

Self-promotion That's Not Selfish

Learn from selfless pros

By Heather Villa



As an author, your fan base includes writers who respect your talent and non-writers who read what you write. Your admirers and future admirers deserve to hear about your author-related news. Whether you avoid talking about yourself, or you've reached a tipping point of oversharing, effective and unpretentious self-promotion is possible. The next time you engage with an audience, be it newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or face-to-face, you'll know *what not to do* and *what to do*—because you'll have a strategy that works.

Don't neglect the business-side of novel writing. Discover the bigger story.

Novelists are entrepreneurs. To become an honorable entrepreneur, market your novel with humanity in mind. Brit Kolo, founder and marketing coach at [JAM Marketing Group](#), is an expert at helping clients fashion "feel-good" businesses. When asked to share a favorite self-promotion strategy, she highlighted an analogy from Donald Miller's new book, *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*. While crediting Miller, Kolo said, "I'd say anytime you're promoting something you've created and you're allowing the customer to be the Hero in your brand story, you're doing it selflessly."

Think about this concept from a novelist's perspective. Could it be that the real hero of your novel is your reader, the customer?

Kolo also explained the opposite of a customer-hero strategy where "salesy" people position themselves as the Hero, acting as if the customer needs them desperately.

As a novelist, consider what you offer readers. There should be a reason someone wants to read your novel.

Don't shine the spotlight solely on yourself. Make your good news about others.

Instead of announcing, "Yay, it's my book's birthday," take the opportunity to separately thank your publisher, literary agent, editor or whoever else deserves recognition in your recent path to publication. You can even thank the book jacket designer. Also, remember the readers

who will be immersed in your words for countless hours.

Get to know your readers by hosting a novel giveaway. For author [Dan Gemeinhart's](#) first giveaway on Twitter for his middle grade novel, *Good Dog*, he asked fans to tweet a picture of their dogs with any book and to tag him for a chance to win a signed ARC. Not only was this a smart way to promote his novel, but other authors shared his limelight. As pictures of dogs with books were posted, along with Gemeinhart's *likes* and positive comments, one could witness a community being built.

Don't brag. Let others mention your achievements, but also cheer on others.

Think about the amount of time you spend marketing your own work and the amount of time you spend offering words of encouragement or sharing others' good news. Legendary author of *The War of the Roses*, [Warren Adler](#), shares humorous writing-related GIFs and links encouraging articles on Twitter. If he writes a review of another author's work, he posts a link. Adler's modesty seems to propel the genuine connections he creates with his fans. He understands why it's important for writers to maintain humility and explains it like this: "An inspired fiction writer's muse thrives best in isolation and humility. Celebrity can be toxic, self-deluding and creatively destructive."

Long before [Tim Tebow](#) won the Heisman Trophy, there was a rule in his childhood home: Never brag about yourself. Tebow mentioned the rule in his memoir, *Through My Eyes: A Quarterback's Journey*. But there was an exception. If someone asked about another's accomplishments, the person asked could answer. You can probably guess how the Tebow siblings responded. They asked each other questions and bragged about each other.

There's a difference between mentioning your accomplishments versus someone else mentioning your achievements. When you promote another author, you're indirectly promoting yourself. Why not join with another writer or writers and make a plan to cross-promote?

Aside from Kolo's marketing coach position, she also has a knack for creating communities by promoting others, namely creative female entrepreneurs. She's the brains behind [Marketing in Yoga Pants](#), a movement that includes a blog, private Facebook group, interview podcasts, plus a recently added Pinterest board.

Can you think of a new way to spread your reach that includes connecting with others?

Don't seem too busy for your followers. Keep fans engaged.

Make fans feel like they're part of your world. Ask fans to tell you what books they're reading. And then tell them what you're reading. Adler has done that. While traveling, ask for restaurant or bookstore recommendations.

Author and speaker, [Jon Acuff](#) is known to make announcements on social media that the first person to find him at a specific airport gate will get a free book. When I messaged Acuff on Twitter and mentioned I'd like to include his creative self-promotion strategy in this article, he responded within two minutes: "Awesome. You should also look up [@Sheaserrano](#). He's brilliant at promotion."

I took Acuff's advice and discovered why [Shea Serrano's](#) self-promotion is noteworthy. By the way, did you notice how Acuff promoted someone else, without hesitation? Before Serrano,

a former ESL teacher, became a published writer, he generated a significant following. Writer [Eric M. Ruiz's](#) article, "[4 Marketing Lessons from Pop-Culture Writer Shea Serrano](#)," published in *Entrepreneur*, features an interview with Serrano. Serrano explained he created coloring book pages of rappers and posted them on Tumblr. A publishing company noticed. Eventually, he asked the featured rappers to promote his drawings in book form.

Even though both Acuff and Serrano are nonfiction writers, their approach to marketing work could serve as inspiration for novelists. Are there unique opportunities to meet your readers or for future readers to find you? Think about the central theme of your novel and if there's anyone who'd feel honored to promote your story.

If you don't receive fan mail, someday you will. If you're not already a *New York Times* best-selling author, humbly act as if you are. Respond when fans contact you via emails or social media. The response doesn't need to be elaborate and should only take a few minutes of your time.

Your fans will appreciate you even more when you offer what matters to them.

Extra credit homework:

For inspiration and encouragement, watch Warren Adler's two-minute video here: [Warren Adler #WriteOn](#)

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