

My New Folding Technique is Unstoppable!

by Alice B. Acheson

[*Editor's Note:* Alice Acheson is one of the nicest persons you will ever meet. That genuine niceness has helped make her one of the most effective book publicists working today. Alice won the *Literary Marketplace* Publicist of the Year Award in 1994 and, more importantly for her clients, some real-world marketplace achievements — such as having four of her clients' books on *The New York Times* bestseller list simultaneously.

Like all good publicists, Alice is obsessive. My entry in her digital Rolodex includes my work address and home address, my spouse's name, my daughter's name, and my *daughter's fiancé's name*, among other very personal details. If you've ever met Alice, she probably has a dossier on you, too.

This article and its unusual title were inspired by Alice's classes at PMA's Publishers University. Alice is a former board member of PMA and has been teaching there — *gratis* — for many years. My favorite part of her basic publicity class is where she expounds on the proper folding technique for superior document display in the press kit. It's this sort of microscopic attention to detail that makes Alice Acheson so endearing and so accomplished.]

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of a press kit is to inspire media coverage for the book by providing information outside the book itself. The press kit smoothes the road to coverage by clearing away any obstacles and providing the media with everything they need for a successful story.

A major obstacle to coverage is time. Consider the radio talk show producer who likes the concept of the book, but doesn't have time to read it. No problem. The press kit provides sample questions or a Q&A with the

author. Either of these can be used as a template for a radio interview.

Here's an excerpt from a press kit cover letter for the book, *Pick Up Your Socks*:

Dear Interviewer,

Your listeners can provide ample variations on the theme:

Will my children ever
- clean up their
rooms,
- do their homework,
- take out the trash
- feed the dog...?

Elizabeth Crary, educator, parent and author of "PICK UP YOUR SOCKS...and other skills growing children need!" (Parenting Press, \$11.95, paperback) can provide solutions.

This cover letter proceeds to list seven topics for discussion the author can address, including whether parents should pay children for doing chores. It suggests a "favorite" topic: how to handle "I forgot."

A television talk show producer might like the book, but have a difficult time visualizing it as a program. The press kit should help her. It should contain a photograph of the author, and possibly a videotape or DVD of the author speaking. The cover-letter or book release should include one or more story ideas around which a show could be built. The press kit might also include contact information for recognized authorities related to the subject of the book, or people whose lives have been dramatically impacted by it.

Your press kit is a one-stop shopping center for media coverage. If a magazine has only enough room to include the title in a list of new books, the news release provides a one-liner plus the vital details: title, author, publisher, format, page count, ISBN, and price. If a newspaper has a few column inches to fill, great! The news release should be written in standard

journalistic style so that it can be used verbatim.

A good press kit can turn a listing into a review, a review into an article, an article into a full-blown feature. It does this by providing quality artwork that can dramatically increase both the space a book gets and the impact a story has. The press kit provides material for ever-larger levels of coverage. Author Q&As make nice sidebars for reviews. Contact information in the press kit may lead to one or more interviews. And suggestions for good excerpts can inspire a journalist to ask the boss for extra space.

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Here's a list, more or less in order of importance, of what should be included in a press kit:

Book Release, written in journalistic style, with all the basic vital statistics about the book, a brief author biography, and contact information for the publicist. Many publishers use this single piece instead of a more elaborate press kit.

Author Photo, 5" x 7" glossy, with appropriate photographer credit as well as the name of the author, title of the book, and publisher printed *on the front of the photo* (versus a label glued to the back of the photo, which will be visible when the photo is scanned or placed on a light box). Most print publications still prefer black and white. However, as color printing becomes cheaper, those preferences are shifting — and color is preferred for television and online media. Include both B&W and color, if you can.

Jacket Photo, 5" x 7" glossy, with appropriate photographer credit and designer credit on the front of the photo. Again, black and white is the standard, but you should have a few color photos available just in case.

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Author Q&A or Sample Questions help television and radio producers translate the book into a program, and may inspire print journalists to interview your author.

Author Biography, much more detailed than the few sentences about the author that appear in the news release. It's especially important to invoke as many place names related to the author as you can, to maximize the number of media outlets that have a local angle on the story.

Endorsements, the more, the better. However, do not include blurbs from media outlets that might be considered competitors of other outlets getting the kit. Quoting the *Los Angeles Times* is not going to help you get a review in other major metropolitan daily newspapers.

Additional Photos. For heavily illustrated books, the media can prepare additional artwork from the book itself, but you will make their lives easier (and, therefore, encourage them to feature your book) if you provide a sheet or two of artwork from the book. That also allows the editor to send the book out for review rather than delay delivery because artwork is being photographed. When the illustrations are photographs, high-quality prints need to be included in the press kit for print reproduction.

PRESENTATION

I prefer to use a twin-pocket portfolio for press kits. Whenever you bind materials, you make them more difficult to browse and use. I never use three-ring binders or clasp portfolios, and I don't like using paper clips or staples in press kits. A press kit is meant to be used, not archived.

The kit should make an immediate impression, while being a good storage place for documents until the story is done. You want the promotional materials to be both visible and easily accessible.

You can glue a cover slick or book jacket to the front cover of the portfolio. If you've made postcards

for the book, these can be used instead of a cover slick on portfolio covers.

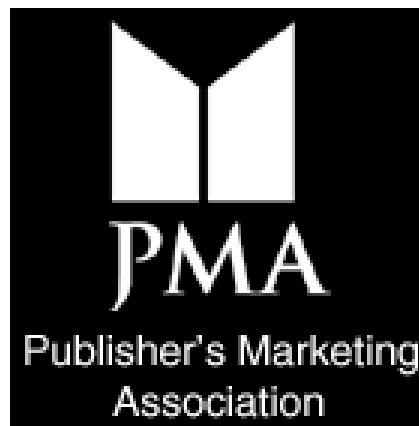
Inside the press kit, you want to cascade the documents so that a journalist can scan them quickly and see what the kit contains. The top inch of each document should clearly state its purpose, such as News Release, Sample Interview, Author Biography, etc. If you have room, that top inch can contain the publisher's logo, the title of the book, the author's name, and a headline of some sort. You may have to play with your document design to get the top inch of each page to communicate effectively.

The documents are then folded so that they layer nicely into the portfolio pockets. I tend to put information about the book in the right-hand pocket, and information about the author in the left-hand pocket. The important point of all this folding and layering (and sometimes cutting) is to ensure a quick visual scan of the entire contents of the kit.

Finally, I'd like to add a few suggestions about mailing etiquette. Do not use those padded mailers that spread fuzzy specks of lint all over the room when opened. I'm also down on big, bulky staples and packages taped so thoroughly you have to open them with scissors.



You can contact Alice B. Acheson via e-mail at AliceBA@aol.com or via snail mail at P.O. Box 735, Friday Harbor, WA 98250.



~ About ~

Patron Saint Productions

Patron Saint Productions is a publishing consultancy specializing in online marketing strategy, campaigns, and training. It was founded by Steve O'Keefe, a 20-year book publishing veteran who has launched online marketing campaigns for more than 1,000 books and dozens of publishers.

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Online Marketing Campaigns

Patron Saint Productions provides the following services, all designed to light a fire under a book during the month of publication. Ask about discounts for series promotions.

New Book Launch

A comprehensive campaign including a media component (e-mail news releases), excerpt distribution, discussion group postings, and online bookstore displays. Price: \$2,750.

Chat Tour or Online Seminar

All the services of the New Book Launch Campaign, plus a week-long author chat tour or online seminar. Price: \$5,500.

Web Site Promotion

Includes directory registration, writing meta tags, linkage campaign, e-mail news releases, discussion group postings, and site-of-the-day submissions. Price \$2,750 + registration fees.