

Pitch Perfect:
The Past, Present, and Way Forward for
Book Publicity Pitching

by
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Abstract

A well-crafted and personalized pitch is the cornerstone of a successful book marketing campaign. Drawing on published interviews of professional experts and building on research conducted by past MPub students, this report provides a thorough analysis of effective pitching strategies and executions. This report examines how the tools of book publicity have evolved over time, and the limitations of those tools that continue to constrain Canadian book publicists. This report features case studies of three successful book campaigns run by marketing agency ZG Communications between 2018 and 2019, with each case study illustrating how to construct a tailored pitch and capitalize on a book's qualities such as genre, author, geography, and launch timing. To conclude, it details both the current state of book publicity practices, exploring the different techniques and tools used by professional publicists while also highlighting the challenges book publicists face in adapting to a vastly new media landscape.

Keywords: Book publicity; self-promotion; media outreach; marketing; media lists; pitching; social media

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In defining book publicity, Smith Publicity founder Dan Smith says it “is the act of using the media as a conduit to spread word of an author and book” (Smith Publicity, 2019). A publicist’s goal is coverage, meaning that they work tirelessly to get their authors speaking opportunities, book reviews, author interviews, op-eds, festival appearances, and any other media opportunity that could result in greater exposure for the author and book. Unlike most aspects of marketing, publicity is not paid. Publicity centers on earned media, which involves promising engaging and relevant content in exchange for free promotion. Unfortunately, traditional media such as magazine and newspaper outlets have been downsizing and with some vanishing altogether; meanwhile, self-published authors and authors of hybrid publishers are increasingly joining the fight for media attention, meaning that securing coverage has become all the more challenging. According to ZG Communications founder Zoe Grams, “With an ever-shrinking media base, coverage is hard won with a combination of honed pitches, long-standing contacts and tenacity” (Grams, as quoted by Cham, 2018). By building on research provided by past MPub reports as well as the insights I gained as an intern for ZG, this report explores how to achieve all three qualities of a successful pitching approach—honed pitches, long-standing contacts and tenacity—to obtain maximum coverage.

1.1: But What *Exactly* Does a Publicist Do?

A book publicist’s job first begins with a campaign strategy, which should ideally take place six to nine months before a book’s publication and should involve a consultation with the author in order to set expectations, determine the author’s wish list of media they would like to be featured in, and to walk the author through their role in the campaign. A marketing campaign is an organized, strategized course of action devised and executed with a specific goal in mind. In the case of book publicity, that goal is to generate as much attention as possible for a particular title. It is a book publicist’s job to write and publish promotional materials, pursue event opportunities, and pitch to outlets. A media outlet is a publication or broadcast program that provides news and distributes

feature stories to the public. To earn excerpts (published book passages) and author interviews, a publicist must utilize what is called a pitch to convince a journalist of the book's timeliness and newsworthiness.

A pitch is a brief note, often included in the book's media kit, that details what the book is about, and explains, for example, why the book would make for a great review or why the author would be an ideal subject for a feature. The first rule anyone undertaking book publicity learns is that a book's publication is by nature rarely considered news. It is the publicist's task to determine what about the book qualifies it as newsworthy, and most book publicists do so by placing more emphasis on the author as an expert or the book's relevant themes rather than the book's launch. It is important for publicists to curate a long list of relevant journals, radio shows, podcasts, and newspapers to pitch to, but they have to first consider what meaningful information they can provide about the author or about the universal themes the author explored that will spark enough interest from editors.

Pitch letters are essential to every book publicity campaign and play a major factor in the campaign's success or failure. According to Smith Publicity's Sarah Miniaci, the many factors publicists take into account include but are not limited to:

the book's plot, themes, timely topics, geographic tie-in's, and key messages, the author's background, talking points in relation to the book, local market hooks, and past media credentials and/or existing media relationships, what's going on in the news, what's trending in the entertainment publishing industry (and/or genre landscape) at large, and what changes are afoot in the media (from contact role updates to new outlets opening to other outlets shuttering their doors or changing focus, establishing new sections, etc.) (Miniaci, 2018).

Not only do publicists have to craft pitches that perfectly articulate the book's selling points and connect them to common human experiences and current events, but they also have to create multiple iterations to be used for pitching editors and journalists with a wide diversity of interests and target audiences. When a publicist secures media coverage for a book publicity campaign, it is referred to as a hit. For example, if an editor from *The Vancouver Sun* replies to a pitch and confirms their interest, that is a hit. Rather

than sales data, publicists measure the success of their campaign based on the overall number of hits they receive, as well as the number of hits they receive from major media outlets.

The key promotional materials used in a book publicity campaign are press kits/media kits, advance reader copies/advance review copies, and BLADs. A media kit or press kit is a package of information that a publicist prepares that gathers everything the media would need to know about the author and their book in one convenient PDF document. Media kits can be sent to reviewers, journalists, and book bloggers. A fully fleshed out media kit contains the book's description, metadata, a picture of the cover, author tour information, publicist or publisher contact information, an author bio, points of interest (the hook), endorsements, prewritten Q&A and a list of related facts if relevant, and pictures if the book includes pictures or illustrations. These documents should be updated throughout the campaign to include award nominations, coverage from major outlets and notable author endorsements, as these can lead to further coverage opportunities.

Advance reader copies (ARCs) or advance review copies are the prepublication version of the book that are sent to editors and journalists that are likely to review the title. ARCs are usually bound, include the cover or an image of the cover on the front, contain marketing and promotional materials such as the press release, as well as any interior illustrations that will be included in the book. Similar to an ARC, a BLAD, interpreted by some as an acronym for Basic Layout and Design is a mockup of a book. Usually used for cookbooks or illustrated books, a BLAD is a small booklet that contains a few sample pages or chapters with a coloured proof of the book jacket or book cover.

1.2: My ZG Communications Internship

Founded by Zoe Grams in 2014, ZG Communications is a full-service marketing agency whose clients include Canadian and American publishers, authors, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and socially conscious businesses. A full-service marketing agency means that ZG provides a variety of services including design,

branding, email marketing, event promoting, and other marketing services; however, ZG's primary service is publicity.

Since 2014, ZG has worked on campaigns for almost every independent publisher in Canada, including Arsenal Pulp Press, Figure 1, Between the Lines, and Douglas & McIntyre. The partnership between marketing/publicity agencies and independent publishers can be especially valuable when the publisher is taking on books from a genre they have not previously published, when the publisher needs to conduct a large-scale campaign, or when the publisher is in a transitional stage. ZG's client list also includes literary festivals such as the Vancouver Writers Festival and Growing Room, booksellers, academic presses like UBC Press and University of Calgary Press, and ABPBC (Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia). According to Grams (interview, 2019), about 65 - 70% of ZG's clients work within the publishing industry, while 30% are non-profit organizations. The diversity of ZG's client list has meant that the agency has connections to a variety of influencers within the industry, especially as Vancouver Writers Festival's marketing team, which is one of the most coveted festival opportunities in Canada.

Between May and August 2019, my role at ZG involved assisting with multiple publicity campaigns by using media databases to collect contacts, inserting media releases or press kits between promotional copies of the books, and packaging and delivering books to the post office. This was a time-consuming process that gave me an appreciation for the labour and true costs associated with packaging and mailing hundreds of advance reader copies. My work with ZG also gave me insight on one of the most important aspects of publicity: pitching. This paper outlines the obstacles publicists—and in particular, Canadian publicists—face in measuring their campaign's impact, accessing data to assist in evaluating an influencer's platform, and discovering influencers with connections to niche target audiences. Beyond providing insights on how to effectively curate pitch lists and tailored pitches, this paper also provides recommendations for how modern publicity resources could be improved to better address our rapidly changing media landscape, thus optimizing the pitching process.

Chapter 2: The History of Book Publicity

To comprehend the modern landscape and current popular practices of book promotion, there is value in first understanding the history of book promotion. According to famous German political economist Karl Bucher, “the book is the first modern-style product,” as it relied on marketing in order to generate sales (Butcher, n.d, as quoted in Fullerton, 2016, p.1). Mass printing created the necessity for book marketing and publicity, because books have “to be produced [and sold] in large quantities to be financially rewarding” (Bucher, n.d, as quoted in Fullerton, 2016, p. 1). In detailing the history of Germany’s book publishing practices, author Ronald A. Fullerton illustrates that audience and accessibility have always been important considerations for publishers. In *The Foundation of Marketing Practice*, Ronald. A. Fullerton writes that in 1817, German publisher Bernhard Friedrich Voigt began publishing a series of handbooks entitled *Neuer Schauplatz der Kunste und Handwerke* (2016, p. 86). In an effort to reach all potential customers, Voigt took a sophisticated approach to retailing. The books were available in bookstores, but Voigt knew that lower class buyers would not enter a bookstore. Voigt thus decided to sell them through innkeepers and “by means of a skilled staff of itinerant salesman, which he himself had trained and recruited” (Fullerton, 2016, p. 87). These efforts proved successful enough that the series was able to expand until almost 300 volumes were published between 1817 and 1879 (2016, p. 86).

In 1842, the public space was only beginning to be imagined as a space that could be fully optimized for advertising. Beyond retail accessibility, visibility has also been a persistent issue for publishers. Marketing collateral such as posters promoting book releases can be traced back as early as the 19th century. In a 2018 paper on the tradition of publishing, Jillian Lerner describes a publisher named Léon Curmer who commissioned a lithographic poster in 1842 to advertise his most promising work, an essay collection written about modern manners entitled *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (2018, p. 69). The poster he commissioned featured a crowd gathering to watch a billposter pasting posters on a wall. The posters functioned similarly to a press release, announcing the subject matter and condition of the book, while the illustrated onlookers

were representative of Léon's ideal audience: the then-modern French society that Léon Curmer depicted in his work (Lerner, 2018, p. 69).

Another pioneer of modern book publicity is Mathew Carey, an author and publisher who launched *The American Museum* in 1787 (Hallenbeck, 1938, p. 48). *Museum* was a monthly American literary magazine that Carey published in the late 18th century and went on to publish a total of 72 issues (1938, p. 49). Like Voigt, Carey was conscious of his target audience and made an effort to partner with relevant distributors. When advertising textbooks, Carey reached out to college and school officials and granted them free copies. Additionally, he had his agents convince local school authorities to subscribe to his works (1938, p. 51). Carey also knew how to use media to his advantage: he generated interest in the magazine by printing magazine proposals in the Philadelphia newspapers, and by having the first issue announced in the newspaper on the initial day of publication, and for several days after (1938, p. 48). While some authors today begrudge the level of work that is expected of them even after their book is past the editing stage, there is a long history of authors spearheading their own publicity. Carey also made arrangements with book dealers "in Boston, Worcester, New Haven, New York, Baltimore, Charleston, and Savannah to act as subscription and distribution agents" (Hallenbeck, 1938, p. 48). Through paid and unpaid publicity, Carey was able to gain advertisements in their local newspapers.

Even in the 1700s, the business-savvy writer could recognize the importance of collecting contacts. Carey made excursions from Boston to Richmond in order to secure new agents and canvas for new subscribers (1938, p. 48). This is an early example of what has come to be known as a media list. When Carey entered a new community, he would first approach the higher class citizens to obtain the names of those who are already subscribing to other literature, and he would secure letters of recommendation for the *The American Museum* as a means of persuading more hesitant potential readers (1938, p. 49).

Carey's other clever publicity techniques involved pasting the subscriber's name to the cover of each magazine and listing each subscriber's name at the end of the

magazine as a tribute. Most significantly, Carey secured letters of recommendation from prominent figures such as George Washington, John Dickinson, William Livingston, as well as eight others (Hallenbeck, 1938, p. 49). Carey’s approach to seeking and advertising the approval of prominent figures is similar to the efforts of publicists who seek endorsements that then get used on the back of the book and in press kits. He “also used to send sample copies of newly printed books... to the larger booksellers and to other prospective customers” (1938, p. 51). The act of sending booksellers and potential customers sample copies is similar to modern publicity practices of sending galleys, which are book samples that are sent to bloggers, reviewers, and booksellers, although it is likely Carey’s samples were closer to the finished product than the galley copies sent by modern publicists.

The introduction of self-publishing and ebooks has not drastically changed this tried-and-true formula for book marketing. Carey’s campaign for his series was significant because it suggests that the foundation for modern book marketing was already established in the 18th century, and that publicists have been utilizing a similar strategy ever since. Similarly, key sales collateral such as book catalogues were already commonplace during Carey’s time. When he published *Museum*, he stitched a pamphlet catalogue “containing sometimes twenty or more pages, inside the covers of the magazine, thus distributing hundreds monthly to his subscribers” (1938, p. 53). His audience then was subscribers, but book catalogues are now used by publishers to market their books to distributors and by book agents and publicists to market themselves to future clients. Even book tours have historic roots: the “year before his death, Charles Dickens gave a series of farewell readings around Britain and Ireland (managing a total of 87 out of a scheduled 100)” (Killick, 2013). For book launches, authors in the 18th century utilized book “exhibits,” which were held at educational institutions and booths which were set up at popular festivals in the spring (Hallenbeck, 1938, p. 55).

By 1790, Carey had an abundance of paying subscribers and had over fifty agents—“printers and booksellers, postmasters, general merchants, and private individuals—located in cities and towns from Halifax to Georgia, to whom he was distributing from ten to one hundred and fifty copies of the *Museum* monthly” (1938, p.

49). As a writer and bookseller, he thrived largely because of his tireless advertising efforts. Carey's campaign highlights the importance of the author's role in the campaign. With self-publishing on the rise, it is more important than ever for authors to actively engage in the marketing and promotion of their work.

2.1: Modern Book Publicity

A strong publicity campaign typically requires initiative from the writer. In an article for *The Guardian* entitled "Why authors need to join the PR circus," Ruth Killick highlights the importance of authors taking initiative in their campaigns and gaining social media literacy, writing, "Authors who are able to build relationships with the wider community of readers, whether via social media, events, blogs or any number of new and as yet unthought-of ways, are best placed to have an audience in the future" (2013). As traditional media outlets continue to cut their review sections or dissolve altogether, there has been a growing necessity for authors to build their own platforms, to foster connections with their target audience, and to ultimately be their own book's greatest advocate. Carey's successful campaigning strategy illustrates that though the tools of the trade have evolved over time, technology has not changed the essence of book promotion.

In modern book publicity, most promotion has been carried out by the publisher's in-house publicist who either collaborates with a marketing team or who does both paid and earned promotion depending on the size of the publisher. More recently in book publicity history, there has been an increased call for authors to take charge of their own publicity by fully utilizing their networks and platforms, which has led to a demand for author publicity and social media training.

Another modern trend is the outsourcing of publicity campaigns to "external publicists" (freelance publicists and book marketing/book publicity agencies). Established in 1999 by freelance publicist Dan Smith, Smith Publicity is the oldest known publicity agency and the largest in the Western hemisphere (Smith Publicity, n.d). A publicity agency is not part of a publishing team, but consists of a team or a single

publicist who collaborate with the author or publisher, or both, to develop and execute strategies to promote their clients' books. In the beginning, Smith had only one client, and was working out of a tiny bedroom office before gathering a tremendously long client list of authors from over 30 countries.

Smith is a pioneer of modern literary publicity, both as an innovator of publicity models, and as a paragon of how to bridge the traditional literary world and self-publishing. The self-publishing revolution has coincided with the fall of traditional media and the rise of social media, blogging and social influencers. As the world of literature and popular media changes, new opportunities have been created for book publicists to break from tradition and develop client lists that feature self-published authors, hybrid publishers, academic presses, indie publishers, and traditional publishers alike.

One literary agency that took advantage of the wide variety of publishing models in Canada is ZG Communications. Pronounced Zee-Gee, ZG Communications is a feminist marketing agency that offers media outreach, design, editing, branding, workshops, and campaign strategizing services. The agency began when Douglas & McIntyre went bankrupt on October 14, 2012 (Cham, 2017, p.1). Zoe Grams, who previously worked for D&M as an internal publicist, then made the natural transition to working as a freelance publicist. Using connections that she had made as a successful publicist for an established publisher, Grams cultivated an impressive client list that enabled her to start her own publicity agency and subsequently hire a team of publicists who share her passion for design, writing, and marketing.

Chapter 3: Building and Maintaining a Media List

In stressing the importance of a strong media list, the website for the *Canadian Association of Publishers* states, “All publicists know that the first step to obtaining good publicity is your media list. Knowing where to mail review copies and having the full contact information for follow-up calls and letters is vitally important.” (“Get Publicity,” n.d). Not only do book publicists have to work to build a robust media list, but they also have to ensure the list is up to date, which can include updating the list every time a column is cut, an editor retires, or an outlet changes offices.

In a 2019 blog post, publicist Dmitry Dragilev explains, “a media list is a document with details of specific journalists, bloggers, writers, editors and influencers who write about your niche or area of expertise.” By building media lists categorized by their contact’s interests and occupation (such as reviewer or podcast host), publicists save themselves the time of having to conduct extensive research every time they want to pitch books that share an audience or angle with a book that they have promoted in the past. Media lists are also key to keeping track of contacts that the agency has preexisting relationships with, and contacts that write for local publications. If a publicist is planning a book tour stop in Winnipeg, for example, it is worthwhile for the publicist to record the contacts they pitched and their contact information in the event that they have to pitch to Winnipeg’s media again in the future.

As publicist Kate McKean writes in her 2019 blog post on book publicity, “It is the job of the publicist—freelance or in-house at a publisher—to know who covers what and keep up with the changes.” For self-published authors looking to manage their own publicity, building a media list would prove a grueling task. And even if they were to compose a thorough list of publications to pitch their title to, a self-published author would need to write pitches, cater them towards the publication’s audience and hope that their lack of ties to the publication would not result in their email from being filtered immediately into an editor’s spam folder: a fate that sometimes befalls even external and internal publicists. Keeping up with the changes can be even more difficult, as media contacts are rapidly changing. This can require keeping close attention to staff updates on

Quill & Quire, collecting multiple contacts for each publication, making note of automated inactive email notices or vacation notices, and searching for new contacts when a previously active contact turns silent.

One of my major roles as an intern for ZG involved expanding and updating media lists using the media database Meltwater. While searching for the contact information of journalists, reviewers, and bloggers, I observed both the advantages and disadvantages of the tool and others like it. During my internship I experienced limitations of the software in fulfilling the needs of Canadian publicists. Fortunately, some of the major media database companies have shown the capability to adapt to the rapidly changing media landscape. As recently as February 2020, Meltwater announced that they will be rolling out a feature that enables users to monitor 25,000 podcasts that are in more than a dozen languages (Czarnecki, 2020).

While they did not have access to podcast contact information and metrics during my internship, it is encouraging to hear that Meltwater has taken measures to expand their database. In explaining their reasoning behind adding the feature, Meltwater's website states that, "In 2019, over half of all Americans listened to a podcast, with over 30% tuning in to podcasts on at least a monthly basis. This is a sharp increase from years prior and is a trend reflected in the world, with podcasts increasing in popularity in all languages" ("Meltwater Announces Podcast Integration," 2020). Meltwater's incorporation of podcast monitoring into their media database is an exciting and necessary step towards technology keeping up with the drastically shifting media landscape.

3.1: Choosing an Influencer Database

With easy access to contact listings on Google and an abundance of websites offering media/influencer databases, cultivating an extensive media list has never been easier. A media database is a website that provides media lists that users can utilize to search through several filters including media type, outlet, region, etc., in order to find the contact most suitable to their campaign. Beyond providing lists with contact

information and interests, the media database also provides a means of reaching out and can be synced with email marketing tools such as MailChimp and Constant Contact. Publicists' dependence on these databases to build their lists is not common knowledge outside of the industry. In 2015, MPub alumni Alina Cerminara published a report of New Society Publishers' email tactics that highlighted the perils of cold-contact email marketing. In her report, Cerminara describes New Society Publishers' relationship with influencer databases as the following:

New Society Publishers utilizes the web-based public relations company MyMediaInfo, which gathers contact information and analyzes subsequent actions. Emails can be gathered on MyMediaInfo and can be sent directly from MyMediaInfo to track open rates. It costs \$5,000 a year to use MyMediaInfo. Hurst reported that a one to two percent response rate is about average using MyMediaInfo, and the lists are approximately fifty to a hundred contacts in size (p. 14).

The cost of MyMediaInfo is standard among media databases. As one can imagine, the advice to pay for access to one of these databases is not featured on any of the numerous articles that coach authors through the publicity process. With that price attached, it is more practical for an author to hire a professional publicist who already has a subscription than it is to purchase their own. Since the publication of Cerminara's 2015 report, Meltwater and Cision have emerged as two of the top competing databases. But which of the two is better?

Meltwater has been useful for expanding ZG's media list of journalists and magazine editors and their niches. Meltwater has its issues, however, as often crucial contact information is missing or outdated. It also contained limited information on key types of influencers who are becoming increasingly important to modern publicity: bloggers, social media influencers, indie publications, and initially, podcast hosts. ZG is especially invested in growing their list of Canadian book reviewers, many of whom are bookstagrammers, but filtering through Instagram looking for relevant Canadian book bloggers is a time-consuming and tedious task. These kinds of influencers are becoming increasingly important to publicity campaigns, and so there was still much left to be

desired with these databases from a book publicity standpoint. Meltwater's pricing model is quote-based, but according to a Forbes article, prices for Meltwater range from \$5,000 to \$25,000 USD a year (O'Malley Greenburg, 2017). To those outside the field of publicity, this may seem like an exorbitant expense, but competitor Muckrack has been quoted at twice the price of Meltwater (Hudnall, interview, 2020). As of 2020, Meltwater's database features 380,000 journalists and bloggers globally ("Meltwater," n.d), but the website currently does not provide a breakdown of how many work in Canadian media.

Cision shares all the same features as Meltwater, but also has an auto-update feature for media lists and a direct email management tool. The database offers a free platform called Help a Reporter Out where journalists can request quotes from industry experts. Once the deadline for the responses has been reached and all responses have been submitted, the journalist selects the responses that meet their needs and link back to the quoted expert's website in their article (Main, 2019). This is a useful tool for authors who are experts in their field and are looking for further media exposure. Like Meltwater, Cision is quote-based, but licenses reportedly start at \$5,700 per license (Lavi, 2020). According to the database's website, Cision has 1.6 million media contacts, outlets, and editors as well as 800,000+ registered users in their HARO platform ("Cision," n.d).

Both Meltwater and Cision are useful databases for any professional publicist, although the advantages for freelance publicists may not outweigh the costs. Media databases can provide access to thousands of relevant contacts, but even these databases do not eliminate the necessity of having to sometimes visit an outlet's website and scavenge for contact information. For example, I still had to visit the contact pages of CBC's regional online news websites, none of which were listed in Meltwater's database of 380,000 contacts.

For publicists and authors despairing over the subscription costs of some of the major media databases, the good news is that there are also free databases available such as Anewstip ("Anewstip," n.d), which indexes over 200 million news articles to help users discover relevant journalists to pitch, and Sources ("Sources," n.d) which is a

helpful archive of Canadian media that lists Canadian broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, and more. Sources, though useful as a starting point for publicists, does not provide indication in their website of which contacts are still active, which can present challenges for publicists. For publicists seeking to pitch to Canadian media, they face an additional struggle of trying to find relevant and active contacts when media databases prioritize maintaining lists of American contacts. Furthermore, subscription-based databases like Cision and Meltwater need to develop technology that updates contact information with greater frequency. Until then, media databases remain useful but incomplete resources for a Canadian book publicist's media contact research.

Overall, media databases can be effective tools for expanding media lists, but there are still aspects of these databases that could be made more efficient for publicists. Collecting contacts can be especially hard for publicists looking to pitch their authors and books to Canadian media, as many of the companies behind these databases are American and cater to an American audience. While Canada has significantly less media than America, even an established publicist's Canadian media list would never be complete, as media outlets are frequently emerging, shutting down, relocating, or experiencing staff changes. For that reason, it is integral for professional publicists to have access to more current and relevant contact information for maintaining their lists.

Chapter 4: Strategies for Getting the Word Out

When deciding how to get the word out about a new book, publicists have multiple factors to consider including time, budget, and overall impact. Another factor is whether the goal is to get the highest number of responses, positive responses, or expressions of interest from national outlets.

4.1: Pitching Strategies: Quantity versus Quality

According to publicist and Medium writer Caleb Kaiser, anyone can be a publicist, but few can be good publicists. He reasons that only a good publicist can achieve results that an author could not achieve themselves after a few hours of googling journalist names. What is the difference then between an ineffective and an effective publicist? Kaiser argues that what distinguishes them is their approach. According to Kaiser, there are two approaches publicists take to get media attention:

1. **The Surgical Approach:** A publicist with strong relationships in the media world takes a book and presents it to select, relevant outlets in a way that is both exciting and valuable to their audiences. There is a mixture of relationship driven [public relations], and cold pitching.
2. **The Spray-and-Pray Approach:** A publicist compiles a massive list of media contacts, and pitches them en masse, hoping that the law of averages will net them some coverage. There is only cold-pitching, most of which is not well-targeted. (Kaiser, 2018).

Cold-pitching refers to when a publicist reaches out to a contact for the first time. Although it is useful for authors to learn the fundamentals of publicity practices, it is worth noting their limitation, which is that a first-time author conducting all their marketing independently will have no choice but to rely on cold-pitching. It takes years of working in the publishing or media industry to develop a rapport with valuable contacts. Publicists working within an established publishing house benefit from the relationships that the publisher has cultivated over time. With a rapport, media contacts already know what kind of books to expect from the publisher while the publicists have had time to learn how to tailor their pitches to meet the preferences of key editors and

journalists. Because internal publicists have access to connections and a wealth of industry insights, they are more likely to use the surgical approach, which is exceedingly more effective.

Most external publicists, including freelancers and publicists working with an agency, do not have media lists as extensive as publicists who work for publishers. As a result, not all publicists have the tools they need to maximize their pitching efficiency. In Zoe Grams's case, she had years of experience working as an internal publicist for D&M, and so she started her agency with a media list and media connections. When pitching, ZG Communications' publicists utilize the surgical approach by employing their curated lists of relevant contacts, creating a series of pitch templates, writing tailored pitches to high-priority contacts, and documenting the feedback they receive from their pitches to help inform their future campaigns. Still, even with ZG founder Grams's media connections and industry experience, it is more challenging for ZG and to build long-term relationships without in-house resources of a publishing house (Grams, interview, 2019).

For external publicists, every campaign is a risk because it is their own reputation on the line every time they pitch. Kaiser explains that this is because, "Their relationships in the media are predicated upon them delivering the best content, and if they start delivering subpar books, they won't have their relationship much longer" (Kaiser, 2018). As such, freelance publicists and book publicity/marketing firms have to be selective about the clients they take on—if a successful publicist does not see marketing potential in a book, in most circumstances they are not going to take the book on. There is also the risk that sending too many emails to a contact could result in being permanently marked as spam, a fate that all publicists dread. For this reason, professional publicists are expected to use restraint in their pitching approach.

4.2: Pitching Strategies: Phone Pitching versus Email Pitching

After a publicist has determined which contacts to pitch to, they are then tasked with determining if they will rely on email pitching, phone pitching, or a mixture of the two. In author Claire McKinney's guide entitled *Do You Know What a Publicist Does?*,

she reminisces on the early stages of her career, and recalls how most of her time as a publicist was spent either on the phone or tracking down contacts' numbers to pitch them her client's book. According to McKinney, "In the 1990s, everything was about the phone call. [Publicists] had call sheets that listed the media outlets' names, numbers, and addresses, and [she] used write notes along the side indicating what happened on each call" (McKinney, 2017, p. 9). Because of technological advancements, publicity practices have changed drastically, and emailing has become the dominant form of pitching. McKinney acknowledges that, "Today, the first round of pitching usually happens by email" (2017, p. 9). In her book, McKinney points out that calls are still used in today's pitching practices, but only in rare cases such as when publicists are seeking to contact bloggers, but no email is listed.

Phone pitches do have their advantages: they are more personal, direct, and immediate. Cold calling can be a productive approach if the publicist or marketer's strategy involves outsiders to the industry including to teachers, associations, or non-profits who may be interested in promoting the book if it aligns with their goals. When cold calling, ZG's Communications Manager Ariel Hudnall advises preparing a script and rehearsing it in order to ensure all points from the written pitch are covered succinctly (Interview, 2019). Unfortunately, relying on phone pitching has several disadvantages in comparison to email pitching as it is time consuming for both parties, requires advance preparation, and the contact can neither reference nor share the call later when determining if the story is the right fit for them.

Warm-Contact Email Pitching: A "warm" contact is a contact that a publicist or author already has a relationship with. These contacts are the most effective to pitch, and the ability to pitch a publicist's warm contacts is a motivating factor for self-published authors who decide to contract a book publicist. It is worth noting that even a talented book publicist may not have connections with the kind of contacts an author is interested in if the publicist does not have experience in pitching the kind of book the author wants to hire them for. For that reason, authors who want to hire a book publicist benefit from specifically looking for a publicist who has run campaigns for similar books.

As a result of working with non-profit organizations and independent publishers, almost all of the books from ZG's list center on at least one of the following topics: feminism, Canadian-relevant issues and topics, environmentalism, psychology, politics, and parenting. While there is a great deal of variety to ZG's list of past campaigns, ZG benefits from having developed a niche for marketing those kinds of books, enabling them to build lasting relationships with the media contacts interested in aforementioned genres. This approach of prioritizing stories with political and social value is an effective strategy both because it advances ZG's brand and ensures that the agency is able to establish and grow relationships with publications who share a similar mandate. The agency has built strong connections particularly with *Georgia Straight*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Vancouver Sun*, the latter of which covers the majority of the books ZG pitches. Because ZG has worked closely with these outlets, the agency knows how to pitch them and knows their preferences in regard to receiving marketing materials, thus resulting in further collaboration between them.

Publishers and publicists are not the only ones whose warm contacts matter. In the initial consultation with the author, the publicist assigned the book will ask the author to provide all of the author's connections and contacts, which may include past publications they have published with, friends who are editors or bloggers, contacts to the community relevant to their title or relevant groups they participate in, producers of podcasts they have guest starred in, and any other contact related to their industry or target audience. In most cases, it can yield better results for the author to directly contact their own connections, but an author should discuss it with their publicist first or risk double-pitching, which is an industry term that refers to when a contact is pitched multiple times about the same title. The risk with double-pitching is that it can jeopardize a media relationship. As a publicity firm, ZG regularly collaborates with publishers who have their own connections, and so on occasion a publisher may pitch those outlets themselves while ZG pitches the remaining relevant publications. It is essential for publishers to communicate which outlets they will be pitching to avoid the aforementioned pitching overlap.

Cold-Contact Email Pitching: The cold pitching faux pas that Kaiser refers to in his article involves publicists who indiscriminately collect and pitch vaguely relevant contacts with the same templated email. As previously noted, spamming editors and journalists who are already bombarded with emails is a surefire way to be blocked or sorted automatically into their junk inboxes. Even if the editor or journalist does read the pitch, giveaways of mass emailing such as “To whom it concerns” can be equally damning to a campaign as it is to a job search. In Cerminara’s 2015 report, she notes that email has the advantage of being cost-efficient and theoretically less time consuming; however, she argues that the time spent going back and forth in an email exchange can add up (p. 13). Furthermore, she suggests that email marketing can be ignored or rejected for a variety of reasons including: “an unappealing subject line . . ., how the email is written and the degrees of personalization, un-optimized email content, [a contact’s] email filters, incorrect addresses, recipients on holiday, inboxes at capacity,” and more (p.13). Cold-contact emailing has many faults, but it is not as though the industry can avoid the approach altogether otherwise publicists would never grow their contact list.

There is also the matter of contacts turning cold over time, such as when a contact retires, or the publication undergoes a major restructuring. When this happens, a publicist has to seek out new contacts and reestablish their relationship with the outlet. Another instance of when cold-contact emails are also necessitated when a publisher or publicist’s list of books is diverse and appeals to a wide variety of audiences. For example, the outlets who would be interested in promoting a title on Indigenous relations, such as *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act*, differs drastically from the outlets or specific contacts who would be interested in the short story collection *Coconut Dreams*. With every new genre a publicist takes on and with every city that they have to promote to for the first time, a publicist must once again build a pitch list that contains a vast number of cold contacts.

If the publicist has done their research on the contacts they are pitching and have tailored their pitch enough to be taken seriously, then a cold-contact email can be an opportunity for the publicist to form a new connection within the industry. The meticulous and time-consuming work of building and updating one’s contact list is an

ongoing task. It is a task that self-published authors handling their own promotion do not have to undertake, but it is a major factor in what separates the value of a professional publicist's campaign versus that of an author or amateur publicist relying on *Google* searches. According to Hudnall, a major hurdle for self-published authors is that many of the major publications do not accept self-published work even if professional publicists are pitching them (Interview, 2020). The exception to the rule is authors who published through vanity presses like Page Two, authors publishing exceptionally relevant books, or self-published authors whose past books were incredibly successful. In most cases, it is more valuable for self-published authors to invest their time and resources in building their platform online and in the communities of their target audience rather than in trying to acquire national media press coverage.

4.3: Media Updates and Follow-Up

In Claire McKinney's guide on building media lists, she advises, "Whenever you do anything, whether it is a mailing, email, or phone call, make note of what you did, when, and what happened" (2017, p.82). Both ZG Communications and Smith Publicity pride themselves upon keeping detailed documentation of their pitching practices and updating their clients throughout their campaigns. In an interview with Greenleaf Book Group, Smith Publicity's Sandy Smith states that the agency provides, "weekly written updates to our authors, and we like to get the authors on the phone every week to go over the update to understand what we're doing, why we're doing it, and to brainstorm with them" ("Smith Publicity", 2017). ZG also provides regular updates through a shared document the agency refers to as a Media Update while the campaign is ongoing, or a Media Wrap Report if the campaign has concluded.

In creating a media wrap report for each book publicity campaign, ZG is able to generate an overview of the campaign, keep their clients updated on successes and feedback, and to illustrate the effort put into the campaign. While this document is less of a necessity for internal publicists, the document can still prove useful by providing an efficient way to review feedback from pitches. An internal publicist may also inform the

author when they have secured media coverage from one of the outlets on the author's wish list. ZG's media reports include the following for each of their titles:

- Title;
- Publication Date (to closest proximity)
- Author availability (if the author is touring)
- Author's literary events organized by date
- Confirmed hits
- Websites ZG has created listings on for the author's events
- Summary of eblasts sent during the campaign (if any)
- Outlets ZG intends to continue to follow up with
- Personalized declines, along with the explanation they were given
- And declines based on lack of response.

This structure enables the agency to provide an overview of the campaign's progress and the strides they've made that week. Hits are one of the few metrics that publicists use to measure how well their efforts are paying off as they do not track sales data, especially if the publicist works externally from a publishing house. If the author has specified which publications are on their wish list, the media update should illustrate that the publication was pitched and that at least one additional round of pitching was sent to the publication if the publicist did not receive a definitive no in the first round. By providing authors with weekly updates, publicists are able to not only foster a relationship with the author, but also demonstrate that they have put effort into the campaign and that effort is paying off. It is imperative for external publicists, be they freelance or from an agency, to prove that they are going above and beyond for a client. Documentation such as the written updates that ZG and Smith provide create transparency and address concerns an author might have about why one of their favourite outlets declined by including succinct explanations about factors such as breaking news, schedule conflicts, and coverage zones. If a campaign does not meet a publisher's or

author's expectations, the media update can demonstrate that the publicist did everything in their power to secure media coverage.

Another important aspect of the media update is documentation of follow up. In the publishing industry there is no standard number of times that a publicist is expected to reach out before declaring a lack of response to a pitch as a decline. In the case of ZG, all of their media updates note that in cases where they receive no response or an uncertain response, they reach out a minimum of five times, including by phone and email, before considering it a decline (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* media wrap report, 2018). In Cerminara's 2015 MPub report, she summarizes New Society Publishers' typical pitching strategy, writing that "If one of the contacts was suitable for the book and they did not respond, a follow-up email would be sent a few weeks later, and [they] may have been mailed a copy of the book along with an accompanying letter" (p.17). This is different from ZG's approach, although the two differ in that New Society Publishers' is under less pressure to secure unique hits because the primary service they provide is publishing, whereas publicity is ZG's. In the event that a title underperforms, ZG will frequently re-evaluate a campaign's talking points before completing an additional round of follow-up pitches and may even pitch additional outlets to give the campaign a final push.

While the best approach in publicity to landing key media coverage for a campaign involves thorough research, an emphasis on personalized communications, a scrupulous record of one's pitches, and the tenacity to follow-up, a publicists' approach will ultimately be affected by their time, resources, and budget. The temptation to conveniently send template emails en masse to all potential contacts whose publication is even slightly related to the book being promoted may be strong, but in both the short run and the long run it is more beneficial to limit one's pitch list for each book and instead concentrate on maintaining and building relationships.

Chapter 5: ZG Communications' Pitch Strategy, a Series of Case Studies

After having worked as an internal publicist for D&M and then maintaining those connections during her time as a freelance publicist, Grams began ZG Communications, her own publicity agency, in 2014. One of ZG's first clients was *Greystone Books*, who relaunched as an independent company in the wake of D&M's bankruptcy (Cham, 2017, p.1). Because Greystone was a small publisher and was undergoing the tumultuous process of a relaunch, it was more convenient and practical for the publisher to outsource their marketing publicity to Grams who provided marketing services.

Since then, Greystone has hired their own marketing team to plan and execute their campaigns; however, ZG and Greystone continue to maintain a relationship. ZG trained Greystone's marketing team during the publisher's transitional years, and the marketing agency currently takes on three to four Greystone books every season. During my internship, I helped distribute promotional materials for several Greystone titles including *Magic Moments in BC Sports*, *Winterlust*, *Scatterbrain*, and *In the Valley of the Noble Beyond*. While many in the local publishing industry feared the worst when D&M filed for bankruptcy, past D&M staff were able to band together to uphold and sustain Western Canada's publishing culture. ZG has also helped re-launch Douglas & McIntyre Ltd. Furthermore, ZG has played a vital role in supporting independent publishers by providing the rebranding and promotional services they needed in order to rebuild and grow their businesses.

In contrasting and comparing the campaigns for *The Woo-Woo*, *Coconut Dreams*, and *Outside In*, this report will illustrate how to effectively leverage a book's genre, theme, author, and book tour locations to achieve optimal media coverage. The case studies narrow in on the publicist opportunities that different book genres provide; however, many of these genres tend to overlap (as is the case with these examples), presenting even more possibilities for advantageous campaign strategies.

5.1: Pitching Memoirs and Biographies: *The Woo-Woo* Campaign Case Study

In 2018, ZG Communications ran a successful campaign for Lindsay Wong's memoir *The Woo-Woo*, which was published by Vancouver publisher Arsenal Pulp Press. While *The Woo-Woo* also overlaps with other genres due to the literary quality of the work and exploration of political themes, this case study primarily focuses on how memoirs and biographies present publicists with an unmatched opportunity to leverage the author's personal story and the authenticity behind their work. Publicists can often find themselves more successful at earning interviews and Q&As for memoirs and biographies because the relationship between the author and the work is already very tangible in a way that does not require further explanation. The work advertises how the author's life is intriguing and unique, which inherently speaks to how the interview could be made into entertaining content for one's audience.

For this national campaign, ZG Communications pitched 71 outlets (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* pitch list, 2018). Of those 71 outlets, 11 contacts did not respond after five additional rounds of pitching, and thus were considered declines (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* Media Wrap Report, 2018). Fourteen outlets responded, but declined, the majority stating that they were interested in the title but could not cover the story because of schedule conflicts (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* Media Wrap Report, 2018). Of the contacts ZG pitched, 65% were interested in *The Woo-Woo* and later provided confirmation of their coverage including *CBC Books* who featured the title three times, *The Vancouver Sun*, and *The Globe & Mail* (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* Media Wrap Report, 2018). By book publicity standards, these numbers are impressive. So how did ZG achieve those results?

One factor of the campaign's success was timing. *The Woo-Woo* was launched on October 18, which meant that the title could be promoted alongside *Vancouver Writers Fest*, which was scheduled for that same month. In the months leading up to the festival, guest authors who are actively being pitched enjoy additional coverage. Because of the timing of the launch, *The Woo-Woo* also made for an ideal feature for media outlets' fall books round-ups; *The Woo-Woo* was featured on *The Vancouver Sun's* and *The*

Province's fall books recommendation list, and both publications syndicated these lists out to around 40 *Postmedia* dailies and weeklies in BC (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* Media Wrap Report, 2018). Wong's two speaking dates at the Edmonton LitFest likely contributed to the coverage Wong earned in Alberta. According to ZG's Communications Manager Ariel Hudnall, another major contributor to the campaign's high-profile status is that *The Woo-Woo* was shortlisted for Hilary Weston Writer's Trust of Canada Prize for Nonfiction during the fall of 2018 (Interview, 2020).

ZG's pitches for *The Woo-Woo* were another notable contributing factor to the campaign's success. The agency's process involves developing the pitches and talking points as a team, and then having one publicist take the lead. A talking point is a factor that invites debate or discussion. According to McKinney, the marketable qualities of a title can be organized into three categories: book attributes, author attributes, and audience (2017, p. 16). Utilizing that structure, ZG's pitches for *The Woo-Woo* can be broken down into the following qualities:

Table 5.1. List of *The Woo-Woo* Talking Points

Book attributes	Author Attributes	Audiences
Dark comedic memoir	Wong's grandmother was a paranoid schizophrenic who feared the "woo woo"	Readers interested in books that cover topic of mental illness
About a dysfunctional Asian family		
Short-listed for awards	As <i>The Woo-Woo</i> is a memoir, author has obvious connection to the subject matter	Fans of memoirs Asian Canadians
Deals with mental illness and the cycle of family trauma	Author graduated from UBC Book tour in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto	Canadian national media Fans of psychological stories Canadian book reviewers Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto based media of all kinds

Along with interviews and book roundups, ZG Communications also achieved hits by having excerpts and Q&As with Lindsay Wong in local and national media. In cases of life writing such as biographies and memoirs like *The Woo-Woo*, the author's unique expertise and attributes become increasingly important to the pitch and can bolster the likelihood of securing author interviews.

The author bio provided by one of ZG draws attention to the author's literary background and publication history:

Lindsay Wong holds a BFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and an MFA in literary nonfiction from Columbia University in New York. Her fiction and non-fiction have appeared in *No Tokens*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Ricepaper*, and *Apogee Journal*. She is the recipient of many awards and fellowships, including from The Studios of Key West, Caldera Arts, and the Historic Joy Kogawa House. (Hudnall, *The Woo-Woo* media kit, 2018).

While Wong's bio establishes her credibility as a writer, the marketing copy in the media kit emphasizes Wong's upbringing and her eerie childhood of being haunted by Chinese ghosts. The difference between the two presents a distinction between Wong as a memoir subject and Wong as an established writer. Wong's literary credibility makes her work more attractive to potential reviewers, as they evaluate titles based on quality, whereas Wong's intriguing life story presents her as an ideal candidate for author interviews and other speaking events.

Furthermore, ZG's pitch emphasizes familiar and relatable aspects of the book—dysfunctional families, mental illness, and the Asian immigrant experience—while drawing attention to the book's uncanny attributes, such as author Lindsay Wong's history of being “haunted” by Chinese ghosts. According to ZG, part of the book's conceit is that [Wong's] family didn't realize or refused to acknowledge that the ghosts were hereditary mental illness (Hudnall, interview, 2020). In highlighting the hereditary aspect of Wong's mental illness, the pitch invites interviewers to explore the larger issue of unresolved trauma that is passed from generation to generation, and how to address these issues. In the 2018 media release, ZG expertly establishes genre, important themes, and audience in concluding that the memoir is, “At once a witty and touching memoir

about the Asian immigrant experience,” and “a harrowing and beguiling manual for surviving family, and oneself” (Hudnall, *The Woo-Woo* media release, 2018).

The summary creates intrigue surrounding the book and the author itself, while also offering mental health, the Asian immigration experience, and dysfunctional families as talking points for Q&As and interviews. These talking points also expand the audience from solely book editors, reviewers and bloggers to include local and national news outlets. Finally, the tour dates and locations—Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto—are listed beneath the author bio to signal local interest to outlets that cover news in those cities.

Following the title’s press release is the Advance Praise document, which boasts praise from *Kirkus Reviews*, as well as author recommendations from esteemed memoir/autobiography writers and celebrated Asian writers, including Kevin Chong, author of *The Plague*; and Alexander Chee, author of *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* (Grams, *The Woo-Woo* media kit, 2018). From studying ZG’s success in *The Woo-Woo* campaign, it is evident that even when marketing autobiographies, the larger cultural relevance of the book as well as the artistry of the prose can be used as major selling points for generating media interest.

5.2: Pitching Literary Fiction: *Coconut Dreams* Case Study

While common book publicity wisdom finds that the media tends to focus on the author rather than their book, literary fiction is often the exception. What sets pitching strategy for literary fiction apart from strategies used for genres such as memoir, history, political works, and other genres is that publicity for literary fiction centers on emphasizing the artistry and accolades of the work.

The emphasis on the quality of the work over the book’s newsworthiness makes literary fiction prime candidates for literary awards and reviews, which tend to focus on the quality rather than the newsworthiness of a book. In 2018, ZG ran a campaign for Book*hug Press’s *Coconut Dreams*, which is a collection of seventeen short stories that explore the links between generations of a fictional family. ZG Communications pitched

a total of 43 contacts and mailed out 25 advance reader copies. Including all syndicated hits, the campaign achieved 115 hits as well as two hits that are currently pending (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* Media Wrap Report, 2018). As defined by Kevin Werbach in his article, “Syndication: The Emerging Model for Business in the Internet Era”, “Syndication involves the sale of the same good to many customers, who then integrate it with other offerings and redistribute it. The practice is routine in the world of entertainment [...]. Columnists syndicate articles to various print and on-line outlets” (Werbach, 2000). Media company *Postmedia* published their *Coconut Dreams* review nationally, and then went on to syndicate the piece to regional papers, resulting in 93 syndications from local publications across Canada (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* Media Wrap Report, 2018). ZG’s pitches for *Coconut Dreams* received only 12 declines, which were listed as such due to lack of response rather than outright declines.

The *Woo-Woo* campaign and *Coconut Dreams* campaign are both examples of successful pitching strategies, however the strategies ZG used for each varied because of the difference in genre. When advertising literary fiction titles like *Coconut Dreams*, there is even greater emphasis placed on advertising the author’s previous award and publishing history. In pitching the story, publicists also place higher priority on describing the beauty and lyricality of the writing—the pitch becomes less about the story and more about the artistry of the storytelling itself. This is done to attract reviewers, who are the primary audience of pitches sent to literary titles.

According to Grams, the most effective publicity for literary titles are book reviews and reading lists like “Top 10 Summer Reads,” which center discussion on the title itself rather than the author (Interview, 2019). Furthermore, the author endorsements selected for the book description within the book’s media kit should include quotes from writers who are also known for their literary prowess. For *Coconut Dreams*’s media kit, ZG includes the praise of both Alissa York, a Canadian writer who won the Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award, and Kim Echlin, a Canadian writer whose work was shortlisted for the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize (Grams, *Coconut Dream* media kit, 2018).

Many publicity agencies' clients are first-time writers, and such was the case with *Coconut Dreams*'s writer Derek Mascarenhas. The writer had been published by literary outlets but never by a publisher, thus creating both a challenge and an opportunity for ZG. *Coconut Dreams* had the disadvantage of being a collection of stories (making it more difficult to pitch as a cohesive story) but was aided by the fact that it was written by an author who already had established ties to the literary scene before launching the story collection. In the press release as well as in the interview pitch and review pitch, ZG positions Mascarenhas as a "rising literary star", and highlighted his graduate degree in creative writing, his past awards, and his previous work which has been published in short story outlets including *Joyland*, *Dalhousie*, and *The Antigone Review* (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* press release, 2018). In the campaign for *Coconut Dreams*, the ZG team averted the notion of their client as a novice by illustrating how Mascarenhas has already established himself within CanLit., which stands for Canadian Literature and signifies Canada's publishing culture. Employing McKinney's (2017) structure of breaking down the logic of pitches, ZG emphasized the following attributes:

Table 5.2. List of *Coconut Dreams* Talking Points

Book attributes	Author Attributes	Audiences
Honoured by <i>Quill & Quire</i> and <i>49th Shelf</i> as one of the most anticipated Spring books	Writer has been published before in literary magazines	Fans of CanLit Outlets that have previously published the writer
Stylistically similar to Dionne Brand and Carriane Leung’s works	Writer has won several awards, is a “rising star”	First and second-generation immigrants
“Anyone who has searched for belonging”	Mascarenhas is a second-generation immigrant whose parents emigrated from Goa, India (key setting in the stories)	Readers experiencing wanderlust Literature awards
Multiple settings including Kenya, Goa, and Canada	Author’s parents settled in Burlington, Ontario while he currently lives in Toronto	Literary magazines Universities
CanLit sees short story collections favourably	Writer is well traveled	“Anyone who has searched for belonging”
A fresh look on the immigrant experience and South Asian Canadian experience	Book tour in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto	

In ZG’s tailored interview pitch, the agency calls attention to the title’s uncommercial genre and suggests short stories as a talking point by noting that, “Following both Alice Munro’s Nobel Prize win in 2013 and the viral short story *Cat Person* in 2017, there has been extensive debate over whether the short story is dying out or experiencing a renaissance” (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* Media Kit, 2018). The interview pitch utilizes the “contentious” genre as a strength rather than a weakness and notes the genre’s history in CanLit by referencing Canadian short story writer Alice Munro. It is evident from the press release that it was updated throughout the campaign, as it cites endorsements from *Quill & Quire* and the *49th Shelf*. This strategy enables the publicist to capitalize off that momentum, as the publicity a title receives early on can be leveraged for gaining further publicity.

Included in the full media kit is the praise of one additional author, Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer, who is also a Canadian writer. The entire pitch was crafted in a way that

emphasizes Mascarenhas's Canadian identity and his position within CanLit canon. Upon analyzing the pitch, it is also evident that it has been tailored for a Canadian audience. If the pitch was written for American media, for example, Mascarenhas's status as a Canadian would have been deemphasized, as would the collection's exploration of the "Canadian immigrant experience" (Grams, *Coconut Dreams* media kit, 2018). For an American audience, Mascarenhas's literary peers, framed by the inclusion of particular endorsements, would have been American authors or internationally famous authors who write similar themes within similar genres. The *Coconut Dreams* campaign is a strong example of how positioning changes based on the reach and scale of the campaign.

Finally, the pitch addresses the author's personal relationship to the subject matter: it mentions that Mascarenhas's own world travels influenced the stories in the collection, which positions the author as well informed on his topic, but also creates an opportunity for media to ask the author about his real-life adventures while interviewing him about *Coconut Dreams*. The pitch successfully sells *Coconut Dreams* as an intriguing and important piece of Canadian literature, while also selling the author as a celebrated writer and ideal interview or article subject. To sell only the book and not the author would be a disservice to both, especially when the author is debuting in a new genre or medium. The additional significance of the detailed and well-categorized pitch is that it minimizes the effort an editorial group would have to make to determine what angle to choose that will specifically appeal to a particular audience. For some campaigns, a prewritten Q&A is created for the author to answer, which is then included in the press kit. This increases the likelihood of a hit, as the publicists are providing relevant content in the most convenient manner.

5.3: Pitching Political and Issue-Focused Non-Fiction: An *Outside In* Case Study

Because ZG positions itself as an agency that is "dedicated to promoting ideals that can transform the world" ("About," ZG Communications, n.d) it stands to reason that the agency has several books in their list that are political or issue focused. In an interview with Grams, she argued that while publicity for literary titles is about building

cache and persuading others to read the title, publicity for non-fiction or issue titles typically centers the important issues instead (Interview, 2019). These titles perform best when the launch is tied to a specific political event, or when the title contributes a crucial perspective to a contemporary issue that is being discussed regularly in the media. Issue-based and political titles also benefit from being inherently newsworthy so long as they are tied to current issues and movements, for example the #MeToo movement, Times Up, or Black Lives Matter.

A successful launch for a political or issue-based title is also greatly aided by expert authors who do interviews. Rather than only presenting the issue as talking points for the media, a publicist team such as ZG knows to also present the author's lived experiences or lifelong pursuit of solutions as further points of interest. Both a political title and a work of life writing, Libby Davies's *Outside In* exemplifies the ideal conditions of a launch such as timing and relevance, and how best to maximize those marketing opportunities. *Outside In* author Libby Davies is a Canadian politician from British Columbia who began her career working as a community organizer in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, before going on to serve in municipal and then federal politics advancing to the role of Deputy Leader of the New Democratic Party. Published by Between the Lines in May of 2019, the title was advantaged by being published during Canada's 2019 federal elections, when NDP leader Jagmeet Singh was gaining a great deal of media attention. While publicists struggled to get word out about their books while competing with the election, ZG positions Davies as a political expert who has valuable insights to offer on political campaign strategies and the NDP's platform. ZG Communications pitched *Outside In* to 88 contacts and secured 42 hits including coverage from *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, *The Tyee* and 14 syndications across local *CBC* radio stations (Grams, *Outside In* Media Report, 2019). The success of ZG's *Outside In* can be credited to the ways lead ZG's team capitalized on the title's timeliness and the author's respected position as an authority within her community.

ZG directly references the timeliness of the title in *Outside In*'s press kit, positioning author Libby Davies as an "Inside the Tent perspective," stating that, "As a former Deputy Leader of the NDP and lifelong social and political organizer, Davies's

perspective on federal politics will make for fascinating interviews at a remarkable time in Canadian politics” (Grams, *Outside In* press kit, 2019). ZG’s *Outside In* media wrap report lists 42 interview hits during the launch, 13 of which were syndicated, and two of which were reposted interviews from other stations. Of the other confirmed hits, 1 was an op-ed written by Davies for *The Hill Times*, 3 were excerpts, 2 were reviews, and 1 was a feature published by national magazine, *The Literary Review of Canada* (Grams, *Outside In Media Wrap Report*, 2019). What can be inferred based on those numbers is that the success in the campaign was in framing Libby Davies as a prominent public figure and as a strong interview subject with a unique perspective to offer based on years of experience.

At a time when many launches would suffer from competing with not only breaking news, but also the federal elections, *Outside In* was advantaged by the ZG team’s ability to leverage Davies as a refreshing voice in Canadian politics. Furthermore, the press kit refers to Libby as, “a combination of warm, open, relatable and bold” (Grams, *Outside In* press kit, 2019). The quote refers to Davies’s writing style and voice within the book, but also to Davies herself, as the press kit says the style “reflects its author perfectly”, further positioning Davies as a great interview subject. Both the press kit and the information form given to *Global News* emphasize Libby Davies’s marginalized identity within Canadian politics. Within the press kit, Davies’s sexuality is introduced as a talking point, as the memoir delves into her experience “coming out as Canada’s first openly lesbian MP”. This differentiates Davies as a subject and illustrates the historical significance to her time as MP. In the form given to *Global News* prior to the interview, Davies’s gender is emphasized rather than her sexuality. The team presented “The evolving role of women in politics” as a talking point, suggesting that “As Canada grapples with how feminism is—and isn’t—affecting federal politics, Davies can provide an inside perspective on how gender stereotypes are being dismantled—or upheld—on Parliament Hill” (Grams, *Q&A form for Global News*, 2019).

The differences between the two persuasive documents written for editors showcases the importance in tailoring the talking points based on the publication’s audience. The press kit highlights how the memoir is personable and reflects on Davies’s

career as an activist and politician as well as her personal life. The talking points for *Global News*, however, expand on the idea of Davies as an “Inside the Tent perspective,” presenting Davies as an expert on ongoing big city crises, women’s evolving role in politics, navigating the intersection between activism and politics, making fringe issues mainstream, and how parliament can do better as a whole (Grams, Q&A form for *Global News*, 2019). None of the talking points given on the form suggested centering the interview on Davies’s new book. The underlying assumption is that *Global News*’ audience would be invested in current, timely issues, and the federal election would be in the forefront of everyone’s minds. Rather than sell the editorial staff on *Outside In*, the ZG team sold them on Libby Davies as an expert with important insights to impart on Canada’s present and future. It requires strategic publicity campaigning to cut through the federal election media circuit to redirect attention to one’s client. While not centering the book, that kind of interview leads to further exposure, boosts Davies’s profile, and creates momentum for further publicity. In answering the difficult question of whether the campaigning directly results in sales, BookNet’s 2018 study on the average Canadian book buyer found that only 5% of book buyers asked said that they find their next reads through author interviews or events, versus the 18% of buyers that said recommendations or interviews are a more likely source of discoverability for them (N.a, “Canadian Book Buyer 2018,” 2018, p. 9). It is worth noting, however, that 26% of readers said that they purchased their last read because they liked the author (“The Canadian Book Buyer 2018,” 2018, p. 9). This reasoning was ranked as the third most common cited by Canadian readers in 2018, indicating that raising awareness about an author can positively impact sales.

Author endorsements are another factor that is difficult to measure the direct impact of, but they do add credibility and genre distinction when seeking media coverage. These endorsements highlight who the publicist considers to be their author’s peers both in terms of skill and target audience. It is not typically the publicist’s job to collect endorsements, but it is their job to determine which endorsements to highlight in media kits/press kits. In *Outside In*’s press kit, only one author endorsement is included in the memoir’s book description page, which is that of Naomi Klein. The publicity team felt that an endorsement from the Canadian award-winning journalist, activist, and

novelist was strong enough to stand on its own—when publishing a Canadian political title, there is no greater recommendation that any Canadian writer could receive. Following the book description page is two pages worth of advanced praise, which features praise from fellow authors, politicians, and activists, with each quote highlighting different themes the memoir explores including marginalization, community organizing, and the imminent need for change. These quotes thus further inform editors of which angle to choose when framing an article or interview for the outlet’s audience.

Issue-based and political titles have the advantage of appealing to journalists and National Public Radio (NPR) directors even more so than other genres. Furthermore, politicians and other public figures are also more likely to have received prior media and social media training before being published. A strong campaign for issue-based and political titles fully leverages those media opportunities, and from there, writers invested in social justice or politics can use the title to help further build their platform. In a *Forbes* article detailing the benefit of deemphasizing the book and marketing the author instead, Smith Publicity’s Dan Smith advises authors, “Sometimes, forget about your book. The book is often a door-opener, and that’s it. It provides something “new” that the media looks for, which opens a door, and then you walk through it. No one interviews a book. People and experts are interviewed” (2018). Like much of what is written about publicity campaigns, Smith’s advice is directed towards authors, but these insights can be equally valuable for beginner publicists who benefit from a reminder that a book’s publication is not newsworthy.

Summary

For publicists and publishers, it is vital to recognize whether a title is marketable before taking on a book and if so, what specifically about the book is marketable. Authors, too, should consider what makes their book special, who their target audience is, why they are the right one to tell the story, and why the story must be told now. Those are the key components of a successful pitch. A skilled publicist knows how to find those qualities in their client’s book and how to utilize those components to draw the editors’ and journalists’ attention. They also know how to tailor their pitch based on audience, as

reviewers are interested in the quality of the work, broadcast media is interested in engaging and personable interview subjects, and journalists are interested in content that is newsworthy or provides relevant social commentary. Publicists with a clear vision of their target audience enhance their chances of receiving coverage by preparing their own reusable promotional materials including author Q&As, book excerpts (significant book quotes), fact sheets, and even teacher guides if they are promoting a children's book.

ZG's campaigns for *The Woo-Woo*, *Coconut Dreams*, and *Outside In* were successful because ZG's publicists pitched to only relevant publications, tailored their pitches, supplied strong talking points and pre-written content, and built on the momentum of the coverage they received by utilizing awards and positive reviews to procure additional coverage. The agency's practice of including tour dates and locations in their new book release pages is also effective because it generates interest from local outlets whose coverage can lead to improved attendance for the author's tour. Lastly, ZG's successful campaigns also showcase the impact of syndication—even one national hit can result in a flurry of press coverage and raise the public's awareness of a book across the country.

Chapter 6: Book Publicity Challenges and The Way Forward

Publicity requires publicists to not only determine the best way to position a book and its author to the media, but also to determine the best medium or person to help spread the word. Even as technology advances to increase access to contact information, the continual shrinkage of traditional media and the growth of untraditional promotion opportunities have complicated the publicity process.

6.1: Measuring Reach and Engagement

Unlike sales and many other forms of marketing, book publicity is not data-driven—publicists do not traditionally track sales data. This is in part because the direct correlation between book sales and publicity is ambiguous at best. It is challenging to track many conversions that result from readers listening to BBC Radio’s “Book of the Week,” or reading about the title on a website’s top fall titles, or from readers skimming through a feature article published by *The Tyee*.

Each year BookNet publishes research tracks the overall effectiveness of promotional efforts by surveying Canadian readers, but this report does not provide data on every individual marketing campaign. For external publicists, access to data is further complicated because they need to access it through secondary sources, including the publisher and outlets they worked with during the campaign. Collecting data to quantify the reach of each feature, review, or interview can prove challenging and tedious: not every website has a visible view or like counter, and, as of 2020, podcasts continue to be infamously bad at providing accessible data for publicists and advertisers. If a publisher was to check the engagements of a book review published by *The New Yorker*, they would find no readily available metrics. *The Globe and Mail* publishes their comment count, but does not publicly showcase views, link clicks, likes, or share count. ZG’s *Outside In* campaign earned 49 hits, the majority of which were radio coverage. Using this method for the online coverage the book received would mean manually checking the websites of 8 publications while trying to determine the average listenership of each

of the outlets that broadcasted Davies's interview. This task is even less feasible for freelance publicists.

The reality is that unless a publicist messages the marketing coordinator of every literary magazine or newspaper that posts an online article, listicle, or review, the official reach achieved is largely based on an informed guess. Unlike in advertising where this information can be included in the contract, publicity is a favor, so hassling editors for numbers visible only from their end is not standard practice. Tracking media reach is further complicated by mediums such as television, radio, podcasts, and newspapers. NPR, for example, cites their 2019 Google Analytics in listing an audience of 120 million monthly listeners across platforms ("NPR," NPR, 2019). NPR offers no audience breakdown per podcast, and no data is public on the reach of individual episodes. Similarly, determining exact distribution numbers of a newspaper presents its own challenge. In *The Globe and Mail's* 2019 Media Kit for their national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* Media group state that they have 899,000 average weekday readers and 1,666,000 average weekend readers (N.a, *The Globe and Mail* Media Kit, 2019). That is an impressive reach and being featured in the paper is considered one of the greatest potential outcomes of a Canadian book campaign. While these figures are useful for publicists, they often do not tell the full story: a newspaper paper having 899,000 readers does not necessarily translate to 899,000 people opening the newspaper they receive, and the figures provides even less of an indicator of what percent of those who do read the paper actually read the newspaper's *Arts & Books* section. If that information was provided, a publicist could use those insights and combine them with BookNet's data on discoverability based on newspapers or reviews to measure how well leads are produced by the now-shrinking book sections in newspapers.

As part of my internship with ZG, I reported the final media reach for a campaign by studying media kits and websites. This involved both counting the individual hits and then visiting each online article to tabulate view counts and likes. Media kits providing numbers on overall reach tell an impartial story, and so different metrics have to be used to quantify the success of a campaign. According to Grace Newman of influencer marketing website Scrunch.com, one's engagement rate:

is an important metric (if not the most important) as it can assist in determining which influencers you should work with based on how their content performs across different platforms. Analyzing an influencer's engagement rate can also help you decide whether the influencer will deliver you a return on investment (R.O.I), as it indicates how responsive their audience is to their content (N.d).

The engagement rate is usually measured based on the likes, comments, shares divided by total reach (followers or audience), and then multiplied by 100. In digital marketing, this formula is used as a means of determining the effectiveness of a campaign by comparing the engagement rate of an influencer's post about the title to that of their other posts. It can also be used to make better choices with influencer outreach: an influencer with a more engaged audience can have a more effective platform than an influencer with a larger reach.

In discussing the discrepancy between referral data and sales data, Publicist Kate McKean writes in her blog post that, "There's no way to track how someone sees a book on Twitter or on their friend's bookshelf and then goes and buys it in a store. Sure, if they buy it online there's referral traffic, but people do still, I promise, buy physical books in stores or—*gasp*—borrow from a library and the algorithms can't track all that (yet)" (2019). Furthermore, in an interview with Grams, Grams explained that for external publicists, it can be a challenge to gather comprehensive sales data from clients and marketing data before and after reaching out to the media (2019). While the lack of transparency and access to crucial data currently presents an obstacle for both internal and external marketing teams, there are companies that have developed tools that can help marketers measure the impact of their campaigns more efficiently.

One such tool is called Authentic ("Authentic," Authentic, n.d), which is a service that provides recommendations on which podcasts, strategies, and creative approaches are most effective for achieving one's targets and objectives. The company behind Authentic, called Podtrac ("Podtrac", Podtrac, n.d) regularly publishes data-driven lists determining the current top 10 podcasts, top 20 new podcasts of 2019, and other similar achievements that can be useful for publicists looking to have their authors guest star on a podcast. While Podtrac is marketed to podcast publishers rather than advertisers or book

publishers, the tool could prove to be an invaluable database in the future if the company were to allow publicists to pay for access to their data, which includes valuable data on podcast downloads, listens, and detailed audience demographics. In the digital age when there is a dwindling amount of traditional media and an overwhelming influx of nontraditional media, there needs to be better tools to help publicists navigate the new media landscape. A good tool for publicists would be one that allows for the building of relationships between publicist and influencer, enabling the continuation of ‘earned’ coverage, rather than tools that only enable relationships between influencers and advertisers.

6.2: The Future of Media Lists

What is needed is better technology and tools to support publicists in the curation and growth of their media lists. While companies such as Meltwater and Cision offer access to editors and journalists, only a fraction of those listed are Canadian, and even less are listed as interested in culture, books, or the arts. Publicists would benefit from a centralization of contacts related to the industry, and Canadian publicists would benefit from a database that extensively covered national, regional, and local Canadian media, with an inclusion of influencers such as book bloggers, podcast hosts, bookstagrammers, and other book enthusiasts who have their own platform. With the rise of online platforms and the rapid disappearance of traditional journalism, these databases need to adapt to expand their definition of influencer, or new and more affordable databases need to be created altogether to address the needs of book publicists. During my time at ZG, the agency was searching for ways to connect with Canadian book bloggers, but at present, there is no easy way to gather those contacts, and filtering Canadian book bloggers based on genre is an even more challenging task. These are needs within the Canadian publicity field that need to be addressed.

There are book blog directories that exist, however many of these directors are marketed to self-published authors who may value quantity over quality, and so publicists would still have to click each link to evaluate the reach of the blog themselves. The exception is BookSirens (“BookSirens”, Booksirens, n.d), a database of book reviewers

that lists blogs, their niches, whether they are accepting review requests, who they accept requests from, their compensation policy, and their social reach.

The optimal service for external and internal publicists would be a database that includes book blogs in their database and with the level of detail provided by BookSirens, potentially even including on event venues for publicists looking to organize launches, and combining that with Cision's ability to auto-update media lists. In her 2019 blog post, Kate McKean complains in her blog on publicity that for editors receiving inappropriate pitches, "It's exhausting, I imagine, and there's no central database where editors update all their information. Would that it t'were. There's no such database for book editors at publishing houses either, as much as I would like to will it into being." This suggests that editors, too, are negatively impacted by the lack of centralized information, and that the industry would benefit from a protected database that those in the industry could opt-into similarly to that of book reviewers' BookSiren.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

While the tools and technologies involved in publicity have evolved drastically since the advent of the internet, a successful professional publicity campaign is still dependent on a publicist's ability to distill a story into a succinct and provocative pitch. It is dependent on the publicist's ability to form and maintain relationships to contacts within the industry and to be selective about who to send their pitches to. A publicist's job is not an easy one—there are more books than ever being published at once, traditional media is shrinking, and the competition for an editor's or a journalist's attention is stiff, especially during a crisis or election.

For book marketing agencies like ZG, navigating the client's expectations can be intense, especially when collaborating with those who have never worked in the publishing industry. Even when enlisting a talented and experienced team of publicists, national coverage and reviews are never guaranteed. McKean warns industry outsiders of the unpredictability of a publicity campaigns, claiming:

The thing is...money doesn't guarantee anything. You can send out all the books in the world and that doesn't mean anyone will cover it. You can send gift baskets and elaborately packaged books that look more like wedding gifts than ARCs, and it still won't mean the *Times* will review the book. It's not a payola system. All anyone can do is put the books out there and hope for the best (2019).

This is not to say that publicity is without value, but instead suggests that publicists can put in the largest effort possible and utilize every resource available to them—there are concerningly few — but they cannot guarantee success. There are factors beyond their control, such as the retirement of a longtime media contact, a publication's last-minute schedule changes, or a new publisher withholding images that are key to marketing their picture book. Even with the obstacles publicists face, innovative and tenacious publicists have been able to take advantage of social media trends and the shifting landscape of media to help their clients thrive. The growing diversity of book-related businesses and the declining prevalence of industry gatekeeping supports the likelihood that more book publicity agencies like ZG will arise and that

those agencies will find creative means of shining a spotlight on authors and publishers that participate in non traditional publishing. What these agencies need, and what all publicists need, is better tools and resources to be developed to give them better access to data that will help them build optimized media lists and campaigns.

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