are realistic about their expectations and realize that, most of the time, one book is not going to make them rich and famous – more likely it will be a useful tool to add to their career.” The difference in children's books is that this is the career (as opposed to a business book that promotes a larger business), and for us, it's even harder.

As with any media campaign, the tricks are to find the hook – what makes your story newsworthy? – and the audience – who will care enough about what you've written or illustrated to help spread the word? Rick Frishman sees radio, print media and the Internet as fertile territory for books of all kinds. In talking about common mistakes authors make, he pointed out that too often “smaller” media outlets are overlooked as not worthwhile in favor of book signings and other events. “Why go to the trouble of spending time at a signing when you can sit at home talking by phone with a local radio show and reaching 20,000 listeners? Sure it's not a huge audience, but it's far better than the 50-100 books you may sell and several hundred people you may meet at a successful event.” For children's authors, the situation is a bit different when looking at school events, which can net an additional thousand dollars or more in honorarium fees.

Surprisingly for the president of a firm called Planned Television Arts Frishman is a huge fan of print publicity. “It’s enormously important – like gold,” he says. “It’s as or more important than television.” Why? “Because you can read it, clip it, save it and then use it to sell books. And, like the Internet – which is our fourth medium – it lasts and it travels. “These are the places other media people will go to find sources, books and information.” 11:12/04