

Dan Shehori on how to sell yourself to the media



Daniel Shehori and his brother, Steven, right, have taken a break from comedy writing to launch their new book; a Do-it-yourself guide for artists and entrepreneurs on how to become their own publicists.

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Not for nothing do the brothers Daniel and Steven Shehori call their business Sweat Equity Publicity. The two comedy writers have toiled away for years, perfecting the art of promotion. And now, they've written a book on everything they've learned.

Checkily titled *Media Whore*, the thin but potent paperback is a DIY guide for artists and entrepreneurs on how to become their own publicists.

The Globe and Mail spoke to Daniel about the claim that no one is better equipped to sell your idea than you.

I have to ask: Are you trying to put yourself out of a job?

Publicity was something Steven and I never intended to do. To be honest, I'd rather go back to just writing comedy. This has been a distraction, over years. I'm doing more of it than creative work. I'd like to switch that back.

Okay, but the notion that people can be their own best publicist, you're sincere about that, right?

Absolutely. I truly believe, and we say this in the book over and over again, that it's in people's best interests to do publicity themselves. It's cool when Second City or another big company wants to hire us. But if you're an up-and-coming artist or entrepreneur, I think the media would rather hear from you than me.

I would disagree. I give more attention to a pitch from a professional publicist than one from a self-promoter.

Okay. Well, for example, I'm working with the filmmakers of a new environmental documentary *RiverBlue*. It's something they have spent years being in the trenches of the subject. They need me to introduce them to people like you, but they have a passion and an energy about the project that I can't provide. I think there's a disconnect of competence, and to do something one way just because it's been done that way traditionally. But I know what you're saying and I appreciate you referring to my brother and I as professional.

You have experience in this, because you and your brother began as your own publicists. You're established now, but how effective were you in the beginning?

We were completely ignored. People, when they did bother to get back to us, were like: "No." It took time. But then we got an article in *Now Magazine*. For a comedian in this city, that's a cool thing. When it first happened, people asked us how we did it. Well, we just asked them over and over. And it happened.

So, persistence is the key?

Not just that. Steve writes most of the press releases. Over time, he's written thousands. He's worked it into a science. Also, I asked a lot of questions. We're speaking now. You're going to go back to your office and there will be a bunch of e-mails from people like me.

How do you decide on who you will get back to?

If it's from someone I'm not familiar with, the subject heading. It can't be vague or funny or anything other than a succinct pitch in itself.

You talk about this in your book.

Exactly. The subject should be a mini press release, under 10 words. We even encourage people to start with one word. The word will come to you quickly and you will build from that. As for the press release itself, if you haven't very clearly expressed what it is you're pitching in the first paragraph, then you're lost. We've talked to the media.

They love to unload on what they do and don't like when it comes to press releases.

May I unload?

Be my guest.

Okay, I don't like attachments. It's just one more step to get to the news release, for one thing. And if it's a large file, it clogs up my inbox.

That's understandable. Also, if you don't know the sender, you're less likely to open up the attachment. So, over time, that's something we learned. So we'll structure the press release now so that you don't have to open anything.

Would you have written this book 10 years ago? The way social media has taken off, it must be easier now to be your own publicist, isn't it?

Well, 10 years ago we wouldn't have had the confidence to do this book. But I'd like to think the things we're presenting in the book would have been relevant 50 years ago and they'll be relevant 50 years from now, as well. It's about reaching out to another human being. It's about appealing to them, whatever the device.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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