

Join Julie Livingston, founder and president of WantLeverage Communications and host of PR Patter, a series of talks focusing on relevant topics in marketing and public relations today, in conversation with Erin Galloway, Director of Publicity for Berkley, a romance imprint with Penguin Random House. Erin has worked with many bestselling authors including Allie Hazelwood, Helen Wong, Carley Fortune, and more and holds an M.S. in Publishing from Pace University.

Livingston and Galloway discuss all things book publishing, how publicity in book publishing is specialized, trends in book publishing genres, and what it takes to be morning show material as an author.

“Book publishing is its own unique ecosystem within the entertainment and communications world. Our publicity is unique because of that as well. We don't have the most glamorous product when you compare us to high-end luxury goods, beauty products— some of what I think of as the most popular markets to work within when it comes to PR. But what we do have is a product that people feel very strongly about and typically have strong emotional resonance with.”

“Every author has something special, whatever that might be, if that's their background story, how they became an author. If it is why the writing is unique— every single author has something special. As the publicist, it's your job to figure out what that is.”

“What are our aims for this particular book? Who is the audience? How are we going to reach them? What will our targets be? You know, what kind of major newspaper coverage are we looking for? Are there any specific podcasts that we think might be of interest? Is this a book that has morning show potential n pr radio potential? Could this author potentially write a really interesting essay for a major outlet? Who are the .com outlets that are going to be interested? Is this an Oprah Daily book? Is this an Esquire book?”

“Romance is a comfort, it's a bomb, it's an escape. It's a way to feel like there will be a happy ending when times are dark and difficult. It's a wonderful way to just feel better about the world that you live in, to read a great book where someone's going to fall in love. Their career is going to go well, their family relationships will be working, whether that's family of origin or family of choice. And, you know, you get to experience the happiness in someone's life. And at a time when we were all feeling pervasive fear and anxiety.”

—Erin Galloway

Transcript:

Julie Livingston:

Hi everyone. I'm Julie Livingston here for another installment of PR Patter, I'm so delighted today to have my special guest, Erin Galloway. She's the Director of Publicity for Berkeley, a Penguin Random House Imprint. Erin has worked with many bestselling authors, including Carly Fortune, Jasmine Guillory, Alli Hazelwood, Jane Ann Crez, Helen Wong, Nalani Singh, and Jesse Suto. She holds a M.S. in Publishing from Pace University and counts herself lucky to

have made a career out of falling in love with great books. Ugh, how amazing is that? And telling others why they should love great books too. Her passions include food and wine, both of which are great accompanied by a wonderful book. Erin, thanks so much for being here with me.

Erin Galloway:

Julie, thank you for having me today.

Julie Livingston:

So many people often ask me if I do book publicity and you know, I say, no, I don't because it's a very specialized field. Why is it so specialized? What makes it a little different than the traditional PR work that myself and others do?

Erin Galloway:

We always joke that we have such an insular industry, and it's really not a joke. It's very true. Book publishing is its own unique ecosystem within the entertainment and communications world. Our publicity is unique because of that as well. You know, we don't have the most glamorous product when you compare us to high-end luxury goods like beauty— some of what I think of is the most popular markets to work within when it comes to PR. What we do have is a product that people feel very strongly about and typically have strong emotional resonance with. I like to think of books as a way that people connect. When you think about it, if you're a reader, this book that you're using— you bring it into your home, you bring it into your bedroom, maybe your child's bedroom. It's a very emotional experience to read a book, especially a novel. And you're allowing that author into your personal world and your personal life.

Julie Livingston:

It's an intimate experience. I never really thought of it like that, but it's true.

Erin Galloway:

It certainly is. I think that makes it special and unique, and we have to keep that emotional experience in mind when we are promoting a novel or any other kind of book.

Julie Livingston:

How does it all happen, Erin? I mean, with authors you work with a lot. You work mainly in the romance book space, which I think is phenomenal. For my first question— how has the pandemic affected sales of romance novels? People have just been so stressed. We are in the midst of a mental health crisis and I want to hear from you how romance novels provide an escape.

Erin Galloway:

Oh, absolutely. There's an old saying in our industry that when the economy goes down, romance sales go up. And that's quite true. That's been true for decades now. Romance is a comfort, it's a bomb, it's an escape. It's a way to feel like there will be a happy ending when times are dark and difficult. It's a wonderful way to feel better about the world that you live in, to

read a great book where someone's going to fall in love. Their career is going to go well, their family relationships will be working, whether that's family of origin or family of choice. And, you know, you get to experience the happiness in someone's life. And at a time when we were all feeling pervasive fear and anxiety.

Julie Livingston:
What's gonna happen...

Erin Galloway:
Next?

Julie Livingston:
Right.

Erin Galloway:
It was so comforting to pick up a book that would make you feel good. So it was not a surprise to me nor the people I work with that during the pandemic romance sales really did boom. These were books that, you know, you could just escape with and made you feel better for the period of time we were living in.

Julie Livingston:
To help you kind of immerse yourself in a different world.

Erin Galloway:
Yes, exactly.

Julie Livingston:
Where are people buying books now? I mean, your books are mainly hardcover or paperback for the most part, right? I guess also audiobooks.

Erin Galloway:
Oh, of course. Yes.

Julie Livingston:
What are the trends in terms of how people are buying books and in what format?

Erin Galloway:
People remain all over the place when it comes to reading. Everybody chooses their own flavor. Paperback sales are still doing well. Ebook sales, which, you know, 10, 15 years ago everyone thought was going to completely eclipse print, absolutely did not happen. They rose and then they mainly plateaued. They remain a very healthy portion of the market for different readers. Various segments remain more popular for romance. For example, we have very strong ebook sales. I think one of the reasons for that is the slice of the market that is romance fiction has some of the most voracious readers. You can carry more books around on an electronic device

than you can physically.

Julie Livingston:

Because they're like candy, right?

Erin Galloway:

Yes! You read through them very quickly. You know, your average romance reader often reads more than one book a week. I mean, you can read in line at the doctor's office. I read in line at the grocery store because I can just read in line on my phone, which is fantastic. It's different for everybody. I would say that it's a fairly set segment of our market now who reads in e-book format. Audio is continuing to grow because again, you can read that anywhere— while you're driving in the car, walking down the street, taking your jog... I think the unique thing about print sales, particularly in the last seven or eight years, is that the rise of books sales on Instagram and TikTok more recently is because books have beautiful imagery you can post about. So the book is also a sort of a visual experience as much as it is an emotional reading experience. We give a lot of thought to how a book is going to look on someone's Instagram feed, because chances are, if you are an influencer posting about the books that you read you're going to be putting that on your social media. The trade paperback format of our market, specifically in romance, has really increased because they're such beautiful books that sit on your shelf, you know? Which is exciting. The trade paperback market was not as strong in romance 10 years ago than it is now, which is wonderful to see.

Julie Livingston:

Wow, that's really interesting. I do notice on a lot of my Zoom calls that people now have color coded setups of books in the background.

Erin Galloway:

Yes. Everybody organizes their shelf in a different way. I do love the rainbow look. I think it's very attractive. I go for authors alphabetically and in order of series— but to each their own.

Julie Livingston:

How does the publicity process for an author of a new book work? Erin, can you tell us a little bit about it, from the beginning to achieving the final result? You know, how do you work with authors? How do you work with your marketing department?

Erin Galloway:

It typically starts the moment that a book is acquired. In general, we acquire most books over a year in advance of the time that they're published. It could be even further in advance than that. It's frequently 18 months or even longer, depending. Once that book is officially acquired, that is when we really start to think about, okay, how are we going to be promoting this book? The publicist and the marketing team that will be working on the book are usually assigned somewhere in the 9 to 11 months in advance range. Once they are assigned, they are in touch with the author. We introduce marketing and publicity at the same time generally. At the time that they're in touch with the author, they already have some initial thoughts on what kind of

outreach they're going to be doing. We think about things like... What are our aims for this particular book? Who is the audience? How are we going to reach them? What will our targets be? You know, what kind of major newspaper coverage are we looking for? Are there any specific podcasts that we think might be of interest? Is this a book that has morning show potential, NPR potential? Could this author potentially write a really interesting essay for a major outlet? Who are the .com outlets that are going to be interested? Is this an Oprah Daily book? Is this an Esquire.com book? You know, thinking about all of those things in advance. You create what we call our plan or our wishlist— what we would like to work toward. We share that wishlist with the author and their agent. Generally that's the time that if the author and agent have specific feedback or questions, maybe even some media contacts that they have close relationships— that's when we will discuss all of those items.

Julie Livingston:

Because if the author already has relationships with journalists, the natural thing to do would be to pitch them first.

Erin Galloway:

Oh, exactly. We really try to get all of that information upfront so that we know how best to strategize. Once we have all of that information and everyone's agreed on the plan, that's when we begin outreach. That's everything from getting trade publications, which are your Publisher's Weekly, Library Journal, Book List, Book Page, Kirkus— these are the publications of our book publishing trade. They're the ones that go out to booksellers and librarians months in advance of the book publication, and will tell these important gatekeepers that this is a book that you want to pay attention to. If you get a good trade review people really pay attention— even journalists and editors at major outlets pay attention to a great review.

Julie Livingston:

Wow. First step is really getting trade coverage.

Erin Galloway:

Absolutely it is.

Julie Livingston:

That leads to retail places, correct?

Erin Galloway:

That's exactly right. You never know who is listening or paying attention. I had the experience maybe five years ago now when a particular book buyer for a major national chain heard me speaking on a podcast about a novel that I was really excited about. He heard me talking about this book probably seven months in advance of its publication.

Julie Livingston:

Wow.

Erin Galloway:

I was invited to appear and talk about upcoming books that I was really excited about, and I was mainly talking about books that were coming out in the next three to five months. But they said, well, is there anything else coming out later this year that you're excited about? I discussed a particular book, and this book buyer was listening. He and I have met on a number of occasions, and he thought, if Erin is this passionate about this book, we better take this book in a big way. They came out of the gate with a large committed buy, which doesn't always happen for a debut novelist. And that book sold really well. It was because he heard me early on. More importantly than that, he trusted my opinion because we have a relationship and a rapport. We've met and spoken before. I could trade on that trust. I didn't even realize in the moment that I was speaking about the book, the kind of trust I was trading on, because of course I didn't know until months later that he had heard me. But it made a real difference for me, my imprint and this author.

Julie Livingston:

That's amazing. Often you do sort of a trend report or a forecast, and you give people a preview of what's coming down the pike. And that could lead to even more publicity. Talk a little bit about the process for a debut novel or a new author coming out with the first book. How do you manage their expectations?

Erin Galloway:

That's one of the biggest challenges, because it's their baby. They have toiled. It is an extraordinary accomplishment to write a book. The number of people that start writing a book and never complete one— I can't even count, the number is so high! The number of people that actually complete a book... It's a huge accomplishment. So to tell someone that not everyone is going to love their baby, you know, that they toiled after...

Julie Livingston:

That's a slippery slope.

Erin Galloway:

Right? I mean, it's such a huge and emotional endeavor to write this novel. You know, to imagine there will be people that won't connect with it is difficult. In terms of setting expectations, there are certain times where we do have to say, "I'm with a debut novelist." You are not proven ground yet. People do not know what to expect from you. We are not, and at least on the publicity side, we are not promoting the book directly to readers. We are promoting the book to the gatekeepers— to media contacts that will hopefully be a great conduit to their audiences. My first goal is always to ask who the right gatekeeper for this book is. And how do I convince them that this is the book that they need to spend their time reading, as opposed to the 15 other authors coming out with books that month that they already know they love, and then to realize in addition to those 15 authors, they already know and love that they could very easily spend their time reading and get a guarantee. There's me and countless other publicists saying, "Hey, pay attention to my book!" One of the things I think we trade on is the trust that we build in the relationships we have with media contacts. I'm very clear when I say a book is a

personal pick from me and that I'm passionate about this book. I go to the mat for this book. This is my pick for the season. That carries a different bit of weight with contacts because they know, okay, she's serious. I don't trade on that for every single book. I couldn't possibly. But I do use those relationships when we're talking about a debut author, because that's not a guarantee.

Julie Livingston:

I mean, yes. How do you build a story around an author, whether they're a first time author or one that's more known? How do you build that story so that they're of interest to the media?

Erin Galloway:

Every author has something special, whatever that might be— if that's their background story, how they became an author... If it is why the writing is unique every single time... Each author has something special. And as the publicist, it's your job to figure out what that is. Sometimes it does involve investigative work, because as the author, what you're focused on is your book. Writing a book is a very solitary endeavor. Publishing a book takes a village. And when the author is thinking, well, I wrote the book, my work is done here. Oh, not at all. We are only just beginning. For me, I need to know what is most interesting about you that is going to help me support the promotion of your book. If it isn't your background, is it your writing style? Is it your approach to writing? Is it why you're focused on the subject matter that you are? I'm going to plumb your depths probably in some uncomfortable ways to figure out what makes you tick. What makes this book special? You know, I've had authors talk about maybe a really painful moment in their personal life. Or their childhood that really illustrates a point that they are trying to make in the book. I've had authors speak about a really hilarious moment in their lives that inspired an element of the book and how their career inspired elements in a book. We've discussed all sorts of different elements that make a book and an author special. And like I said, it's the publicist. That's your job to figure out what it is and then talk about it in a way that's interesting, exciting, and personal for the media that you are reaching out to.

Julie Livingston:

I'm reading the list of authors that you've worked with, Erin, and it's fascinating to see how multicultural they are. And the different backgrounds. How have multicultural stories come to light and opened new markets and presented new publicity opportunities?

Erin Galloway:

That's a great question and it's one I'm excited about. I, I think any editor at my imprint, Berkeley would tell you that the first reason they acquire a book beyond just falling in love with it, of course, is because they are captured by the voice of an author. Yeah. and that's what's distinct. We are always looking for new and exciting voices. The discovery element of finding a new author is high, unlike any other. I think that's something that my imprint has always been really committed to— finding incredible voices. We are especially committed to finding diverse voices because the truth is, for many, many years publishing has not been representative of the readership we are trying to serve. Publishing is overwhelmingly white. And that is changing. Is it changing fast enough? No, but it is changing. We are incredibly committed to ensuring that our

writers are representative of the market we serve. And what does that mean in terms of opening up new avenues? Well, it means that all sorts of different publications and media outlets that are available become available to us.

Julie Livingston:

It's crazy. And then you have different publications for various cultural segments of the market.

Erin Galloway:

Oh, absolutely. It's thrilling to be able to reach out to a podcast that wants to serve the AAPI market and have an author that's excited to speak about, you know, topics and current events that are relevant to this market. I also think that it is important for readers that have always gravitated to a book with people on the cover that look like them to pick up books with people on the cover, of course, that do not look like them or that do not have their lived experiences. What so many people find when they pick up one of these books that they can relate to these characters. We're all human. We all have the same hopes, dreams, desires. How we get to them may be different. The challenges that we deal with may be very different, and it makes us more conscientious citizens and neighbors if we are more aware of the experiences of our community counterparts. It's important to us to constantly be reaching out to new markets and to find new media to help reach those markets. It's a big part of our job.

Julie Livingston:

Oh, I'm sure. People often say to me, and I'm sure a lot of authors say this to you, whether they're experienced authors or new newbies— that they want to be on the Today Show.

Erin Galloway:

Yes.

Julie Livingston:

What is it? What are the requirements to be morning show material?

Erin Galloway:

I'll be honest and say that this is ever changing. First and foremost, you need to have an incredibly confident, smooth, and upbeat delivery to be on camera. You need to be what we, as you know, publicists say: media. You are someone that speaks in a way that is clear, you enunciate well. You have a real sparkle about you. And there needs to be something compelling about you when you speak. There is either a resonance to your voice— a voice that readers will trust... that viewers will trust. And not everyone has that. So we're always looking for someone with a fantastic delivery. A morning show is looking for someone with a proven delivery style. Do you have clips? Have you appeared on local TV before?

Julie Livingston:

Right. They're gonna be less apt to pick a debut author and more apt to pick someone with a very big audience already.

Erin Galloway:

Correct. They want someone experienced. Maybe you have expertise in a particular topic depending on the time of year you're selected. For example, we had a romance author several years ago with a book that was out and was with Reese's Book Club. It was a Reese pick, and that book was a Reese pick during the month of February. Well, what could be more perfect, but to be on a morning show during the month of Valentine's Day, credibly talking about your romance novel that is a Reese pick. That is how Jasmine Guillory got onto the Today Show for the first time. Ah. She was so sensational that they understood what a fantastic book recommender she could be. And she's appeared numerous times now on the Today Show, to talk about the book she loves. Is it about, can I give you a perfect list of checkboxes to hit? No. If I could, I'd be a consultant and charging way more money. If you are in the right place at the right time and you have all the right elements, that's your best shot. We were very fortunate that she was in the right place at the right time. She had exactly the kind of book that people would want, and she has a great delivery and she's very widely read. So The Today Show loves hosting her because she always comes back with very interesting picks and does a fabulous job.

Julie Livingston:

That's wonderful. What kind of responsibility does the author have in the publicity process? I mean, you just mentioned that if they are going to be on broadcast television, they have to have a particular persona and manner of speaking. But what about for podcasts and for print interviews, or other interviews for other digital platforms? What does the author need to do?

Erin Galloway:

We in general handle all of the pitching as the publicist. Of course, granted, if an author has personal relationships, they may do some outreach themselves. But in general, their job is to hopefully do all of the homework that I am assigning to them, and we decide in advance what they're comfortable with. There are authors that don't love podcasts. They're either just not as comfortable doing it or long form interviews they don't love. They're just not as talkative. That's fine if that's the case. I have a lot of authors that love podcasts because they're not on camera. They can do that interview in their pajamas if they desire. Really the responsibility is being very clear with me upfront about what you are comfortable and willing to do, and then I'll work within those parameters. But as the author, it is the hope of your publishing team to do them. And when we acquire you, we're very clear about this, that you'll be a real partner in the promotion of your novel, that you will be an important element of the campaign. And that is by doing interviews, whether in print, online, on a podcast or broadcast. If we are lucky enough to book that.

Julie Livingston:

That's great. Erin, I can't believe we're at time. This has been such an informative conversation. Thank you so much for being with me today. How can people get in touch with you?

Erin Galloway:

Oh, thank you so much for having me today, Julie. And well, honestly, all you have to do is

Google my name and my email address shows up on all of my author's websites.

Julie Livingston:

Okay. Fantastic. Listen, have a great day and everyone stay tuned next week for another edition of PR Patter. Have a great week.