

## **Modern Tools for Marketing Online**

By Emily Raij, Maupin House

Online marketing today is all about creating communities. The following are some tools educational publishers and suppliers can take advantage of to reach out to customers in new, more relevant ways.

**Virtual sampler.** This virtual version has the same pagination and look of a print product. Most samplers let readers turn pages, click on links, and use special features like bookmarks and searches. Publishers save on production and mailing costs associated with printed review copies and can also use online sampling to draw traffic to their website and get valuable statistics on their readership. Virtual samplers are also a great way to offer up an online catalog for any type of company with links taking customers to the company e-commerce site. Sampling online also allows publishers to test a product before committing to a print version and even sell “chunks” of content that customers can personalize and select, rather than an entire book. Impelsys and Nxtbook Media are two companies that offer e-publishing solutions.

**Book Widgets.** A widget is a portable chunk of code that can be placed in different places like blogs, social-networking sites, and websites. Widgets can contain page samples, links, and other content that can even be updated automatically. These make nice sales tools because they provide back-links to a publisher’s website, which enhances traffic (that’s an example of SEO, or search engine optimization).

**Book Previews.** Similar to virtual samplers, these previews also allow publishers to limit the content available for viewing. Maybe readers can only read a certain percentage of the pages of a book or certain parts like the table of contents, introduction, and index. Amazon’s Search Inside is an example of a preview program that has had a very positive impact on book sales.

**Blogs.** Blogs are nothing new, but they do offer more possibilities than publishers might know about. Review blogs let publishers get (hopefully positive) feedback that can be used on social-networking sites to help spread the word about a book. Author blogs can be used to attract a following for the author before the book even comes out. These blogs let authors showcase their expertise, announce signings, share videos and free content, and interact with readers who might otherwise be inaccessible. You should definitely have a company blog, too, where you make announcements, run contests, and offer tips and tools to readers that aren’t just related to your product sales.

**Author Social Network Profiles.** Encourage your authors to post their profiles on LinkedIn, Facebook, or more niche sites for their area of expertise. Here, authors can start groups or pages and create communities of people interested in their topic. Most sites offer tools for taking polls, sharing event calendars, hosting contests, creating subgroups, and extending the interactive relationship with readers. Having public profiles online lets readers find authors and their books more easily through simple searching.

**Author Videos.** From promotional book trailers to longer how-tos and demonstrations, author videos can really bring in the readers. As we all know, free video-hosting sites like YouTube (or niche video sites like TeacherTube for educational videos) get lots of traffic and can bring the same benefit to publisher websites. Through videos, authors can share readings, presentations at conferences, or quick tips with readers.

**E-newsletters and E-mail Campaigns.** If you haven't done so already, take advantage of your website by promoting an opt-in e-newsletter. The email addresses you collect are invaluable, and e-newsletters are great tools for promoting new releases, offering information, providing subscriber-only discounts, and sharing other benefit-heavy content with customers new and old. Just be sure to make your newsletter information-driven and not just a sales tool. Readers should get more out of your newsletter than just a push to buy your products. Programs like Constant Contact provide easy design templates and maintenance of e-mail lists.

**Social Reading Lists.** Personal online booklists maintained by readers usually show books they've read, books they intend to read, and books they own. Readers can share lists with each other, provide rankings, and discuss favorites, all while maintaining an online bookshelf of their reading. Social-networking sites like Facebook offer applications to post reading lists to user profiles. Popular reading list sites include Shelfari, LibraryThing, and GoodReads.