

- Top Ten Author Promotion Missteps by Marcia James



To paraphrase an advertising adage, "Only 50 percent of promotion works, but no one knows which 50 percent." So it pays to understand your PR options, as well as how to avoid undermining your promotional efforts. The following is my personal list of author promotion missteps.

**10. Sending too many book excerpts -- or the same excerpt too many times -- to reader loops. Also "drive-by promoting" on reader loops.**

Even in promotion, there can be "too much of a good thing," so be aware of how many excerpts you send to reader loops. You want readers to say, "Oh, look, another fun book excerpt from Anne Author!" vs. "Oh, no, not another book excerpt from Anne Author!" Also, readers enjoy interacting with authors vs. being treated as a target market. So if you don't have time to participate on these loops beyond posting book excerpts and blurbs, consider picking just one loop and developing reader friendships on it while promoting your books.

**9. Bad-mouthing people (especially those in the publishing industry), as well as other authors' books.**

Snark might seem popular on certain blogs, but what you say online can haunt you forever. It's best to follow the old saying, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

**8. Making things difficult for readers: a hard-to-navigate website, hard-to-read text, no printable book list, no purchase link by your website's book blurb/excerpt, etc.**

Readers appreciate being able to easily find information about your books and how to buy them. Is your website simple to navigate and read? If you have a reader e-newsletter, can they see how to sign up to receive it? If you have a book series, does your website list the books and their order, so readers can read them in sequence? Is there a clear "purchase link" next to your website's book blurbs and excerpts?

**7. Not using an email signature -- and not putting title CAPS in URLs.**

Making things easy for readers pertains to more than just websites. Do you use an email signature? Most email programs make it simple to set up a signature. It should include your

website URL as an active link, so readers don't need to copy-and-paste your URL into their web browser. The email signature can also include things like your tagline, the title of your current or next release, contest wins, etc. But check the loops you're on to see if they restrict email signatures to three lines. And remember that other writers are readers too, so use email signatures on your writer and reader loops.

Most URLs aren't case sensitive, so reinforce your pen name within your URL by using title CAPS. For example, it's easier to see my pen name in my URL if I type it [www.MarciaJames.net](http://www.MarciaJames.net) vs. [www.marciajames.net](http://www.marciajames.net). And sometimes title CAPS can avoid unintentional connotations. An example of this is a consignment store named Children's Exchange, whose URL used to be [www.childrensexchange.com](http://www.childrensexchange.com). The store had to shut down its website until it got a new domain name. Title CAPS would have prevented any misunderstandings in that example.

## **6. Treating readers, bookstore personnel, librarians, etc poorly.**

I'm always amazed when I hear of authors pulling diva acts at book signings or snubbing other writers at conferences. Successful marketing includes positive word-of-mouth, so why give the people you meet a reason to tell their friends and family how unkind you were? Booksellers don't hand-sell the books of authors who were a pain at a book signing. And librarians don't recommend books by someone who was difficult when doing a library presentation. Years ago, I attended the book signing of a *New York Times* bestselling mystery author. He was so abrupt (read "rude") to readers, I never bought another one of his books.

## **5. Discounting the importance of networking.**

Power-schmoozing can pay off with contacts who can introduce you to their agent or editor, give you a cover quote, join you in co-promotion efforts (like a group blog), include you in multi-author book signings, etc. The phrase, "It's who you know" is as pertinent in publishing as it is in every industry. Obviously, extroverts enjoy networking more than introverts, but shy authors can network online through reader and writer email loops.

## **4. Not Googling pen names and taglines before using them; and spending more on logoed PR items because you're buying them to promote one book vs. your brand.**

These two seemingly different missteps are connected under one concept: originality. Obviously, if you Google the pen name and tagline you'd like to use, you'll be able to determine whether or not another author has the same or similar name or tagline. Years ago, when I decided on the pen name "Marcia James", I did a search to see if there were other romance authors with similar names. I found Eloisa James and Stephanie James, who wrote very different stories than I did. So I locked in my domain name. Now, almost ten years later, there are so many authors with James in their names, I made lemonade out of the lemons by interviewing a different one each month for my James Gang feature ([http://www.MarciaJames.net/James\\_gang.html](http://www.MarciaJames.net/James_gang.html)). ;-) So while you can't predict who might have a similar pen name or tagline in the future, you can try to make yours as unique as possible today.



Uniqueness is also a good thing when it comes to your brand and the logoed PR items that support it. E.g., my logo is Smokey, a Chinese crested hairless dog, and he appears on my website, my business cards, and all of my print PR materials. I chose a "crestie" as my logo, because I have one of the breed in each of my books.



*Heating Up the Holidays*  
Liquid Silver Books

I give away thumbcuff keychains (over 7,000 and counting) as part of my "Hot, Humorous Romances" author brand. The keychains represent my law enforcement protagonists and the racy sex in my stories. Because I'm promoting my brand and not a single title with these thumbcuffs, I can order over 1,000 thumbcuffs at a time and save a lot on the bulk order.



One summer at the national Romance Writers of America conference, three people came up to me to tell me they were sorry they hadn't gotten any of the thumbcuffs I'd put in the Goody Room. Why is that important? Because I hadn't put any thumbcuffs in the Goody Room. Another author had bought them to promote a single book that had handcuffs on the cover, but a number of the people who noticed the thumbcuffs thought they were from me

because I've been giving away those keychains since 2006. So it would have been more cost-effective and memorable for that author to purchase in bulk a PR giveaway that would become associated with her brand.

### **3. Choosing to do PR options you hate or are ill-suited for.**

No one author can possibly take advantage of every promotional opportunity available -- even with the help of a publicist or a PR site, such as AuthorIsland. So why choose to do those things that are outside your comfort zone or areas of expertise? Instead, use criteria such as your personality, skills, and book specifics to determine your best PR options. This is a core element in my online author promotion workshops (including the one I'm presenting March 7th - 20th for Savvy Authors). For example, I'm an extrovert and love power schmoozing, so networking is one of my chosen promotional options. I'm also a technophobe who would hate learning how to design a website, so I hired a Webmistress (Karen McCullough, <http://www.KarensWebWorks.com/>) to create mine. I'm not saying, for example, that a shy author shouldn't try to develop networking skills; I'm simply saying that authors have limited time and resources, and it pays to use them wisely.

### **2. Not having a professional, often-updated website.**

A website is often considered an author's #1 one promotional tool. Make yours as professional as possible, with interesting, new content to entice readers to visit often. Like many authors, I have a website contest that encourages readers to join my author newsletter list (<http://www.marciajames.net/contest.html>). You can also offer free reads, articles, interviews, a blog, book plates and other giveaways, recipes, games, photos, etc.

### **1. Spending all your free time on promotion vs. writing your next book.**

Each book you write brings you new readers, so prioritize your time to allow for more writing than promotion. (This is a concept I have to keep in mind since I love promoting so much.) Social media sites, like Facebook, can be fun but incredible time drains. Protect your writing time, so you'll have products (your books) to market during the time you allot for promotion.

That's my list. ;-) As I mentioned earlier, it pays to understand your PR options so you can make educated choices. I have a 330-page Microsoft WORD file on Promotional Options that I give away free to any writer who would like it. To request this file, go to my website's "Contact Me" page and email me. I'll attach the file to my reply email.

If you're interested in exploring your promotional opportunities -- including niche marketing - - please check out my Savvy Author PR workshop, "GUILT-FREE PROMOTION: Picking the Right PR Options for You", March 7th - 20th (<http://www.savvyauthors.com/vb/workshoplister.php>). And if you have any author promotion questions, post them in the Comments section, and I'll do my best to answer them. ;-)

Happy promoting!  
-- Marcia James

*Marcia James writes hot, humorous romances and finaled in eleven Romance Writers of America contests before selling her first comic romantic suspense, *At Her Command*. Her short story, "Rescue Me", appeared in *Tails of Love*, a Berkley anthology, and her sexy Christmas novella, *Heating Up the Holidays*, was a December 2010 release from *Liquid Silver Books*. In her eclectic career, she has shot submarine training videos, organized celebrity-filled nonprofit events and had her wedding covered by *People Magazine*. An advertising copywriter and marketing consultant, Marcia presents online and in-person author promotion workshops.*