

Publicity Best Practices and Strategy for Unnamed Press

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A Note Before We Begin

You will often be met with silence or rejection, and this is never a reflection on your work or the book itself, but due to factors beyond your control. Always keep in mind that it isn't personal and don't let that silence stop you from thinking of creative alternatives and solutions. It also makes success feel even more triumphant when it does happen – and it will!

What's the Subject

The Subject Line is arguable the most important copy you will craft, and your most important tool for the follow up.

Avoid using words that are vague like “New debut novel” at the start – that’s valuable real estate! Ideally there is something eye-catching you can use, whether it’s an endorsement, the author, or the book’s topic.

Some examples of using endorsements for debut books:

- Megan Abbott calls 'A Certain Hunger' "American Psycho rewritten by Angela Carter."
- Hysteria by Jessica Gross - "If Moshfegh and Phoebe Waller-Bridge painted the town red together"
- Blurbs from Courtney Maum, Chelsea Hodson for Vagablonde by Anna Dorn
- What We Inherit "shook my deepest assumptions about America." -Sebastian Junger

Some examples of subject lines for authors who are known, or particularly arresting book titles:

- Pulitzer-winner Dale Maharidge's new book on poverty in America •
Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime by Alex Espinoza

If it isn't working – fix it. Often it's best to send pitches out in batches of 15 or 20

emails, because if there aren't any replies, you can make adjustments to the subject line before pitching the book to the next round of contacts.

Change the subject line when following up! In general, we recommend emailing about a single book 3 times (and no more than 4 tries if there is no response at all) and trying different subject lines.

After your initial outreach, wait at least 2 weeks before pitching again (in pandemic mode, more like 3 weeks, especially if you are still 3-4 months out from pub date). Try not to email the same person more than once a week. Often you will be juggling outreach with different titles. It's important to make a schedule so people don't feel like they are being bombarded.

Follow-up subject lines using coverage: In an ideal world, you will have something exciting to share when you email them a 2nd time, but failing that, trying out a different endorsement or a subject line about the content of the book can help, too.

Some examples with reviews:

- Vogue calls 'Like A Bird' by Fariha Róisín "One of the Fall's Best Novels" •
- NYT raves about Chelsea G. Summers' "stunning feminist page-turner"
- "Handler joins the ranks of Gail Honeyman and Maria Semple" Booklist
STARRED REVIEW

Some examples using the book's content:

- From Hell to Breakfast by Meghan Tifft --What We Do in the Shadows meets Ghost World
- Cruising as Resistance – Alex Espinoza's new book on LGBTQ history

Act Locally:

Often, **finding a local angle is your best chance for newspaper and radio interviews.** The absolute best-case scenario is if the author is based in the city where the book is also set, but that doesn't happen as often as you would think!

The local angle is a real incentive for many major newspapers, the Seattle and Portland papers won't even consider covering a non-celebrity author that isn't from their city, writing about it, and having a launch there. When following up to "local" media outlets, adjust the subject line accordingly. Often these require a shorter lead

time, so you can hopefully have some reviews at your disposal.

Some examples:

- SF-based debut author Esme Weijun Wang in NY Times, NPR • Memoir about Oklahoma upbringing by Man Booker winner Jennifer Croft
- Kirkus Star for Chicago-based Rebecca Entel's 'Fingerprints of Previous Owners'*
- SF-based debut author Rebecca Handler getting rave reviews*

*A note about the last two: not everyone knows what Kirkus is or the value of a Starred Review. The emails about Rebecca Entel's book were for Book Reviews Editors and Novelist / Freelancers – people very much in the literary world. The pitch for Rebecca Handler was to various arts organizations, local radio, and for places like SF Weekly, so even though she also has a Kirkus Star, that might not mean anything to them. Always consider the recipient and make adjustments as needed.

This brings us to local media in general. It's always helpful to **set up a "hometown" event**, not only because of the opportunity to connect with an indie bookstore and local readers, but because of the media opportunities.

Once an event is booked in the author's hometown (and usually you don't need to worry about turn out for something like this – parents' neighbors, cousins, etc., will all turn up) then you can pitch local newspapers, alt-weeklies, radio, and even TV* and morning shows in the area.

*I never thought Malu Halasa (a Jordanian Filipina American writer based in London but who grew up in Akron, Ohio) would be on the Northeast Ohio Fox News channel talking about feminism in the Middle East but such is the power of the small town success story!

This is some of the most important research you'll do when adding to the outreach list, and can help generate strong word of mouth book sales. Local media can also be leveraged into national coverage, so it's important to use in your strategy.

I Hope This Finds You

In general (and omitting the many follow-ups necessary), the timeline for outreach should be:

6-5 months before pub date:

- PGW sales team, internal marketing, and marketing strategy for any major conferences like Winter Institute and ALA Annual.

- Build outreach plan and spreadsheet
- Meet with Author about Questionnaire / Blurbs

5 months before pub date:

- Submit books to pre-publications for review (Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, Booklist, Shelf Awareness, Foreword Reviews). • Cover Reveal
- Schedule events and plan the tour (pitch book festivals)
- Pitch major book clubs (ex: Reese Witherspoon, Belletrist, Book of the Month Club, etc.)

4-3 months before pub date:

- Pitch national media: major newspapers, national magazines, book reviews, and literary publications/arts & culture magazines
- Pitch freelancers and book critics
- Send ARCs to “Bookstagrammers” and Influencers
- Send ARCs to booksellers

3-2 months before pub date:

- Pitch local media
- Pitch original essay ideas
- Pitch excerpts
- Arrange author interviews*

1 month before:

- Develop social media strategy for events and promotion
- Confirm awards submission plan (obviously this varies by awards deadline) • Finished copy mailing to major media

*While in general the book media world is completely unethical, friends still cannot review their friends work. Ideally, your author has friends who are also writers who have freelanced or contributed to some magazines in the past. Talk to your author about the possibility of their friend interviewing them about their book, hopefully the friend can pitch this themselves to their contacts.

This brings us to my personal mantra of book publicity:

Focus on what you can control

Besides book reviews, there are a lot of ways that a book can be promoted and discussed:

- **Interviews** – try and find friendly freelancers who are either a fan of Unnamed’s or a writer friend of the author that can pitch and place an interview on their own

- **Excerpts** – have three excerpt options at the ready: a 2000 word option, a 1000 word option, a 500 word option.
- **Essays** – This isn't right for every author, but if they are able and willing, think of an idea or two that could be pitched. These should feel relevant to the book's topic but expanding on an idea.

Book Critics are People, Too

Always name and/or tag the reviewer or critic in social media posts – they just want some acknowledgment, like anyone else!

It's important to develop a personal connection to book critics and culture editors, either by making plans for coffee or drinks when you are in town, or meeting at a conference like AWP (probably AWP's only value), and following them on social media and liking their posts – especially when they are covering books published by other publishers.

You will have a sense of what they are interested in by following them*, and you'll know not to pitch every book critic every book you publish. This helps build a sense of trust, it's all about mutual respect. They respect and understand that we are a small press trying our best, and we respect and understand that they expend a lot of effort in reading and reviewing books, with very little financial pay off.

*It's also important to think of your own social media – what is the image that you want to project? What voices are you amplifying/re-tweeting? How are you connecting beyond email?

This is also why there is a high turnover of book critic / freelancers (Instagram is off-setting some of that with sponsored posts, people are able to stay in the game longer), so it's important to read book review sections, literary magazines, and your most useful tool is going directly to the source: the **National Book Critics Circle**.

Every week, the NBCC sends a newsletter and updates their website with all of the reviews, interviews, and essays published by NBCC members that week. This is a great way to find new critics who are actively working, and to see what the critics are interested in.

The Personal Connection is Key

This is why every email pitch should not be just the press release with book cover and info, but we always include a note at the top. It can be more formal, describing why we are publishing this book and highlighting a particularly great review or blurb, or it can be informal when you have a personal connection. It's really up to you, but it's important that it feels natural, that it **concisely conveys why you are**

telling them about this book and why they should pay attention to it, and that they ultimately know there is a real person on the other end.*

*Publicists are people, too!

This is also why it's *really* important to double-check your email formatting before hitting send. If they can see that their first name is a larger font size than the rest, or gray instead of black, they'll feel like they are just being spammed, when they need to feel like they are receiving this pitch because you wanted them personally to know about the book.

Always take the time to highlight the top message (above the press release in the body of the email), and check that the font, font size, and font color are uniform.

This is also why we usually say "Dear FIRST NAME" when mailing a galley or sending an email.

Snail Mail:

Again, you want the recipient to feel like their time is valued, so always keep things as personal as possible, even if in reality you are sending 50 identical packages. They don't need to know that! Always include a personalized letter (this can be a post-it or handwritten note IF you have already emailed about the book, and that email contained the most up-to-date information about the book and blurbs) along with the press release.

If the recipient is based in a place where the author will be doing an event, mention that event in the letter and be sure to update the press release with the book tour information.

Competitive or Comparative

Comp titles are useful in lots of ways, from early marketing intel for PGW to thinking of authors to request blurbs from and writing compelling jacket copy. One other use for comp titles is review coverage.

Find 3 to 4 comp titles published the year or two prior and look at where they received media coverage. Would that critic also be interested in this book? Or maybe there is a place to pitch an interview or excerpt? It's a quick way to find relevant freelancers and media outlets, and can lead to great opportunities.

Keep it Rolling

Rolling PR updates are how we keep the PGW marketing team informed. Any pre pub reviews, or information about scheduled upcoming reviews, interviews, and essays is really useful for them to know. Also include events in these updates, so that the relevant field sales rep can be sure the order arrives on time. No need to send an update about a single title more frequently than once a month, you can wait to consolidate information so that it seems as exciting as possible. To keep it rolling, you simply forward the previous update and add the new information at the top. This is also useful for agents, so that you can send them a quick update, and is also a great reminder to double check that your press release and email pitch to the media are current.

Transparency & Invisible Labor

So much of the work that goes into a publicity campaign is hidden, which is why transparency is key. It protects you in the event that an author or agent is disappointed, and demonstrates the amount of work that went into the campaign. This is why it's important to update the spreadsheets when you have found new contacts to pitch and sent a round of follow up emails – so that your labor is visible. It also keeps us accountable and organized – that's what we call a win-win!

Another key part of transparency is not just making the spreadsheet visible and available to the author, but having two formal PR check-ins over the course of the promotion process. Those months can fly by, so it's important to schedule them. They can also lead to brainstorming and new avenues to explore.

We are a small, dedicated team, and while there is a lot that we do for our authors, you should also feel comfortable letting them know that some promotional activities are the author's responsibility. This includes: submitting flash fiction or short stories not connected to the work, pitching essays or articles not connected to the work, and if the author wants to review a book themselves or interview a different author. The author is responsible for maintaining their own personal social media accounts.* While we will make graphics and promotional images available for them to share, we can't go beyond that.

*Of course, always happy to advise and make suggestions.

In closing, keep things positive, be patient, try new ideas, and have fun with it. Much like a bookseller's role is to help get the right book in the hands of the reader, we are trying to find the right journalists and critics to champion a special book.