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# Guide to Running Bookshop Events and Publicising Your Shop

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## Running Bookshop Events and Publicising Your Shop

# C O N T E N T S

	Page
1 Introduction	2
2 Author Events	2
3 Local Press and Media	4
4 Writing a Press Release	6
5 Listings	6
6 Other promotion	8
7 The Event	10
8 After the Event	12
9 General Promotion for your Store	14

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## HOW TO RUN BOOKSHOP EVENTS

### Why run in store events?

Hosting events in store, whether they include an author or not, is a proven method of reaching your community effectively and is an ideal way of making sure potential customers find out about you, and come back again and again.

Successful events are an ideal way to create and build links with all sorts of new markets, from schools for all age groups, book clubs, local businesses and community groups. These links can lead to a number of further marketing opportunities.

Once you've worked out which events work well for your store, you'll find it easier to promote them and will get an even better turnout. And this in turn will lead to extra sales and turnover: something we are all looking for!

### Author Events

#### Approaching Publishers for Authors

In order to win support from publishers and get authors to your store, you'll need to think carefully about what kind of event you want to run and how it will work in detail.

Make your pitch as enthusiastic as possible. Back it up with photos, reports and details of book sales from previous events. This will give the publisher confidence in your track record.

Don't be scared to ask for big authors, and don't assume that just because you may be in an out-of-the-way location that you don't stand a chance of getting an author to your shop. If you don't try, you'll never know! Publishers will appreciate a thoughtful and enthusiastic pitch and if you're unsuccessful for one author, they may think of you again for another.

The first step is to approach the author's publicist at the relevant publisher well in advance of the event. Publicists in house generally start working on their campaigns six months in advance of publication date, but events can still be arranged with a few months to go. Generally you are more likely to secure an author for an event if they have something new to promote, so do bear this in mind when pitching.

It is also worth checking out regional literary festivals to see who is coming, as you may be able to tie in an event in your store. Consider the logistics of the author's travel and make that work for you - perhaps you can catch them for a lunchtime event as they travel between two cities?

To find out who the right publicist is for your required author, either check the press release for the book which may be on the publisher's website. Or you can check with the PPC (Publishers Publicity Circle). This is a professional body of publishers' publicists that meets once a month and publishes a monthly newsletter. If you want to start hosting events, a notice in the newsletter is an easy way to tell publicists you're on the map. The contact for getting notices in the newsletter is Heather White, who can be reached at [ppc@lineone.net](mailto:ppc@lineone.net).

The PPC produces a directory with contact details for all book publicists. This is downloadable from the PPC website:  
[www.publisherspublicitycircle.co.uk/directory.asp](http://www.publisherspublicitycircle.co.uk/directory.asp)

Every year the PPC hosts an event at The London Book Fair. If you attend, this is an ideal opportunity to meet some of the publicists you pitch to and to strengthen your relationship with them. It will also give you more tips on running promotional campaigns.

### **Getting the word out**

It's no secret that there is a lot of competition for people's leisure time these days. Therefore it's essential to publicise your event well in order to attract customers and get the event in their diary.

### **Direct to the customer**

A mailing list is the best way to build a customer database and ensure loyal customers find out about your latest initiatives. It is also free!

You can do this by creating some forms and putting them by your tills asking people if they'd like to find out about forthcoming events. You could mention this at the end of a transaction too. Email is the quickest, cheapest and easiest way to inform people about events, but it never hurts to obtain as much information as possible and learn more about your customers. Even if you don't use their home addresses and daytime telephone numbers, it's information worth having.

Why not use the form as a chance to dig a bit deeper into their reading habits, and find out which authors they like? You can then create more sophisticated and effective mailing lists, not just about events but also special offers, themed book suggestions, Books for Christmas or Summer Reads... you'll also have a better idea about what to stock and which authors to invite for events.

**NB Data Protection:** you must add a paragraph about data protection when soliciting emails or addresses for a mailing list. It's standard to say that the information provided will be used by you and you alone and that it will not be passed on to a third party. You may not add anyone to a mailing list without their prior permission. You can find out more information about data protection at [www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)

### Sample Paragraph:

- Tick box if you wish to receive information by emails from xx bookshop
- Tick box if you wish to receive information by post from xx bookshop
- Tick box if you wish to receive information by SMS or MMS from xx bookshop

By giving us your email address/postal address/mobile number you agree that we may send news about upcoming events, special offers and other marketing communications about xx bookshop by email/by post/by SMS and MMS. Your privacy is very important to us so we will never pass your details on to any other third party for mailing or marketing purposes.

You may opt out of receiving these at any time by emailing [xxx@xxx.co.uk](mailto:xxx@xxx.co.uk) or by calling xxx.

### Online

The internet provides many free, cheap and easy ways to engage directly with local communities and find new customers.

You can set up a Facebook fan page for your shop to announce your latest promotions and events. By sending messages out to your fans it will act as a secondary mailing list. When announcing events you can add details such as timings and maps. Visit [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) to sign up for free.

Set up a Twitter account as another channel to send out information about upcoming events. You can also use this to send out promotional codes, such as money off tokens (with expiry dates) or a voucher for a free glass of wine when shopping on a certain evening. Visit [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) to sign up for free.

When running events, ask visiting authors to flag up the event on their blog or to tweet about it on Twitter. There are many book websites, blogs and fan sites who might also run links to your event.

The BA has created a The Independent Booksellers Guide to Multi-channel Bookselling, which is full of information about how to make the most of digital opportunities. You can download the guide here: <http://bit.ly/hixV5I>.

### Schools and colleges and other community groups

If you have a children's author visiting, then contact the relevant schools in your area to let them know that x will be appearing at your shop. It's also a great way to build up contacts with local schools and is frequently the most effective method of advertising the event.

It may be stating the obvious... but do programme the event when schoolchildren can actually get to the shop!

Local community groups and colleges often have pinboards where you can post information about upcoming events; they may also have websites and newsletters where they can include information too.

## **Local media**

Your local newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations will be supportive of your shop and will help promote your events, if you strike up a good relationship with them.

First of all: familiarise yourself with the local papers and radio. Find out which correspondent covers what (especially arts and events stories) on the papers, what the opportunities for coverage are; and on radio find out which DJs interview guests or have a slot to mention upcoming entertainment listings.

### **Get to know your papers and local radio stations**

#### **Daily and Weekly papers**

Speak to the appropriate people in the editorial departments of the newspapers which cover your local area to find out when their deadlines for information are. As a rule:

Morning dailies: everything needs to be in place by mid-afternoon, day before publication although technically they can take breaking news until around 2.00am.

Evening papers: most pages are ready to print the day before publication, with a deadline of between 9.00am and 10.00am on the day for bigger, breaking stories.

So, if a particularly well known author visits your shop at lunchtime on a Tuesday, you can expect to see coverage by the following day, Wednesday.

Weekly papers will need information much more in advance than the dailies. Don't dismiss the weekly papers - they can have a huge circulation, and people keep them for longer.

It is definitely worth sending information to the larger papers which cover your region e.g. Manchester Evening News, Western Daily Press or the Metro, however they are more likely to only cover large or high profile author events.

#### **Glossy magazines**

Glossy magazines which are published monthly or quarterly are an excellent way to publicise an event as people keep them for a long time. This would include magazines of the same type as Hertfordshire Life or Devon Today. They will often have an entertainments page at the front of the magazine. Find out who edits this and what their deadlines are (often several months in advance of your event).

#### **Local commercial and BBC radio**

Local radio stations sometimes have programmes which flag up local entertainment so it's worth finding out which these are. Some DJs also interview guests - this is a great thing to line up for your author before the event, as most really enjoy doing radio interviews and will help gather some last minute attendees.

BBC radio stations are more likely to schedule these sorts of programmes but it's worth contacting your commercial radio too.

### Online

Nowadays there are a plethora of listings websites such as [viewlondon.co.uk](http://viewlondon.co.uk) or websites for regional press, so aim to get your events listed here too.

### **How do you promote a lesser known author?**

If you have an evening event with a local teacher turned first-time novelist then you have to work much harder than with a household name. First of all, you can't assume it will get into the paper because it's not necessarily newsworthy.

A household name will probably warrant coverage in a news and photo story, but there are also regular books and arts pages which will probably appear on a weekly basis who are more likely to cover lesser known authors.

Before calling a newspaper, buy copies of it and familiarise yourself with it. It's no good pitching a story to Joe Bloggs because you thought he covered books, when he moved to the sports desk six weeks ago. Or ringing up to say: "I've got a story for your Arts Page on Tuesday" when it's moved to Friday.

Establish a relationship with the Arts Desk, if the paper has one, or the reporter who covers news on your patch. Don't assume that the Arts Desk will also compile the weekly listings of events in the area - send the information to listings as well as the news desk.

If you haven't been able to find out who writes the kind of stories you're after, then ring the switchboard and ask. When you've found out who the right person is, why not meet up and talk to them over a cup of tea, and invite them to pop into the shop when they are next in your area?

And keep an eye on the time of day when you ring - find out when print deadlines are and don't call then! Always check it's a convenient time for your contact to talk.

The best advice we can give is don't leave anything until the last minute. Once you've established a relationship with the right reporter, send them plenty of warning in advance of a news story, and follow up nearer the time.

### **Media coverage**

#### **Press Releases**

To obtain coverage you'll need to issue a press release to the media. And to get coverage for your release, you'll really need to make it stand out.

It's worth spending some time getting this right, as once you have the right template you'll make publicising future events much easier.

How do you do this?

- Consider your audience - what will appeal to a busy journalist? They will want something punchy, newsworthy, with facts, stats and an author photo if possible.
- Date the press release at the top.
- Include your store logo at the top.
- Get the content right. You'll need to tick the following boxes: *Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, How much?*
- Proof read the release for sense and spelling and double check the facts.
- Keep the release to one side of A4 paper, 10 or 12 point font.
- Start with a succinct summary of the story and news; background information should follow on from this.
- Use the release to flag up other key events which have been a success or promise to be exciting.
- Include a juicy quote from the owner or manager about how they're looking forward to welcoming the author, or what they love about that author's work.
- Style: keep sentences short but sweet, avoid clichés and stay objective. Don't use sensational claims, exaggerate or use words such as "unsurprisingly". A press release is used to inform and promote, rather than make assertions.
- Notes to Editors: this is a section at the end which includes:
  - o Name and address of your shop
  - o Telephone and website address
  - o Key messages eg X Bookshop is the only independent bookshop in the town, range of y thousand titles/specialising in z, was first founded in xxxx by xxx, previous authors visiting the shop have included a, b and c
  - o Contact for further information - landline and out of hours line

Sample Press Release

**XXXXXX bookshop (welcomes X -author -) as part Books Are My Bag celebrations**

Customers at xxxx (name) bookshop in xxxx (town) will have the chance to meet xxx (author) at a special event on xxx (date), just one of dozens of special events and activities organised for Books Are My Bag.

Tickets for the event, which takes place at (time and place) are priced at £x, and are available from xxxxx.

The bookshop is one of over 330 around the country which has signed up to take part in the promotional week, organised by the Booksellers Association (BA), the national trade association for booksellers. The week is designed to showcase how the 'indies' provide a distinctive, personal service for book lovers and the unique role they play in their communities.

All bookshops taking part in the promotional week will be featuring in-store promotions and events such as author talks, children’s storytelling, creative writing workshops, and even top name authors taking a turn behind the tills.

xxxx shop is organising several other events including (details here.)

*“We’re delighted to be involved in Books Are My Bag this year and have loads of great events planned. The highlight of the campaign for us will be .....”,* said xxxxxxxx proprietor of the xxxx bookshop.

Visit [www.booksaremybag.com](http://www.booksaremybag.com) for further information about local events taking place during the campaign.

### **Ends**

For further information please contact: xxxx at xxxx, and visit [www.???.co.uk](http://www.???.co.uk)

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

#### **Books Are My Bag**

UK & Irish bookshops taking part in Books Are My Bag are supported by the BA with the preparation of toolkit packs, including information on how to engage with the local community and media and point-of-sale materials, whose distribution will be carefully targeted so as to avoid waste.

For more details: [www.booksaremybag.com](http://www.booksaremybag.com)

For further information please contact:

xxxxxxx

### **Photos**

You may be asked to send photos to the picture desks separately.

If you are sending a picture in as part of a preview story, always caption as follows:

***“Author X who will be signing copies of TITLE OF BOOK at the X Bookshop, time and date”***

Speak to picture desks about sending a photographer to your event, and if you talk nicely to them, they might send you a copy of the photo for your files. If you have your own digital camera, then take some pictures and whenever you send them out to a paper, caption them. Otherwise you’ll continue to see your picture but no credit. You can also put these photos up on your website and send them to publicists following the event.

## **Branding**

If you have an event with a famous author, use it as an opportunity for branding in photos, which will hopefully be distributed far and wide.

A variety of branding is available, from back drop boards with your logo on it, to stand alone banners which you can roll out every time an author visits. If you are using a lectern, put your logo on the front of the lectern so everyone can see it.

Service Graphics, who have five offices over the UK, make stand-alone roll up banners. Find them at [www.servicegraphics.co.uk](http://www.servicegraphics.co.uk). The London office is at 3 Osiers Road, Wandsworth, London SW18 1NL. General enquiries are: 0845 60 500 60.

## **Listings**

It’s just as important to get advance information in a newspaper in listings as well as a news piece.

Journalists are always on the lookout for an image to liven up their pages. Get hold of an author photo or jacket image from the book publicist; they should be able to send you the picture electronically and it should be of sufficiently high resolution (300 dpi) to reproduce well.

NB Publishers no longer hold physical copies of photos, they are all stored electronically.

Ask the publicist for a press release about the book, so you can tell the paper why the author is coming and request a brief biography if it’s not already on the press release.

If you are putting something into the weekly events listings then find out when the deadline is. Allow a minimum of three weeks, whether it’s a national or local paper, to give yourself plenty of time to follow up.

You can check up to ensure the information has been correctly received and that’s an opportunity to offer a picture, if you haven’t sent one already.

## National newspapers

Don't forget the nationals - most of the quality dailies and weekend papers list events - and are very conscious of being too London-centric. It's really easy to establish a relationship with these papers - they assign one person to look after the listings - but they do need the information several weeks in advance.

*Key contacts for book event listings in the national press are:-*

### The Independent

arts@pa.press.co.uk

### The Independent Information magazine

information@independent.co.uk

### The Independent on Sunday

newreview@independent.co.uk

### The Guardian

guide@pa-entertainment.co.uk

guide@guardian.co.uk.

### The Times

books@thetimes.co.uk

dailyregister@thetimes.co.uk

fiona.wilson@thetimes.co.uk

### Sunday Times

christina.borg@sunday-times.co.uk

### Daily Telegraph

Sameer.rahim@telegraph.co.uk

### Metro

claire.allfree@ukmetro.co.uk

editorial@ukmetro.co.uk

news@ukmetro.co.uk

### Evening Standard

katie.law@standard.co.uk

### Time Out

saraoreilly@timeout.com

aroundtown@timeout.com

### Press Association

michelle.cooper@pressassociation.com

events@pa.press.net

(Scotland) scottishevents@pa-entertainment.co.uk

**London at Large**

**glen@londonatlarge.com**

**The Bookseller**

**felicity.wood@bookseller.co.uk**

**katie.allen@bookseller.co.uk**

**ADVANCE MEDIA INFORMATION LTD (AMI)**

**lali@amiplan.com**

**Entertainment4Media**

**henry.hemmings@Entertainment4Media.com**

**Lastminute.com**

**bwicks@lastminute.com**

**Entertainment News**

**jenny.priestly@entnews.co.uk**

**National News**

**pix@nationalnews.co.uk**

**The Crackberry Times**

**info@thecrackberrytimes.com**

**The Media Eye**

**news@themediaye.com**

**The London Word**

**word@thelondonword.com**

**BooktradeInfo.com**

**steven.kelly@booktrade.info**

**Book Brunch**

**liz@bookbrunch.co.uk**

**nick@bookbrunch.co.uk**

## **Other promotion**

### **Joint advertising**

Some publishers will also contribute towards the cost of an advert in a local paper if you are prepared to organise it. But you must always check with them first and confirm in writing.

Think about timing - try to avoid the advertisement appearing on the same day as any news stories or previews you may have secured. And do some market research to see if it has any effect - all you have to do is ask, when a customer enquires about the event by phone or email, where they heard about it.

## **In-store promotion**

Some publishers will provide you with flyers to publicise an author visit alongside the usual showcards. Again, give them plenty of notice and be very clear about the copy you need to go on showcards or flyers. The flyers can be placed at the till point and also included in bags with people's purchases.

## **Cross marketing**

Cross marketing - ensure information that your local library, Tourist Information Centres, book clubs, local hotels, schools and even pubs have information about the events.

## **Season's brochure**

If you're lucky enough to be able to programme a series of events, consider producing a modest brochure with all the events listed. Type of information that needs to go in includes:

*Who*

*What*

*When - date and time*

*Ticket details*

*Where to get tickets from*

*Your website*

If you're planning a week of events, why not consider holding them as a Festival? This will inspire confidence in publishers when pitching to them, and stoke interest in your local community.

## **How to Avoid Disappointment**

If you've promoted the event actively and efficiently, all should be fine. But one thing publishers hate is to get to an event having been promised an audience of 35 to find 5 in the audience. It doesn't look good for the author and it certainly doesn't look very good for the bookshop. Publishers would rather that the store is honest with them and gives them advance warning of any problems.

The best way to predict the success of an event is to ticket it, even if it's a free event. A good way to secure customers if you are charging is to make the price of the ticket redeemable against a copy of the book. If you've sold or given away, say, 100 tickets, you know you'll probably get at least 75 people turning up. But if you've only managed to shift three the day before the event, you'll know it's probably better to cancel.

Publicists will appreciate it if you're proactive and let them know how ticket sales are going.

To avoid disappointing customers, if the event has to be cancelled, the publisher should be quite willing to provide signed and dedicated copies for these people. A handy alternative is to use book plates which avoid costly postage and the possibility of the book arriving damaged.

## **The Event**

### **How to prepare effectively**

You'll need to make a note beforehand of:

- Author's arrival time. This should be with a minimum of 15 mins before the event is due to start, and earlier if you want them to sign stock beforehand or if they have equipment to set up.
- Will anyone be accompanying the author?
- Method of transport - will they need a taxi from the station? Is there a car parking space available?
- Will the author need any equipment such as a lectern or PowerPoint display?
- Emergency mobile numbers, so you can keep customers informed about any delays. Equally, make sure that the author or publicist has your store's contact name and number.

## Running the event

A checklist:

- Who's going to introduce the author; check the biographical information is right?
- How long will the author talk or sign for?
- Will there be an opportunity for a Q&A at the end? If so, who will chair? If it's a large event you will have to consider booking a PA system.
- Will they do stock signing? Will it be before or after the event?
- When and where will you get reservations done?

## Filming

Films of author events can be excellent archive and marketing material for your shop.

- check with the author beforehand that they are happy to be filmed
- ensure you use a decent quality camera
- mount the camera on a tripod for steadiness
- set up the camera next to the author for clarity of sound. If you film from across the room, you will pick up the noise of people coughing etc
- alternatively use a separate microphone which you can set up near the author and film from a distance

## Looking after the author

Welcome the author properly.

Set aside a room such as an office for refreshments and for the author to catch his or her breath, and a secure place for coats and bags.

As a courtesy, find out from the PR what sort of refreshments they like and if they have any dietary requirements.

At the end, thank the author properly and if you have can give them a little thank you, such as a bottle of wine or box of chocolates, then it will most definitely be appreciated!

## Book signings

- Provide a proper table and a chair of the appropriate height for the signing.
- Plan your customers' route: position the table so that customers cannot push or walk behind it and have a clear area for people to exit once they have had their book signed.
- Provide a selection of suitable pens - not all authors bring them with them; if the book has shiny pages, felt pens or fountain pens aren't suitable. Sharpies are best, failing that CD writer pens will do.
- To avoid chaos, keep the queue for signing and the queue for payment separate. Consider whether you want people to pay first and then have the book signed, or the other way round.

- Often it is better not to have a cloth covering the signing table as it usually moves and people trip over it.
- If it's a large queue, have a large supply of post-it notes and a member of staff to write the customer's name clearly on each post-it note and place it on the title page before they get to the author. Also get the books opened up to the signing page in advance. This helps speed up the queue.

### **Managing stock and dealers**

With particularly popular authors, there can be enormous queues. You may need to decide how much stock can be signed and whether dealers should wait at the end of the queue after your customers.

Make sure your staff are on hand to keep the customers informed about how long the queue is likely to take. And if the author has a limited amount of time, then restrict signings to name only, not long dedications. You may also have to cut the queue off at some point if the author needs to leave. To avoid disappointment, suggest the option to customers of leaving their books to be signed and picked up the following day.

If children are queuing; quizzes, puzzles and crosswords help queuing go quickly along with the occasional glass of water or a sweet.

## **After the event**

### **Trade press**

Send a captioned picture to The Bookseller with a paragraph detailing the success of the event. This will attract the attention of publishers and get your name known in the trade.

### **Local Press**

If the local paper has sent down a reporter and/or photographer and the piece appears, send an email to say thank you. Very few people do and it's always appreciated.

### **Author and Publicist**

And write a note of thanks to the author - they will remember you for next time.

Tell the publisher how many books sold and how many people came. They get feedback very rarely and they find it very useful.

### **Customers**

Thank them and take the opportunity to tell them about the next event. You could put leaflets about the next event on their seats.

## Online

Upload a video of the event to your website, and then run a link to it on your Facebook fan page, so people who couldn't make it can see what they missed and get excited about the next event.

## General promotion for your store

You don't have to have an author event to promote your store. Take advantage of any national campaigns to get publicity for your store e.g. the BA's Independent Bookshop Book of the Year, National Year of Reading, World Book Day, Galaxy British Book Awards

Some ideas:

- Ask your local radio station down to the shop on World Book Day to vox pop your customers.
- Target your local DJs, local authors and customers on who they would vote for the Galaxy National Book Awards shortlists.
- Publicise your booksellers' own favourite recommendations.
- Put a board up in the shop where people can suggest books.
- Run a local poll for your town's favourite book. Ask people to complete a nomination form when they are in your shop (another way of creating a database too) and encourage them to complete the forms with a prize draw.
- Become a commentator in the local press about book issues. For example, if a local author is shortlisted for a prize - or wins one - ring up the local newspaper with a comment, saying how pleased you are and how well the book has sold in your shop.
- Set up a book group or offer to host a pre-existing one local book club. You could branch out and offer your space to the local wine tasting society for example.
- Open late one night per month for evening shopping with a glass of wine for customers.
- Theme shopping days or evenings according to the seasons e.g. with mulled wine and minced pies, Easter eggs; or tie in with other gifting opportunities e.g. Mothering Sunday, Valentine's Day.
- Suggest to your local paper and radio stations that you could write a weekly column or book recommendation slot.
- Set up a blog with your latest news, reviews and events.