

Facebook Marketing

Facebook can be a great marketing tool.

We just have to figure out how. Experimenting with marketing strategies for a year before my first book published, I found that because of my style of writing and because of my reader demographics, Facebook works for me.

As a regionalistic writer, I write stories set in my location and use the elements of that style in the plots. Because readers learn about my culture, our history, peoples, places, events, customs, traditions, etc., I discovered Facebook is my best promotional platform because that's where many of my readers are. Other genres like romance, fantasy, adventure, horror, are among those which find success on Facebook. But there are factors: how well the author creates his fan base, keeps their interest, and engages them in posts are a few. If you want to make the most of this promotional platform, perhaps what I did might work for you, too, other than the errors, I mean.

Step 1:

Setting up your Facebook page

I'm not going into the steps since it's pretty self-explanatory from the Facebook site prompts. I didn't need to consult any kind of handbook of instructions to follow to set up the page.

However, I really should have researched first how other authors did it.

The first thing I did was to make a mistake. But how else do we learn, right? I honestly thought my first book would be my last. I had no idea after it published that I had more stories in me. So I called my page "El Hermano" after my book of the same title. When I started publishing short stories, articles, and essays a few months later, I changed it to my name, followed by author of *El Hermano* because that book began selling well and gaining in popularity amongst readers of my region mostly.

I also downloaded the Facebook Pages app, which is a font of information, especially at tax time when calculating expenses. That page is where I choose the audience I want to reach when I create boosts, which are a kind of ad. I target my readers through demographics, including interests, genres, hobbies, etc., and location. When I create a boost for any post, it reaches readers in ten Spanish-speaking countries. Boosts can cost anywhere from \$2 a day to as high as I wish, depending on how many days I want it to run. I rarely run boosts; though when I do, they're usually for \$4 a day.

I'll go into more detail about what I learned about boosts and ads a bit later. Let's start with when to create the page and what to post to ensure engagement with followers.

Advance Promotion

I knew before I published my debut novel I would need readers ready and waiting for it. It made logical sense that I had to tell people about it if I was going to get anyone to read it. A

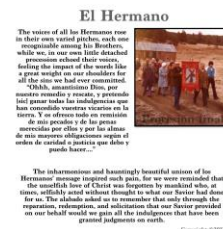
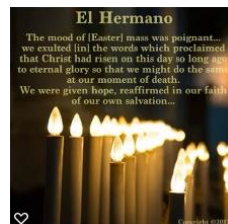
few months before I queried four publishers, I also wrote to twelve famous Latinx and Hispanic authors for advice about how to market a regionalistic book written by a Hispanic. Five of those authors graciously responded with a few suggestions in common. One was advance promotion.

I didn't know when I began the publishing process with my publisher that he would take fifteen months to publish it. Back then, the only social media account I used to keep in touch with family and friends was Facebook. No one I knew was on Instagram or Twitter, so FB is where I began telling my friends and family I was finally going to publish my first book. Many of them knew I had written that book in 1992 and dreamed of publishing it one day. That day had come, delayed for over one more year, yes. But it was coming, and they were excited for me.

Rather than filling my personal feed with promos, I needed my page to be professional-looking. I now had a place where I could write exclusively about all things writing. I just needed people to follow it and keep abreast of the progression of my first publication. I invited all my friends and family, which gave me a grand total of a bit over 600 followers almost immediately. Great! Now, what was I going to do to keep them following?

Engaging Readers

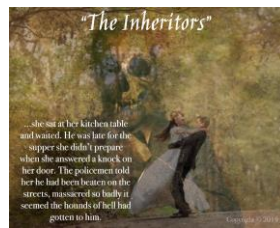
Writers have asked me what I posted to acquire and grow a following since we don't usually have our book covers or any artwork when we start writing or querying. I was lucky my first book is historical fiction based on a true story, so I had photos of the people, places, events. I had historical documents and other resources, including artifacts. I took photos of everything. Then I created promotional posts featuring a short but usually suspenseful excerpt from my manuscript. These are samples of what I did then when I hadn't discovered more than the basic uses for photo apps.



Some of my first informational posts were short paragraphs where I told my readers about the inspiration for the story. For that first year, I created a good 100+ posts with photo apps using the real photos of important people, places, events, artifacts, historical documents, etc. with short excerpts from the book. I interspersed small informational posts about the query process, what my publisher was doing, what I was doing to organize the launch, getting myself interviewed by the media, etc. It was exciting because my readers were experiencing what I was with my posts. What makes Facebook successful when readers find the content interesting is engagement. The posts with the excerpts were getting more likes, shares, and comments with questions and the statement every author wants to hear: "I can't wait for this to publish."

By the time I wrote my second book, I had been publishing a variety of short stories in online literary magazines and anthologies. Many of those and that second book were a different genre

than the first: horror. I began creating the graphics for all of those from photos I found on copyright free photo sites. The more I practiced, the better I got. I also found an app which allows me to blend two to three photos to create a ghostly effect.



By the time I published my fourth book, I found another app which animates my posts, so I use those most often.



Looking at the analytics on my FB page, I have noted that the promotional posts are the ones which get a lot of traction in both comments and shares. Between these types of promos, I also let my readers know who I was, but I didn't tell them much about my personal life. I focused on myself as an author. I talked to them like we were friends since so many of them are, told them about events like the launch, radio interviews, etc. Confessing to being nervous made me human, and the support was evident in their communication with me.

I made sure to post every event with details, so those in my area could attend if they wished. After each event, I posted videos or photos most often created with captions and short explanations. Always a thank you to those involved. Publishing and marketing require teamwork, and there are always people to thank for their support, help, word of mouth endorsements, whatever they do to help make our books successful.

I know there are other authors who create giveaways and other such promotions; I don't have experience with those. But the feature to create offers is there right on the page for those who want to take advantage of it. I know other authors who do count downs of their book covers, giveaways, releases or events, but I don't do those either. I don't take advantage of live chats, but that's another feature available on Facebook pages. There is so much available on Facebook pages for us to take advantage of. However, they're all useless without engagement with our followers. This brings me to another point: the target audience.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Because I write through the style of regionalism, I knew my first book would attract those who are Hispanic, who live in the southwest, PR, DR, Spain, Mexico, a few other Latin countries, and those interested in the southwest or the Hispanic culture. That's the target audience I set on Facebook. I promote to ten Spanish-speaking countries, so my following has become populated by readers of those countries.

No matter that I write historical fiction, horror, non-fiction, mystery, among other genres, my style remains the same for about 90% of what I write: regionalism. This is why those I mentioned in the previous paragraph make up most of my audience. However, because I publish short stories, articles, and essays as often as I can in online literary magazines and anthologies, I've attracted readers from all demographics. (That's the subject for a future discussion—online visibility).

USING FACEBOOK BOOSTS AND ADS

The only times I use Facebook boosts are for my book trailers and my new releases. that's when I pay (usually \$10 for a week) to give my post a "boost" to reach more readers from those countries I target. This is the feature where I select the reader demographics of those I think will be interested in reading my works, the duration of the boost and whether I want to run the ad on Instagram simultaneously. The feature lets me know how many potential readers I can reach per day, which helps me decide whether I want to boost the post or not. The analytics allow me to select options, like getting more engagement or messages. The most reach I've achieved with a boost is over 30K potential readers.

I've only run a Facebook ad once because of an initial mistake when I began using the platform for promotional purposes. As seen in the screenshot below, I would need to click on the "Start Plan" line at the bottom of the page to create an ad. I can't bring myself to do that because when I created that one accidental ad, I didn't know FB was going to charge me \$50. I'm afraid if I click on it, the plan will begin without giving me a price. Note, the Duration also says continuous without telling me if it's a week, a month, the entire year. So, no FB ads for me because I'm still learning and because the boosts work well for me.



