

THE INDIE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO STREET TEAMS



What is a street team?

“Street teams” originated in the music industry, with teams of volunteers plastering the streets with posters, handing out flyers and CDs, inundating radio stations with requests, and moving the artist’s album to the front of the racks.

Today, the definition has broadened beyond the street to online promotion. And these teams aren’t just limited to music, but now encompass the publishing industry too. ([Jennifer Probst](#) points out that they’re also called ‘reader groups’ and ‘fan clubs’).

Why should you have a street team?

The most obvious reason is to **get help promoting your book**. After all, as [Penny Sansevieri](#) explains, personal recommendations can be one of the biggest sales drivers in almost any category.

Writing and publishing can be lonely work, especially for indies. Yet even traditionally published authors, in an industry where marketing budgets are often directed straight to the ‘sure bets’, can use a little help from friends.

There are two major kinds of help a street team can offer:

*** Objectivity.** Intellectually, many creatives struggle with making an objective evaluation of our work. That is, starting to think of our art as a ‘product’.

Most of us are loathe to reduce 70,000 words to a few snappy lines to fit on a blurb. We fall in love with [‘bad’ covers](#) that cleverly depict some subtle yet significant metaphor, even though it might not be the most attractive option for readers.

Readers who have greater distance from the project can help us make less biased, and potentially more effective, decisions.

*** Social proof.** Emotionally, many creatives also struggle with self-promotion. Few of us like to blow our own horn.

We hesitate to describe our own work as ‘hilarious’ or ‘riveting’ even though marketing departments would happily slap these words across the front of a book that they haven’t even read.

We know that, to be successful on social media, we should only post about our work intermittently, to avoid becoming one of ‘those’ authors who does nothing but tweet BUY MY BOOK! The rest of the time, we should be interacting with and helping fans… But it’s hard when we don’t have any fans yet!

As [Laina Turner](#) points out, a street team can be invaluable for your motivation, and for writers experiencing self-doubt. Yet, as [Angela Ackerman](#) describes, it is often that same self-doubt that makes many authors reluctant to ask for help.

‘Why would anyone want to help me?’ we think.

But consider, as [Ackerman](#) suggests in another post:

- 1. Are there writers you’ve become friendly with that you want to see succeed?*
- 2. Do you have friends/family/online connections who you would help follow their passions?*
- 3. Have you loved a book so much you’d jump at the chance to help the author launch another one?*

If you’ve answered at least two of these questions with a ‘yes’, chances are, you’re building authentic relationships with others – people who might well respond the same way about you and your work.

Importantly, however, street teams shouldn’t be a one-way street (terrible pun intended!). Find out why joining a street team has benefits for readers, book bloggers, and writers:

Why should you join my street team?

Readers: Apart from being a great way to support your friends, joining your favourite author's or a friend's street team gives you a behind-the-scenes look at the production of a novel – and often, early glimpses and other bonuses.

Bloggers: In addition to the general benefits for a reader, book bloggers (and I'm including everyone here – bookstagrammers, booktubers, podcasters and so on!) can enjoy some great opportunities to get exclusive content – and maybe even have a break from writing/photographing/recording.

Writers: The reasons for joining someone else's street team might seem less obvious in our busy lives, but really, they're just as important than building your own.

Being a part of someone else's street team gives new and experienced authors the opportunity to experience someone else's book launch from 'behind the scenes'. Quite apart from the buzz and companionship we can find by helping another author out, we can also get some great new ideas.

*** Experience.** If you've never launched a book before, joining someone else's street team can be like a trial run. Use the opportunity to make notes of what worked and what didn't, what ideas might be appropriate for your own launch, and what timeline is involved.

*** Fresh ideas.** Even if you've successfully launched several books in the past, being a part of someone else's book launch can be invaluable. Not only does mentoring someone else help to reinforce your own knowledge, but you may even find some new ideas. Publishing changes all the time, and while new authors may be inexperienced, they're also likely to be immersed in the latest books, blogs and courses on marketing. You might find some cutting-edge new ideas you can implement in your own launches to keep them fresh.

How can I find members for my street team?

The ideal members of a street team are:

- Genuine readers
- Fans of you, your books, or the genre you write in
- Active online

You can seek out interested members by:

- Asking friends and family who have enjoyed your work
- Reaching out to any book bloggers you have developed a relationship with
- Putting a call out on social media
- Emailing your newsletter subscribers
- Looking for beta reading communities on Goodreads, Scribophiles, and Absolute Write, or even LinkedIn.
- (If you are an established author) Getting in touch with readers who have reviewed your previous work

Let them know a bit about the book you're releasing, and ask if they have any ideas.

[Ackerman](#) recommends doing this 2-3 months ahead of your launch if possible, and using a form to collect some information about interested members.

Does anyone who expressed interest have a podcast geared towards your readership? A blog? Does anyone have media, conference, educational or library connections?

Ask them in a sign-up form what they would like to help with, and be respectful of their time. ([Click here to see my sign-up form as a sample](#))

[Nicole CW](#) suggests asking whether those interested in joining your street team have already followed you on social media, and (if you're an established author) whether they've reviewed any of your previous books.

[Claire Bradshaw](#) warns that you don't just want 'anyone' on your team. Concentrate your efforts on those who are real fans of your genre, (and hopefully) your books.

There are many reasons you should focus on real fans:

- When it comes to feedback, you want to make sure the people you're taking advice from are those who would actually be likely to buy your book. It's no good 'designing by committee' if the committee you're listening to would never be interested in your book regardless.
- You want your street team members to genuinely enjoy your work. You don't want to be pressuring people to read (and then recommend!) something that simply isn't to their taste. Not just for their own benefit, but because...
- When people recommend things they don't fully endorse, their lack of enthusiasm can show. Even worse, your work could receive *negative*-word-of-mouth, where readers discourage others from giving your work a go. [Michelle Raab's excellent series on marketing](#) points out the need for 'quality control' when seeking word-of-mouth recommendations.
- Even if your street team shower your work with unmitigated praise, if they're not genuine fans of your genre, it might simply fall on deaf ears. Most of us follow book bloggers or are friends with certain people because they share (some of) our tastes. If the content they share starts to diverge

too wildly from what we've come to expect, we may no longer trust their recommendations or even unfollow them.

- Perhaps most importantly, the chances that someone who genuinely likes your books will know other people who will enjoy them is higher than someone who doesn't.

Keeping the above in mind, passion is probably more important than influence when it comes to building your street team. Don't ignore potentially enthusiastic supporters by only chasing those with vast followings who might not be as interested.

[Sansevieri](#) states that she generally seeks out people with smaller social media accounts now.

Why smaller can be better:

- The owner of an account with 'only' 1,000 followers is likely to be much more responsive than someone with 100,000 followers.
- The fans of smaller accounts are more likely to be genuine (not purchased) and genuinely engaged. Those [Sansevieri](#) calls 'micro-influencers' often attract tight communities that engage with most or all of their posts, even jumping to buy whatever they recommend.

How many members do I need?

When [Sansevieri](#) asks her classes how many 'super fans' an author needs on their street team, attendees typically guess between five and ten *thousand*. But she says the majority of authors have lists of fewer than 100 people, and some as low as 25.

Contrary to what most of us might think, smaller, empowered groups are often more powerful influencers than great big groups.

The size of your street team will depend on how much time and effort you have to devote to a) attracting interested readers, and b) coordinating their activities! As [Bradshaw](#) warns, it's important to emphasise the **right qualities** in street team members over the **quantity** of members (or the quantity of their followers).

Don't worry too much about the numbers. As [Angela Ackerman](#) points out, 'Whether ten people join your team or two hundred, everything is much easier with help.'

How can I get started?

After you've assembled a team, [Bradshaw](#) recommends creating a 'HQ'.

One option is a **closed/secret Facebook group**. This is perhaps the easiest method.

Another is to create a **password-protected section of your own site**. This has the advantage of permitting those who don't use Facebook to join.

Keep in mind that you may need to email members to let them know when there is new content on the site, as they won't be accessing it as frequently as Facebook.

Or, you could simply use email instead.

Post an introduction, thanking your team for their help, and then, give them a mission!

How can a street team help?

Here are some ideas of how a street team can help with a launch (in order of approximate time taken):

- **[1 minute]** Follow the author on social media

- Use a special hashtag
- Encourage discussion of the book on social media or forums
- Give feedback on design, pricing, typography etc.
- **[5 minutes]** Offer a guest post or takeover
- Invite other enthusiastic readers of the genre to your street team
- Share the author's website, interviews, and blog content etc. on social media
- Retweet/reshare anything you post with a certain hashtag
- Post shoutouts on social media
- Word-of-mouth promotion (talk about the book to family members, friends)
- Mention the book's release in their own newsletters
- Add the book to recommendation lists
- Add your book to their Goodreads 'Want to Read' list.
- Introduce the author to connections
- Purchase the book at a strategic time/date
- Contribute to an FAQ
- Give feedback on future book ideas
- Promote coupons and sales
- **[10 minutes]** Brainstorm marketing ideas (You can follow up part way through the launch – team members may have had some more time to

formulate ideas at this stage – and again at the end of the launch period, for ideas you can use (or not use) next time)

- Post Instagram book photos like book selfies or shelfies
- Request the book from the library
- Suggest the book to book clubs
- Post photos of the book/any promotional materials
- Order your book through stores
- **[15 minutes]** Sell your book via affiliate links
- Post reviews on Amazon, Goodreads, personal blogs (NOTE: Amazon is said to be strict about ‘review-swaps’, so be wary of reciprocal arrangements. Additionally, as [Reedsy](#) points out, incentivising reviews is also against Amazon’s terms of service.)
- Create an unboxing video
- Run a contest
- **[1 hour +]** Host an interview or guest post on their blog/vlog/podcast
- Run a book club
- Hand out promotional materials at an event
- Attend or help host book launch events/signings

You may not want to post all of these suggestions at once. Make it clear you don’t expect your team to do everything – you don’t want to overwhelm them. And always be thankful!

[Book Marketing Tools](#) suggests authors might want to make some activities a requirement for participation (or for receiving certain freebies), but if you do go down this path, make sure you don't ask too much or you may find nobody helps at all!

How can you help your street team?

Make sure the stream of helpful traffic in your street team flows both ways. Aside from thank yous in the form of street team bonuses, authors can help out their team by providing content for blogs, agreeing to interview requests, and promoting team members' social media. An engaged author can actually help their street team by saving them time (on producing content) or even helping them profit monetarily (those who use affiliate links can share a small portion of the proceeds).

Tips: Be organised so that all of your requests to your team are made as easy as possible.

- For any steps that are particularly tricky, like adding your book to a 'want to read' list on Goodreads, make sure to post a video, template, or image tutorial.
- Create a space on your website, a Google Drive or a Dropbox folder with all of the materials they'll need in it.
- Pre-write tweets.
- Supply lists of hashtags.
- Have pre-written blog posts and interviews ready to go.
- Make it easy for your team to share images, and have a wide range of attractive options for them to choose from (turning their social media feed into a repetitive billboard won't do you or them any favours).

View this not as an opportunity for you to promote your book, but for you to entertain your readers, and make a valuable contribution to your team's social media engagement.

How can you thank your street team?

Here are some ideas for exclusive content and rewards for your street team:

- First access to Advance Reader Copies (ARCs)
- Early access to short stories, prequels etc.
- Opportunity to be beta readers for future novels
- Sneak peeks at covers and title reveals
- Excerpts from future books
- Bonus book-related content e.g. printable artwork, maps, bookmarks etc.
- Other content e.g. writing/blogging tip sheets etc.
- Early/exclusive access to content on author site
- Promotion of team members' blogs and social media accounts on your channels
- Shoutouts/thankyous in Acknowledgements sections of your books
- Bonuses like character and setting backgrounds
- Previews of works-in-progress
- Book launch events
- Street team only webinar
- Giveaways for their subscribers/followers

- An exclusive Facebook group
- Previews of future projects
- Get to help name future characters
- Exclusive coupons to share with family members/friends

A word of warning: While it might be tempting to offer gift cards or other incentives, not only may some of these enticements violate Amazon's terms of service (being potentially seen as a 'fee-for-review' arrangement), as [Probst](#) warns, persuading readers to join your team primarily for the freebies will likely attract the wrong sort of person. You want team members who are motivated by getting more of your work.

More information

You can find all of the blog posts I referred to in preparing this guide (and more as I come across them!) on my [Street Team Pinterest board](#).

If you're interested in joining my street team (and seeing all the new ideas I try out!), or think I might be interested in joining yours, please visit [Sarah's Street Team](#).

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