

CHAPTER TWO: THE ART OF SELF-PROMOTION

In his novel, *Shoeless Joe* (upon which the film *Field of Dreams* was based), Vancouver writer **W. P. Kinsella** presented the now-famous maxim: “build it and they will come.”

For self-employed artists and cultural workers this idea is particularly compelling. Write the play, paint the mural, compose the song, create the dance troupe – whatever the goal is, just do it, and the audience will follow. This is a wonderful utopian vision, and, unfortunately, one generally best left in the *Field of Dreams*. Like it or not, artists and cultural workers have always had to find or create a market for their work. This is as true today as it was, in their respective times, for William Shakespeare or Amadeus Mozart.

Marketing is a complex subject, but the purpose is simple: to present your work to potential buyers. An effective promotional and marketing strategy helps your future audience or market to know about you, your creation, or the services you provide. Such a strategy ensures that whatever artistic or cultural endeavour you are engaged in, they will come to your performance, buy your work of art, or engage your services.

Today's practice of sales and marketing is much different from what it used to be. ***It is now more about using online and other electronic tools to connect with your audience, your customers, rather than the simple practice of manipulating someone into parting with his money.***

The modern marketing approach begins to address the concern many in the cultural industries have – that selling your work means “selling your soul.” Unless you are prepared to do that, it doesn't have to be that way.

The marketing and promotional information in this chapter will help you work from the core values and goals you identified in Chapter One. This chapter will enable you to decide what type of promotion is appropriate.

Despite a sixth place finish on *Canadian Idol* in 2007, not much was happening for **Tara Oram**, so she created a video blog about her life, and posted it on YouTube and Facebook. That exposure led to a CMT television show, *The Tara Diaries*, and then a CMT/YTV show aimed at youth,

Karaoke Star Junior. Her debut album, *Chasing the Sun*, won a 2009 East Coast Music Award for Country Recording of the Year.

If you want your songs to be played on every radio station and seen most often on YouTube, your marketing strategies will be different than if you want to be free to just busk for coins outside the neighbourhood liquor store. You will always be more successful, whatever your personal definition of success might be, if you believe in and respect the integrity of your goals as much as the integrity of your work.

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN EFFECTIVE PROMOTIONAL PACKAGE?

The ideal promotional package responds effectively to the advertising needs of the kind of art you practise or the work you do.

Visual artists, who want an exhibition in a public gallery, must develop a digital portfolio. A demo CD or DVD and discography is the “résumé” for the **musician** wishing to sign with a recording company. **Consultants and some “technical workers”** (such as theatre technicians and artefact conservators) often rely on proposals and well-crafted résumé to sell themselves. **Writers** demonstrate their writing talents by proposing an idea in a written “query” to an agent or publisher.

An audition is more important for an actor or a musician than anything material that he can hand to a potential director or an audition committee.

So what do you need to do? **There are two primary rules that are simple but almost always broken:**

Find out what the receiver of your package expects

Although “industry standards” can be discovered through market research, you should always try to learn which promotional elements your target market expects to see. Information about what the standards are can be found in CHRC’s Careers in Culture (go to www.culturalhrc.ca, click on Careers in Culture, select a discipline, click on What You Need to Do, and click on Work search strategies).

Canadian curators have overlooked more than one talented visual artist because she sent a letter stating that her work can be found on the Internet rather than submitting the expected digital portfolio. Many curators don’t have the time to find an artist’s work on the Internet; some find it

difficult to compare high-resolution images to low-resolution scans; and even those curators who are impressed by the work on the website may find it too cumbersome to share their findings with a committee. So, despite the talent and the best intentions of the artist, she is unlikely to be chosen for an exhibition.

Deliver what is expected, then present it in a unique and creative way

You want your promotional package to be sufficiently standard as to allow the receiver to make a proper comparison. At the same time, you also want yours to stand out. Achieving both of these goals requires striking a delicate balance. One caution: decide very carefully what should be “special” about your promotional package.

A Halifax filmmaker (who asked to remain nameless) applied for a residency at a prestigious New York school and sent the requested résumé etched by hand (with a compass needle) on a reel of old film. The reviewers did indeed remember him, but only as the person who almost blinded them when they fed the reel into a projector rather than reading it like a book, as the filmmaker had intended.

No matter which type of promotional package is ideal for you, **follow these guidelines:**

Plan it carefully

Your promotional package – like your business and marketing strategies – deserves thorough planning. Should you present the full range of your work or a thematically cohesive segment of your work? Should you send a story proposal with one concept for a magazine article or submit several strong ideas at once? If you truly know all the variances of your target market, it will be relatively easy to decide what your package should include.

Produce it professionally

It may seem unfair, but contracts have been lost because of a spelling mistake in a cover letter or a bad mix or edit of a demo tape. Strive for the very best that your talents deserve and your budget allows. Refer back to the answer you gave (in Chapter One) to the question: “How would you like to be remembered?” and incorporate what you learned about yourself into the development of your promotional package. If, above all else, you want the memory of your work’s quality to linger, emphasize that aspect in your materials. People remember the unusual. Often it is the understated, high-quality presentation that stands out.

Package it attractively

If your heritage building conservation proposal is delivered in a red binder left over from your high school days, the contents won't be taken seriously. Design or purchase a high-quality package that complements the contents and also fulfills industry expectations. The film industry, for example, has very specific rules on how a film treatment should be presented, right down to the requirements of how you bind the document.

Distribute it appropriately

Carefully select the recipients of your material. Although a wide, general mail-out will get your information into a lot of hands, an impersonal, unsolicited, untargeted package will end up in as many garbage containers. If you are unsure which person or department in your targeted market should receive the promotional package, e-mail first, describe what you wish to present, and find out to whose specific attention the package should go. Be sure to get this person's exact title and the spelling of his name. Then address your cover letter appropriately. Never use a generic mass-marketing approach, such as "Dear Editor" or "To Whom It May Concern." The result will be that your promotional package won't be of concern to anyone except that ubiquitous garbage container.

Review it continuously

Learn from the feedback you receive – or don't receive – about your promotional package and constantly update and fine-tune each aspect. Before you send the material, show it to a person whose judgement you respect.

Keep in mind that your promotional package is often the first and only indication of your talent, your understanding of your market audience's needs, and your ability to address their needs. Your package should represent you as well, or even better, than a personal interview.

HOW CAN I ECONOMICALLY PROMOTE MY WORK?

There are many ways to promote yourself and your art or cultural services without spending much money.

Network

Networking is perhaps the scariest term in business lingo – just the thought of having to “work the room,” “press the flesh,” or “rub elbows” can weaken even the most confident cultural worker’s marketing resolve. It doesn’t have to be this way. All that is meant by networking is that people should talk about their interests with people who share them. Schmoozing can be fun, as long as you count your fingers after each handshake. Don’t forget that the others in the room are also selling or browsing for ideas.

So, how do you find people with interests similar to yours?

Go where people like you go

Attend performances, exhibition openings, book launches, readings, public meetings, conferences - wherever people might congregate that you should talk to. If the thought of approaching a stranger terrifies you, don’t stay home. Go to be “seen” – someone may approach you. At least appear to be interested in his “spiel”; you may learn something new and useful.

Participate in online social networking

Social networking tools like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn and other web-based applications are the best way to introduce your work to new audiences, and are free or cost very little. Musicians post live videos from a tour on YouTube to introduce their music to many new fans, and use Twitter, iLike and newer applications to let an ever-widening circle of people know more about their life and work. Many agents look to MySpace to find new talent. Curators, arts managers and consultants use LinkedIn, GoogleDocs and other Web 2.0 applications as virtual collaborative workspaces. Regardless of discipline, if you have a bit of writing talent and are willing to share personal reflections about your life as an artist – including posting information about the upcoming show of your mixed media paintings, where your next performance will take place, or what life is like on tour – consider writing a blog. Just remember that regular posts to your blog are the best way to keep people coming back to find out what you are doing. Also look for opportunities to post to other blogs, or share your favourite book choices at www.shelfari.com or the music you are listening to at iLike, all opportunities to have your name out in the

marketplace and in virtual circles where people with similar interests go. However, be careful how much personal information you post on the Internet, to protect yourself now, and in the future.

Michel Rivard, a singer-songwriter and actor well known in Québec and internationally, jumped into the fray to protest the cuts to federal funding for culture during the 2008 federal election. His YouTube video went viral, raising awareness – and a lot of laughter – about the issue, and introduced his work to many anglophones at the same time.

Join a professional association

Associations and Arts Service Organizations (ASOs) bring like-minded people together and provide a source of tremendous professional and personal support. These organizations normally offer their members an array of useful information about the industry, sometimes provide tangible benefits such as health insurance or professional development courses, and always present the opportunity to be a part of a network of colleagues. That network can counter the sense of isolation many self-employed workers feel and help them to remain focused on their work.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are travelling on the thrust of one another, much like geese flying in the 'V' formation. When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone - and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front. If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those people who are headed in the same direction as we are. (Source: Wallace co. inc. *Le travail d'équipe ou quand la nature nous donne une leçon de solidarité.*)

Note that, while membership in a professional association may not be free or inexpensive, there is usually a discounted fee for members to participate in association events, which allows the opportunity to network with other members and develop additional skills and knowledge. In Québec, being a member of a legally-constituted professional association is required under the Acts Respecting the Status of Artists in order to be recognized by the government as a professional artist.

Membership in a recognized association can provide certain financial advantages under the terms of these acts. (See page 62 for more information on how to choose the most relevant professional associations.)

Take note that networking is most successful when you make the effort to learn about the other person, rather than just talking about yourself. Marketing is about relationship building and meeting customers' needs. You can't establish trust, or respond to someone's needs, if you aren't listening.

Website

A website has become an essential tool for most artists and cultural workers. Do some research into what kinds of information people in your discipline generally include on their websites. Figure out what you really like on your favourite websites, and include what you can afford in the design of your own website. If you are just starting out, see if you can barter web design for something you've created. If you cannot afford the time or money to develop a website and have it hosted, look into creating a web presence on Facebook at a minimum, find opportunities do mount a video or two on YouTube, or take advantage of opportunities to post to another artist's blog.

Volunteer

The cultural sector thrives on the valuable work of volunteers. These volunteers have learned something that some business people never do – that volunteers often benefit as much or even more than the recipient of the donated time or objects. If you donate an artwork to the local children's hospital or offer your professional expertise to someone asking a question on an online discussion list, you provide something of great benefit to someone else. And, at the same time as you are doing something worthwhile, you are also promoting yourself, getting your work out where people can see and enjoy it, and might even be “creating” a customer or a market where none previously existed.

Beware, don't allow yourself to be “used” by volunteering while others benefit in material ways, such as by playing in a jam session at a bar or reading at an open-mike poetry bash. “Exposure” is either illegal or bad for your health. At the very minimum, your performance should be worth a free cappuccino or jug of beer to the coffee house or bar owner.

Publicize

Publicity is the catch-all term for advertising that doesn't cost you anything. In fact, it's even more effective than paid advertising because an article or a blog written about you by a third person is

often more credible than an advertisement, and you can reach many more people this way for little or no money. (Can you imagine how much it would cost to advertise directly to each of the people who subscribe to *The Globe and Mail* newspaper and visit the *Globe's* website? Yet if the *Globe* publishes a story about you, you achieve the same market penetration or better; and it's free.)

How do you convince people to discuss and write about you and your work? A **press release** is the most common and accepted method of reaching people through the media without paying for the resulting advertising. Through a press release, you can promote some timely, newsworthy aspect of yourself or your work.

A simple announcement of the production of your new play may get you listed in local event calendars, but a description of something distinctive and interesting will be more likely to result in an article, review, pre-performance interview or blog comment. Is this the first time this play has been produced in Canada? Was the inspiration behind the play a particularly moving story or a personal experience? Will the proceeds from one night's performance be donated to PEN Canada to fight for freedom of expression? Was your work well received abroad? If so, send out copies of those reviews to local media, and post them on your website or Facebook page.

An event is somewhat simple to publicize because the event itself is the subject of the announcement. **What can you do if you want to publicize your business and don't have an event to promote?**

Create an event

Offer public seminars, host a studio "open house," invite other musicians to a jam session, or arrange a poetry reading. By creating an event, you have also created an opportunity to promote yourself through the media and to showcase your talent and that of the others who participate.

Communicate your successes

The stereotypical Canadian will shy away from patting himself on the back when he achieves a significant goal or receives an award or recognition. Don't let modesty or any other consideration stand in the way of a perfect reason to raise your public profile.

Develop an “angle”

This doesn't have to be as sinister as it might sound. Just discover what is newsworthy about yourself, or your work, and report on it. Perhaps you are the youngest artist represented in a corporate art collection, or the last dancer to perform in a facility slated for demolition.

Sometimes a creative approach is effective: a news bulletin about poet **Earle Birney's** treatise, *Spreading Time: Remarks On Canadian Writing And Writers 1904-1949*, sparked a minor media sensation. It illustrated the poet's growing nationalism by claiming that, sometime between the ages of four and nine, he began to object to the absence of “Canadian content” in the Lord's Prayer.

It all comes down to this: to remain in business and develop a greater readership, editors must print articles or broadcast stories or deliver key news in the news sections of their websites. Most editors are savvy enough to see through, and reject, a thinly disguised advertisement. It is your job to discover and promote something interesting about your work.

[TIP: Write your press release in the third person to make it sound less like a sales pitch. Instead of writing, “Now you can preview our latest recordings over the Internet,” try, “Now discriminating listeners and loyal fans can preview my sought-after and high-quality recordings through the Internet.]

Your press release should contain the following elements:

Title – Include a title such as “Press Release” or “Media Release” or “Time Sensitive Material.” Some marketers omit this as it seems overly obvious, but editors have thousands of pieces of paper crossing their desks every day. If one of those papers doesn't have a clear purpose that can be determined immediately, it may be overlooked or end up in the wastebasket.

Release date – Insert the words “For Immediate Release” or “For Release Not Later Than April 16, XXXX,” depending upon whether you want the story to go out right away or be held back for a later release date.

Headline – Add a specific, engaging, “punchy” headline that encapsulates the subject of the release and entices the reader to read on.

Dateline – List your city, province, and the date you are sending out the press release (as many newspaper wire articles do).

First paragraph – State the main message of your release in the first paragraph. What is the story, and why is it newsworthy?

Middle paragraph(s) – Provide supporting material such as background information, quotes, and examples in the middle paragraph(s) of the release. Remember that the editor or journalist may use parts of your press release exactly as you have written it, so take care to make the wording clear and memorable.

Last paragraph – List the specific details that readers will need to follow up on the message (including dates, prices, addresses, hours of operation, etc.)

Close – Add the code “- 30 -” to indicate that the release has concluded.

Contact information – State the name and phone number of the person who is prepared to speak to the press. Remember to include weekend and evening contact information if your story is particularly timely, as the journalist assigned to your story may be working to a strict deadline. (Note: some people prefer to have the contact information at the top of the release, others feel that too much information at the beginning can weaken the impact of the headline.)

MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vancouver, October 24 XXXX – The Tsawwassen Gallery Society presents *From across the sea: Visual art of immigrant experience*. Works in *From across the Sea* interpret the landscape and human geography of a new place.

Guest curator Tina Gupta, from the South Asian Multicultural Alliance for the Arts, has gathered a broad panorama of paintings, photography and sculpture from newcomers old and recent. According to Gupta, “In these evocative works, you really see the challenges of making a home in an unfamiliar land.”

The show also features pieces by students in the gallery’s Arts for Youth program, run by visual artist Lily Wang. “Making art about landscape and home with children who have been uprooted, whether by their parents’ choice or as refugees, is amazing. What they draw and form provides such clear insight into their lived experience. These works may be simple, but the emotional content is astonishing,” said Wang.

The show runs from Wednesday October 25 to Saturday November 18 at the Tsawwassen Gallery.

Opening reception is Thursday October 26, from 6:30 – 8:30pm.

- 30 -

For further information, contact: Tom Mangrove, Special Events; (604) 111-1111; tmangrove@tsawwassengallery.ca.

Send these press releases to everyone who might have an interest. Draw your contact information from the masthead of current magazines and newspapers and from their websites, and call television and radio stations for the proper contacts. You don't have to limit yourself to the media, either. Post copies of your press releases on your website, and email them to your past, current, and potential customers to remind them about yourself and to update them on your work. Even better, send them reprints of the resulting articles (allowing a third person to sing your praises for you).

Build upon other promotions

Just as retail stores often have related items placed near each other on the shelves, and fast food restaurants reverberate with the phrase “Would you like fries with that?”, you can utilize the power of the “tie-in” to market your work. You can multiply the effects of your promotions, and save on marketing costs at the same time, by building a part of your marketing campaign to complement existing events or products (and usually, therefore, benefit from promotional activities that someone else is financing).

A Montréal-based New Media artist took advantage of an existing, highly publicized event and created her own to follow. She invited people to attend with a simple e-mail message:

From: H  l  ne Brunet
To: friends
Subject: party/exhibition
Date: Sun, 11 Feb 12:01:31 -0500

Dear friends,

Just a quick note to let you know that the opening of my new show at Gallerie electrika will take place immediately after Culture Montr  al's 5    7 on Friday February 23, from 7 to 9pm. The gallery is just a few blocks away from the 5    7, and there will be more wine and delicacies at the opening. I would enjoy talking with you about the new direction in my work.

Please stop by if you can,

H  l  ne

Note that this artist also used this invitation as an opportunity to remind people of her work and where to find it. Probably many recipients of this e-mail failed to even recognize the marketing process that was working here. Had that same promotional effort taken the form of an e-mail message directly advertising the work, it might have been dismissed. However, by piggybacking her event on Culture Montréal's 5 à 7, Hélène Brunet brought people with common interests together and built upon the "outreach opportunity" afforded by the invitation to promote her work – a winning situation for everyone involved.

WHAT OTHER TOOLS CAN PLAY A ROLE IN MY MARKETING STRATEGY?

One of the most significant laws of marketing is the “law of gradual recognition.” According to this law, one-off advertisements don't work because consumer trust and consciousness is built only through longer-term presentation of a consistent message. Your promotional package might be extraordinary, but it should not be your only marketing tool. Research has indicated that, on average, consumers generally need to be in contact with positive information about a person and their product or service 27 times before they are willing to consider investing in it. You must, therefore, do more than just send out your promotional package and wait for a response.

Traditional business tools

Many artists don't consider a **business card** a necessity. But you will inevitably have to provide your address or phone number to a business contact or somebody else who might be in a position to positively influence your career. Why not have cards at the ready? The manager of the art gallery in which you were dying to have your work displayed will probably be more impressed if you put an inscribed professionally designed business card in her hand rather than a napkin from the hors d'oeuvres table. If you have cards, you can also give a number to any of your many satisfied customers who might know, or be in contact with, people looking for work like yours. A good-looking card indicates to your client that you take your business seriously and have enough confidence in it to spend a few pennies on this most basic promotional tool.

By using some conventional business tools – such as **business cards, brochures, a professional-sounding voicemail message, and a website** – you complement your promotional package.

Paid advertising

While emblazoning your name on T-shirts, mugs, cheap pens, and the sides of buses may not be appropriate for most cultural work, advertising should not be considered “out of the question.” **A listing in a membership directory, an advertisement in a publication that your target audience reads, a commercial spot broadcast during a pertinent radio program, or an online blurb about your work and a link to your website** can present your professional image to markets or persons not normally reached by your other promotional initiatives or who might benefit from another form of reminder.

Contact database

How do you know when to send people a reminder about your work? **The most important promotional tool of all is the contact database.** A well-designed database (or even a paper contact record) can act as your “silent partner” by:

- Recording the contact information and “profiles” about your past, current, and potential customers, your media contacts, and your sponsors.
- Tracking where you sent your promotional packages, the response, and the next steps required to follow up.
- Making it easier to analyze the success of your marketing strategy and enabling you to refine it.

By keeping an accurate profile of all your contacts, a well-designed database will help you communicate more effectively with them, identify and fulfil their needs, and understand more about (and develop more to offer) them. From a strict “bottom line” point of view, this same information which allows you to develop better relationships with your customers also results in lower market research costs (because information gathering is an ongoing process) and lower promotional costs (due to better-targeted mailings).

The tools and promotional strategies available to you are limitless, as are the ways in which they can fail. The following is a list of the **six most common marketing mistakes** professionals make, along with tips on how to avoid them:

1. **Advertising too generally.** Many people spend their entire promotional budget on one large advertisement in a newspaper or magazine that reaches a wide, general (and primarily uninterested readership). It should not come as a surprise to anyone that such an approach doesn’t work. It is less expensive and more effective to focus your time and money on smaller, continuous, varied, and targeted outreach activities.
2. **Using only one tool.** No one promotional effort is going to reach everybody and not everyone will react identically to the same marketing message. A basic but professional-looking website featuring quotes from reviewers might give some people a perfect reason to call you. However, this same website may fail to catch the eyes of other people who would be sold by dazzling images and a diversity of creative content that present your story more dramatically. People respond differently to various stimuli, so vary your “promotional mix” accordingly.

3. Considering and designing each tool in isolation. This problem usually reveals itself in a series of unrelated materials lacking visual continuity. Even if you don't have the budget to produce the kind of professionally designed and co-ordinated website or physical materials a corporation would utilize, it should still be within your means to produce materials containing such common elements as a standardized logo or colour scheme. People should be able to tell that your business card, your website [and your Facebook or MySpace pages, for example, all belong to the same business. Everything should contain such basic information as how you can be reached and, if appropriate, your hours of operation.

4. Failing to focus the message.

Don't try to please everyone – it can't be done, and the attempt weakens your focus and your message. So what do you do when you wear more than one “hat,” as many artists and cultural workers in Canada do, and need to market your one product – yourself – to more than one audience? You can do this without losing focus by targeting different messages to different customers.

You may, for example, develop one part of your website for the voice lessons you offer to adult vocalists and separate webpages to advertise your after-school voice-training program for children. Websites particularly lend themselves to a “cafeteria-style” marketing approach that encourages different clients to find and choose the information they need.

One of Canada's “superstars” of self-promotion, **Sky Gilbert**, developed a website, <http://home.istar.ca/~anita/>, which includes some general information in the form of a biography as well as specific and detailed information in sections titled “the writer,” “the filmmaker” “the playwright,” “the director,” “the actor,” and “the drag queen extraordinaire.” By offering his audience well-defined categories of information, he allows them to choose to visit the sections which directly interest them. In this way, he targets his specific marketing strategies to specific audiences.

5. Ignoring the fact that even marketing tools require promotion. A well-designed website can be an effective marketing vehicle, but it won't promote your work if nobody knows it exists. Spread the word.

- Announce your website address to your customers and include a link to it to all other online spaces you occupy (such as Facebook).
 - Try some quick Internet searches to find the websites of other artists and cultural workers in your discipline, see what comes up near the top of search results. Use the same key words on your website;
 - Add to or change the content of your website regularly to keep it near the top of Internet searches.
 - Finally, add it to your business cards, brochures, and the “signature file” that is automatically appended to the end of your e-mail messages;
 - Work toward the goal of having each of your promotional tools complement and “advertise” the others.
- 6. Failing to follow up.** This is the most frequent mistake, and the one that is most simply rectified.
- Call potential clients to ask whether there are any questions about the proposal you sent last week;
 - E-mail a “customer satisfaction survey” to a client you have just finished doing work for;
 - Write a thank-you note to someone who referred business to you;
 - If last year you played for a wedding, send out invitations to the bride and groom when a gig this year coincides with their first anniversary celebration;
 - Send past customers a flyer promoting your new CDs or paintings during the fall to take advantage of this peak season for the purchase of many artistic and cultural products.

Following up can help you maintain a position at the forefront of your customers' consciousness and consequently will result in more work or sales.