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## Marketing Maven Edition

Last Saturday I spent an entire gorgeous April day indoors. And it was totally worth being cooped up because I learned so much from [Mimi Herman](#), author of [The Kudzu Queen](#). Herman herself is The Book Marketing Queen, in my not-so-humble opinion.

The occasion was the annual spring conference of the [North Carolina Writers' Network](#), a statewide organization that hosts gatherings with terrific workshop leaders, of which Ms. Herman was one.

Mimi Herman is the author of two poetry collections, and *The Kudzu Queen* is her first novel. She worked on her manuscript for ten years. Though her book was published by Regal House, a traditional press, Herman orchestrated her own publicity and marketing. The results are impressive. Her novel has been longlisted for the [VCU Cabell First Novelist Award](#). The North Carolina Center for Humanities named *The Kudzu Queen* a [Great Read](#) from Great Places. Electric Literature talked about *Kudzu* in an [article](#) predicting the Pulitzers.

So how did she do it? Mimi Herman gladly shared her recipe. The first step, she told us, is to "get over yourself." If you aren't comfortable saying nice things about your achievements as a writer, it's time to step up. And while you are at it, be gracious and thank everyone who helps along the way, because no author succeeds alone. Mimi's thank-you gifts for booksellers who host her readings include kudzu-scented bars of soap with the image of her book cover embossed on top (I kid you not; I got to smell one.).

Herman is systematic and dedicated. From organizing her own book tour to ordering a cake with her cover recreated in frosting, here are Mimi Herman's ideas for your consideration.

### **About Your Author Website:**

If you don't have a website, build one now. If you already have a website, update it about your new book. Include a book club discussion guide, and on the same page, a button to click if people want you to come to their book club (Such a great idea! I need to do this).

### **About the Blurbs (Endorsements) for Your Book:**

Aim as high as you can for people to blurb your book. They have to be willing to take the time to read it, and when they do, thank them profusely.

How did that go for Mimi? Look closely at the front cover of *The Kudzu Queen* and you'll see a blurb from [David Sedaris](#).

### **Your Press Kit:**

Mimi views the press kit as a living document. Create a press kit before your book comes out and keep adding to it. As you get better things add them, including new links to places where your book has been reviewed.

### **Your Platform:**

Like [Jane Friedman](#), Mimi stresses the importance of connecting with other authors. Appreciate them on social media, which then becomes reciprocal.

And do your own posting. There is no substitute for your voice on your platform. As Mimi pointed out, it's obvious when someone else (such as a publicist) writes your material on social media.

### **Your Book Launch:**

When your launch date is coming up, email possible venues. Don't beg, don't apologize, just ask: *Is this possible?* And don't be afraid to toot your own horn.

Your launch event can take place in a bookstore, or in a cafe, in a bar, or at your house. The people you know will be excited and will want you to do well. Mimi suggests getting a Square that connects to your phone so that you can sell your book at any location.

### **Your Book Tour:**

The year her book published, Mimi and her partner drove to AWP and Mimi arranged a book tour along the way at her own expense (This woman is dedicated). One suggestion for a road trip book tour: Connect with writers who have new books along your route and arrange for "In Conversation With" events. Both authors can read and can sell their books.

### **Preparing for Public Readings:**

Get the word out about each event. Ask your host ahead of time how many minutes for your reading, how many minutes for Q&A, and prepare accordingly. Mimi's system to prepare for readings is genius.

- Pick a set of passages that don't require much explanation, don't give too much away, and are intriguing. They should be mix-and-match (i.e., you could

read any combination of passages in the order they appear in the book, and they would work together).

- Practice reading the passages aloud repeatedly and then time each one. One might be 3 minutes 39 seconds, another might be two minutes flat.
- Keep a file card in your reading copy of your book with a list of the passages, the page numbers, and the time each one takes to read.
- Then when you're asked to read for ten minutes, or fifteen minutes, etc., find a set of passages that adds up to the right length of time and you're good to go.

### **Your Swag:**

Perhaps not surprisingly for someone who has book covers printed on cakes, Mimi is a big fan of swag such as bookmarks and postcards. But swag, she told us, must be productive. Along with your book cover, include the logline for your book and a QR code to order it. Include your website and where to sign up for your mailing list.

Mimi also prints her own book plates on Avery labels so that she can send a customized signature for the inside of a book to readers wherever they are. Much cheaper, she says, than ordering pre-printed book plates.

### **Your Outreach:**

Mimi wrote a generic email that she could personalize and send to reviewers, book festivals, and podcasts. She sent out thousands of emails and never heard back from most of them, and some wrote back to say no. But more importantly, she had positive responses from many and has the reviews and appearances to show for it.

### **Your Publicist:**

Although she published with a traditional press with a marketing department, Mimi decided to hire her own publicist. She stressed that anybody can call themselves a publicist. Mimi wanted something more: a publicist with a Rolodex, with regular meetings with reviewers, with connections with the big book clubs like Oprah. She wanted someone who could get her blurbs, get her on podcasts, and get her book on "Best Of" listings. That kind of publicist can get you writing opportunities, and get you "In Conversation With" events with well-known writers.

Each publicist is different, and has a different menu of things they do for writers. The kind of publicist Mimi talked about will want a lead time of at least a year before launch and will run you \$5,000 to \$20,000 for one book. And that is the kind of publicist she hired.

Another much less expensive option is to hire a publicity assistant: A high school or college student who can create and maintain a spreadsheet with your publicity and marketing efforts and send out emails on your behalf.

### **Keeping Track of Your Campaign:**

Mimi set up a spreadsheet to track all aspects of her publicity and marketing campaign. Her spreadsheet has different pages for Reviewers, Awards, Podcasts, Book Groups, etc. Depending on the page, she records different data points in the columns. For Awards, for example, she records the sponsoring organization, the date submissions open, the deadline, the date she submitted, the number of books sent, who is eligible for the award, who can submit to the award, the prize amount, and when she heard back.

Herman spent ten years writing a novel and then spent a year working full time on promoting her book. She also spent thousands of her own dollars to do it. Mimi is on a mission that goes well beyond *The Kudzu Queen*. She wants this campaign to land her the kind of agent who can open doors to a Big Five publisher. If anybody can do that, Mimi Herman can.

Our job as authors is bigger than being a writer, as wonderful as writing certainly is.

I'm writing this newsletter in the midst of editing the final chapters of my book, *Write & Sell a Well-Seasoned Romance*. These final chapters are, naturally, the "Sell" part. I'm inspired by Mimi Herman's approach, and her ideas will resonate with me as I edit. I hope you will find her ideas in this newsletter just as inspiring.



Please keep the pen moving (or the keys clicking) and keep thinking about getting your words in front of readers.

All the best,

Stella,

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Please Share this Newsletter!



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## From the blog this month



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### A Quilt is More than Fragments

**Stella Fosse**

By age 92 my mother was no longer independent, though she lived in the house my parents had bought sixty years before. My brother and I were far away, and Mom depended on the kindness of neighbors and a bit of hired help to shop for her, do her laundry, and vacuum her rugs. Mom's car rusted, undriven for years, in the

driveway. The neighbors were burning out; one confronted my brother on a visit and asked why he hadn't stepped up and put Mom in a care home.

"I would," he said, "if she would go."

### **Board and Care**

An emergency hospital visit changed all that. The hospital refused to discharge Mom without a placement, and my brother, who at least lived in the same state, found her a room in a [Board and Care home](#) that looked a lot like her house. As the former [Director of Nurses](#) in a convalescent hospital, my mother had no illusions about this stage of life. "This is where they send people to die," Mom told me on the phone.

The care home was expensive. My brother and the neighbors cleared out the family house to sell. Becky from down the street packed up all the clothes left in Mom's closet and stashed them at her house. She had a plan.

[Read More.....](#)



**Small Press Publishing**

## Vicki DeArmon

Flashback to 1988 in San Francisco when I was the publisher of Foghorn Press, a start-up with no capital. We had big dreams—dreams that actually manifested in high sales. Each year, we shipped 40,000 copies of our lead title, the guidebook *California Camping*, the golden goose of our list. Our other guidebooks sold heartily as well (5,000 to 25,000). That was our reality.

Fast forward to 2022 and the launch of [Sibylline Press](#). Imagine my surprise to hear that we should expect sales of only 2,500 or less per title. It seems books suffer from diminished expectations, by being fiction or memoir *and* having been written by [debut authors](#). But also the Foghorn era was a different time, they tell me. I nod my head like this is acceptable, but inwardly the optimist in me rejects it *completely*.

Creating a book is a lot of work, more than anyone outside the business will ever know. There's eight months of developing and finessing before a book ever hits the market. We labor over editorial, title, cover, price, production, marketing, publicity, each of those representing a hundred subsets of decisions. How do we justify bankrolling a publicity tour with expectations that only 2,500 will sell? We can't actually believe that number or it will be obvious that we cannot afford to promote our books at all. We must delude ourselves and in deluding ourselves, we'll promote at a higher level and therein the hope of selling more than that average can actually happen. It's a publishing [Catch 22](#).

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