



Video Skills for Literary Stars

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Over the last few years, many book authors have discovered that they can increase awareness of themselves and their works by maintaining an online presence, often in the form of a blog. But until recently, the opportunity for using the web's multimedia capabilities for book promotion has been limited.

Now that is changing. With the advent of services like VidLit, which produces short, humorous, animated Flash films about books, authors have a new way to reach online readers. Because of the viral quality of online videos, some writers are finding success at the end of the broadband pipe.



"I think VidLit is such a terrific idea (because) it creates at least 60 seconds of entertainment and information about a book and allows a publisher and author to use that as a calling card for a book in a much more expansive and elaborate way," said novelist [M.J. Rose](#), who is planning a VidLit for her novel, *The Halo Effect*.

To date, VidLit founder Liz Dubelman has created VidLit videos for seven books and has five more in the works. They range from one to three minutes and cost approximately \$3,500 a minute to produce.

Dubelman said that the VidLit for Ellis Weiner and Barbara Davilman's hit book, *Yiddish With Dick and Jane*, was seen by a million people in its first two weeks, leading to sales of more than 150,000 copies.

According to Rose, who was formerly a contributor to Wired News, initiatives like VidLit and a few others are crucial in an era in which authors are having a harder time than ever getting publicity.

"We're in a crisis situation in publishing where there are 150,000-plus books published a year," said Rose, "and review space has been cut by about 50 percent across the board. Either magazines have completely cut their

review space, or newspapers have cut it back, or they're using syndicated reviews."

To be sure, VidLit isn't the only online multimedia option authors have. Another is [BookShorts](#), a Canadian company that produces slick promotional films that attempt to distill the essence of the book's story line into a couple minutes of video. Others include [TeachingBooks.net](#), which creates mini-documentaries about the making of books used in schools, and Bookstream, which packages author video clips and book excerpts for its promotional website, [bookwrapcentral](#), and for viewing on online merchants' sites.

BookShorts founder and executive producer, Judith Keenan, said that a marketing plan for a book such as Susan Swan's historical novel, *What Casanova Told Me*, involves the author, the publisher and a broadcast outlet. For another book, Pauline Couture's, *Ice*, the company coordinated with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to televise its film at the same time the clip went online on the BookShorts website.



Jaymz Bee as "Casanova" on set "What Casanova Told Me" BookShort Set Design by Peter Wilde

Photo Credit: Matt Phillips

BookShorts makes high-production-value short films promoting books. The films are distributed online by broadcast partners. Photo: Courtesy of BookShorts

But Rose thinks that efforts such as those from BookShorts are too elaborate to work for many authors. And she questions the style of video Keenan produces for authors.

"When you look at them, you'll see all they are are 60- to 90-second (films) that look like they're advertising a film or a movie," Rose said. "A book isn't a movie, so making a movie out of a book is confusing at best."

Keenan disputed Rose's contention. She said that if the films are well-done and viewers are entertained and want to know more about the book, then a BookShort is a success.

"I wonder if that same comment would apply to Tolkien and Lord of the Rings," Keenan said of Rose's BookShort assessment. "That film didn't take away from Tolkien's work at all."

Regardless, Keenan is a big fan of Dubelman and her service.

"I quite like VidLit," Keenan said. "They deliver a lot of entertainment value."

Keenan said that initiatives like BookShorts and VidLit are a boon to the book industry because the costs are low enough that publishers can afford to experiment.

Heather Foy, product manager for Mira Books, publisher of Rose's novel, agreed. However, she said it is vital for a publisher to evaluate the content and genre of a book, as well as its author, to ensure there is an appropriate match for something like a VidLit video.

Plugging a VidLit video into an author's blog also helps in promotion. Dubelman said that some VidLits include "buy the book" links to Amazon.com.

Amazon spokeswoman Kristin Schaefer Mariani said that the company has begun incorporating VidLit videos as part of its "larger, ongoing effort to provide customers with a range of content to help them find and discover products that best meet their needs."