

Learning How to Kill/How to Have a Killer Book Signing

December Write Brain

Presenters: Madge Walls and Beth Groundwater

By Kirk Farber

In December, Madge Walls and Beth Groundwater joined forces to present the Write Brain event “How to Have a Killer Book Signing.”

Madge is the author of *Paying the Price*, a novel set in Florida about a real estate deal gone bad. Beth is the author of the mystery *A Real Basket Case* and the upcoming *To Hell in a Handbasket*.

Right from the beginning, Madge and Beth let us know they are two very different personalities. Madge is a real estate agent, used to “making the sale” by good old-fashioned handshakes and conversation. And Beth is a self-described obsessive compulsive organizer due to her former career as a computer programmer. Both have found successful ways to have a killer book signing and were happy to share them with us.

Beth’s first bit of advice was—make your book signing an event. Ever the organizer, Beth’s first signing at a Barnes & Noble had a great turnout, because she literally called everyone she personally knew. She handed out 150 flyers. She brought cookies, and there happened to be live music there the same day. People were bustling about, which attracted more people, and the buzz was undeniable.

Beth also recommended bringing in an interesting display or relevant costume to help draw attention. For example, a medieval suit of armor if it fits your book’s genre, which might also allow for fun photo opportunities.

Madge, on the other hand, prefers a more subtle approach. She said she likes to keep things less theatrical in favor of a simple softsell approach. She shared with us her basic pitch which she’s found to be very effective. Simply stand next to your table of books (preferably positioned near the front door) and warmly greet customers. “Hi, I’m Madge Walls, and I’m signing books today. Would you like a book mark?” If they accept, you’re 95% there, because you’re giving them something of value, and they will inevitably ask “What’s your book about?” And you tell them, in a very brief way. “It’s about Hawaii,” Marge says. And now you’ve got something to talk about.

Something both Madge and Beth emphasized was that you must talk to people—get up and greet people. Sitting behind your table of books hoping for the best is not enough. And how important it is to have a sightline to the front door. You don’t want to be stuck in a back corner where nobody can see you.

A surprising fact that both authors shared is how few copies you need to sell for it to be considered a success. Madge said if you sell 8-10 copies, the bookstores are very happy. And Beth added that if you sell 15, they will have you back again really quick! The point being that bookstores want to sell books too, and they don’t lose anything by having you come in for a signing.

Other points they covered included the difference between independent bookstores and chain bookstores, how to coach your family and friends to help you appear more popular while not getting in the way of sales, and the differences between a signing and a reading.

They also shared some important common sense business tips, like calling ahead

frequently, all the way up to the day of the event, to make sure everyone knows to expect you.

Some other unique points I took away from the event:

- Madge: If it's quiet or slow, meet with staff and give them your little pitch so they can repeat it when customers eventually come.
- Beth: Arrive 30 minutes early and talk with staff. Be friendly and approachable because (indies especially) will hand-sell copies for you.
- Have a few phrases or sayings prepared for autographs and keep a pad of paper handy, so you can spell names out before permanently inking them in the customer's copy.
- Mind your manners. Soft selling is always more effective than hard selling and will get you invited back. Nobody likes an aggressive author.

Lastly, they both followed up with some great advice on your promotion timeline. Strike while the iron is hot, Madge emphasized, getting your promotion out as soon as possible after the publication date. Beth agreed, saying that the first six months is generally your window to have a positive effect on your book sales.

Huge thanks to Madge and Beth for sharing their wisdom and experiences. Hopefully, one day we can all have a Killer Book Signing!

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