

## Promoting the Heck Out of Something Without Annoying Everyone

Hello beautiful people and thank you for checking out this month's awesome module from **SMFA Essentials**. We're so glad you're here, and I'm stoked to talk to you about some ninja moves in the world of self-promotion. Let's dive on in, shall we?

Probably one of my favorite self-promoters is showrunner, writer, and director Jeff Greenstein. I don't just adore him because he taught me how to play poker in the '80s (when he was a spec writer for shows like *Mr. Belvedere*, *The Charmings*, and *Charles in Charge*) but because he's smart, he breathes this business, and he has created dialogue for some of the most iconic characters on television (seriously, check out [his IMDb page](#)).

Jeff isn't actually a self-promoter. Not by any stretch. Yet, he uses Twitter to bring gifts to his fans—building his fanbase by doing so—every time an episode of something he wrote or directed is airing.

By opening up his Twitter feed to "ask me anything" type convos in the hour leading up to these episodes airing (once on the east coast, again on the west), he invests a bit of time engaging with folks who want to know everything from "What is Nicollette Sheridan really like?" to "Did you really create the Janice character on *Friends*?" Luckily, they also ask him about his record collection, his favorite black and white camera equipment, and parenting. He answers all the questions. He gives "yes, and..." to the jumping-off points he is provided. All the while, he is reminding everyone who follows him (or who retweets his replies to their followers) that he has a show on the glowy box right now.

It's active. It's engaging. It's brand-building. It's non-annoying promotion.

I want you to ask yourself what you can add to your promotional activities. What *value* can you bring to those who count themselves among your fans? What could you share with the buyers that would be seen as fun, non-threatening, and *additive* to something that otherwise would be "all about you" and promoting your play, your guest appearance on a sitcom, your Kickstarter campaign, your festival screening?

Do you have behind-the-scenes photos that don't violate your NDA from the shoot? Can you disclose some fun facts about working with a legendary director? Any non-spoiler teasers you can share could be fair game, here. Be smart about it, of course! There are horror stories of actors being cut out of episodes after they've wrapped because of what they've Facebooked about a key storyline. Don't let that be you, but do try to come up with fun shares that add a little *oomph* to your promotional efforts.

Maybe there's a souvenir from the shoot that you could offer up to someone via random drawing among those who comment on your blog post about your time on that set? Perhaps there are "tips from your tier" you could share with a newbie actor who doesn't know a honeywagon from a double banger. How about if you become known as the actor who always mentions the casting director when

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celebrating a booking! Think about how many fans the actors who thank the casting directors make during awards shows! So few people \*do it\* that when it happens, the entire casting community thinks, "Oh, cool. I need to cast Kevin Spacey immediately," when he voices a tribute to Debbie Zane.

When you think about self-promotion, if you break out in hives, it's likely because you've—as a consumer of others' self-promotional tactics—felt your skin crawl when one of those over-promotey blowhards blasts your inbox, your Facebook, your Twitter stream, with yet another "opportunity" to see their crappy short film online. Well, add to all of that promotion a bunch of postcards in the snail mail, emails sent to every email address we've ever had, and insipid text-to-landline spam blasts of shows, screenings, and showcases... and then you may come close to understanding how buyers feel, receiving such contact.

Of course, if you're concerned you're going to annoy someone with your promotional efforts, you're probably already going to err on the side of caution, of respect, of very mild promo action. Yay! Unfortunately, it's the folks with very little sense of "other awareness" who will not consider (or care) that there is a line they can (and do) easily cross in self-promotion. Because you obviously care, here are some ways to "up" your game, when it comes to creating meaningful connections via promotional contact.

## Understand Your Audience

As with all opportunities to put your goodies out there, your promotional ones come with loads of potential research. Who's your audience? Are you doing mailers to all casting directors in Los Angeles? (Oh, if so, please consider targeting your mailing to the top dozen or so who are most likely to cast your type in current or future projects.) Are you sending email to everyone in your address book? (Please don't. Instead, do one, nice, big email—using BCC for the love of all that is holy—to your contacts inviting them to "opt in" to your mailing list. Use MailChimp for some free, easy-to-use mailing list management. Then send updates to folks who really want to receive them.)

Are you using social networking sites as your publicist? Hoo, boy! If you are, I beg you to read Chris Brogan's excellent article called "[Pirate Moves: Promoting Without Being That Guy](#)." He provides a lovely list of ten tips on building relationships in social networking environments *before* getting into the whole promo thing. I love it. I especially love the picnic analogy Brogan explains, as taught to him by Yahoo's Conn Fishburn. I wrote about a similar "vibe" in online communities (specifically message boards) years ago in a post called "[Message Board Culture and Etiquette](#)."

Bottom line: Know your audience. Know your peer group. Know your readers, your listeners, your followers, your fans, your friends, your buyers, your contacts... whatever! KNOW the receivers of your message or you risk alienating them through your lack of care in communicating with them as the unique critters they are.

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## Read the Signs

If you're posting on Twitter, you have a very simple way of learning what's too much promo and what's too little. You'll over-share and lose followers. You'll under-share and fans will reach out to ask *when* you're going to talk about the upcoming screening you've not yet mentioned. It's a lovely, self-correcting-opportunity-filled social networking platform. And all it takes is both being aware of what the audience is asking for and reacting quickly to those requests. Same goes for non-social-networking-related audiences!

Do you find you get called at certain casting offices after doing a postcard mailing? You get in the office and hear, "Yeah, I remembered you from that workshop (or that preread last year or that showcase or whatever) and then your postcard came across right when we were looking for someone like you. It was great timing!" No, it doesn't happen often, but when it does, you've been given a great piece of data about that office and how postcards work for them. Log that in your show bible! It's gold.

When you're at a networking event, how are you at reading people's faces when the conversation turns from preliminary chitchat to your launch into "all about me and the two lines I have in the latest Judd Apatow film"? If you're so deeply locked into your own promo bubble that you can't see their eyes glaze over, can't register that they're bored to tears after having initially liked you as a person, or can't notice they're starting to make signals to their wingman to extract them from your company, you're not down with the delicate art of self-promotion.

Networking is all about "yes, and..." and if you're really *listening* and not just going into your "self-promotional script" because you're so nervous or unaware or ill-prepared to simply discuss it organically, you could be turning off your audience. They'll see you coming at the next party and say, "Oh, crap. Here comes that media whore. Get me outta here."

## Buzz Beats Butts

Of course, I talked about this in the MP3, but it's worth repeating: Sometimes, buzz is more valuable than getting folks out to experience your "thing" (hence "butts," as in "butts in seats"). Think about how certain you are that a particular restaurant is THE BEST, yet you've never eaten there. How sure you are that a certain type of car is the top of the line, yet you've never even test-driven one. How you just *\*know\** that a book is a can't-put-it-down page-turner even though you've not yet picked it up yourself. This happens due to buzz.

Rather than busting your hump to try and get folks to do something (click a link to watch a reel, donate to a crowdsourcing campaign, attend a play, show up for a screening), share the great reviews that those who HAVE shown up have doled out thus far about whatever it is you're promoting. Get the word out that you've got something GREAT going on, because when that becomes the goal,

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getting more folks to come out and experience that great thing becomes a bonus. Think Malcolm Gladwell and *The Tipping Point*. You want to be on the lips of others who love to gab about "what's hot." Don't worry that they don't kick in five bucks for your short film at Kickstarter. Celebrate that they got the word out to 20 others, some of whom donated and still others of whom are now eager to see the finished film, because they're excited about what you're building.

Just like I don't want you focusing on those who \*are\* turned off by your promotional efforts (and some will be; it can't NOT happen), I don't want you focusing on those who don't take action due to your requests that they do so. Celebrate how awesome it is that you've got something really fab happening. Treat it all like that Coca-Cola billboard I so love mentioning. (Y'know, that bit of brand management that's going on, on the side of the road? It's not so you'll slam on the brakes, pull a U-Turn, and go buy a Coke. It's so you'll remember, the next time you're in the market for a tasty beverage, that Coke is it!) You're sharing good news. You're celebrating moving forward with a project. You're letting the buyers know that you've not left this business and that you're still doing something proactive, today.

If you really wanna ninja this up, get down with [HARO](#) (Help a Reporter Out). A friend of mine (y'all hear me talk about her all the time, probably—Colleen Wainwright, of "Are you SURE it's impossible?" fame) saw a listing on HARO \*years\* ago for a casting director to be a source for an article in E! Online. She flung me the info and I contacted the reporter, saying, "Hey. Journalist-slash-casting director, here. I know how to give good soundbite. How can I help?" And a beautiful relationship was born.

I am \*the\* go-to for all issues of independent film casting, overseas bankability of actors, and brand-building for growing webseries into studio properties for not only E! Online but also for the *LA Times* and Yahoo! Movies. And when I needed to get a little \*heat\* for my own IndieGoGo campaign, I reached out to my reporter friend and said, "Now I need YOU." Boom. Instant media coverage.

What do you know that no one else knows? What cool hobby do you have that could help \*up\* your profile, just by turning you into a source for a reporter who needs a quick quote now and then about something you know very well? Don't look at it as an acting connection; look at it as a relationship builder that gets your name in the press, ups your Googleability, and gives you an edge when you ARE ready to cash that chip in and ask for some coverage of your own.

Long-haul picture, here, folks. It's way ninja!

Please submit your questions for our follow-up MP3 immediately, so we can get you covered before we wrap up this month's interactive module! We're excited to hear what questions you may have about your promotional efforts. Send your email to: [ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com](mailto:ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com) with the subject line: **Promoting the Heck Out of Something Question**, so we can easily get you in

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the queue to help out with your questions, before we head into next month's awesome interactive **SMFA Essentials** module. Hooray!

I hope you're feeling more excited and inspired by your creative career every day, beautiful people! Next month's interactive module is **Rock Your Logline**, and it's filled with awesome. Whether you use it in your bio, at your website, in your social networking "about me" space, or in meetings with buyers who are trying understand exactly how to cast you, your logline sets the intention for your career trajectory. So, let's rock it!

We are ridiculously lucky to have a life in which we get to live our dreams, every day. Being blissed out, confident, and capable of achieving your every goal along the way is totally do-able. Unless you're SURE it's impossible, folks, every little dream you hear whispering to you is absolutely, totally attainable. The *Self-Management for Actors* principles **work**. **Bonnie Gillespie is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs.** She casts SAG-AFTRA indie projects such as the zombie smash hit *BITE ME*, which made the leap from web to TV with **Lionsgate** in 2012. Bonnie's weekly column, **The Actors Voice**, runs at Actors Access and her podcast, **The Work**, is available on iTunes. Her books include *Casting Qs: A Collection of Casting Director Interviews*, *Acting Qs: Conversations with Working Actors*, *SMFA: The Ninja Within*, and *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business*, which has been named one of **The Top Ten Best Books on Acting Ever Written** and featured at the Tom Cruise actor resource blog. Bonnie regularly facilitates seminars based on this top-selling book and has traveled internationally—to demystify the casting process and the business side of pursuing an artistic career—as a guest instructor at colleges, universities, actors' unions, and private acting studios. Bonnie has been featured on *Good Morning America*, *BBC Breakfast*, UTV-Ireland, ARD-1 Germany, *Sunrise* Australia, CBC Radio One, BBC Radio 5, E! Online, and in the *LA Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. To hop on Bonnie's mailing list, visit [BonnieGillespie.com](#).



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