

ally about 10 percent less in word count. Tighter writing is key for the thriller genre.

Another area to pay attention to is dialogue. From his many years as a novelist, Morrell, author of 28 books, admitted seeing a lot of bad dialogue. "The problem is that most people have been influenced from television and the movies. Unfortunately, writers have absorbed a technique from these mediums that does not work in books."

Furthermore, "Most of the problems people have in dialogue are in the speech tags [he said/she said]. The majority can be easily eliminated, and your dialogue will be so much better and so much faster." Instead of the tags, Morrell recommends writers replace them with dramatic action.

Another major recommendation is to eliminate the characters swearing. While not present in most Christian novels, swearing can be found in general-market thrillers because often the main characters are in the military or law enforcement. Morrell explained, "There is a suspicion that law enforcement and the military pile on the swear words. From my research, the opposite is true. Most of these people are soft spoken, polite, and do not curse endlessly. For many writers, swearing is a crutch; so don't use it."

## Buzzing Your Thriller

Three seasoned publicity veterans—international bestselling author and marketer M. J. Rose; David J. Montgomery, book reviewer for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*; and Sarie Morrell, a freelance publicist—provided loads of valuable insight in a panel called Buzz Your Thriller.

First, thriller writer Rose gave the bad news. "Over 3,000 mystery and suspense novels are published each year; and over the last five years, review sources have shrunk by 50 percent." Then she explained, "Writing is an art, but publishing is a business. So once your novel goes to your publisher, it becomes a product. At that point, the best thing you can do is learn about marketing, so you can help

your book along and become a marketing partner with your publisher. At the same time you need to understand you can't do everything."

Each panelist identified a major "to do" and "not to do" for marketing. Rose said, "My big 'to do' is don't quit your day job. Take as much of your advance as you can, and spend it marketing your book. My 'not to do' is to spend all of it on a Web site. For a first time novelist, \$500 on a Web site is enough. Spend the rest on other marketing opportunities."

Book reviewer Montgomery said, "My number one 'to do' is for authors to be proactive in getting media attention for their books. They need to make sure the reviewer receives their books. You'd be astonished how often the publisher never sends the book. "Be vigilant, and make sure the people who review crime fiction get your books. If nobody else gets the books, make sure these few reviewers get the book and follow up with them. Also make sure these reviewers receive your book as far ahead from the release date as you can."

Publicist Morrell said, "My number one 'to do' is for the author to understand what makes your book different. You need to know your particular market, keep lists of bookstores and booksellers, and keep these lists updated. Bookstores are like the media in that they can reach a large target group that you want to reach with your book."

## Taking the Challenge

Following the practical advice from these writers, editors, and industry specialists can help you tap into the rising star of the thriller genre. Maybe you will be the next Frank Peretti, Ted Dekker, or Brandilyn Collins.

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