

Birth of a Book:  
What to Expect When You're Expecting....

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Note, this is based on my experiences and experiences of friends published in the romance, mystery, and thriller genres—your mileage may vary!!!

## **EXPANDED MARKETING TIMELINE**

### **12 months prior to publication:**

Step #1--Know your BRAND: you already know what kind of book you wrote and what kind of books you want to write. Now you need to consolidate that into a brand.

A brand is a subliminal promise to your readers—that any book written under this author's name will promise this type of emotional experience.

For example, even though I love to cross genres from women's fiction to suspense to thrillers to romance, every book I write has a theme central to my life: they're all about making a difference, trying to change the world.

For me, once I realized this fact, the tagline came easily: **No One is Immune to Danger**

Note that is an emotional concept, not a promise of specifics. I did this on purpose because I knew up front that I didn't want to get locked into writing only medical thrillers. But it works with medical thrillers, woman's fiction, romantic suspense, mainstream thrillers, etc. And it reminds the reader that I'm a physician—which is part of my platform or unique selling proposition.

If this all seems very confusing to you, there's a book I found very helpful called Primal Branding. Instead of talking marketing mumbo-jumbo it discusses brands as ways to tell stories, so it was very intuitive.

Also, be sure to talk to your editor and agent. Who do they see as your target audience? What label will be on your books? Where will they be shelved in the bookstores? What do they see you writing and selling successfully in the future?

All these questions will tell you how these two people who know your work see your brand (even if they don't use those words—but they might, just ask them!)

A brand is more than a central theme, more than a tag line, it also includes visual images that evoke the same emotion. So, as soon as you have your brand, it's time to go to #2: Build a web presence.

Step #2—Build a Web Presence: With all the free and easy to use software out there there's no reason not to have a web presence. Register your domain names if you haven't already. If you want a "real" site, then I'd highly recommend this even if you don't think you'll use it yet. Someday you will!

Get a free Blogger or Wordpress account. Even if you don't plan on doing a formal blog. You can tie these to your main site or use them as your website until you figure out what's what. Wordpress is especially nice as a website because you can add pages and content easily.

Also get your free MySpace sites, FaceBook, Ning, etc—wherever you feel comfortable that you'll find friends for your books.

When you design your site/blog use the images and colors and words that apply to your brand. See step#1. For instance, part of my brand image is that I'm a doctor, so I use medical imagery. I also use the color red a lot—again, creating an emotional response.

One thing that I wanted on my site was to evoke a response that it was fresh, dynamic, and different than other suspense writers' sites. Subconsciously this tells a casual viewer that here is a writer who's different than others, willing to take chances, and whose books are also fresh and different.

I checked out as many websites as I could. Many I fell in love with—but they didn't fit my brand and the emotional response I was aiming for.

So instead of a dark background (which 99.9% of mystery, thriller, and suspense writers have) I went with a light background. Instead of the boxes that many webdesigners use for images, I asked my designer to make the images feel more fluid and expansive rather than boxed-in. There's no way to totally get rid of the "boxes" without sacrificing clarity, but we got rid of as much as possible.

Getting these sites up and running is time-intensive at first, so do it now before you get too busy. Don't forget to add a way for people to contact you and consider starting a mailing list.

Step #3—Gather Your Resources: You, your editor and agent will already be brainstorming ideas for your marketing campaign. Part of these ideas will include deciding which authors would give you useful cover quotes.

Your editor will probably be approaching most of these authors himself, but if you have personal contacts, this is the time to use them.

But note that if you write fluffy chick lit mysteries then even if Ken Bruen is your best friend, his name on your cover extolling the virtues of your book is only going to do you both a disservice. His fans will be disappointed by your book and yours will be turned off before they start thinking your book is like Ken's.

Never, never mess with reader's expectations. Building a brand is essentially making a promise to your customers. This is why knowing your brand is so vital. If you write fluffy chick lit mysteries then you know which other authors out there would appeal to your potential readership—those are the ones you want to ask.

### **9-10 months prior to publication:**

--Decide on your budget. Don't base it on your advance, base it on what you can afford. You will never see this money again. Period. So just decide on a budget, stick to it, and you won't have to worry down the line.

--Within your budget, brainstorm promotional ideas. This is very individual. Some people have more money and no time and might actually hire outsiders to do a lot of their promotional work. Others have no money but do have time and can DIY. Lots of people are somewhere in between.

Things to decide:

--blog or not? Only blog (and promote it as a blog, not just a News page) if you have something to say, can say it in an interesting way, and can keep saying it at least three times a week.

--contests? Offering free stuff is a great way to build interest and your mailing list, but it does cost money.

--appearances? Many conferences plan 9-12 months in advance, so if you want to get a speaking gig, you need to plan early.

--articles? There are a lot of outlets for articles, especially if your books have a built-in hook that would appeal to a specific audience. Research the online and print publications that this audience reads. Can you write an article for any of these venues? Even if you don't get paid, if you time it around your release date, it's free publicity.

Base your decisions on your brand. As a doctor, teaching is a natural part of my life, and teachers are noted for making a difference, so volunteering to teach workshops, give keynotes, etc, was an easy fit for my brand.

If this didn't come naturally to me and fit my brand, I might have passed on some of these opportunities and spent my time and energy doing something else—like maybe blogging (which doesn't come easy to me so I use my blog as a news update and focus on guest blogging which is more like teaching).

### **6 months prior to publication:**

--Cover art is usually available by now and most publishers will assign you a publicist at

this point. Ask them what their plans are, where they'll be sending ARCs to, if you can order more ARCs for your own use (often they won't charge you, but ask), and let them know you're interested in working with them, not against them.

--Order promo items. When choosing promotional items make sure they fit your brand or reflect it by creating a similar emotional response.

I was lucky—the cover Berkley did for LIFELINES reflected my brand perfectly. It was a real-life photo--not stock art, crisp and fresh and energetic, and featured the color red. Perfect for my marketing platform of "real-life doctor writes stories as real as it gets". I decided that any marketing I did would use this fantastic cover as much as possible.

So my business cards—had my cover art. My bookmarks (I like them to sign if someone doesn't want to buy a book and to give out at conferences) had the cover art and review quotes. The cover is on every page of the website. And the one promo item I paid for, to use for contests, charity auctions, and other give-aways, was a t-shirt featuring the cover art. They all fit my brand and create an impression.

I did not buy: pens, bath salts, magnets, stress balls, etc, etc, etc. Why? Other than pens they don't reflect the brand (well, maybe the stress balls could <g>) and for about the same price I could get the t-shirts. Again, you need to decide what fits your brand, not just buy something because it's cute, cheap or some other author has one....

--Media list: a great resource for you and your publicist is a media list. This would include any media contacts you have, the appropriate contacts from your local papers, magazines, alumni groups, professional newsletters, etc. Basically anyone/anywhere you know of where you have a hook by being a local author or member of their organization, etc. A separate list of booksellers/librarians/reviewers who have expressed an interest in your book is also helpful.

--Ads: if you plan to purchase ad space in print publications, you need to start working on it now.

--if you're planning a launch party, this is a good time to start to search for venues and begin to plan

--this is also a good time to speak with outside publicists if you're interested in hiring one. They like to be on board around 4-6 months prior to publication.

### **3-4 months prior to publication:**

--ARCs go to reviewers and long-lead publications. This is usually done by your publisher and includes PW, Booklist, Library Journal, etc. Be sure to set a Google alert of your name and book title so you can get advance notice of any reviews.

Because of this, I knew about my fantastic PW review a few days before anyone at my publisher did—because PW releases reviews online before it ships the print magazine. And I found other reviews, like Harriet Klausner's, and mentions of my book on blogs and discussion boards via the Google alert.

--send ARC's and a sell sheet (see below) to other long lead publications where you want a review or possible feature article. Follow up with a phone call or email.

--print business cards with cover art, ISBN, contact info, and if room, cover quotes and early reviews

--print bookmarks with all of above

--create a sell sheet: a one page sheet with cover art, all ordering info, back cover copy, cover quotes, reviews and any pertinent bio info. You'll include this with mailings to media, when you give an ARC to a bookseller or even instead of an ARC. Think of it as a one page ad for your book—just one side of one page, though!!!

If you want an example, let me know or check out the media page on my website, <http://www.cjlyons.net>

--start setting up appearances, either live or virtual

--if you're running a contest, start announcing it to gear up interest

### **2-3 months prior to publication:**

--keep your in house publicist and editor informed of all your promo plans

--by now, your editor will have some idea of pre-sales and can tell you if they plan to do co-op (buy front of store space) and if you made it into the "box" stores via Anderson and Levy (Walmart, Target, Costco, etc). If the answer to both is yes, then congrats!!! With those two things your publisher is giving your book more of a push than 95% of other books get!

If the answer is no, don't despair, but do be realistic about the possibility that you might have a smaller print run and readers might have a hard time getting your books locally. You might want to direct folks to on-line venues to purchase your book or work a deal with a local indy bookseller to carry extra stock so you can direct frustrated readers to their website to order—maybe even host a special "buy here" page on your website that links to the indy bookseller. There are ways around this, but you need to think ahead and be creative.

### **1 month prior to publication:**

--prepare the guest blogs you have promised for any bloggers. Believe me, far better to

do this now when you have time instead of the night before when you've been traveling and have no sleep!!!

--up date your website, blog, myspace, etc with your events/appearances

--remind everyone on your mailing list, loops, writing groups that the book is coming out and encourage them to pre-order and/or buy it that all important first week

--finalize any appearances with your publicist and be sure they have contact info to get books to the right place at the right time

--add your editor and publicist's numbers to your cell phone, to a card in your wallet, and in your computer—you never know when you'll be out on the road and need them, fast!!!

--buy thank you notes—you can even pre-write some and have them ready ahead of time

### **Launch Day: your Baby has Arrived!**

--sit back and enjoy!!! Do not obsess over your Amazon rankings, do not pace the bookstore searching for your first buyer <g>

Instead, make sure your friends and family know how stressful and exciting this day is for you and let them take care of you! You earned it—after all, you've done what 80% of the population dreams of doing but so few of us actually accomplish.

Congratulations, you are now the proud parent of a healthy, thriving novel!

### **About the author:**

Award winning medical suspense author **CJ Lyons** is a physician trained in Pediatric Emergency Medicine. She has assisted police and prosecutors with cases involving child abuse, rape, homicide and Munchausen by Proxy and has worked in several trauma centers, on the Navajo reservation, as a crisis counselor, victim's advocate, as well as a flight physician for Life Flight. She is a member of MWA, International Thriller Writers, RWA, and Sisters in Crime. Her writing has appeared in Romantic Times BookReviews, CrimeSpree and Spinetangler.

Look for her debut novel, LIFELINES, coming from Berkley in March, 2008. Contact her at <http://www.cjlyons.net>