**A Tome About Promo for Indie Authors**

**By: Kait Nolan**

**Part 1-The Blog Tour**

Posted on [February 5, 2011](http://kaitnolan.com/2011/02/05/a-tome-about-promo-for-indie-authors-part-1-the-blog-tour/) by [Kait Nolan](http://kaitnolan.com/author/seanachi/)

I’ve been thinking a lot about promo lately, looking at what I’ve done, what others have done, and trying to gauge what the best bangs for your buck are.  This is totally relevant to an indie because starting out, you don’t have many of those bucks to spend.  So anyway I thought I’d talk about what I’ve done over the last year to promote my books and my platform.  Your mileage may vary.  I started to put this all in one post, but it was turning into a Post of Ridiculous Proportions, so I’m going to break it down into a series.  We’ll start with Part 1.

**Right out of the gate when I released *Forsaken By Shadow*, I did a month long blog tour for the month of May.** This was somewhat about promoting the book, but really more about getting my name out there.  Except for the small following I had already on my blog, mostly a group of other writers, nobody knew who Kait Nolan was.  This was evidenced by the fact that the top search terms for my blog were “Gerry Butler”, “the crud” (seriously? Who needs to look up what the crud is?), and assorted terms that led to my post opining about the unfortunate moniker “tramp stamp” for lower back tattoos.  Obviously I’m doing something right as currently “Gerry” is only beating “Kait Nolan” out for lifetime searches for my blog by a hundred or so now.

Anyway so I did a 31 day blog tour for the month of May.  Some of my stops were the blogs of already traditionally published authors who were Twitter friends.  Some were simply other wonderful writer friends who gave me a shot to talk to their blog audiences.  Many also had small audiences, as I did, but that was fine.  Baring the death of that blog, these posts will be out there for eternity in the Google world, and people still stumbled across them from time to time.  We were helping each other.  Mostly I didn’t post about the book unless the host asked me to.  That was reserved for the little author bio/blurb at the end with discrete buy links.  I talked about all kinds of stuff, trying to gear the post toward something that the host’s audience would find interesting.  Some of that was about writing.  Some was about books in general.  My topics were all over the place and were, hopefully, interesting and non-repetitive to anyone actually FOLLOWING me on said tour.

Going back to track those initial sales for FBS, they doubled from April (went from 23 to 50).  I was thrilled with that.  I have no way of knowing how the tour really affected those sales.  They could easily have been from the darlings on Twitter who RTed and told people to help get the word out.  But it certainly didn’t hurt.  And other than quite a chunk of time, it didn’t cost me a dime, which was exactly where I was on promo budget at the time because I was still earning back that initial $150 investment for copyright and cover costs.

A few words to the wise for doing  your own blog tour:

1. **Be sure to gear your post toward THAT BLOG’S AUDIENCE**.  This shows that you’ve been a thoughtful reader and you’ve taken the time to check out what sort of posts that host makes themselves BEFORE approaching them.
2. **Be sure to provide your draft post to the host well in advance** and politely make certain that said host knows that you CAN and also HOW TO schedule a post in advance so that it actually goes live on the proper day.
3. **Be sure to check out the potential host blog to make sure that they post on a regular schedule.** One of my hosts, I discovered after the fact, hadn’t posted in 3 or 4 months prior to my guest post, so I suspect no one actually SAW that post.
4. **Be calculated about this.** If you write in a particular genre, it would absolutely behoove you to pick some blogs by other authors in your genre because they probably have a higher chance of having fans who would also like your stuff because they already read in that genre.
5. **Above all, be polite and remember that the host is doing you a favor.**

**Part 2-The Freebie**

In [Part 1 of this series, I talked about The Blog Tour.](http://kaitnolan.com/2011/02/05/a-tome-about-promo-for-indie-authors-part-1-the-blog-tour/) Costs you nothing but time and helps build some recognition for your name.  **Today I want to shift gears and talk about something else that costs you nothing–the freebie**.

Now when I say freebie, I mean a couple of different things.  A freebie, to my mind, can be either free copies of your book that is for sale or straight up free reads that you offer on your website, as a bonus for signing up for the newsletter or whatever.  **Both serve the same primary purpose: Giving new readers a chance to try your work without any monetary risk  to them.**

Now I can already hear you sputtering, “But, but, but…those are lost sales!”  No, my friend, they’re not.  **You cannot bemoan the loss of HYPOTHETICAL sales.** And if you have no name recognition or reputation to drive those hypothetical sales, the chances of someone finding and trying you are considerably diminished.  You’re new, after all.  You have no established track record with readers.  And you’re indie, which means that the Gatekeepers of traditional publishing, whose alleged job is to keep the dreck out of readers’ hands, have not waved their magic wand of approval over your work to say “yes, this meets some minimum standard”.  Dude, you’ve got odds stacked against you, so stop thinking about those hypothetical sales and start looking at the things you can to that can lead to ACTUAL sales over the long term.  As I am often fond of saying, publishing is a LONG HAUL game.

**So let’s look at the first of these types of freebies: Giving away copies of the book you have for sale.**

When I did this the first time with *Forsaken By Shadow,* **I had a giveaway offer on my blog.  I would give readers a free copy (which is made nice and easy by the Coupon function at Smashwords, where readers can obtain any format their little heart desires) in exchange for an *honest review*.** I can’t remember if I limited it to reviews on Amazon or if it was across the various places I had it for sale.  But it was absolutely geared toward getting 20 reviews on Amazon.  At that time, 20 was hypothesized to be the magic number that would get Amazon recommending you to others.  It would help get you noticed.  I’m no longer sure that this is the case, as Amazon keeps apparently tweaking their logarithms and junk.  But whatever, this was the goal at the time.

So I gave away a bunch of copies, and I got my 20+ reviews.  Sure, not everyone who got a copy reviewed it.  Some folks probably forgot.  Some may not have liked it and rather than leave a review saying so (even though I asked for HONEST reviews) decided to stay quiet.  Whatever.  I still got my 20+ reviews.  Thankfully they were almost all 4 and 5 star reviews, which does a really great thing: **it begins to establish your credibility with readers.** The more reviews you get, the less likely it is that you got your friends and family to all come rate your stuff (which is one of the myths floating around about indie authors…in fact the vast majority of reviews I’ve received have been from people I don’t actually know).  My sales went up.  It’s impossible to narrow down the specifics of WHY.  There were a lot of factors at play and there was nothing at all scientific about the approach that I took because I was blitzing trying out a LOT of different stuff.  But it absolutely can’t hurt.  Because those people, if they like your stuff, will do this other fantastic thing: They will tell their friends.  **Because here’s the thing.  Readers love books. And they like to introduce others to good books.  You want to do everything you can to cultivate your relationship with readers because they’re worth more than a multi-thousand dollar campaign.**

**Which brings me to the next component of this freebie thing.** [**Goodreads**](http://goodreads.com)**.** If you have not set up an account on Goodreads, you need to go do it right now.  It’s like Facebook for Readers.  But way better because it doesn’t have all the lame, annoying games and poking.  There are groups you can hang out in (and you’d better be really participating, not just dropping in to pimp your book–that’s rude), friends to be made, pay per click advertising (I’ll come back to that later this week), and most importantly for our purposes today–EVENTS.  What I did with *Forsaken By Shadow* later on in the year was to have a Goodreads Event where I, again, offered up free copies to anyone who would post an honest review.  And this was awesome and better than my blog because I had a much wider potential audience here–both the hundreds of people who were my Goodreads “friends” and, because I made the event sharable, anybody on the friends list of those who share the event.  When I started, I was aiming for folks to post reviews on Barnes and Noble, Smashwords, Goodreads, and assorted other spots where the book was listed.  But the unexpected and wonderful thing I found was BOOK BLOGGERS.

**Book bloggers can be an author’s best friend.  We’re talking about what is tantamount to professional readers who keep blogs devoted entirely to reviewing the books that they read and telling people what they thought about them**.  If you hook a book blogger and they review your book favorably, they’re gonna have a LOT bigger impact on getting your book in front of a much bigger audience that can lead to potential sales.  Of course they can also negatively impact you if they *don’t* like your book, but that’s a risk you have to take.  If you put out a quality product, to the best of your ability, that possibility is much diminished.  I’ve wound up with a fair number of book blogger reviews that were quite positive, and I’ve definitely heard from readers who said that that’s where they’d heard of me.  I’ve got a list of them on each of my book pages up top so you can see what folks are saying about each title.  **Book bloggers are awesome because that adds yet another layer of credibility to your work.  You’re getting positive reviews from somebody readers trust**–there’s a lot smaller chance that you’re related to or friends with all of THEM–meaning that in readers’ minds, they’re a lot more likely to be honest about what they REALLY thought about the book.

**Of course Goodreads isn’t the only way of getting in touch with book bloggers.** Most book blogger sites have a section on submission requirements.  Be sure to pay attention to these to make sure that your book meets their criteria for genre, format, etc. before offering it for review.  And beware that many book bloggers still will not review indie published books.  That’s changing, of course, but you definitely want to make note about what each blog’s policy is on such things in the same way you would pay attention to the submission criteria for querying an agent or publishing house.

**Okay lets shift over to the other type of freebie–the one you have on the website or elsewhere.** Now some folks have short stories, novellas, or even whole novels available for free.  They may be just on their website or they may be listed out on Smashwords (which then gets the free work into their premium distribution channels–again lots more places for people to try you without risk, which is a Good Thing).  I haven’t done the latter yet.  I’m slow to produce, so I haven’t yet been able to justify to myself putting the stuff that I’ve written out completely for free.

**But I did serialize *Forsaken By Shadow*.  Over the course of 6 months, I did weekly installments in what I called Free Fiction Friday**.  The hope was that people who regularly came to my blog would read it, like it, and not be able to stand to wait to find out what happened.  And it worked.  I heard from numerous folks (largely through Twitter) that that’s exactly what happened.  Again, no idea how many of my sales this tactic accounted for, but it was some.

**What I’ve done with my current (as of this writing) release *Devil’s Eye* is something slightly different.** It’s for sale in all the usual venues, but I am offering free copies to anybody who signs up for my newsletter.  Up to this point, I’ve done a lousy job building my newsletter (which, according to what They Say, is a really important component of sales).  Adding this freebie as a benefit to readers quadrupled my number of subscribers in less than a month.  Now will all of those people go out and buy my next release when I let them know about it in the newsletter?  Probably not.  But a big chunk of them might.  So that’s trading on the possibility of future sales.

My plan for the future, which I’ve talked about before, is to have an archive of short stories–stuff that isn’t available anywhere else–that I offer exclusive access to for newsletter subscribers.  Someday in the distant future, I’ll accumulate enough stories to compile into an actual formal release, but in the meantime, it’ll be another good way to build that newsletter.

Now are you noticing the consistent theme here about everything I’m talking about?  In all of these scenarios where you are giving away free work (and theoretically giving up that sale), you are *getting something in return.* Reviews on sales sites.  Reviews by book bloggers.  Subscribers to your newsletter.  All of these things contribute to the possibility of future sales if you hook the readers with the free stuff and create, instead of just a reader, a *fan*.  And if you don’t.  Well they probably wouldn’t have bought you in the first place, so you didn’t actually lose anything.

**Part 3-More About What Goodreads Can Do For You**

So if you’re just joining me for this series, in [Part 1 I discuss The Blog Tour](http://kaitnolan.com/2011/02/05/a-tome-about-promo-for-indie-authors-part-1-the-blog-tour/), in [Part 2 I discuss The Power of the Free](http://kaitnolan.com/2011/02/07/a-tome-about-promo-for-indie-authors-part-2-the-freebie/).  In the latter, I mention Goodreads as an excellent source for doing review copy giveaways and the like, but that’s certainly not where the awesome of Goodreads ends.

Now the stuff I’ve focused on up to now has largely been to do with promoting the book you already have out.  What I’d like to talk about next is promoting your upcoming release.  Goodreads provides a couple of different ways to do this, both of which largely rely on having your cover art.

Before we move on, I have to make a statement about cover art.  Do not, under any circumstances unless you are a professional graphic designer, design your own cover art.  And don’t have your BFF or a family member do it either because if you do and it sucks, then nobody will be brave enough to tell you.  Cover art is (next to telling a good story and making sure your product is well edited and formatted) THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, so for the love of all that is bookish, hire a professional cover artist. /PSA.

Ok, so when you have your cover art and your nice, handy dandy little blurb describing the book, the next thing you should do is list the book on Goodreads.  The easiest way to do this (at least that I can find) is to do a search for your title.  It will then bring up whatever the search does, and there will be an option on the right-hand side of the screen that says “Manually add books.”  This will take you to the nice little screen where you enter in all your details about the book, including uploading your pretty, professionally-designed cover art.  When you’re finished, click “Create Book” at the bottom and, voila, your book now has a Goodreads page.  For an example of a book page for a book that’s not yet out, [see the one for my upcoming release, *Red*](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9844320-red)*.*

Why is this a good thing?  Well apart from the excitement of showing off the new pretty that is your cover art, it allows people to ADD YOUR BOOK to their To Read list (and/or any other list they might like).  This means that in the days, weeks, months (depending on how much time you have) before your book releases, there’s time for people to NOTICE your book and think “hey, I wanna read that…CLICK”, then bookmark it in their To Read list for when it actually comes out.  You can also put an “Add this on Goodreads” button on your blog, Facebook, wherever to encourage folks to do exactly that.  And, you know, it’s a nice thing to then go add those people to your Goodreads friends list, so that when your book really does come out, you can make a book recommendation to them so that they know it’s available.  This, of course, is more free advertising (well, other than the cost of your cover art, which you’re going to have to pay for anyway).

You can also do Pay Per Click advertising on Goodreads.  On any given page of the Goodreads website, you will see a box (usually on the right side, lower on the page) that says “Sponsored Books”.  These books are part of the PPC program, otherwise known as Self Serve Advertising.  Here’s how this program works.  You will create a campaign, write up ads (these are short…140 characters, so think about advertising your book in a Tweet) and feature any image of some kind–book cover is best.  These ads can be linked to any website.  The default is the Goodreads page for the book, but you could link it to the Amazon sales page or some other page if you like.  Once you create your ads, they will go into the queue to be approved by the nice Goodreads staff.  Meanwhile, you will decide how much you want to spend.  This is pay per click advertising, meaning that you don’t pay a cent until someone sees your ad and clicks on it.  You will set your total amount for the campaign (which can be set to be a recurring payment if you like), and how much you would like to pay per click (anywhere from $0.10 to $50).  I have yet to figure out why anybody would want to pay $50.  I got the best results by setting it at the lowest click rate amount (a dime).  And, what makes this fabulous as opposed to other forms of advertising, is that you can TARGET IT based on reader AGE, GENRE, and other factors.  So if you write romance, your ad isn’t being wasted on a bunch of crotchety old men who read nothing but war novels or something.

I had 3 ads rotating for *Forsaken By Shadow*, and the cool thing about this program is that it will give you stats so you can see which ads are the most effective in getting people to click.  What’s the end game of these ads?  Well, for me it was getting folks to add my titles to their To Read list.  I have no way of directly measuring sales connected to these ads, but again we’re talking about building some buzz and recognition.  It will show up on your book page how many shelves your book is sitting on.  The higher that number, the more likely people are to add it to their own shelf.  Now do all those adds automatically translate in to sales?  Maybe not.  But it gets your book into their awareness, and when you’re indie or just building your platform and don’t have a big marketing department behind you, you need all the help you can get.

Tune in tomorrow for Part 4 where I talk about the types of promo I don’t think would be the most effective.

**Part 4-Least Bang For Your Buck**

I’m late posting today because *we are having the second snow day of the season*, and I slept in.  Y’all this doesn’t happen here.  It just doesn’t.  So hell has probably frozen over.  I’m taking advantage and going to build a snowman whenever I make it out of my fluffy bathrobe and slippers.

In any case, this brings us to the last part of our series–the stuff that I think gives you the least bang for your buck in terms of promo.  Now I haven’t actually DONE any of this stuff (because I’m ~~a cheapskate~~ frugal), so this is more my opinion and a collection of observations.  Take it all with a grain of salt.

* **Newspaper/magazine/print media ads**: Now, I have no data to support this at all, but frankly I’m not sure why anybody, even traditional publishing houses, spends money on this.  I realized I am not 100% representative of Jane Q. Public, but face it, we are an increasingly digital society.  Otherwise newspapers would not be folding left and right.  Magazines…well yeah I still read magazines and other people do too, so maybe these aren’t as much of a waste of money, but I really don’t think any kind of print media ad is the best use of a small marketing budget.  It simply does not reach a large enough population.
* **The Book Trailer:** This is one that can go either way.  If you’ve got some savvy, web knowledge, etc., and a good eye, you can put one together that’s decent on your own for not TOO  much money.  And there are companies that make them who do a really fabulous job.  And you pay for said fabulous job.  My view of the usefulness of book trailers is in what the conversation rate would be from number of viewings to actual SALES.  My guess is that in MOST cases, unless a book trailer goes viral, it’s not going to earn you enough sales to justify the expense.  If you’ve already got some kind of following on YouTube or wherever, that might not be the case, but for the average Joe, I think perhaps there are better uses of your limited budget.
* **The Kindle/Nook/iPad/E-reader Giveaway:** Here you’re talking about a BIG EXPENSE**.** Even though the price of the Kindle and Nook have dropped, this is still a significant amount of money to spend.  You will no doubt generate a lot of comments or newsletter signups or whatever it is you’re centering the contest around, but I don’t think this is a wise use of limited promo dollars.  Here’s why: This kind of contest has nothing to do with YOU or YOUR BOOKS or YOUR PLATFORM. So all that buzz and attention and whatever you’re generating is only snagging people who want a free e-reader.  It’s not generating fans.  There is no guarantee that a single person who did whatever is required to enter for the device will ever buy a single book beyond what’s required for the contest.  And unless you’re the person who won it, there’s nothing about that kind of contest (usually) that’s going to make other people remember that it was YOU who gave it away!  You can do a LOT more putting that money toward targeted Goodreads ads and excellent cover art.

If you’ve found this little series helpful and have any desire to print and keep it, check the Downloads tab.  I’ll be making a nice, neat, printable version later today.  But, you know, I have a snowman to build first.