
The Kiss of Death



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THE PR BUDDY SYSTEM: The Benefits of Author Cross- and Co-Promotion

By Marcia James

Self-promotion. Say the word aloud in a room full of authors and watch a finger-nails-on-the-blackboard shudder run through the crowd. Promotion can be a scary drain on time and finances. For this reason, savvy self-promoters are joining forces with other authors to share the expense and effort—a sort of PR buddy system.



The simplest form of *cross-promotion* is reciprocal links—authors posting each other's URL links on their own sites. Cerridwen Press author Paige Cuccaro took this a step further, posting both links and photos of other authors' offices on her Web site's popular "Writer's Cave" page (http://www.paigecuccaro.com/html/the_cave.html).

Another form of cross-promotion is guest-blogging, a free and easy way to introduce yourself to another author's readers and vice-versa. For example, Medallion Press author **Cheryl Norman's** "Grammar Cop" blog (<http://cherylnorman.com/blog>) has occasional guest authors who bravely post "regarding those burning questions about grammar." Kensington author **Shirley Jump** has featured guestbloggers on her recipe-filled "Eating My Words" blog (<http://www.shirleyjump.blogspot.com/>). She even offered me, a non-cook, a shot at posting on my Avocado Body Paint recipe. It was a fun PR opportunity that cost nothing and required only a short commitment of time.

Blogs are as varied and unique as their creators. Bantam Dell/Tor author **Jenna Black** recommends **Jackie Kessler's** blog (<http://www.jackiekessler.com/blog/>). "She has the main character of her [Kensington] books—a former succubus named Jezebel—interviewing main characters of other people's books," explained Black. "Jezzie will be interviewing my heroine, Morgan Kingsley, on November 26, just in time for the release of Morgan's first book."

Speaking of interviews, they are another enjoyable way to cross-promote. Leisure author **Winnie Griggs** spotlights a different writer each month on her Web site (<http://www.winniegriggs.com/spotlight.html>). The "Author VIP" brings traffic to Griggs' site by announcing the interview to readers and on email loops, while Griggs' fans learn about the featured authors. And the interviews themselves can be used by the spotlighted authors as part of their print and on line press kits.

Co-promoting with other authors is another smart PR move. Many writers are banding together to do co-op ads or form group blogs. One example is the Vamps & Scamps blog (<http://vampsandscamps.wordpress.com/>). Kensington's **Dianne Castell**, one of their ten authors, said, "The Vamps and Scamps loves guest-bloggers, too—both authors and readers. It's fun to discuss books from both viewpoints."

Another is The Pink Ladies blog (<http://www.pinkladiesblog.com/>). "The beauty of a multi-author blog is that you have other authors with whom you can share the costs and the work," participating Kensington author **Patricia Sargeant** explained. "It underscores the point that, as writers, we aren't in competition. At the Pink Ladies Blog, an added bonus is that we represent so many romance subgenres. An example of true cross-promotion, too."

Authors can co-promote through a variety of joint ventures. For example, a group of Ohio authors, under the leadership of Berkley author **Lori Foster**, has a MySpace page (<http://myspace.com/romanceauthors>). As one of these authors, I was able to dip a technically challenged toe into the MySpace pool without jumping in—possibly over my head—with the time commitment of my own page.

Another group MySpace page is run by the International Thriller Writers (ITW) debut authors

(www.myspace.com/itwdebutauthors). Avon's **Jordan Dane** and other KODers are part of this “First Kill” group. “We have community MySpace and Crimespace blogs [and] space on the ITW Web page,” Dane explained. “We all pitch in to promote the genre plus each other.” And the benefits have gone beyond gaining new readers. “When I posted my news on selling another three-book series to Avon HarperCollins,” Dane said, “I got international hits and queries on my foreign rights. I've already sold into Germany with other deals working.”

In addition, the First Kill authors conduct workshops together at conferences—another way to co-promote. **Dianne Castell** has joined her best friend **Lori Foster** to host their own conference, their annual Readers & Authors Get-Together in Cincinnati. “It's a fun, relaxed weekend of readers and authors, and now agents and editors and publishers,” Castell said. “The only cost is the price of food, \$35 for readers to meet over 70 authors and authors to meet over 200 readers.”



The June event features a huge booksigning—yet another opportunity for authors to promote to each other's fans—as well as a raffle benefiting several worthy causes. “Dianne and I wanted to

send out a great big THANK YOU to readers and authors because they're the nicest group of people ever,” Foster said. “We wanted to do a function that didn't cost the moon, was based on having fun and would also lend a hand to our community. It's more rewarding than we'd ever imagined.”

Creativity is part of a writer's “toolbox”, and many are putting it to good use in crosspromotion. For example, Ellora's Cave/Cheek author **Michele Pillow** does scavenger hunts (http://ravenhappyhour.com/raven_halloween_hunt.htm), in which readers search authors' Web sites, then answer quiz questions or locate hidden logos to win prizes. “I participated in the Halloween Scavenger Hunt,” **Jenna Black** said, “and my Web site hits [went] up hugely.”



Sourcebooks/Samhain author **Terry Spear** (<http://www.terryspear.com/>) has turned her talent at making award-winning teddy bears into an author PR op. “I've been making specialty bears for authors' books,” Terry said. “When they have their contests, I advertise their books and the contests on all my loops and my sites.” She also teaches online

workshops, using examples from other authors' books in the courses.

Mira author **Brenda Novak** (<http://www.brendanovak.com>) is an amazing promotional role model. Her well-publicized, annual online auction for diabetes research offers an opportunity to join other authors, readers and industry professionals for a wonderful cause. “Everyone gives great stuff, but those who get creative and really run with it get spotlighted in my newsletter, [which] goes out to 22,000, and on the front page of my Web site,” Novak explained. “Last year, we had nearly 10,000 unique visitors. Superromance author **Anna DeStefano** is a great example of someone who really wants to help but will also gain a lot of PR value for her contribution. Last year, she did a whole page of designer purses. This year, she's doing the same...remaining consistent and building a connection between those awesome purses, the auction and her.”



Novak has co-promoted her books, too. For example, she joined with Ballantine's **Allison Brennan**, Grand Central Publishing's **Karen Rose** and multi-genre author **Wendi Corsi Staub** to produce and distribute a poster to bookstores when they all had a book coming out at the same time.

She also wrote a serial Whodunit game with **Karen Rose**. “The first person to correctly guess the villain won the grand prize,” Novak explained. “We advertised the start of the game in *RT BOOKreviews*, and it turned out to be an amazing success. I'm still hearing about it from the participants, so we're going to make it an annual thing.”

These examples of pro-active co- and crosspromotion are just a fraction of the opportunities available today. So the next time you hear the dreaded “self-promotion” word, don't cringe. Instead, connect with other authors. The possibilities are endless.

Marcia James' debut comic romantic suspense, AT HER COMMAND, was released in trade paperback this year from Cerridwen Press. After a career in marketing and advertising, she enjoys PR but tries not to admit that in front of other authors. She offers her file of author promotion options to any RWAer who requests it. Just email her through the “Contact Me” page on her Web site: www.MarciaJames.net