

Episode 5.19: Book Publicity for Business Owners with Sonia Awan

Welcome to the Write.Publish.Market. Podcast. If you're an entrepreneur considering writing a book to serve your business, you're in the right place. Or maybe you've already decided that's even better. I'm your host, Jodi Brandon, book publishing partner for entrepreneurs and 20 year veteran of the book publishing industry on the Write.Publish.Market. Podcast. In addition to learning from me, you'll meet entrepreneurs just like you and hear about their experiences as we explore all facets of Writing, Publishing, and marketing a book that will help your business grow in ways you might not even have dreamed of yet. Our guest today is a seasoned public relations professional, Sonia AWHONN, has more than 19 years of experience. She has a degree in journalism, and she has been working with authors and companies in the US and abroad, bringing focus into branding and publicity. She is the principal at out bloom PR. And she is currently based out of Los Angeles. And we are very lucky to have her today.

Welcome, Sonia. I'm so happy to have you today.

Sonia

Hi, I'm happy to be here.

Jodi

So we are going to dig into all things book publicity and PR, which is something I know that I'm sure my listeners' ears perked right up when they heard your intro. Because this is a topic obviously that is near and dear to an author's heart. So let's start kind of at the beginning, one of the things that I get asked a lot, and I don't have the best answer for I know, because this isn't my zone of genius, is the difference between marketing and publicity.

Sonia

So basically, marketing would be an you know, chain of events that you create for yourself, where it's sort of like you kind of invest your time and money and all that, trying to come up with promotional products or services and all kinds of fun stuff, right, which is you're doing it, you're telling the people you're telling the world that here, look at me, this is me, I'm doing this, you're trying to bring attention to yourself. And publicity is the opposite end of the spectrum; publicity is where you are getting third party validation. So basically, you're having a neutral, non-biased and unbiased source telling people or talking about you, right, explaining your book or services or anything you're doing. So you are not, this is nothing that is, it's not something you're paying for. It's something that you have shared and people are giving their, you know, unbiased opinion.

Jodi

Okay. All right. So I'm not too far off the mark, because I typically describe it as sort of marketing is internally created and publicity is externally created.

Sonia

Yeah. And publicity, you take the marketing internal creations and sort of put it out there. So it's really important that marketing and PR work together, because a lot of the content that you're going to be providing will be actually created in the marketing department, but taken through the PR efforts

Jodi

Okay. How soon should someone, a business owner who's writing a book? How soon should they be thinking about publicity? Starting marketing, all of those things? I mean, I know you can't start really too early.

Sonia

No, no,

Jodi

but at what point do you recommend them really kicking into gear,

Sonia

I would say at least invest three months, and okay, marketing, pre-publicity, because you need to build your brand, right, and you need to build awareness and, you know, create the buzz and all kinds of fun stuff. So you need to give it at least that much, because you always have to assume whenever you start a new campaign, or in a book launch, or anything that you're doing, you have to assume that the media doesn't know unless you're like, really, really huge, right? So you just have to sort of like, start from the scratch and you know, sort of, you have to develop the plan. And you have to figure out your target audience and you have to research who you're trying to, you know, reach out to. So all that takes a little bit of time, right, while building your brand. So yeah, three months will be a good time.

Jodi

And what do you need to have in place like it's, I mean, obviously, it's helpful to have a book cover that you can share and

Sonia

and a bio.

Jodi

Okay, bio,

Sonia

your headshots, and then anything that you've previously. So what I do is that I tried to tell my clients that let's create, like an online press kit. So it's just short and simple. You know, it has these, you know, again, the book cover excerpts. And if you have already, you know, there's some kind of reviews that

you've had or a list of all that, so that when I as a PR person is sending it to a reporter or a book reviewer. They're not like scrambling to find who you are. It's all in one place.

Jodi

Yeah. Yeah. Everything's there. I mean, your job as the author is to make it as easy as possible for people to help you by that? Yeah. Okay. Okay. So what is I mean, obviously, the value of you know, publicity and PR is brand awareness, social proof all of those things. What's the number one thing for authors to know, about, like book PR?

Sonia

From my understanding, what from my experience, I would say that, the best way to put it is that when you publish a book, you would sort of like you can assume, or you kind of hope that your book will get the kind of recognition you want through word of mouth, right? Like, okay, somebody read it, and you know, and then they recommended it and all that. So PR, or publicity sort of like comes in to jumpstart the process, because it has to reach somebody, right? And it just goes beyond just, you know, your friends and family or, you know, it has to reach the, if you're a business owner, right, it has to reach your market, it has to reach your industry. So, it's always good to keep in mind that, okay, you know, I want this to be done, but how do I get, you know, go about doing it, and the middle person between you and your market is your unbiased media. Right. Okay, so that's, that's where the connection comes in.

Jodi

Got it. What are the things that you see, most effective, and then also, I mean, just as important, least effective for, for authors of nonfiction, typically, the listeners of this podcast are, yeah, they're doing, like, professional development, self help of some type.

Sonia

So I would say that the most effective would be to create your own persona as a top leader in your industry in your space. So basically, you know, look into your trade pubs and all that, you know, and then create a lot of like, you know, essays or, you know, opinion pieces, or byline top leadership pieces. So while you're writing your book, it's good to speak about what you know, right? So and through the byline or opinion pieces, and all that, are you able to that for that. So once you have your, a lot of times, you know, if you have if you have many things published, and by the time you actually release your book, there's, you know, you've you built up, you have a background or so it's always good to have start writing in a small in a short pieces and all that, commenting on things being active on social media, and all that it's very important because you because again, it's brand awareness, right, you're raising your profile, and the more committed you are to that, the better chances you'll get to be recognized or have that traction, you're looking.

Jodi

Right.

Sonia

And also, you know, another thing is to be like, you know, reaching out to book reviewers or reporters or media who actually do you know, they do big report reviews and all that. And, you know, offer them something unique, you know, not just like, hey, read my book.

Jodi
Right? Right.

Sonia
So it's just, you just have to, I cannot really tell you exactly what but it all depends, like, hey, you know, sort of, like, look up, see what they've been writing about, or the books they have read, right? And so give your opinion about that particular angle. And so they'll be interested, they'll be like, hey, this person knows what they're talking about. And nonfiction is easy that way. Right? Is, ya know, you're put in your space. So it'll be really, really easy for you to just, you know, I mean, for to share that insider opinion.

Jodi
Right. What about, I mean, I know blog tours used to be really big for book authors. And I feel like podcast tours, podcasts are big right now.

Sonia
I think podcasts are big right now. And I tried to get my clients to as you know, as many podcasts and interviews as possible, because you know, you're you're actually directly talking to your target audience, right? Because you're not just gonna go into any podcasts you're not if you're writing a book about software solutions, you're not gonna be in an entertainment podcast, right? So it really have to You're just reaching that market and you know, and I always say that podcasts and byline, that the two are bylines meaning like essays or opinion pieces and all that that is the really the way of knowing that okay, you've reached who you want to reach right decision makers and all that. So right, it's just again, creating that buzz beforehand and all that but what I would never suggest is just throwing randomly, not doing your research and having a huge media list and sending it out like blindly right? Yeah. Because they don't want you to think that you're wasting your time and you're wasting their time. You wouldn't even cared what I read what I write about and all that so don't write that just sort of like, affects negatively definitely, absolutely.

Jodi
How should be business owner - authors prepare for, for interviews. So I mean, is it different based on you know, like print versus TV versus podcast? Or can you talk a little bit about that preparation?

Sonia
Yeah. So a part of my service I always provide is this immediate training? Because you'd be surprised at how many people are extremely knowledgeable, extremely, you know, they know what they're talking about, but they kind of have that, you know, shyness, right. So, what it depends, like some clients, when I feel like they're really not comfortable, I would push for more email, you know, interaction, email, interviews, and all that. And, but then when it comes to podcasts, or, you know, broadcast interviews, we just have to make sure, you know, I tried to get the questions beforehand, so they can prep. Okay. And then, you know, just practice and, and, but in my experience, what I've noticed is that it just takes a

couple of times. But the third time around, you're a pro, you're like, we're enjoying what you're doing. And it just makes a huge difference. When I see my clients when they actually start seeing their names coming up, you know, in media coverage, that confidence level goes up. And, yeah, I've seen that, like, I have worked with clients who are like, extremely, extremely shy, but didn't make eye contact. But within like, by the time they had their fourth interview, they're more confident, and they're like they weren't.

Jodi

Well, that makes sense. That makes sense. Right? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, I mean, I think one of the things I just actually answered this today in my membership, we do like an office hours q&a. And one of the questions, one of the questions was, should I just hire a publicist? Because it seems like this is going to take so much time to do it myself. And my answer is, if you can afford it, build that into your budget, then absolutely. Because again, like, like I said, the beginning, this is your zone of genius, not my zone of genius. Yeah, and you can absolutely DIY some of this stuff. But there's a lot of it is going to be far easier. If you're in a professional's capable hands.

Sonia

Yes. And you know why it matters, because it's hard to create a connection, you know, with the media. So, you know, they get so many pitches and all that. It's easy that whatever you're sending, and if you don't know how to exactly to put it or you know, pitch it, right, it's might get lost. So what we do as PR people, we build that relationship with the media, right? So by the time we start sending them something, they know that okay, these people are not just gonna send me junk. Yeah, I'm gonna pay attention to what they have to say. Right? It's just yeah, it's just that's how it really, really helps, because we come with our own credibility and old connection. Right,

Jodi

Well, yeah. Because because you've spent the time and done the legwork to build those relationships. So you're not coming in blind like everything. Right? Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. So I mean, I, okay, so I answered that question pretty well this morning, and I feel pretty good about that. So and media training is something another piece of hiring, which is, that's, that's a really interesting point that I hadn't really thought about. Especially for Yeah, you know, video and that sort of thing, if someone's not comfortable, because I mean, especially, I mean, business owners, especially, I say, all the time, you are an extension of your brand. And the book is an extension of you. So that's your reputation out there. So you want to make sure that you're protecting it, and it's being presented the way you want it to be presented.

Sonia

Yes, exactly. And then also, you know, it's just the way you come across will add value to your brand, right? So it's confidence is reputation. So it's just it's really, really important that when you come across when you come across a reporter or you you're doing an interview and all that just show your passion that okay, you know, this is you believe you build a product, you build a service, why did you do it? It's always good to bring out the origin story, right? And I always tell my clients that have a story to tell PR is all about storytelling. Because you need to rise above all that, you know, there's so much going on,

and how is your story unique or and that will sort of generate the kind of you know, publicity need that you need for your upcoming books and all that because people are people will be curious.

Jodi

Yeah, yes, story is so important, I think to any anything you're trying to project out into the world. But especially I mean, like you're saying the market is so saturated. The pitches people receive the number of books as being published every day, all of it, there's just there's so much information to consume. Yes, that you have to be able to clearly articulate why it is that this is something worth someone's time.

Sonia

Exactly. And then, you know, because I always tell my clients that you have to realize that most reporters and media, they're working on a deadline, they have their own bosses they have, you know, so respect, and we're just trying to do everything in our power to make sure that you come across you you're, we're putting your best face forward. Right.

Jodi

Right. How Okay, so we talked a little bit about how soon you can start when you should be starting. Let's talk, let's say, just because, you know, this happens to that someone launches their book. Uh, huh. They don't do a huge PR Blitz, for whatever reason. Yeah. And then, you know, the books been out for a little while, and then they say, Okay, it's time for me to get serious about book publicity. Yeah. What should they do at that point?

Sonia

They should actually, I would say that this launch a new campaign. Okay. When I mean, the book has been published, right. But it can be a brand new launching, right, with a different angle, where it's been, like, we have, you know, this is this upcoming book that we talked about, we talk about what's going on in the training in the industry, and tie in the book, then, because it's not a book launching, it's more about like tying in the product or the service that they discussed. And how is it relevant in the industry in the market today?

Jodi

Okay, so just treat it like a new phase of the book marketing campaign. Okay. Got it. Okay, that makes sense. I have a feeling there are probably some listeners in that. So that's super helpful. That is super helpful. If you were sitting with a business owner writing a book, and you could only tell them one piece of advice, what would it be?

Sonia

It would be, try to be your unique, authentic self. Don't read other things don't, don't feel intimidated, like all these people wrote about this? No, just feel that, again, it goes back to your origin story and all that just yeah, see what's in your heart to say what you want to write about. Don't try to put yourself in other people's shoes, just to tell your own story. And that that uniqueness, that authenticity makes a huge difference.

Jodi

Yeah, I agree. I think even as a consumer of media and information you can feel when someone is not being their unique, authentic self.

Sonia

Because it's okay. I mean, because I know that kind of like, like I said, that can get intimidating, because you're writing about something and you're like, oh, there's a best seller with the same title, right? And you're like, how do you compete with that? But you know, it's not about competing, it's about tapping into the right margin. And knowing that if you write it well enough, there will be an audience.

Jodi

Well, that's exactly right. I mean, you're not trying to get Joe Schmo whose audience you're trying to get your audience for your book. So that makes perfect sense. Oh, this was a good discussion, so much good information. So we're gonna link all of your information in the show notes so people can find you to learn more about you and the services you provide, which are obviously super helpful. And I'm sure anyone listening to this episode, even if they thought at the beginning, "Oh, I can totally do everything myself" now probably assuming a little bit of a different tune. So yeah, this is super helpful.

Sonia

You know, otherwise, we wouldn't have a job. Right?

Jodi

Well, there you go. That's for sure. Okay, so yeah, I don't let anyone leave this podcast, though. Without giving me a book recommendation. Whether it's something you read recently in love you're reading now or you're about to read. You've heard good things about just anything for me to add to my you know, TBR pile on my nightstand.

Sonia

Oh, okay. Right now, I actually am reading the *Glass Palace* by one of my favorite, favorite author Amitav Ghosh. Okay. And, you know, he, it's obviously fiction. Uh huh. And, but then it's based on a lot of what is it called historical events, and I love reading historical novels like I do, you know, really true. And I'm, I'm fascinated with the whole Asian cultural thing where it's Chinese history or, you know, the Glass Palace is about Burma. So, yes, so yeah, that's my, that's my escape. I read a lot of also a lot. I read a lot of what is it called prime novels?

Jodi

Okay. Those are not my cup of tea. I'm too much of a chicken for those of Asian history also, so I'll have to check out the Glass Palace. That is a good recommendation. You'd like it. Okay. All right. Well, thank you so much, Sonia, for being my guest today. This was a really great conversation.

Sonia

Thank you. Thank you for having me. I really Appreciate it. And I hope you know I was able to help some of your listeners,

Jodi

I'm sure, you helped me and I already probably know a little bit more than they do just speak from my experience. So I'm sure that it was I'm sure that you did. So thank you. Thank you.

Sonia

Thank you so much.

Jodi

Thanks for listening to today's episode of the Write.Publish.Market. podcast. I know just how busy your schedule is as a business owner, so I'm grateful you've taken some time out of yours to journey into the world of book publishing with me today. If you are looking for even more book writing, marketing and publishing information and support, check out my mentorship membership. The author entrepreneurs lab where each month we take a deep dive into one element of the book world with education, a q&a session with me your book publishing expert resources, co writing times and so much more. You can learn more at the link in the show notes. I hope to see you inside the lab