

Promotion for Introverts

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I'm an introvert, which surprises a number of people who don't know me well. They say I'm outgoing, sociable, even perky. Well, yes, I can be. But I'm actually more comfortable all alone with a good book.

It's not that introverts don't like people, but we tend to prefer being with them one at a time, and not for long periods of time. Introverts get our energy from being alone; being with people (no matter how nice the people) tends to drain us. Extroverts are the opposite. Of course there's a continuum of introversion-extraversion, and most of us don't fall at either extreme.

When you consider how to promote yourself, your writing, and your brand, either before or after you're published, it's helpful to know where on the continuum you fall. You'll find promotional methods that are suited to your personality. They're likely to be effective because you'll feel comfortable doing them, and they won't stress you out and drain your energy. However, it's not a good idea to simply settle back in your comfort zone and never extend yourself to try new things. If I can learn to be perky, so can a lot of other introverts!

Here are some promo/marketing techniques that suit most introverts:

- Creating an informative, attractive website and keeping it updated.
- Collecting subscriber names and sending out an e-newsletter, new release announcements, etc.
- Blogging; using social media; using Goodreads and similar sites.
- Participating in blogs and other forums for writers and non-writers with common interests (especially blogs on subjects that relate to your writing – e.g., if you love dogs and include them in your books, visit dog-related blogs and interact with the people who hang out there).
- Requesting reviews and writing reviews.
- Giving away free stories on Amazon etc. and/or on your website.
- Holding contests at your website, blog, or guest blog.
- Creating promo items, handing them out in person, and mailing them to conferences, stores, reader groups, etc.
- Entering contests (which provide industry exposure and give you something to post on your website and elsewhere).
- Writing articles for writing magazines, Chapter newsletters, special interest magazines.
- Placing ads.

(No, I'm not saying you should do all these things. Choose the techniques that appeal to you and suit your time and budget, and bear in mind that you're not trying to sell one book but instead to promote your brand and build a career.)

When you do introvert-style promotion, try to make your contact personal as well as professional and informative. This doesn't mean you should post pictures of your kids on your website, but do put some personality into what you say. When you send out a mailing, send a cover letter. When you send an e-newsletter, don't just promote your new release but include a "behind-the-scenes" note or a recipe. And of course, make sure the personality you convey matches your brand (e.g., if you write dark vampire romance, don't have a humorous website or cover letter).

So far, so good. You're probably feeling pretty comfortable. Well, now I'm going to ask you to step outside your comfort zone and grow a little. No, don't dive into the deep end of extrovert promotion (e.g., give a solo talk to 300 local businesswomen), but start taking baby steps.

You're a writer; you know about character arc. We expect our heroines and heroes to confront their fears and issues and grow into stronger, better people. Don't expect anything less from yourself.

The more you practice behavior you're uncomfortable with, the easier it will become. Learn and practice relaxation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, positive affirmations). Rehearse at home alone and then with family, friends, or colleagues. Consider taking a course (e.g., public speaking, media interviews). Read up on systematic desensitization.

Talking to strangers is one thing that holds us back from extrovert activities like attending conferences, speaking at the library, and doing book signings. We fear we won't know what to say and we'll make fools of ourselves. That's a very "me" focus. What about focusing on them instead? Even though you're an introvert, you're probably interested in people. I doubt you'd be writing if you weren't. So, ask the person next to you what they write (at a writing conference) or what they like to read (at a signing). Then listen (i.e., focus on them, rather than on you) and ask a follow-up question. They'll think you're a brilliant conversationalist!

Here's a trick I use when I'm facing an event that scares me. I tell myself it's only a couple of hours out of my life. Even if it's horrible, what's the big deal? I'll live through it. And I'll feel proud of myself for having had the guts to face it.

Rewards are good, too. Often, a nice conversation is your reward, but the reality is, sometimes it really will be horrible! If so, there's always chocolate and a good book.

And don't beat up on yourself if you just can't break out of your shell today (change is hard!). Gently remind yourself to try again tomorrow.

Set goals and start small. At your local writing group, chat with new members or guests at the coffee break (they'll likely be more nervous than you, and incredibly grateful to you). Get together with a couple of other authors to present an interactive workshop (so you don't just stand there, head down, reading notes). Participate in a group signing at your local store and invite your friends and family.

You may never feel 100% comfortable doing extrovert activities, but your comfort level will grow.

A word of caution. For an extrovert, going to a conference and meeting a bunch of strangers, doing pitch appointments, and presenting workshops is an energizing experience. For an introvert, it's the opposite. It's likely to be draining and exhausting. When you plan an extrovert activity, allow time afterward to relax on your own and recharge your batteries. If you're at a conference, try to schedule some alone time each day.

So, here's my challenge: be the heroine (or hero) in your own story and take those baby steps out of your introvert comfort zone. For every two steps forward you may take one back, but your comfort level will grow and you'll get better and better at doing those extrovert-type promo activities.

©Susan Lyons. *International bestselling author Susan Lyons, who also writes as Susan Fox and Savanna Fox, writes "emotionally compelling, sexy contemporary romance" (Publishers Weekly). Visit her website at www.susanlyons.ca.*