

PUBLISHING NOW

Kathleen Whyman finds out how best to use social media and virtual platforms for self-promotion

Online promotion has been necessary for authors for some time now, but never more so than during lockdown. With book tours, festivals, award ceremonies and launch parties cancelled, the internet has become the only place where writers can let readers know about their books. But what are the best ways to do this?

Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are the obvious social media tools for writers. Fortunately for us, the writing community is very supportive, which has been particularly beneficial during self-isolation.

Alice Lutyens, literary agent at Curtis Brown, says: 'Support at publication is so important, but social media is also there to cultivate friends in the very lovely and warm writers' community.'

Anita Chapman, freelance social media manager and founder of Neets Marketing, adds: 'Support networks and Facebook groups can also be helpful for exchanging information, seeking advice or simply letting off steam.'

'The online bookish community is a great space to connect with other authors, reviewers, bloggers, booksellers, event organisers – and readers – as well as finding out about publishing trends and key issues,' says Emma Dowson, publicity manager at Myriad Books.

'Don't make your content too sales-driven though,' she warns. 'Be generous to other

writers and engage with bloggers, particularly if they write or review in the genre you write in. Congratulate them on a deal or competition placing, publication etc.'

Gwyn GB, co-founder of MyVLF (Virtual Literary Festival), agrees. 'Don't broadcast and do a hard sell. If you support other authors, they'll support you. People don't just buy one book a year, they buy lots, so there doesn't need to be rivalry among writers.'

Read on

Establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with other authors is a worthwhile investment of your time, but how do authors get the attention of potential customers – the readers themselves?

'Book bloggers have played an important role in helping authors with promotion for many years, and their fantastic ability to create a buzz about books on social media is especially helpful to authors at the moment,' says Chapman.

'Also, I'm seeing a lot of Facebook Live, Instagram Live, Twitter chats and YouTube videos,' she continues. 'The use of live video has grown slowly in recent years amongst authors, probably because speaking live on camera can be a daunting prospect, but many authors are embracing it now. Video often gets more attention on social media platforms as algorithms tend to push it to the top of news feeds – more so when live. Currently this is a great way for authors to communicate directly with readers.'

'The personal touch is very important in engaging with your audience,' says Dowson. 'One author I worked with, Hannah Vincent, promoted her book *She Clown and Other Stories* by posting a series of photos of herself putting on clown make-up, backed up with some witty comments about the roles we (particularly women) are expected by society to perform every day.'

Dowson also recommends arranging a virtual launch party or event.

'Many online literary festivals, bookchat parties and book groups have been launched over the past few months,' she says. 'Twitter is a good place to pitch yourself to them.'

One such online festival is MyVLF, which was set up in 2019, long before the pandemic. 'We don't have a crystal ball!' says Gwyn



Publicity manager Emma Dowson of Myriad Books

GB, one of the three 'Blonde Plotters', who founded MyVLF. 'We set it up because not everyone has the time, money or ability to go to festivals. We wanted to bring readers to the authors.'

'When we initially set up MyVLF, we sent out an information sheet explaining how to use Zoom. Lockdown has forced everyone to embrace online video, so people have realised that it's not a big scary thing. It's easy to access and use, so people are much more open to using it.'

Gwynne is an advocate of video calls. 'People like to see real people. They're not expecting you to be a Hollywood superstar.'

She recommends taking inspiration from what other authors are doing on social media.

'All the interviews we've hosted are in our online theatre. Watch them to see what the authors are doing and take the bits you like to use yourself. And think about how you're framing the video and the sound quality as well as the picture.'

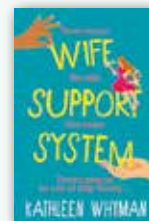
Chapman believes the pandemic could change the way books are promoted going forward.

'Authors who have begun to use video will probably continue to do so,' she says. 'Georgina Moore, director of books and publishing at Midas PR, recently said during a Twitter interview with *The Bookseller* that virtual events are now a mainstay and she will be continuing to use them after the lockdown ends.'

With the future looking uncertain for mass gatherings, it's reassuring to know that the online writing community is there for us.

Good luck and stay safe.

• Kathleen Whyman's debut novel, *Wife Support System*, is available from 29 July on Amazon, Apple and Kobo



Freelance social media manager Anita Chapman