

# CRITIQUE GROUPS AREN'T JUST FOR CRITIQUING ANY MORE

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You've written a really good book and it's going to be published. And by a real, honest-to-goodness publisher, too. None of this vanity stuff for you and your fine work. And that, of course, means you can quit your day job, sit back, and wait for the royalty checks.

Right?

Wrong.

What it means in the real world is that you now have a third job. You've got your regular day job, your part-time job as a novelist, and now another part-time job as marketing guru because if your sales figures don't meet your publisher's expectations, your next book will molder (love that word!) on a shelf in a closet somewhere in your home office.

However, the scenario isn't as hopeless as it might appear. Especially if you are a member of a critique group. (And, if you aren't, form one immediately.) The secret is to be willing to share your talents and any information you gather such as mailing lists. When another member of the group is published, you're obligated to step forward in return. Here are some services you and the other members of your group can provide one another:

## **BOOK SIGNINGS**

Make it a group event and assign or let members volunteer for different tasks such as:

1. Ask one person to take charge of the sign-in register so that you can begin to create a list of potential readers/book buyers—a list you'll share with the other members of your group.
2. If you're serving food or refreshments such as wine and cheese, let a volunteer set up the table and serve the wine.
3. If you work full time, perhaps one of the members will do the shopping for you. They'll then give you a receipt and you'll reimburse them.
4. Ask one or two members to take photos of the event. Be sure to ask them to take a photo of you with the bookstore owner—and send the owner/manager a copy with a thank you note after the signing. If necessary provide a disposable camera, but also see if a member of your group has a digital camera so that you can post the photos on your website and/or submit digital photos with press releases you send via the Internet.

5. Members who can't help with these chores, may volunteer to help clean up. As you know, you always leave the bookstore or signing venue as neat as when you arrived. (Neater is better.)

6. And after the signing is over, have everyone make written notes of what was done well and what you can improve.

## **PRESS RELEASES AND PRESS KITS**

Press kits and releases are vital tools, but both take time. You can certainly write your own press release, but if you do, it's an excellent idea to have your release critiqued as thoroughly as your manuscripts. If nonfiction is not your forte, perhaps a member of your group is a reporter or works in marketing or PR. If you're not comfortable writing the release, get someone to do it for you.

Creating press kits takes time and should include the press release; your bookjacket; a flyer about your book; a list of forthcoming events—signings, workshops, and talks; photos from the signing along with a head shot; and reviews as well as any advance endorsements or blurbs. If you have promotional items such as bookmarks, postcards or refrigerator magnets, include those as well. Ask everyone to stay a little while after a meeting to help you put the kits together.

## **REVIEWS AND MAGAZINE/NEWSPAPER ARTICLES**

Who knows you better than the members of your critique group? And who better to write about you? Each member of the group should begin now to compile names of e-zines, magazines, websites, writers' organizations, and newspapers that use book reviews and articles about authors. Before your book comes out, the other members can write and submit reviews of your book and interviews/personality profiles of you.

It's a win-win situation. They get extra publishing credits and possibly earn a few bucks and you get positive publicity. Even better, you have a measure of control over what is written. You're too smart to tell another member how to write the review or the article, but you can certainly point out information that you want included or omitted.

## **MAILING LISTS**

This is an area that can be of invaluable assistance to each and every member. Begin now to compile these mailing lists:

- Daily newspapers in your area
- Weekly newspapers in your area
- Magazines in your area

- TV and radio stations in your area
- Bookstores—both general and specialized
- Libraries
- Civic and social organizations that present programs featuring writers
- Special interest groups that would be interested in your book
- Addresses from your high school/college reunion

Have the computer nerd in the group organize, format them for labels, and save them so that each member has a copy to use when his or her book comes out.

## MAILINGS

Obviously you won't send a press kit to every address on your mailing list. You'll send postcards to some, letters to others. However, whatever you send, get your critique group to stay late to help with putting address labels on the envelopes, inserting the press kits or releases, and affixing the postage. If it takes too much time to do this after a regular meeting, spring for some refreshments and have a special meeting at your house.

## NOW WHAT?

Now you have the information to create your own marketing guide. Whether you print a hard copy and keep it in a three-ring notebook or store it on your computer (and be sure to save a back-up copy), keep it current. Make sure your mailing lists are up-to-date. Keep track of what works and doesn't work in your mailings, at signings or launch parties as you and your other members hold them. Constantly research book promotion online. Print out articles. Talk to bookstore owners and other authors. Save the articles and notes in your marketing guide. As always, share that information with the other members of your critique group and encourage them to do the same.

Location, location, location is the mantra of the real estate and retail industries, but it applies to you as well. Unless you have tens of thousands of dollars to allocate to book promotion, you're smart to begin building your readership in your own neighborhood. Let your critique group help.

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