



MARIA ZANNINI'S BLOG

I'm always on the lookout for people with great promotional ideas. Well, I hit the motherlode with [Marcia James](#). I met Marcia on [Shelley Munro's blog](#) last year and I was blown away by her promotional savvy. I had to have her come here. Marcia, sensing a fellow dog-lover when she sees one, graciously agreed.

Marcia is an advertising copywriter and marketing consultant, and she presents author promotion workshops. In her eclectic career, she has shot submarine training videos, organized celebrity-filled nonprofit events and had her wedding covered by People Magazine. After years of dealing with such sexy topics as how to safely install traffic lights, Marcia is enjoying “researching” her novels' steamy love scenes with her husband and hero of many years.

And to any reader of this blog...

She offers her 200+ page file of author promotion options to any author who requests it. Just email her through the “Contact Me” page on her Web site: <http://www.marciajames.net/>

When Marcia asked me what she should talk about I immediately asked about my favorite subject; low or no-cost promotional techniques. As you read through this post, you'll discover she doesn't disappoint. Post your comments and questions below and Marcia will answer each of you. I give you, Marcia James.

PENNY-PINCHING PROMOTION: How to Make the Most of Your PR Budget

There's an old saying in advertising/PR circles, “Only half of all advertising works, and nobody knows which half.”

I wish I had a definitive answer to the question, “Where can I get the biggest bang for my PR bucks?” But like so much about promotion, it depends on a number of variables—including an author's budget, time constraints, and product. What's an outstanding opportunity for print books might be all wrong for e-books. Category romances with a limited shelf life might require a different PR approach than single title novels. And authors who do 100% of their own promotion face different challenges than those who have support from their publisher's PR staff.

If you have the time (and in some cases the skills), you can do a lot of promotion that is inexpensive or free. Here are some ways to stretch your PR dollars:

1. Reader and Writer Email Loops – There are many free email loops that allow author promotion, from publisher loops to loops dedicated to specific fiction genres and sub-genres. (You can do a search on [Yahogroups.com](#) for the latter.) Participating on these loops can be time-consuming but very effective. However, most readers gravitate towards authors who post regularly vs. just posting when they have new releases. And don't forget to reinforce your pen name by adding an automatic signature line to your emails. Some email loops restrict the number of signature lines to three, but you can easily add your Web site URL, possibly several social media site URLs, and the name of your current release or next book. Note: URLs are not case-sensitive. So make sure it's easy to read your pen name in your URL. For example, instead of <http://www.marciajames.net/>, I use

<http://www.marciajames.net/>.

2. Author Co-Promotion – Joining together with other authors for promotion can save both time and money. For example, authors can:

- * Split the cost of print ads in magazines such as Romantic Times BOOKreviews
- * Design and produce joint print or trinket PR materials (e.g., for authors who are in an anthology together, share the same publisher, or write in the same sub-genre can co-promote)
- * Arrange online chats and in-person booksignings together
- * Create a joint Web site or blog (Group blogs are very popular right now.)
- * Present online or in-person workshops together

3. Author Cross-Promotion – There are a number of ways for an author to promote another author, which results in both benefiting from exposure to each other's readers. For example, authors can:

- * Share reciprocal links (i.e., putting other authors' Web site, blog and social media site URLs on your site, and having them return the favor)
- * Interview other authors for a Web site or blog (e.g., my monthly James Gang interviews -- http://www.marciajames.net/James_gang.html)
- * Guest-blog (as Maria has so nicely allowed me to do today!)
- * Quote or promote other authors in articles you write, on your blog, and in workshops you present
- * Participate in non-profit fundraisers, such as Brenda Novak's May online auction for juvenile diabetes research
- * Create a unique cross-promotion opportunity, such as Paige Cuccaro's Writer's Caves (http://www.paigecuccaro.com/html/the_cave.html) and Janie Mason's Happily Ever Afters (<http://janiemason.com/HEA/>).

4. Social Media Sites – Online promotion through sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, can be free but very time-consuming. Even technophobes, like myself, are starting to explore the ways to reach new readers through these sites.

5. Design and Maintain Your Own Web Site – An author's Web site is her number one promotional tool. If you have the skill to design and maintain it (or the interest in learning to do so), then this can save you quite a bit of money.

6. Create Your Own PR Materials – You can produce lots of print promotional materials on your computer – including book plates, bookmarks, brochures, excerpt booklets and even iron-on designs for t-shirts. And some talented authors create promotional items or trinkets, such as book thong bookmarks. If you have children or a kind husband who can help you with the crafty items, that's a plus.

7. Podcasts and Vidcasts – If you aren't too shy to be interviewed for Internet Radio or Video, there are a number of shows that feature authors. One example is author Rachelle Chase's "Chatting With Chase" show on BlogTalk Radio.

8. Create Your Own Book Video – Technophobes might be intimidated (raising my hand here), but creating your own book video can be fairly simple and inexpensive. You'll need a program like MovieMaker, then you can buy music from sites like Stock20.com and images from sites like 123 Royalty Free and create a video to post on your Web site, YouTube, etc.

9. Networking – Power-schmoozing is a great way to gain name recognition and make contacts that can be important to you in every area of your career, including promotion. Even introverts can learn to be successful networkers. You need to perceive "scary" networking in a different light and prepare to schmooze:

- * Always remember that romance authors (and readers) are 99% incredibly nice and non-threatening. ;-)

- * When you approach another author, you're not asking for something, you're offering something—friendship, information, conversation, etc. Most will be grateful and/or happy to be approached.

- * Mentally and physically pump yourself up with a dose of chocolate, caffeine, or exercise, but avoid alcohol.

- * There are two sure-fire opening questions you can ask: Where are you from? (What chapter or state?) and What are you writing? (What genre or sub-genre?)

- * Compliments are also a great way to open a dialogue. Compliment the person on her outfit, jewelry, etc.

- * Wear or carry your own conversation pieces, e.g., a book pin or an interesting tote bag, that will give others a reason to approach you and start a conversation.

- * Network by yourself or with a single friend by your side, but avoid going around in a group of friends.

- * Smile and project an approachable demeanor.

- * If networking exhausts you and you're at a conference, go back to your hotel room for mini-breaks, to relax your smile and put your feet up for a few minutes.

10. Niche Marketing -- If you can spot elements in your book that lend themselves to niche promoting, you can win new readers and help grow the romance market. For example, since my books have Chinese Crested hairless dogs in them, I joined an international message board for "crestie" owners to chat with people who not only are great subject matter experts when I need detailed information on cresties, but are also interested in buying books that feature the breed. And once you have determined your niche market(s), you can look for groups within those areas in reference books, such as The Encyclopedia of Associations and Associations Unlimited.

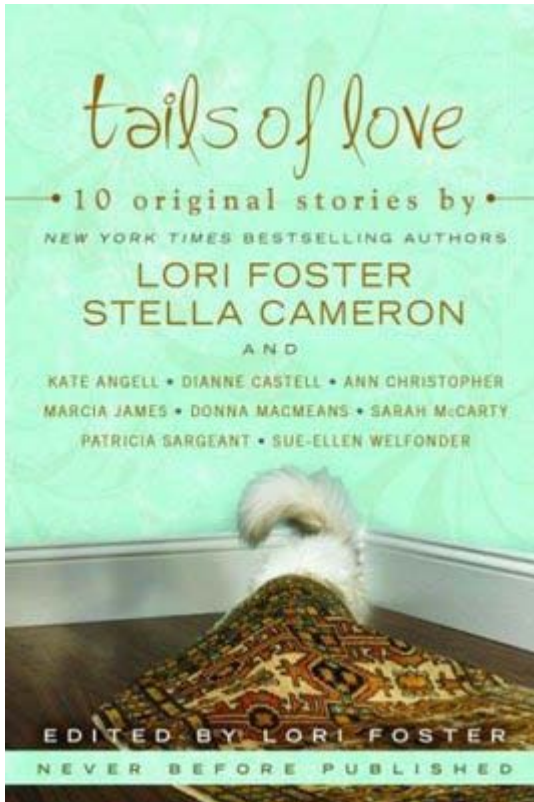
To reach niche markets, you can send press releases (by snail mail or email) to the contact person listed for the group. Sometimes the person will print the press release about your book in the group's

newsletter. You can also contact bloggers who post on the elements in your book. One way to find such bloggers is to set up a Google Alert for the element or topic. For example, you might have a heroine who practices t'ai chi. Set up an Alert for "t'ai chi" (put the topic in quotes so you have less false hits), and Google will send you regular emails whenever the topic is mentioned online. Once you have found groups and bloggers involved in your book's elements, you can ask them if they'd review your book in their newsletter or on their blog, if you sent them a free copy. It can really kick-off some valuable word-of-mouth.

Here are some "niche promotable" book elements:

- * Hero and heroine's vocations – What are your protagonists' professions? If your heroine is special events coordinator, there is a professional association for people in that field. If your hero is a veterinarian, you can look into marketing to the veterinarians' professional association.
- * Hero and heroine's avocations – What are your protagonists' hobbies? You might have a character who collects vintage cars, and there are many groups of vintage car owners. Your hero or heroine might knit or quilt (okay, your Beta hero might do these things!), and there are probably groups in your community of knitters and quilters.
- * Hero and heroine's sports/physical activities – Do your protagonists play softball or volleyball, fish, jog, hike, canoe, etc? There are groups devoted to all sorts of sports.
- * Hero and heroine's charitable activities – Do your protagonists volunteer for Big Sisters, Special Olympics, homeless shelters, or animal rescue? Is your hero or heroine dealing with a medical challenge, such as cancer, or a physical disability? Charities -- and the people who support them -- love to know when their causes are mentioned in a fiction book.
- * Do you have any 4-legged characters (not counting shape-shifters!)? – There are many, many organizations for those who love animals. And there might be marketing opportunities at a pet adoption fair or a Humane Society fundraiser (you could donate a themed basket with a signed copy of your book).
- * What is the timeframe and location of your novel? – If you write historical novels, there are groups interested in many historical eras. For example, there are Renaissance Fairs and Civil War reenactments that might offer a chance to promote your work. If you set your books in a certain city, state, or country (and maybe feature events specific to that location), there might be events that offer marketing opportunities, such as a state bicentennial celebration, the Kentucky Derby, a Scottish festival, an art fair, a jazz festival, or a Taste of the Town.
- * Do your books have paranormal, science fiction (s/f), or fantasy elements? – Quite a few romance authors in these subgenres promote their books at s/f or fantasy cons. There are also groups who are into vampire lore, shape-shifters, and dragons.
- * Does your book contain elements that would appeal to specific fans? – For example, do you have an Elvis impersonator in your book? Is your heroine's younger sister a Jonas Brothers' fan? Does your hero love film noir or NASCAR? There are groups for all of these.

The bottom line is nothing can beat or even match the support of your publisher—such as distribution, store placement, marketing, etc.—but you can supplement their efforts and build your readership. And the first step is continuing to write your “keeper shelf” books. ;-)



Happy promoting!
-- Marcia James

PS: I love talking about promotion. ;-) Just post questions or tips in this blog's comments, and we can have a lively discussion!

Marcia James writes hot, humorous romances and finished in eleven RWA chapter contests before selling her first comic romantic suspense, *At Her Command*, to Cerridwen Press.

In June 2009, her short story, "Rescue Me", will appear in *Tails of Love*, a Berkley anthology. **100%** of the author and agent proceeds from *Tails of Love* will go to the Animal Adoption Foundation, a no-kill animal shelter in Hamilton County, OH. This benefit anthology is the pet project (pun intended) of New York Times bestselling author Lori Foster, who contributes a story along with those of award-winning and bestselling authors Kate Angell, Stella Cameron, Dianne Castell, Anne Christopher, Marcia James, Donna MacMeans, Sarah McCarty, Patricia Sargeant, and Sue-Ellen Welfonder. *Tails of Love* is available for pre-order at:

[Borders](#)

[B&N](#)

[Amazon](#)

Maria says: You know where I stand on animal rescue. I implore you to buy this book, not just for the fabulous stories, but for the profound difference you will make to animals that really need your help. If you know an animal lover, they will LOVE this gift.