

Guide to Targeting an Audience

By Maria Murnane

If you start casually chatting about your book with someone you just met at a coffee shop and she enthusiastically asks, "Who would enjoy reading your book?" do you have a good answer ready, besides replying with an equally enthusiastic "Everyone!"?

For authors, it's important to pick a target audience if you want to develop an effective marketing campaign and create a compelling message for it. Why? Because unless you have unlimited time and money to market your book to everyone who could potentially enjoy it, you need to **focus your efforts**. There are only so many hours in the day, so knowing your audience will allow you to utilize precious marketing time - and dollars - more effectively. If you go at it blind, despite your best intentions your book will most likely get lost among the more than 1,500 that, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, are published each day.

It's never too early to start thinking about your audience. If you're still working on your book, try to write with a specific reader in mind. Is there something you can include in the text that would give you a marketing angle (e.g. mentioning a restaurant, school, event, or neighborhood)? Even if your book is already published, a helpful strategy is to think of your target readers as real people. And I mean *real people*, with names and jobs and hobbies. For example, if your book is about fishing in Alaska, your main target reader could be Joe, a 55-year-old doctor who lives with his wife and three teenage kids in California and spends many of his vacations fishing. Once you think of your audience in those terms, then you can use that example to conduct the following three-step exercise:

1. **Identify your audience:** Who is Joe? What does he want to do before he retires? What does he worry about at night? What is one thing he never got to do as a kid? What is his favorite fish? When and where did he learn to fish? Has he been to Alaska to fish?
2. **Understand your audience:** What would make Joe want to read my book? Where else does he vacation? How does he plan his vacations? Does Joe wish his family would love fishing as much as he does? Would a family fishing trip to Alaska be fun for the whole family?
3. **Target your audience:** How do I find Joe? Where does Joe go when he's not fishing? Where does he read about fishing? Where does he buy his fishing gear?

Even if you didn't write your book with a specific reader like Joe in mind, that reader can still exist for you when it's time to begin marketing. Let's look at a real-life example. For my first novel, a romantic comedy called *Perfect on Paper*, here's how I followed the steps above:

1. I identified my primary reader as a young, single, professional woman in a major city who wonders if she's ever going to figure out what to do with her life. Let's call her Debbie. Choosing Debbie isn't to say that men or older women wouldn't enjoy my book, but from the beginning my *proactive marketing efforts* focused on Debbie.
2. To encourage Debbie and women like her to read my novel, I dedicated it to "any woman who has ever been on a really bad date or realized halfway through the workday that her skirt is on backward." That dedication always makes Debbie laugh, which also makes her want to give the book a read.
3. To reach Debbie and her friends with the above message, here are just a few of the actions I took, which may give you ideas for targeting and marketing to your own audience:

- I gave signed copies to the owners of several women's boutiques in San Francisco, where the novel is set, and nearly all of them began stocking the book after they read it.
- I donated signed copies to the winning bidders in a live bachelor auction, with a personalized note asking them to please get in touch if they enjoyed the read.
- For a "holiday reading" campaign, I sent 15 signed copies to sorority presidents at major universities right before the holiday break, also with a personalized note asking them to please get in touch if they enjoyed the read. This particular campaign led to my being invited to speak at the Harvard Women's Leadership Conference - twice.
- I reached out to book clubs with a fondness for women's fiction and offered to attend their meetings if they chose my book.

- I printed a ton of business cards featuring the cover of the book on the front and the dedication on the back, along with my website and email address, so that when I made connections, people would know how to follow up.
- I created a Facebook profile for my novel's protagonist, Waverly Bryson. She regularly posts funny things that happen to her (e.g., embarrassing moments, dating mishaps), comments on posts her Facebook friends make, and she always wishes them a happy birthday. On Waverly's own birthday her wall was flooded with hundreds of greetings from her "friends." Waverly is never overtly selling to her Facebook friends, but she's selling herself just by being a part of the conversation.
- I created a Twitter profile for Waverly for her to share funny things she observes in real life and/or in my imagination. Again, she is rarely overtly selling the book, but just by being there she is selling.
- I lifted the term "Waverly moment" i.e., an embarrassing episode, from the pages of my book and invited my readers to send me their own Waverly moments to include in the sequel. I was flooded with submissions.

These are just a handful of the many things I've done to create a brand - and a fan base - around Waverly Bryson, which has convinced a lot of "Debbies" out there to pick up a copy of *Perfect on Paper*, and to tell other Debbies to do the same. I'm proud to say Waverly now has thousands of readers anxiously awaiting her next adventure, which comes out in fall 2011. However, despite the success of what I've done so far, I'm constantly brainstorming for new ways to get the word out to potential readers; and I mean constantly. Targeting your audience and promoting a book isn't something you can check off your to-do list. **It's something you have to work at every single day.**

In today's digital world, if you want your book to stand out, you're going to have to step up and get involved in the promotion, which often means communicating directly with your target audience through a variety of channels (online and social media, in-person, through print media, etc.). Writing can be somewhat of a solitary profession, but the resources available to authors today give us the opportunity to reach our readers and form relationships with them to create a fan base. Marketing to your audience can be a little intimidating at first, but all it takes is focus, creativity, and a lot of energy. Get to know your audience and you'll be well on your way to more effective marketing.

Maria Murnane writes romantic comedies and provides consulting services on book publishing and marketing. Learn more at www.mariamurnane.com.