

Ask the kids

Publicizing a book in the digital age can be a hurdle for the BA50 crowd.

Selling books may be the natural outcome of writing them, but authors never tire of grumbling about book promotion. Whether we crisscross the country on a multi-city tour or read at our neighborhood bookstore, publication season brings a familiar push-pull between our private and public selves, between the small-writer and the capital-A Author.

Working on a book, I'm a stay-at-home in jeans and bedroom slippers, searching for just the right word, polishing and revising. But when a new book is launched, voila, the homebound, inner-gazing, slipper-clad writer must transform into the lime-light-seeking, question-answering, decently dressed Author, ready for interviews and public appearances. As an Author, I'm suddenly concerned with commerce and sales, print runs and advertising budgets, media and three-minute elevator pitches.

I'd crossed the line from writer to Author with a handful of books over the years, but publishing my first book in this new century was a wake-up call. Suddenly, Rip Van Winkle-like, I roused from my long, analog slumber to be born again into a publishing universe that had become digitally connected around the clock. Ready or not, I had to get up to speed as an Author for the digital age. And managing all the Internet marketing tools available can easily turn into a second career.

Months before my pub date, I received my publisher's "Social Networking Toolkit" (as a pdf, naturally). It highlighted tips for negotiating the World Wide Wonderland, from Facebook to blogging to websites to Twitter and YouTube. I was urged to create a digital presence on all fronts, build an online avatar that was part expert, part self-help guru, and get ready for almost 24/7 availability.

Although I may be a digital immigrant, fortunately my sons, in their 20s, are natives, and my older son is an online video creator and promoter. I enlisted him to make a YouTube video trailer to publicize the book, a guidebook for parents of 20-somethings. It featured a mother and her 24-year-old daughter, Mollie, squaring off about work, sex, marriage and how long Mollie could continue living at home rent-free. It was poetic justice that my own 20-something was helping me put out the word about this book meant to explain his generation to their parents.

Until now, I called it my badge of honor to be among the last mothers in America to embrace Facebook, wanting to leave those virtual playing fields to my kids. But when my publisher asked me to create and administer a Facebook page for the book – and link it to my personal page – I quickly created my own page just for the purpose of the

link. Faster than you can say Mark Zuckerberg, I had those two Facebook pages, an Amazon author's page, a Google Plus page, a page on LinkedIn and one on my publisher's website, all touting my new book. I certainly hadn't been doing any writing, but regardless, I was piling up the pages. I was also getting a little tired of me, myself and I.

Along with sidestepping Facebook, I'd also bypassed blogging for two important reasons: I like to be edited, and I like to be paid. But for the good of the book, I was encouraged to blog, "even for free." Keeping the book's Facebook page current became a blog of sorts as I posted reviews, ruminated on boomeranging kids, their job hunts or financial woes and shared links to others' relevant work. (Helpful hint from the authors' toolkit: No one likes an unbroken self-advertisement, so mix it up with shout-outs to OPC, or "other peoples' content.")

Born into motherhood too late for the mommy blogging craze, I discovered a sticky web of empty nest and older mommy blogs geared to my targeted demographic like BA50 (Better After 50), and Grown and Flown, as well as old standbys, born anew, like aarp.org's relationship channel and Next Avenue, PBS's website for the over-50 crowd. To build buzz from an audience of fellow travelers, I wrote guest posts, sometimes for money, sometimes for love.

Tracking my Facebook "likes," the comments on my blog posts and my YouTube views, I felt myself regressing into an insecure teenager. The private writer and the public Author were also staring each other down. Was I oversharing or was I being noticed enough? No matter how many likes piled up, Author X always had more, and no matter how often I posted, Author Y's posts were more brilliant, or at least more frequent. The digital universe, I quickly learned, is as insatiable as a needy child, and there's always another email, blog, comment or tweet an Author can write to feed it.

Once when my boys were little, I bemoaned to a friend about Mother X who sewed all her kids' Halloween costumes (mine wore store-bought) and Mother Y who made every birthday cake from scratch (I ordered from the bakery). Don't compare yourself to those gals, she sagely advised. Think about the moms who aren't making much of an effort at all and congratulate yourself that you're doing more for your little darlings than they are. This kind of positive reframing turned out to work as well for an anxious Author as for a stressed-out parent.

I was hopeful that somewhere out there were the authors who were even less tech-savvy than I was. Indeed, several late-adapting writer friends confided they'd outsourced their digital book promotion by hiring 20-somethings to be their voices on Twitter and Facebook. But sometimes that practice backfired. After a flurry of "ghost posts" struck the wrong note, one friend of a certain age fired her hired hand: She just sounded too darned young.

For me, hours down the rabbit hole of Facebook turned into months in the blogosphere. Despite my steep learning curve, I did get the hang of using social media and even came to enjoy it. I liked widening my circle of contacts, talking online with readers and checking out other writers' posts on topics of shared interest. What's more, creating online publicity rather than creating new work turned out to be even better procrastination than plant watering.

But sooner or later, even the most dedicated Author must return to her small-w writing. I began to look forward to the steady, personal focus of a new project. Yes, as soon as I check my Facebook pages, my YouTube account and the comments on my latest post, I will seriously get down to work. **W**

Elizabeth Fishel is the author of five nonfiction books including *Getting to 30: A Parent's Guide to the 20-Something Years*.



FEEDBACK FOR YOUR WRITING

★ Contests with cash prizes.

★ Be a part of an online writing community.



TRURO CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT CASTLE HILL

Come Study on Cape Cod this Summer with Our Distinguished Faculty!

Anne Bernays • Melanie Braverman
Peter Campion • Morton Dean • Mark Doty
Ethan Herschenfeld • Ann Hood • Judy Hugel
Wendy Kesselman • Michael Klein
Darryl McGrath • Barry Schwabsky
Gabe Stuart • Lynda Sturmer • David Unger

Special Events: Summer 2014

July 8.....Reading by Ann Hood
July 9.....The Role of Art Criticism Today with Barry Schwabsky, Mira Schor, Helen Miranda Wilson, moderated by Joanne Matterna
July 10.....Poetry Reading by Barry Schwabsky
July 15.....Reading by Stephen Kinzer
July 19.....Summer Bash!
Aug 7.....Stand Up Comedy Night with Ethan Herschenfeld
Aug 9.....Annual Silent Art Auction
Sept 3.....Artist Panel Discussion: The View From Cape Cod

508-349-7511
www.castlehill.org
Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill
10 Meetinghouse Road, Truro, MA 02666
Paid for in part by the Provincetown-Fishers Service Board & MCE