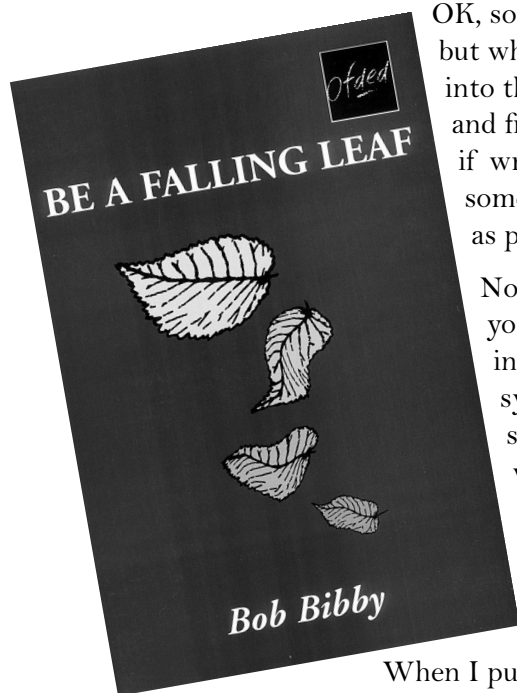


## MARKETING FOR SELF PUBLISHERS GOING TO MARKET BOB BIBBY

*“You have to be bright to write a book but you have to be a genius to sell it.”* So runs an old saying and it contains a lot of truth. Major publishers invest huge amounts of money and energy in marketing the books they produce, so it’s only reasonable that you should invest similarly.



OK, so you don’t have the financial clout of huge publishing companies but what you do have is your unique product: that book you’ve sweated into the small hours to write, that book you’ve ignored your family and friends to write, that book you’ve wanted all your life to write. So, if writing it is so important to you, then the least you can do is spend some time and energy in marketing it so that as many people read it as possible.

Now, you may be wishing you hadn’t started reading this, because you’re rather shy, rather introverted, not too keen on the limelight, in fact that’s why you’re a writer and not a salesperson. I sympathise. That’s true for me too. But, when I read a book by someone, I have a picture in my mind’s eye of the sort of person who has written that book. It may not be an accurate picture of that person, but it is a picture of the writer of that book. It is you the writer that is going to market, not you the mother, you the stamp-collector, or you the argumentative late-night wine-imbiber.

When I published my first crime novel, *Be a Falling Leaf*, I had to decide who Bob Bibby the writer was and create that brand. What follows are my notes on ‘How to market your book’. They are not exhaustive and they may not all work for you. But they are based on my real experience of self publishing four crime novels and in marketing myself as a writer of three travel narratives.

### CREATING A BRAND

#### *Publishing Imprint*

So, you’ve written your book, you’ve decided to self publish it, and you’ve found a printer who will produce the agreed number of copies at a price that seems reasonable. That printer will have helped you acquire an ISBN, agree a price for the book and put a barcode on each copy. But what is your corporate identity? What is your brand?

The easiest way to create a brand is to choose a publishing imprint. You can’t choose Penguin or HarperCollins because someone’s already picked those, so choose something that’s unique to you and your book (and maybe books, because surely you’re not going to settle for just the one, are you?). I chose Pierrepont Press for my crime novels, because Albert Pierrepont was the last hangman in Britain and that seemed appropriate. It also allowed me to create a noose as the Pierrepont logo and the strapline ‘Don’t hang up’.

✓ *Select a publishing imprint, logo and strapline.*

### *Writer Branding*

Now you've created a brand for your book, you're nearly ready to start marketing but there's just one more bit of branding to be done: on you as the writer. You will have already begun this when you wrote the blurb for the book-jacket and the photograph of yourself that's on the back cover. But how will you look to any journalist who comes to call, or any bookshop staff you visit, or any potential buyers? Think about it: have you ever seen a picture of Terry Pratchett without his hat on? Or of Bill Bryson without his beard? Or of Jacqueline Wilson without her glasses and spiked-up hair?

The thing I bought when my first book came out was a white jacket for those very early photo shoots with local journalists. I still wear it every time I appear as a writer: at book signings, at readings or talks I give, and in photographs. Always it says 'This is Bob Bibby, Writer – Buy Me'.

✓ *Decide on how you will present yourself as a writer.*

### **DETERMINING YOUR MARKET**

There are thousands and thousands of books published in the UK every year, so how is your book going to stand out in this already-flooded marketplace? Why should anyone buy your book rather than someone else's? Who is going to buy your book?

#### *Friends and Relatives*

Let's start with you. You have relatives, you have friends, you have acquaintances. With any luck, you've got them altogether in your address book. They will all be curious to see this book you've been beavering away at for so long, so they are your first and most obvious market. You will want to give free copies to some of them; some of them (more than you expect) will want you to give free copies to them: resist the mean buggers! Even so, you can expect a reasonable amount of that immediate market to purchase your book.

✓ *Make a list of names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of all your friends, relatives and acquaintances.*

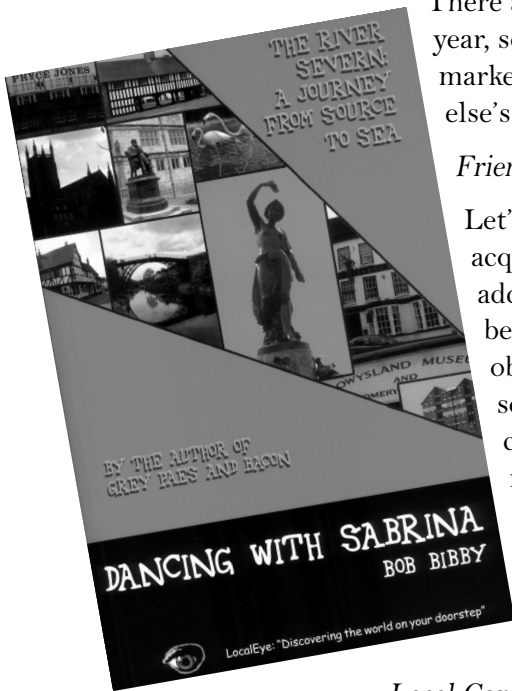
#### *Local Community*

##### (a) Media

Let's move on to the town you live in or near to. The term 'Local Writer' can be a two-edged sword: for some it's an immediate turn-off, whereas for others it evokes immediate interest. Remember, it is an important market for you.

First of all, you're more likely to receive free publicity in local newspapers, radio and TV than you are from the national media, so your brand has a better chance of being known locally. So, you need to identify all the media outlets in your area: newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations. For each one you need to find the name of the person who might be interested.

✓ *Make a list of names of all local media outlets, plus addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.*



## (b) Bookshops, etc.

Secondly, because of that publicity local people are more likely to have some knowledge of you when they are shopping for books. So, you need to identify all the local bookshops in your locality and other retail outlets that might be interested in stocking your books (I've tried newsagents, garages and garden centres, for example, with mixed success).

- ✓ *Make a list of names of all local bookshops and other possible retail outlets, plus addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.*

## (c) Libraries

Thirdly, again helped by the publicity generated, libraries in your vicinity are likely to be interested in stocking your books. So, you need to identify all the local major public libraries in your area and then find out the name of the person responsible for library purchasing for each one (NB don't bother with local branch libraries: all purchasing is done centrally, although branch librarians do usually have a say).

- ✓ *Make a list of names of all local public libraries, plus addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.*

## (d) Other market outlets

Fourthly, depending on the specific nature of your book, you need to ask yourself whether there are any other obvious markets for selling it locally, e.g. local museums, tourist information centres, hotels. I've used all of the latter for selling my travel books. My first travel narrative, *Grey Paes and Bacon*, about a walk around the Black Country, went down well in local museums and tourist information centres, while my third, *Special Offa*, has sold especially well through the Offa's Dyke Centre.

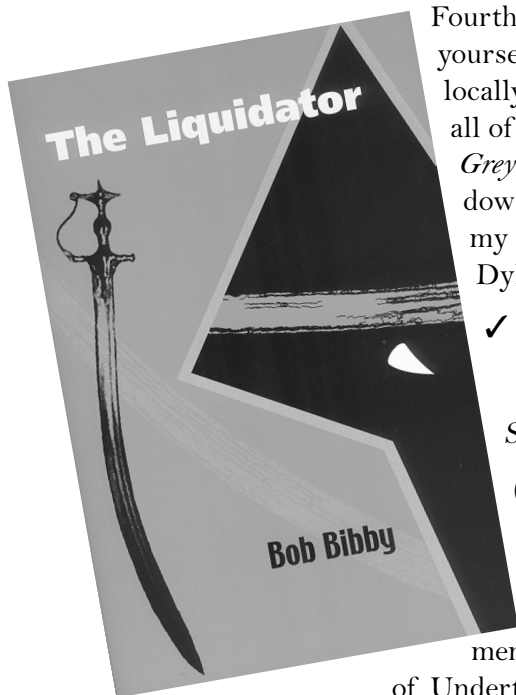
- ✓ *Make a list of names of all other local market outlets, plus addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.*

*Special Interest*

## (a) Organisations

It is likely that you are a member of some organisation, maybe local or maybe national, which mails its members periodically. Those members are likely to be interested in a book by a fellow-member: just imagine if you were a member of the British Society of Undertakers and found out that one of your colleagues in Aberdeen had written a murder novel! So, find out how you can get yourself into that mailing, either by the inclusion of a flyer, or by purchasing some advertising space, or by arranging for an article about you to appear in the newsletter. My fourth crime novel, *The Llareggub Experience*, has a very strong Dylan Thomas background so I got it on sale in the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea.

- ✓ *Identify organisations to which you belong for mailing, interviews, advertising, etc.*



## (b) Workplace

Whether or not you are currently in the workplace, you have a community that you have a special connection with regarding the people you work or have worked with. If it's a big company, then the potential audience for your book is great; if it's a small company, nevertheless you will have links with other small companies who know of you. Even that person who used to be in the next office to you and irritated you like mad with their stupid jokes will be interested in you and your book!

- ✓ *Make a list of named people in your workplace, plus addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.*

## (c) Other marketing opportunities

It is possible that your book has a specific feature that might make it appealing to certain sectors of the community. Books on local history rarely have an interest beyond their locality but a novel set elsewhere has an obvious appeal to that elsewhere (most copies of my second crime novel *Bird on the Wing* sold on the Isle of Skye, where it was set) and a book about walking has an obvious appeal to walkers (lengthy extracts from my book about walking Offa's Dyke, *Special Offa*, appeared in a free magazine published by the Wales Tourist Board called *Walking Wales*). My third crime novel, *The Liquidator*, has a background of a Wolverhampton Wanderers football match, so I paid for a small advertisement in the local fanzine.

- ✓ *Identify other marketing opportunities for your book.*

**PRE-PUBLICATION: PLANNING FOR THE MOMENT**

Now you have determined who your potential readers (and crucially buyers) are, you need to develop a marketing plan to lead you up to and beyond publication date.

*Publication Date*

First of all, decide a date for official publication. This doesn't have to be the day you receive copies of the book from your printer, but it must be a day when you can guarantee having the copies.

- ✓ *Select an official publication date.*

*Pre-Publication Publicity*

It's always a good idea to seek to generate some interest before your book actually appears. For instance, as I've suggested above, if you belong to some organisation with a newsletter, get them to run a piece about your forthcoming book (with date of publication). For my first crime novel, *Be a Falling Leaf*, I arranged for an association I am a member of to print an interview with me about my new career (my questions, my answers: that's how it's done!). I also arranged for the organisation I had recently been employed by to run a similar interview in its house journal.

- ✓ *Arrange for an article/interview in the newsletter of an organisation/company you belong to.*

### *Mail Order Flyers*

If you're thinking of trying to get mail orders, you will need to plan out and get printed a flyer with details of your book and an order form for potential buyers. Remember that your order form needs to include the address, phone number and email address of the buyer and the address to which orders should be sent. You will need to decide whether to charge for postage and packing, or whether to absorb such costs in your overall charge.

- ✓ *Plan a flyer for mail ordering.*

### *Advance Review Copies*

Do you know anyone who might write an advance review for use in your publicity – someone with special knowledge of your subject perhaps, or a local/national celebrity, or another writer? If so, send them an advance copy (do your own typescript – I always do mine as two-column on landscape in Point 10 font size) and ask for a review you can use. For *The Liquidator*, I got a local radio chat-show host, who was also President of the Wolves Supporters club, to do a review.

- ✓ *Send off advance review copies.*

### *Promotional Sheets*

You need to have prepared a promotional sheet for your book to accompany the specimen copies you intend to go for reviews or for library scrutiny. This should include the following information, laid out properly: title, author, ISBN, format (e.g. paperback), dimensions, publication date, price, number of pages. A brief description of the book, say about 200 words, and a further 50–60 words about the writer, including reference to previous titles, should then follow. Finally, give contact details.

- ✓ *Prepare promotional sheet.*

### *Business Forms*

If you're going to do this properly, you're going to have to have business stationery, delivery notes and invoices. Get blanks of these prepared in advance. I created my own on the computer: it's not difficult, but you need to find a way of keeping records of deliveries and of invoices sent. Some bookshops are notoriously slow in paying up.

- ✓ *Prepare all necessary business stationery.*

## **PUBLICATION: ANNOUNCING YOUR PRESENCE**

### *The Press Release*

The first piece of advice I read about marketing your own book was 'If you can write a book, you can write a press release'. And it's absolutely true. So here's a few tips about writing press releases.

First of all, work on a catchy title. My first crime novel, *Be a Falling Leaf*, concerned the murder of a school inspector, which is the job I was doing at the time, so my strapline was 'Inspector Turns to Crime'.

Your press release should be no more than one side of A4. The title and the first paragraph must catch the reader's interest, so include details of where you

are from and summarise your book succinctly and in a lively manner. Second and third paragraphs should embellish this, preferably including a quote either from you ('I'm really thrilled that my first book is about to appear') or from some tame noteworthy person, maybe one of your pre-reviewers.

Remember to put FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or EMBARGOED UNTIL ??? (publication date), plus phone contact details.

Press releases should be posted: don't fax or email them, as they get chucked immediately.

✓ *Prepare your press release.*

### *The Launch Party*

This is really just self-indulgence but you've given birth to this wonderful thing, your book, and it (and you) deserves a party, so book a room in your local pub, get the landlord/lady to lay on some sandwiches and invite your mates for a drink. Try inviting a local celebrity or bigwig to make a short speech (for my Isle of Skye crime book, *Bird on the Wing*; I got the local postmaster and the local band leader to turn up). Try inviting the local media: you never know, it may just be a free drink opportunity they can't turn down (for the same book I got the local radio producer to attend).

Yes, it will cost you a few bob, but you'll probably sell some books and the word of mouth will start from there. So do it!

✓ *Book a venue for your book launch and send invitations out.*

### *Mailings*

This is the really busy part of the operation because, once you've got your publication date arranged and your press release ready to go and your launch party set up, you need to be mailing all your contacts to start the selling process. Don't panic! It doesn't all have to be done at once but you need to be systematic.

#### (a) Bookshops and other retail outlets

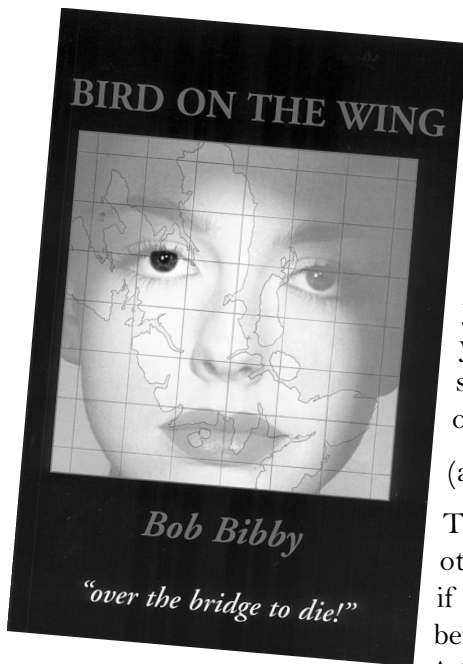
The most important contacts in the early stages are the bookshops and other retail outlets, because that's the first place that punters will go to if they've seen or heard about you in the local media. Write to them before the publication date, enclosing a copy of the promotional sheet.

A few days later, phone each and every one of them, tell them about the other promotional plans (press release, advance reviews, launch party, etc.), ask them if they've seen your letter and if they are interested in stocking copies. You'll need to be persuasive because they get a lot of requests but most local bookshops, in my experience, will take a few copies at 35% discount and on a sale or return basis. When you receive orders, agree a delivery date and prepare a delivery note to accompany the order.

✓ *Get orders from bookshops and other retail outlets.*

#### (b) Mail order flyers

If you've decided on this marketing strategy, now is the time to send out all your flyers to friends, relatives, acquaintances, work colleagues, organisation mailing lists, etc. This is a costly business, so use 2nd class mail and the cheapest envelopes you can find (always buy in bulk). Then



make sure you have enough packets of the right size ready for when the deluge of orders rolls in! How can they resist?

✓ *Post mail order flyers.*

(c) Libraries

Less urgent, because their ordering mechanisms are slower, but not less important is contacting the local libraries. I always send a copy of the book, together with a promotional sheet, and a covering letter saying that I will sell them the book at the full price but that, if they order five or more, they can have a 35% discount – seems to work! No need usually to follow up, unless you hear nothing within about a month.

✓ *Get orders from libraries.*

(d) Other market outlets

Assuming you've identified other possible stockists of your books, now is the time to treat them exactly like the bookshops – send a preliminary letter and promotional sheet, then follow up with a phone call and agree delivery times.

✓ *Get orders from other market outlets.*

## POST-PUBLICATION: KEEPING SALES GOING

This is the bit they never tell you in the books. You tend to believe that once you've gone through all the stages of producing your book, announcing its arrival, and making it available, it will sell itself. Unless you're very lucky, this simply ain't so. OK, so your initial sales will come from the launch of the book on to an unsuspecting public, but, if you want it to keep selling, you are going to have to do some real hard work.

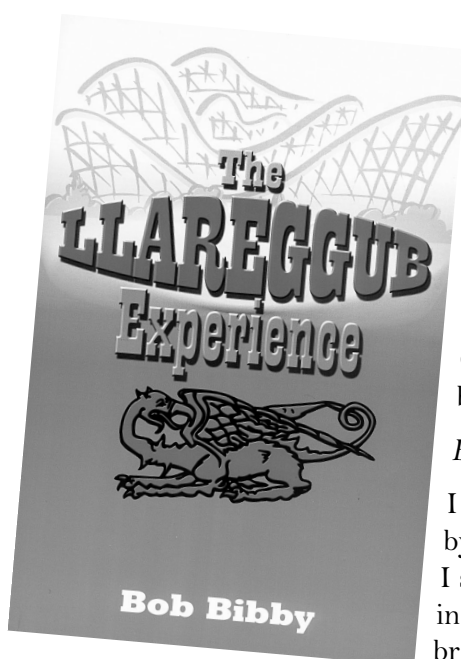
### *Keeping Records*

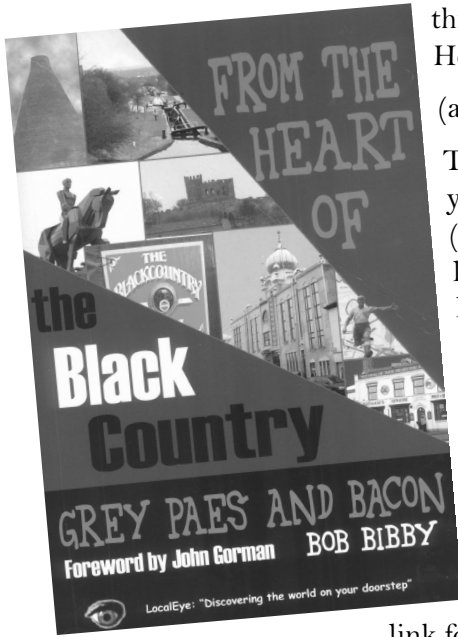
It is crucial that you develop a good system for keeping track of all your book sales, partly to ensure you get paid and partly because buyers of one book might want more copies or might want future books.

I keep separate databases for mail order purchasers, for libraries, and for bookshops, all with full details of names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. For mail order buyers this is because I know they are a likely audience for subsequent books. For libraries it's because I need to check that payments have been made (public libraries are normally dependent on their town/county treasurer's department, which can be a slow process). For bookshops it's because I need to make a judgement as to when to send an invoice (NB if you're using the big chains like Waterstones, WH Smith and Ottakars, you need to send to their main office, not to the individual bookshops).

### *Blatant Self-Promotion*

I had never heard of this until I discovered an American site designed by writers to help each other in marketing their books. Remember what I said earlier about you as a brand? This is where you as brand comes in. In order to keep your sales going, you have to develop yourself as a brand and get potential readers interested in you and your book(s)





through blatant self promotion, or BSP as it's known in the USA. Here's a few of the things that I've done.

(a) Bookmarks

This is a surprisingly cheap way of advertising yourself. Design yourself a bookmark, get your local printer to make you 1000 of them (or 5000 if you can afford it) and give them away. Stuff one in every letter you send out. Insert one in every book you deliver to bookshops, libraries, museums, individuals. Leave them lying around in your local pub or cafe. If you don't know how to design one, just look at the things that Amazon send out or ask your printer for advice.

(b) Websites

Some writers swear by websites; others, like me, are more dubious. Yes, I have a website ([www.bobbibby.co.uk](http://www.bobbibby.co.uk)) and no, it didn't cost an arm and a leg to create. Yes, it tells you pretty much everything about each of my books and how to purchase them and provides a link for contacting me. But I don't know how much good it has done in terms of direct sales. I've had a few contacts through it, usually from people from my past who want to know if 'Bob Bibby the Writer' is the same person they knew millions of years ago.

The problem with websites, so people tell me, is that unless they change regularly, people stop going to them, and I keep forgetting to add in new information. Besides, in the slow gestation of a book, there's not an awful lot to write about. I'm still thinking about ways of improving my website.

Of course, if you're an ICT wiz, you can build your own, but then maybe that's what you want to spend your life doing. Whatever, if you have a website, you need to publicise it, so make sure that your email signature includes it, that it's included on your business stationery and on any other publicity you send out (press releases, bookmarks, invoices, delivery notes, etc.).

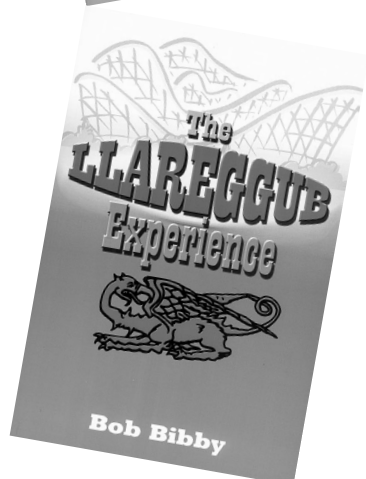
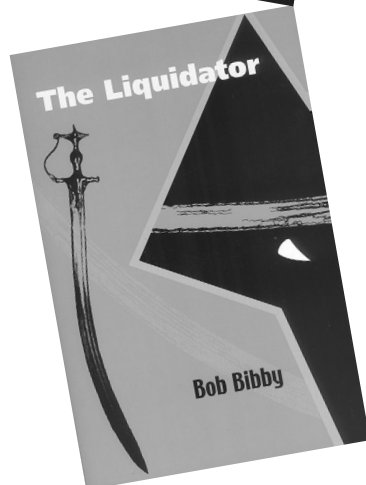
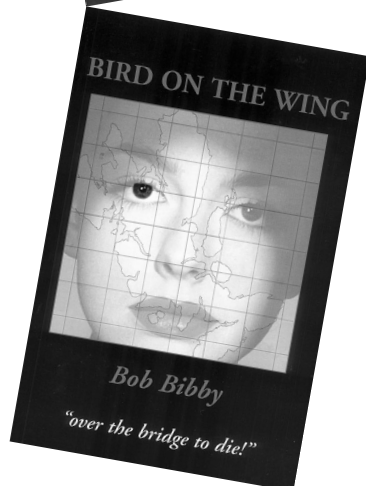
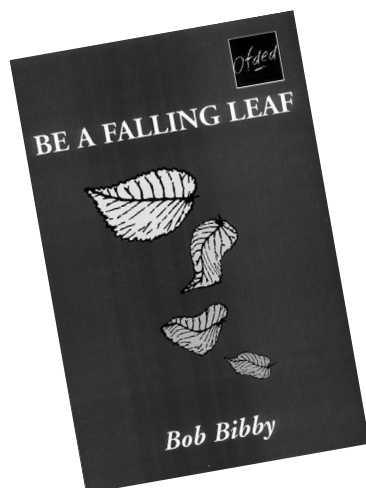
(c) Bookshop signings

Try to persuade your local bookshop to let you do a book-signing session. I've done a couple of those in the past but tend to fight shy of them nowadays, if only because, of the three people who spoke to me on the last occasion, two of them only came to ask if they could have a biscuit!

If you're going down this route, you need to be more active than I was. Don't just sit behind a table with your books and a plate of biscuits. You'll feel like some kind of museum exhibit anyway, so get up and walk about. Take something with you to give away, bookmarks are a good idea, then tell people who you are and ask them if they'd like to have a look at your books. If you get them this far, offer to personalise the book with a dedication if they want to purchase. Then, and only then, give them a biscuit!

(d) More press releases

Don't think that your initial press release announcing the launch of your book to an overexcited public will be enough. The book needs continual plugging, so find occasions when follow-up press releases might be sent. For example, I've sent them at particular milestones, such as the sale of



1000 copies or hitting high spots in some category of Amazon's sales chart,\* or when I've had an email from some distant part of the universe (get someone you know to send one), or when some other promotional activity has been successful (e.g. when Walking Wales published lengthy extracts of *Special Offa*).

\* Amazon's sales charts can be very deceptive. Remember, there are lots of categories and sub-categories. For instance, *Special Offa* features in the Travel Writing Wales sub-category of Travel Writing, whereas my second travel narrative, *Dancing with Sabrina*, features in the Travel Writing United Kingdom sub-category. Selling three or four books in a week can move you an amazing number of places higher. Unscrupulous writers have been known to organise their mates to buy four copies on the same day, thus propelling their book to a high chart position. Shameful behaviour!

#### (e) Advertisements

Buying advertising space in most local newspapers is expensive but it's worth inquiring about advertising rates in free newspapers, in local magazines, and in other smaller circulation issues, such as parish newsletters, fanzines, community magazines, church newsletters, etc. I bought advertising space for *Bird on the Wing*, my Isle of Skye novel, for three issues in a free newspaper produced for holiday-makers in the Hebrides.

#### Giving Talks

Remember what I said about you as a brand? Well, this is where you as the brand can really make a difference. I have come to the view that people are more likely to buy books by someone they know a little. That's why they buy books by celebrities – why else would someone buy Ginger Spice's autobiography? So I now spend significant amounts of my time, white jacket and all, giving talks about one or other of my books to audiences in my area.

You'll be surprised how many groups there are out there desperate for speakers. Rotary clubs meet weekly and give you dinner as well, usually rubber chicken; women's institutes and townswomen's guilds meet monthly and do a good line in home-made cakes; many churches have fellowship groups; there are loads of senior citizens' groups; local history groups abound. Believe me, there is no shortage. And once you're on the circuit, word spreads rapidly.

You need to work out your talk, of course, and, if you're not a natural public speaker you may need help but remember, it is you as brand that is performing, not that shy person who actually wrote the book. So learn a few jokes, practise reading a few juicy bits from your book, and go out and sell yourself and your books. You'll be surprised how you can keep sales going. I reckon I've now given my talk on my first travel book, *Grey Paes and Bacon*, over 100 times (always in the white jacket, of course) and just ordered a further reprint.

I make a modest charge for my talk, which does little more than cover my travel costs, but my aim, as I keep telling myself, even when I return home with the same number of books I set out with, is to sell, sell, sell.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

I spent much of my life as a teacher who always wanted to be a writer. Well, now I am one. I currently have seven titles on the market, an eighth one is at present being readied for market, and two further ones are at various stages of gestation. When I began, I never realised that I would have to learn so many new skills. Naively, I believed that, once I had written the masterpiece, the rest would look after itself. I know now that, unless you're extremely fortunate, this isn't going to happen.

Major publishers like to entice us with stories about J.K. Rowling writing her first Harry Potter book at a cafe table when she was living on 50p a week, or of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* being rejected by 7000 publishers before it was finally accepted, but these are all part of the publicity that publishers engage in to get us to buy their books. Unless you're very lucky, this probably won't happen to you. Yes, some self published books do get taken up by major publishers. Yes, some books do sell themselves. But for many of us, marketing our books is the only way we're going to sell them. The advice I've given above should help you.

Finally, this whole experience can be and should be a lot of fun. I've met loads of people I wouldn't normally meet, I've developed presentational skills I never knew I had, and I've sold loads of books. And my white jacket is just back from the dry cleaners ready for some more action.

*Carpe diem!*

**Bob Bibby**

**February 2005**

(Find out more at [www.bobbibby.co.uk](http://www.bobbibby.co.uk))

PS Notice how I have cunningly used writing this article as a way of publicising every one of my books. Want to buy?