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Publicity Final Paper

23 April 2025

How to Publicize Romance

Romance books were originally mass-market paperbacks with shirtless men and long flowing hair on the cover. They were guilty pleasures that remained tucked away from the outside world, being read in private or thrown in a bag to read behind closed doors with friends. Now, romance books have drastically changed. They have become more widely accepted as literature and have had a major facelift. They have swapped the buff Fabio with cartoon-esque drawings and more artistic covers. While this alteration was happening, TikTok, a social media platform, grew. With the growth of TikTok, a book community blossomed within the social media frame. BookTok quickly took over, especially during COVID-19, and it started a high demand for bookstores to create feature tables and bays. Thanks to this side of social media, bookstores have a 120% growth in sales strictly due to romance, fantasy, and romantasy books. Endless streams of romance publications are released each Tuesday, and stores have expanded their romance genre section. In fact, the demand has gotten so high that several bookstores are romance only selling stores. With what some may argue is an oversaturated genre, publicity is extremely important for key books to stand out. So, how does one publicize romance in this new, romance-highlighted book world? Let's figure that out.

Most publicists juggle more than one book at a time and must start publicity six to eight months before the release date. With this timeline in mind, where do you start? Print media should be the first outlet you hit, since they have strict deadlines for their publications. Print

media, contrary to popular belief, is still alive, and most are prospering. Who could you reach out to for a review or a feature article for your romance author? There are the obvious big contenders for newspapers: The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times, etc. Most people read the newspaper sections of bestselling books. USA Today has a pretty expansive list and more often than not, will feature romance authors. Keep an eye on this list during the release date because if the author you represent makes it on, having a USA Today bestselling author as a tagline could gain extra traction for further interviews on broadcast or online media. The same goes for the New York Times bestseller list as well. However, they have more restrictions for their paper features. The paper normally highlights hardcover fiction and nonfiction instead of releases across the board, but they have since expanded to paperbacks online. It is a huge accomplishment to be labeled as a New York Times Bestselling Author. It is a title, like USA Today, that can brand the rest of an author's books if you have a repetitively published author. There is a way for romance authors to make this list, not only with the expansion of paperbacks, but also some publishers will decide to put out a special collector's edition in hardcover to reach the hardcover bestseller list. This will increase sales, too. As a publicist, keep your eye out for this as, again, it can be used in future emails as a tagline or point for extra intrigue. With all that aside, the New York Times has recently added a romance book columnist, Olivia Waite. Waite has made large waves in the romance department and is one of the top people that most publicists contact when referring to the New York Times. Alyssa Gammello, from St. Martin's Press, contacts Waite whenever she gets a romance book, and will send an immediate email with a PDF for a romance book that is a high contender for big sales. Waite has drastically changed the idea that romance can be taken seriously and should be featured in the New York Times in some capacity.

Aside from newspapers, there are other print media forms you can contact for romance books as well. Most trade reviews do not take romance books on, so you have to gain publicity and find pull quotes from other avenues. Most women-focused magazines offer a surefire way to get traction for a romance book. They are always on Kristin Dwyer's list when she sends out query emails from Leo PR. Some of her immediate go-tos and ones that you can add to your list are First for Women, Women's World, and Real Simple. However, there are more print titles you can contact when publicizing romance books. There are other "women's interest" magazines you can email and query like Elle, Vogue, Entertainment Weekly, US Weekly, Vanity Fair, Cosmopolitan, People, InStyle, Women's Health, and Allure. All of these print media titles also cover romance books, whether it be a compilation of the best reads, a review blurb, or a feature article. When reaching out to print media, do not forget about regional and local print media, too. Most cities and states have a local printed magazine. Some examples for the northeast are DownEast, Yankee, Boston Magazine, etc. Look at where your author is located and contact a magazine publication that is nearby. It may not be groundbreaking, but it will get you a spike in local sales. Once you have contacted editors for magazines close to your author, start branching out to other smaller, regional magazines next. On top of the regional media, there are more hooks you can test when reaching out to print media as well. For example, look at Casey McQuiston's newest release, *The Pairing*, where the main character wants to be a wine sommelier, and food and wine are a huge part of the plot, consistently being highlighted throughout. Could you contact food and wine magazines? You definitely could; it may not always work, but it is always worth a try. Additionally, you cannot neglect book-themed publications like BookPage, BookForum, or Women's Review of Books. These examples feature romance authors quite frequently and are popular contenders you could also reach out to.

Aside from print media, there is also online media and publications. Not all magazines or blogs are printed, but they are constantly making posts and articles online. One way that some publicists gain extra early traction for a romance book is to partner with an online publication for exclusive rights to do a cover reveal. Julie Paulauski, from Harper Collins, says, “It doesn’t always impact sales since it is a release so early, but it can train your reader to recognize the cover in stores.” When walking in a bookstore after the book releases, a shopper may be more likely to pick the book up due to recognition of the cover from months previous when the post was released. It can also create a relationship with your author and that publication by reposting and commenting on the cover reveal. Online publications can be more advanced than that, though. They can be used to find pull quotes to put on the back covers of books or to add as ammunition to gain further reviews, interviews, foot traffic, or sales. Some sites that see romance genre books as important to highlight are PopSugar, Bustle, Refinery29, BuzzFeed, and Glamour. Out of the five previously listed, PopSugar is one of the most eager to cover and review romance books. It is what most publicists go to after picking up a new romance title for their list. In fact, they have a whole section on their website location that is strictly titled “Romance Novels.” It covers a range from summer reads to paranormal romance books to have on your radar for spooky season. They have since expanded their genre to dip into romantasy, a new romance genre trending. On top of online publications, there is also the blog world. Some of the original book review blogs are still alive and extremely impactful. For example, Fairy Godmothers, Smart Bitches Trashy Books, and Nerd Daily still do romance book reviews and they have quite a large following. Keep in mind the same strategy for print publications when reaching out to online publications. What is a unique trait or factor in the romance book that you can use when reaching out to online publications? Also, remember to reach out to any local online publications

or blogs as well. Publicity isn't always dependent on the mainstream options. We live in a world where the online is all-consuming, so use that to your advantage when reaching out to online publications or groups.

Moving outside of print or online publications, let's look at broadcast publicity. When it comes to broadcast media, it can be difficult for romance authors to break through unless they are one of the already "established", like Emily Henry, Abby Jimenez, or Rebecca Yarros. However, it is possible. When looking at publicizing romance in the broadcast media world, first turn to local news media outlets. Local and regional media are more likely to take on a new romance author than the larger news outlets. Having a local author on their broadcast can be a hook for readers. However, you do not have to be confined to just local media for your author. You can expand out past where your author may reside and reach out to the smaller, regional broadcast stations as well. One way to draw extra intrigue for your author is to find a good hook. Sometimes it can be based on the setting of the romance book. However, the best way to get a hook is to get personal. Look first to your author. What can you find out about your author that others may not know or will spark enough curiosity? For example, Kristin Dwyer, founder of Leo PR, used this exact idea to get authors Christina Lauren onto broadcast media. Before they were well-known authors in the romance department, their authorship was misconstrued as one person. Instead, it was two people writing together under one name, both their names combined. Dwyer used this hook when contacting broadcast media to say, "Hey! Look at this. You think it has been one author this whole time, but actually it's two." Look into what makes your author unique since most romance books tend to follow similar plot outlines. At the end of the day, viewers and readers want to make the interaction personable. Another example of using a niche author trait to pique the interest of producers would be Julia Whelan. Whelan was known for

being an audiobook reader and persona, but in 2022, she branched out and decided to write her own romance book instead of just narrating others. This was the hook that Julie Paulauski used to get Whelan on broadcast media. It was a career shift that intrigued producers enough to question. Whelan had created a name for herself in the audiobook world, but now she was expanding into author territory. It was a change big enough to garner an audience and curiosity. This caused a snowball reaction in publicity, and Julie was able to get print and online media to cover her as well. Getting an interview on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox is a huge accomplishment, as well as on other minor, local news stations. So, what can you use as a hook for your author to pique the interest of producers and readers?

Producers for broadcast media won't be the only producers you will have to reach out to. You will also have to contact producers for radio shows and podcasts. When it comes to the radio, NPR is a big hit for some romance authors. One thing to keep your eye on before pitching these producers is the pop culture and news scene. What is currently happening in both scenes? Anything new or exhilarating that can be tied to your book? The news and pop culture scenes aren't helpful for just nonfiction, but for romance books, too. Is your author's book about going on a singing tour or trying out for a singing competition? If yes, look at what is going on in the music scene. Maybe something happened on American Idol that became headline-worthy, and you can use it as a hook to contact producers again. When searching the news, also keep in mind what you used to contact broadcast media. What makes your author unique? Keep it personal for broadcast and radio, or podcast shows. Producers want a hook, and sometimes that hook is with your romance author instead of the book they wrote. Author Jasmine Guillory is a great example of leaning into the personal. Before being a romance author, Guillory was a lawyer for her nine-to-five job. Julie Paulauski took her lawyer background and turned romance author as a hook for

broadcast and podcast media. When looking at NPR, you can also look at some of their affiliates or themed shows like Pop Culture Happy Hour, Radio Boston, Fresh Air, and On Point.

However, you cannot forget about podcasts, either. Some podcasts that highlight romance authors are Fated Mates, Buzzing about Romance, Smart Podcast Trashy Books, Shelf Love, Book Babes and Bubbles, and more. Podcasts are a great way for an interview to turn into a conversation for your author. They are not always timed like broadcast media may be, and can answer questions about your author and their book.

Let's take a break from media forms and instead jump to events for a second. Events can be a huge pull for authors, however, there are requirements in order for them to be successful enough to even be considered. When it comes to an author tour, Julie Paulauski says, "In order to even offer a book tour, there has to be a guarantee of two things. At least thirty books sold and an attendance of 75-100 people at each stop." Without those two things being a guarantee, it can be hard to provide an author signing book tour. There are some ways around it when it comes to bookstores putting on an event. For example, some bookstores require ticket purchases that include the book as part of your ticket cost. That way, it ensures attendance and book sales requirements. If you have an author who has written previous titles, the bookstores may offer additional purchases of the previous titles with their ticket as well. One other option when it comes to booking tours that Alyssa Gammello has begun is setting up a dual-author location signing stop. These are growing in popularity because they benefit two authors at once. If one big-name romance author is going on an extended tour, their publicist may reach out to you to see if you have an author who will be near that location on that day. For example, if author Sara Adams is going on tour and a local romance author is near that location, they may call in that other romance author to be the moderator if there is a discussion. It is a symbiotic relationship

for the author on tour and the guest author, as well as for the publicists, so keep this in mind when thinking about book tour events.

When finding bookstores or locations for your author tour, think about which stores align with your romance author and their book. You don't necessarily want to pick the Museum of Science for a location with a book about a small-town romance, but Lovestruck in Boston would be a great location instead. Think about what aligns with your author's book and the readers. Also, when looking at book tours, think local first. Don't jump the gun and go across the country, but instead narrow your location around your author. If they are out of Boston, what are some spots near them in the city you could contact? The same applies to all other locations. If your author lives in Illinois, how far are they from Chicago, etc.? You can also reach out to local bookstores close to your author's home location to see if they have tables during the weekends for signings. That way, it isn't so much a tour per se, but more so a tabling event near the author's home. With the right publicity from the publicist, the bookstore, and the author, this can sometimes be a big success. Bookstores are responsible for maintaining books from the warehouse for an event like this, and the author can sell anywhere from five books to thirty-five books, depending on how long the table is set up. When considering signing events, also look into book festivals and collective themed signing events. The Boston Book Fest would be an example of a book festival. However, a collective themed event for romance is more popular. Chicago is doing a romance event this year called "Wild and Windy." This event is held in Chicago. Phoenix, New Orleans, and Vegas each year, and has over thirty authors in attendance at each event. Although there tend to be some big-name romance authors at these events, it can be a good way for new, emerging romance authors to enter the community, make connections, and increase sales. These book events are held locally by individual parties or by a conglomerate

like “Wild and Windy.” It can be a great way to keep publicity events flowing post-release day for your author.

When thinking of events, you can also consider release day events. These small types of events are growing in popularity. What small events can you do to increase foot traffic and sales on the day of the release? One option is to contact local bookstores and send some promotional goodies related to the book. This is something that other romance authors and their publicity and marketing teams have started doing. However, there are more ideas to keep in mind when it comes to release day, too. Julie Paulauski and her team have been creating ideas for the upcoming romance books they are representing as a way to broadcast across social media platforms, so people will come out on release day. She and her team represented Alex Aster’s new romance, *Summer in the City*, and they partnered with a local coffee shop truck to set up in NYC with the cover and title of Aster’s new book on the side. Aster came to the coffee and book release event to meet her readers and sign some of their books, too. Paulauski and her team came up with the initial idea and then contacted marketing to further the process. Sometimes you have to team up with other departments in order to publicize romance books. However, when coming up with these ideas, always consider the location of the author, the book setting, and the main plots within the story. How can you turn a coffee shop meet-cute into publicity? Publicity is about creativity, and romance books are supposed to be fun or insightful, so think about some different and exciting ideas to come up with for a new release and book tour events.

Sending out advanced readers’ copies (ARCs) and galley proofs is another way to not only give producers and reviewers a chance to read the book, but also people on social media and other forms of influencers. Some Big Five publishers put this in their marketing department, but not all, so it is important to know who to send these to when publicizing romance books. There

are hundreds of book influencers out in this world now. They have jobs through YouTube and TikTok, reviewing and reading books for their viewers. Most book influencers focus on romance, fantasy, young adult, and general fiction. However, with the rise of TikTok, as previously stated, romance has become a forefront for the book influencer world. Remember those goodies and promotional freebies I mentioned earlier for release day? You can use those for a PR package with an ARC of the soon-to-be-released book to send out to these influencers. They can include bookmarks, book tabs, pens, and trinkets related to the book. The hope is that these influencers will open these packages on camera, read the book, and then create an early buzz with their review. Kristin Dwyer is constantly creating PR packages and trying to find new influencers to reach out to with her romance books she is publicizing. When looking for influencers, look at subscribers or followers to gauge how broad of an audience you may reach. Some influencers that are high on the chain are Sara Carrolli, Katie Witruk, Khalilah D, and Just Ali are some of the names and faces that publicists reach out to with romance book PR packages. It is a way to reach a broader audience of the younger generation who may not see book reviews in print media and instead look to social media for influence.

The moral of the story, when it comes to publicizing romance books, is to stay creative and build a relationship with the author you are representing. It is important to get personal with your author to create their story that you can send out to query different media outlets. The problem with romance is that it follows a similar structure across the plotline, so you need to make your author stand out. Always consider what personal attributes, history, or fun facts could be a hook for outlets. When looking at your author's personal history, also take time to dissect their book. What is a part of the plotline that is highlighted consistently that could make the story unique? When publicizing, think big and think small. Any media form can be helpful during your

process, so make sure you contact local and large publications or broadcast networks. Print, online, and broadcast media will always be a must when contacting for publicity. But don't forget about events and influencers, too. Make sure you are staying up to date in the pop culture world and scour the news sites for anything you can use to connect to your author or their book. Most importantly, don't give up, stay creative, and keep pushing. Romance is growing, and the way we publicize will grow too.