



Promoting Your Availability

by Alexis O'Neill

Let's say you want more school visit bookings. How do potential hosts learn about your availability? The basic ways include face-to-face contacts at conferences, direct mail to schools and libraries, and word-of-mouth recommendations from former hosts. But there are other strategies than can help you get your name out. The bottom line is – the more places you can be found, the more likely hosts will be able to find you.

Your Website

The best advertisement (besides having created a great book), is your own website. Be sure to let your personality shine through as you describe your school visit program. Many of my invitations have come from readers who like my books, Google my name, find my website and send me an email.

Organizational Websites

Organizational sites typically offer “passive” promotion in that the organization doesn't actively promote a speaker's availability, but they can boost your visibility factor.

I belong to local, state and national associations for reading, school libraries, independent booksellers, and of course, [SCBWI](http://www.scbwi.org). Many of these associations have a “speakers' bureau” or “directory” button on their websites, listing members who are authors and illustrators. Some are enhanced, posting interviews or brief bios and providing a direct link to personal websites. For example, see <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Speaker-Bureau> or <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/Speakers.html>

In addition, many publishers' websites have author visit pages promoting authors from their specific house (i.e. www.Candlewick.com). Be sure to keep your data updated, adding new

books, awards and other information that will increase your marketability.

Group Websites (non-commercial):

Non-commercial group websites or blogs are usually comprised of authors and illustrators who know each other personally and who provide expertise on a topic or offer a service. This kind of endeavor provides lots of opportunities for friendly cross-promotion.

Those that directly promote their expertise in a content area (i.e. teaching, nonfiction, writing), also do a nice job of indirectly promoting their availability as speakers. Some examples include <http://www.teachingauthors.com/> <http://www.inkrethink.blogspot.com/> <http://threesillychicks.blogspot.com/>

Other groups, such as Utah Children's Writers & Illustrators <http://ucwi.org/> are specifically dedicated promoting school visits. Organizers for the Utah site also send an e-newsletter to “teachers and librarians and bookbuyers of all types,” including congratulations for awards and honors and a calendar of upcoming publications and appearances.

Author Kim Norman provides a list of traditionally published authors who do school visits by state at <http://authorbystate.blogspot.com/>

Group Websites (commercial):

You may be solicited to purchase space on a commercial group website that offers to promote your school visits. Generally, this kind of service will post your bio, list your books, tell about your program, and actively send information about the group listing to librarians, educators and parent groups. The fee you pay in advance goes for maintaining the website and publishing

promotional brochures or other materials. There is no guarantee that this service will result in paid bookings and the money you pay is not refundable.

Booking Agents

A full-service booking agent is someone who is dedicated to promoting your visits, negotiating fees, handling correspondence with hosts, scheduling travel, and arranging for book sales. In return, the agent takes a percentage of your fee, often 10%, and may also, as the bookseller of record, earn money from sales. The booking agent only earns money when you earn money.

The Right Fit?

For any service in which money is involved, you should evaluate whether this is the right fit for you. Appearances are never guaranteed. If you are paying up-front, you may need to be willing to expense that amount to promotion should your bookings generate less income than

the expenditure. It's always good to check with the agency's clients and find out if the service has been useful to them before you sign-on.

For a comprehensive list of agencies that represent speakers of all genres for visits and book publishers who coordinate author visits and publicity, go to ALAN Online, the official site of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents at <http://www.alan-ya.org/speakers-bureau/>.

Here's wishing you a year filled with all the school visits you want!

***Alexis O'Neill**, Ph.D., is the author of **THE RECESS QUEEN** and other award-winning books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is a popular school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs. Visit her at www.schoolvisitexperts.com*
