

## **Reach Out and Touch Your Fans—Faster and Easier than Ever!**

### **Selecting a Contact Management System\***

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You've collected all those names, addresses, and e-mails, promising to let your fans know when your next book is out or when you'll be in town for a signing. Now, what are you going to do with them? Rummage through them each time you want to send something out, trying to locate that enthusiastic fan who said she'd bring lots of friends to your signing in her town? While you're sorting through piles of business cards, scribbled names on torn scraps of paper, and contact info jotted on convention programs, you're wondering why you didn't write a note to remind yourself of the enthusiastic fan. Of course, at the time you were sure you'd remember.

How many times has a single person made all the difference in your promotional efforts? How much time have you wasted searching for phone numbers, emails, and addresses? There's got to be a better way to collect and use the names of readers, booksellers, and others you meet at signings and conventions!

Marketing our books is a requirement in today's publishing world regardless of the size of your publishing company. What publishers don't do, you must. Scrambling to keep up with all the promotion strategies possible boggles the mind of many authors who would rather be doing what they do so well: write. Enter the world of contact management systems, designed to handle this often onerous task.

Check back to the article, "Generating Word of Mouth for Your Book," described previously in *InSinc* (Eleanor Sullivan, xxx), for ideas on how to make the most of your

contacts. A contact management system is core to all these activities, enabling you to track and build your support network by automatically remembering everything you need it to know about all the people you know. It is fast and flexible, allowing you to expand your promotional activities as you further your writing career.

A contact management system allows you to collect, organize, and use information about people you know and meet in an easy, effective, and time-efficient way. Readers, booksellers, writer colleagues, publications, and organizations, such as Sisters in Crime, can be organized into separate but combinable groups, giving you the ability to tightly target your promotional activities.

Market to specific people with information relevant to them. For example, you can easily and quickly inform selected groups of contacts about the release of your new book by simultaneously sending them an email announcement or printing a batch of mailing labels. You can send different announcements to different groups, or a single announcement to everyone. But here's the best part: there's no need to go through each contact individually; collect all the names and addresses of your chosen group with just a few keystrokes.

Going on a book tour? Use this same technique to send postcards or emails about signing events to all your contacts in a range of zip codes or cities. The possibilities are endless: send electronic or snail-mail newsletters, share exciting news, such as an award nomination, or mail holiday greetings. Try to find something newsworthy at least once a quarter, but avoid emailing your contacts too often—in general, you should send emails no more than once a month. Each time you reach out and touch someone (or everyone), it builds your relationship with your fans.

Want more ideas? Let others stuff the envelopes with direct mail outsourcing, for letters or postcards. Talk to your fans with a voicemail blast that leaves a message for everyone on your phone list. Don't forget to make the most of the web world—include links to bookseller websites in all your emails, and put your website address on EVERYTHING. If you have a “contact me” form on your website, be sure to add those contacts to your contact management system. If you don't have a contact form, get one so you can keep in touch with all those website visitors!

There must be a downside, right? Well, here it is: a contact management system only works if you actually use it. Regardless of which system you choose, it requires a time investment to set up and maintain. Busy professionals have a tendency to install a system and ignore it until they need it. Do that and you'll be overwhelmed in no time. Keep up with it regularly, entering contacts as you go, and minimal maintenance is all that's required.

Now that you've decided you want a contact management system, what's next? First, determine how you will use it. Will you want a system primarily for sending electronic and postal mail? How much time will you spend organizing it? What kind of promotional activities do you plan to do? How often will you meet new contacts, and how many will you add each week, month, or year? These questions will help you figure out what you need, how much time it will take, and how you need to set up your system.

There are a number of software solutions for contact management, including Microsoft Outlook, Act!, and Goldmine. Microsoft Outlook is a popular email program that you may already have on your PC. It has the ability to store contacts, but mail/email merges require a lot of work to get right, and their categories are very limited—you can't

do a whole lot with different groups, and it's hard to use categories when you do a mail merge. Their add-on product, Business Contact Manager, is supposed to do more advanced contact management, but it really doesn't add enough features to be worth the effort.

Act! will be the best fit for most of you. It's like Outlook on steroids, with powerful features that make group management a breeze. Mail and email templates are built in to simplify group contact, and organizing your contacts is extremely easy and flexible. Avoid the 2005 version—go for the new 2006 version (or even the older 2004 version). Act! was rewritten in 2005 for technical reasons, and the 2005 version suffered as a result. It's buggy and there's simply no reason to use it when you can opt for the 2006 version instead.

Another excellent system is Goldmine. It is a bit more complex than Act!, largely because it is intended for multi-user environments, but it can do nearly everything Act! can do and then some. If you have several people managing contacts, this may be your best choice.

Check out add-on products as well—these are extra tools that install on top of these programs to give you even more features and functionality. Duplicate contact checkers help you clean up your database by removing duplicate entries. Business card scanners like the remarkably accurate CardScan automatically read business cards and plopp the data in the right place in your system, saving typing and typos. Palms and Pocket PCs—or smart phones like the Treo and Blackberry—allow you to take your contacts with you wherever you go. And there are a number of email marketing services that can link directly to your database. Make sure that any add-on programs work with

your specific version of your contact management system. In particular, because of that Act! upgrade, add-ons designed to work with older versions (2004 and before) won't necessarily work with the new 2005 and 2006 versions.

Now that you've selected your contact management system, you're ready to put it to its intended use—to help you sell more books! Come back next issue when we'll teach you how to make the most of your system. In the meantime, keep collecting those contact names!

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