

The Business of Writing: A Short Guide to Book Trailers

By LindaRohrbough

The newest trend in fiction is book trailers. They look like movie trailers, but they promote books. The goal is to connect the Internet generation with the world of books. Here are the how-to resources for book trailers, including common problems and cost considerations.

A number of PPW authors have done their own trailers, such as Cicily Janus, whose book *The Face of New Jazz* was recently bought by Random House/Watson Guptill. Mystery chick-lit writer Diane Carver credits her book trailers for an increase in sales. Libraries are posting book trailers on their Web sites for readers. And research shows that commuters are book readers, so it's effective to post short videos on TVs in trains and buses. However, most book trailers end up on streaming video sites like YouTube.

If you're a do-it-yourselfer, you'll be happy to know the latest iterations of Windows include Windows Movie Maker, a program to create your own mini-movie. Detailed how-to advice is available on-line from award-winning Christian romance author Brenda Coulter (brendacoulter.blogspot.com/2007/06/promoting-your-novel-how-to-make-book.html), or from the aforementioned Diane Carver (www.writersweekly.com/this_weeks_article/004498_01302008.html).

You might end up forking out \$100 for music, video, and pictures, but some authors have spent less than \$10 altogether with stuff they found free on-line. Brenda's page includes how to find free ingredients for your trailer, but there are also links near the bottom of the page for more resources.

The main problem is time—40 to 60 hours, including the author's learning curve. Matthew Koumalats, a television producer in Fort Worth, Texas, started doing book trailers part-time after he and his wife found themselves with a new baby girl and a new mortgage. He initially founded ReaderHook.com for his mother, New York Times best-selling author Jodi Thomas.

Matt says many authors want trailers pre-publication. "It helps build anticipation, especially if there's a fan club involved. The idea is to create interest, but not tell the book."

Matt says the most common earmarks of an amateur trailer are poor video quality, pacing that's off, inconsistent sound, and excessive length. Poor video quality usually results from the author trying to keep the file size down. But Matt says there's no benefit to small video if lower quality results. Pacing problems can be dragging stills/video, or rushing through images, or images that are not synchronized with the soundtrack. Inconsistent sound has to do with spikes or drops in volume.

But the biggest mistake is trailers which are too long. "A lot of this stuff is viewed while people are at work taking a 'web break.' Very few people will watch a five-minute video. Most won't even watch three or four minutes." Matt doesn't do book trailers that are longer than ninety seconds. Most of his average a minute.

Jodi Thomas told me that for *Texas Princess* she spent most of her time finding voice-over talent. Matt posted a script on a number of voice-over sites and people sent audio files.

How long does all this take? "If we have good communication with the author, we

can go start-to-finish in three to four weeks,” Matt said.

Prices vary for video book trailers. ReaderHook.com asks \$475 for video with sound or music and still photos and text but no voice-over. Stock video, custom voice-over, and music will cost up to \$1,400. Circle of Seven Productions (COS) is the award-winning video production site that trademarked the terms “book trailer” and “book teaser.” According to their latest brochure, prices start at \$300 for a trailer with just your cover as the still, to \$1,500 for a “teaser” with stock video and stills. More custom work with actors and voice-over talent is bid by the job, but company representative Sheila English said publishers have paid from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Usually production houses ask the author to fill out a questionnaire along with the cover art and promo copy from the book. You can expect they’ll throw in uploads to video streaming sites with corresponding links you can post on your Web site. However, creating a distribution plan for the trailer to fit the author’s goals is COS’s specialty. This plan, done up front, may include up to 5,000 libraries, B&N.com, and even showing the trailer on buses in major cities via Transit TV (for an additional charge).

Matt’s advice, should you decide to hire help, is: “If you don’t feel the trailer represents your book in a way that you’re happy with, don’t compromise. Get the editor involved and work with them until you have something you are happy with. You should be proud to show this to your friends and family.”

Are publishers paying for video trailers? COS said in 2002 it was all on authors, but now it’s about 50/50. But if you can present a solid case, you might negotiate the cost of a book trailer into your next contract. Who knows?

Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and numerous awards for her fiction and nonfiction. Linda’s latest book is Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band (Da Capo Lifelong Books, March 2008). Visit her Web site: www.LindaRohrbough.com

Sidebar

Sources for Professional Book Trailers:

ReaderHook.com (Matt Koumalats)

Circle of Seven Productions (www.cosproductions.com)

Do It Yourself Guidelines:

Brenda Coulter’s video trailer guide:

brendacoulter.blogspot.com/2007/06/promoting-your-novel-how-to-make-book.html

Writer’s Weekly how-to article by Diane Craver:

www.writersweekly.com/this_weeks_article/004498_01302008.html

Free images sources:

www.sxc.hu

www.istockphoto.com

www.bigstock.com

Free sound source:

www.sounddogs.com

Originally appeared in The Pikes Peak Writer, Volume VIII, Issue 3, May, June 2009