

LIBRARIES – THE NEW DATING AGENCIES FOR READERS AND WRITERS

Bethany Clark is a public relations consultant and editor. She is passionate about Australian literature and helps authors, publishers, booksellers, libraries and national reading and literacy organisations to build their profiles. With promotion on INCITE's mind this month, we asked Bethany for her romance tips for libraries seeking meaningful relationships with authors.

THE READING HOUR IS ON TUESDAY 19 AUGUST 6–7PM. IT'S A PERFECT TIME TO HOST AN AUTHOR EVENT!

With the ongoing closure of bookstores and rapid growth of online and offshore publishing, libraries now more than ever play an important role in connecting readers with writers. Some may remember when the match-maker's role was filled solely by bookstores, with many libraries pleading for access to big name authors – or any authors at all.

But as the market constricts, more publishers and writers are seeking alternative networks to provide them with what bookstores used to. This offers great opportunities for libraries to host more author events, create dynamic programs, and foster those all-important romances between readers and their favourite – or soon to be favourite – writers.

But what makes a successful library-based author event? Here are a few tips to keep in mind.

Below: A fine romance.



RESEARCH

Clever matchmakers take the time to think about their customers' needs before they line up prospective partners. The same goes for successful event hosts. Keep your customers front and centre and choose an author for your target audience (not because they were once on TV or you're their greatest fan!).

Think honestly about the author's benefits. Will they meet readers, convert new readers, or sell a couple of books? Or speak to six people who haven't heard of them? Be up front early or consider a fee.

BOOKSELLER LOVE

Book sales aren't core business for libraries but they are for everyone else in the publishing chain, and are absolutely critical for any successful author event. Establish a relationship with your local bookseller. Cross-promote each other's business, work with them to order event stock early, and update them with bookings to adjust orders accordingly. Ensure book sales run smoothly and you will find authors vie to work with you.

MOOD LIGHTING

Much like a date, a successful literary event is all about creating the mood. Choose your venue with care. Be honest – is your library's backroom really the best venue, or would you get more attendees at a school, winery or pub? Don't be scared to venture outside the library – remember you are more likely to reach new customers/patrons if you do!

Catering works wonders in competing for people's discretionary time, giving them multiple reasons to choose you. Investing in sandwiches or a little wine and cheese is well worth it if it creates return business or a great event.

ASK A DATE

Match-make with local clubs, schools or businesses and invite them. Brag ceaselessly: create posters and plaster the neighborhood, send out a media release, add it to your websites and social media, and tell your teammates to actively promote it.

HOSTING

Set up chairs for the number of bookings you've received (you've been taking them right, even if it's a free event?). Check your microphone and any other requested technology is working, add tables for the bookseller and the signings, and draft a running sheet to introduce and thank your author and bookseller and announce books are for sale and signing.

Then sit back and watch the romance unfold.

In short, remember the best author events are where all participants feel the love – the library by engaging with their customers, the author by meeting readers and selling books, the bookseller and publisher by making a living, and the audience by finding a new romance – with the author's books that is!