



THINKING OUTSIDE THE HEART-SHAPED BOX (Part One)



My guest is romance author, [Marcia James](#). She holds an Interdisciplinary Masters degree in Communications and Creative Writing from American University in Washington, D.C.

Marcia is involved in several charities and participated in a *March of Dimes Celebrity* downhill ski race in Big Bear, CA (Her team captain was Olympic gold medal pole vaulter, Bob Seagren.) She also spent an evening as the media escort for Tom Selleck during a U.S.O. event. (Held at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center, it was a televised, celebrity-filled Bob Hope birthday special.)

By vocation she is a freelance video scriptwriter and advertising copywriter. In addition to developing marketing and promotional materials.

Marcia also offers a two week online workshop on author promotion that offers lessons on topics, such as niche marketing, author branding, and co-promotion/cross-promotion. Marcia's next workshop is *August 15 - 28* and will include guest lectures from the following PR-savvy authors and publishing insiders: *Melissa Alvarez, Dianne Castell, Carol Ann Erhardt, Karen Harper, Susan Gee Heino, Kathy Kulig, Donna MacMeans, Michael Matthew, Janice Maynard, Karen McCullough, Beth Morrow, Patricia Sargeant, Kay Stockham, and DeNita Tuttle. For more information on this workshop, please visit: <http://neorwa.com/index.php/Workshops/Workshops>*

It is a pleasure to have promotion savvy, Marcia, here Over Coffee to talk a bit about hidden promotion ideas for authors. She will be visiting today and again on Wednesday.

Even a small amount of daily or weekly self-promotion cuts into an author's writing time. That's why you have to decide carefully which PR options are right for you and your books. The romance-reading community is huge and voracious, but finite. If you can spot elements in your books that lend themselves to niche promoting, you can win new readers and help grow the romance market.

This is what I call "*Thinking Outside of the Heart-shaped Box*". Look at the different elements in the book you're promoting to see which groups might be interested in it. E.g., since my books have Chinese Crested hairless dogs in them, I joined an international message board about "crestie dogs" 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.

Here are some "niche promotable" book elements:

1. 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.

2. 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 knitting and quilting groups online and maybe even in your community.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Four-legged characters (not counting shape-shifters!) – There are many, many organizations for those who love animals. And there might be marketing opportunities at a Humane Society fundraiser (you could donate a themed basket with a signed copy of your book) or a pet adoption fair.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

On August 4th, I'll talk about niche marketing resources and other PR tips.

- **Until then, I'd love to hear about your book elements and creative ways you can promote with them!**

THINKING OUTSIDE THE HEART-SHAPED BOX (Part Two)



Monday, August 2nd, I discussed ways authors are "Thinking Outside of the Heart-shaped Box" by using niche marketing. Today I'll talk about resources for this type of targeted promotion and tips to use your book elements for things like press releases, presentations, and guest-blogging.

Once you have determined what elements you can use from your stories to promote them, where do you go from here?

There are library reference books that offer information (contact name, email, address, phone, whether the group has a member newsletter, etc) for every conceivable type of association and club. And some of these reference books are available online through library Web sites. Here are two good reference books:

- The Encyclopedia of Associations--Regional, State, & Local Organizations (Gale Research Co., Biennial: v. 1. Great Lakes States, v. 2. Northeastern States, v. 3. Southern & Middle Atlantic States, v. 4. South Central & Great Plains States, and v. 5. Western States.)
- Associations Unlimited -- electronic resource (Gale Research Inc)

Most of these groups would be happy to hear from an author who has written a book of interest to their members. This does work better, however, for books that have a sensuality level from G-rated to R-rated, since some of these groups might not be willing to promote a "hard R-rated" or X-rated book to their members.

You can contact a group by email to ask if you can submit a press release about your book for their newsletter. Or you can join the group's message board or attend one of their local meetings. You can ask the group's contact person if you can send him/her a copy of your book to be reviewed in the group's newsletter or for their blog. You can run a contest just for their members to win a copy of your book or a themed basket. You can get a table at one of their events to hand out your promotional materials or sell your book.

If you've gotten to know your local librarians, you can ask which groups use in the library's meeting rooms. Or you can see if the library is planning a display or event with a local group. For example, a local quilting group might offer quilts to the library for a display. And if your book features quilting, you could ask the library to add your book to the display.

Or if the library offers classes – say on floral arranging -- and your heroine is a florist, you might ask the library to recommend your fiction book to the students, along with recommended nonfiction books on floral arranging. And if your library makes themed bookmarks for their patrons – which include lists of books on a certain topic or with certain elements (e.g., a bookmark of mysteries featuring cats) -- see if your book would fit any of their themes and could be included.

- Another promotional angle:

Depending on your book elements, you can tie your book to events or holidays. For example, there's a National Spay or Neuter Your Pet day. I reinforce my dog logo and brand, while supporting this important day, by guest-blogging on that topic on that day. You would not believe all of the interesting, funny, and crazy holidays out there. ;-) A good resource is *Chase's Calendar of Events*.

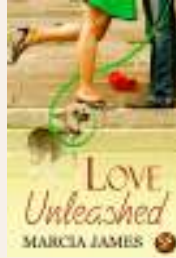
Another way to Think Outside the Heart-Shaped Box is to consider yourself as not only an expert on romance writing but also fluent on your genre or subgenre – and on elements within your books. For example:

- If you write Regency romances, you can give presentations not only about writing romances, but about the Regency period.
- If you write mysteries featuring a Napa Valley vintner sleuth, you can write articles on wine as well as articles on writing.
- If your contemporary romances feature matchmaking felines, you can blog on pet issues as well as on writing.

It's a little like having a double major in college. One of the majors will be in fiction writing, while the other(s) will concern elements in your books.

Thinking Outside the Heart-Shaped Box is a matter of opening your mind to the possibilities beyond traditional author promotion. All it takes to do niche marketing is the same imagination you use to write your books. ;-)

Have any of you used these or similar tactics? What success have you had?



Marcia James' short story, *Love Unleashed*, was part of All Romance eBooks' American Heart Association fundraiser in February 2010. Marcia offers her 300-page file of author promotion options free to any writer who requests it. Just email her through the "Contact Me" page on her Web site: [http://www.marciajames.net./](http://www.marciajames.net/)



Marcia James, when she isn't penning romantic comedies with elements of mystery and suspense, is a freelance video scriptwriter and advertising copywriter. In addition to developing marketing and promotional materials, she writes romance articles for her local weekly newspaper. After years of dealing with such sexy topics as how to safely install traffic lights, Marcia is enjoying "researching" and plotting steamy love scenes for her romance novels with her husband and hero of many years.

In her spare time, Marcia enjoys volunteering for non-profit organizations. One of the benefits is networking with celebrities. Thanks to her involvement with good causes, Marcia asked the guests at her 1989 wedding to donate to charity vs. buying gifts. Word of the "non-profit wedding reception" reached *People Magazine* which covered event. (Her wedding was also featured in *The Washington Post* and *Brides Magazine*.)