DIY Promotion and the Writer

By Holly Lisle

Sheila has a controversial piece up on Paperback Writer about do-it-yourself promotion. Mostly I agree with what she has to say. The best promo you can get is word-of-mouth from readers, and that isn't something you can buy. It's something you earn.

I don't think there are any absolutes in promoting yourself, though. Anything you should **always** do, or **never** do. **Always** and **never** are trainwreck words — as soon as you say that some form of self-promotion is always good or never good, someone will come along and prove you wrong. It didn't work for this great writer, it shot that starving midlister to international celebrity.

I wouldn't pay someone to do my site for me, for example. I want this place to reflect me, and to me that means designing my own graphics, layout, type-faces, color schemes, content, and everything else. I want my site to be a blue-jeans-and-sneakers kind of site, because I am a blue-jeans-and-sneakers kind of woman. I want the place to be casual, comfortable, a little scuffed, plainspoken. I don't want to have to wait in line behind more important clients; I want to be able to try out new ideas NOW, whenever that might be; I want to post content on my schedule and not someone else's; I want complete control of such esoterics as linking schemes, page load times, and browser compatibility.

I want people reading the site to see who I am, because I'm the same person writing my books that I am here. If you hate me here, you'll save yourself some bucks by not buying my books. If you like me here, it's a safe bet you'll like my fiction.

Nobody else could do what I want for me, so I've learned how to do it myself. That's the essence of the American Dream to

me. Figure out what you want, make it happen yourself, help somebody else make their dream happen by sharing what you've learned.

Professionally designed sites are fine. I've seen a lot I haven't liked, but I've seen a lot that I have, too. However, this is one of those always/never moments for me. I still think there's room for the do-it-yourselfer, if the DIY writer has a clear vision of who he is and what he wants. Because there are a lot of writers out there whose websites make me think of power suits and dressy shoes. Maybe that's them. However, maybe it's their web designer not getting them, too — not having a clue about who they are or how their books **feel** when you read them. And if that's the case, it's a shame, because their readers are seeing something in the site that won't exist in the books.

Power suits are fine in their place. Professionally designed websites are, too. But they aren't me.