

PUBLISHING NOW

How can authors promote a book during a pandemic? Kathleen Whyman asks the experts

Without wishing to state the obvious, getting published is hard. And when it happens, after months or years (10 in my case, but that's between us) of toiling over your manuscript, it needs to be celebrated. Ideally very publicly so that you attract the attention of as many readers as possible.

Which is where Covid-19, once again, sticks an oar in. Book signings, launches, talks, library visits, literary festivals and events have been out for more than a year now, and although there's a possibility they'll resume in the summer, that's a few months away.

So how can authors promote their books until then? My own has just come out in paperback, but instead of dancing with joy around my kitchen, I'm concerned it'll disappear without anyone ever knowing it existed. All is not lost, though – there are ways to get noticed, as the experts explain.

'People are spending increased time online,' says Annabelle Wright, campaigns manager at EDPR. 'There'll be a community of other writers online for you to connect with, and then you can support each other – either in a Facebook group, or using a hashtag on Twitter or Instagram. Find your tribe – readers who'll be interested in your particular title – and be authentic and be engaged.'

Facebook groups are a great way to get in front of your audience. Many live-stream author interviews and spotlights, as do some

libraries. 'We run a fortnightly panel interview profiling authors on our Facebook page and it's really successful,' says Kim Nash, head of publicity at Bookouture. 'It's easier to do a Facebook or Instagram live if you're being interviewed by someone else. If you're not comfortable doing a live video, it will come across, so you may prefer to do a recording.'

Creating content

One concern many authors have is what they should talk or tweet about. Not much is going on and I doubt people will want to hear about what I had for tea last night.

EDPR's Wright says: 'Readers love seeing a behind-the-scenes insight into the life of a writer. Share as much about your journey, your writing and your book as you feel comfortable doing, whether on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Use the materials your publishers create for you, and don't be coy about celebrating your successes.'

Wright also suggests taking advantage of direct links you have with other authors, journalists or media outlets for possible endorsement. 'A personal connection is a great way to cut through the noise,' she says. 'Don't be afraid to offer suggestions to your publisher. Promoting a book is a team effort, so if you have an idea, share it. That being said, trust that they're doing what they think best for your book and keep them in the loop about opportunities and plans, so that the campaign can be effectively coordinated.'



Annabelle Wright
from EDPR

Nash suggests Q&A blog posts as a way of connecting with readers. 'An author can use their own Facebook page or find groups that do interviews in that way,' she says. 'Many bloggers need content, so look out for that, but don't overload yourself with bookings because it can become overwhelming.'

Book festivals may be on hold for now, but many have created an online alternative. When 2020's Capital Crime was cancelled, its creators – author Adam Hamdy and Goldsboro Books founder David Headley – found another way to bring readers the festival experience.

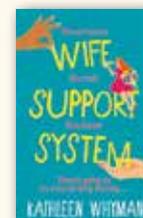
'We wanted to create a brand that felt true to what we'd achieved while supporting amazing authors,' explains festival manager Lizzie Curle. 'The solution was an online book club, combining a traditional book club with exclusive author interviews. The videos are only accessible to our subscribers, to create a sense of community.'

Nash cites accessibility as an important advantage. 'Taking part in online festivals is a great way to get in front of readers we might not normally be able to reach,' she says. 'Events are regional, so being online allows access to people who might not be able to afford to go in person or can't logistically get to them.'

Wright reminds us that although bookshops might be closed, readers are still reading. 'Make the most of the opportunities you have and engage with your readers online as much as possible,' she says. 'It's the next best thing until we can meet again in a bookshop with a warm white wine in hand.'

With all this great advice, I have cause to dance around my kitchen after all. Rest assured though – I definitely won't be sharing a video of that on social media!

• Kathleen's novel *Wife Support System* (Hera Books) is available from Amazon in paperback, ebook and audiobook



Kim Nash of
Bookouture



Capital Crime festival
manager Lizzie Curle