PROMOTIONAL PUSHES
By Craig Lancaster

Less than a year ago, I appeared on this site (http://bloodredpencil.blogspot.com/2009/10/craig-lancaster-guests-part-1.html) and audaciously banged the drum for my debut novel, "600 Hours of Edward." (http://www.amazon.com/600-Hours-Edward-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1606390139/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1256144119&sr=1-1) It was the first stop of a hastily thrown-together blog book tour, and as I look back on it, I realize that "hastily thrown-together" is an apt descriptor for much of my promotional efforts in those early days of the novel's emergence.

So here I am, back in this cozy seat as I approach the January 2011 release of my second novel, "The Summer Son." (http://www.amazon.com/Summer-Son-Craig-Lancaster/dp/1935597248/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1280730335&sr=1-1) I've learned a lot about promotional work in the past several months – enough to know that I still have much more to learn. Here's a short list of what I'm doing better this time around:

1. I have a much more robust, focused blog book tour planned: 10 stops instead of seven, at sites with established readerships that are good bets to be interested in my book.
2. I'm taking advantage of a slower rollout: Lining up blurbs, putting together mailing lists for ARCs, seeing if some buzz can be ignited. The current publishing landscape, which is increasingly putting more power into the hands of authors (a good thing), often lends itself to instant gratification, but there's something to be said for the old-school simmer.
3. Taking care of my readers: I was fortunate that "Edward" was so well received; a year ago, I had prospective readers. Today, I have actual fans of my work. Their enthusiasm for it and willingness to tell their friends will do more for my books than I can on my own. I do my part to honor them by doing the best work I can and remaining in touch.
4. I'm blogging regularly (http://craiglancaster.wordpress.com) : This one is still the toughest for me; with a full-time job and a Facebook habit that's like heroin, I have to force myself to make time for it. But I can see the payoff in my better metrics, and I expect to enjoy even better results after I take Dani's class in September.
5. In an effort to highlight father-son stories (my new novel hinges on one) and to give other writers a promotional outlet, I launched a new site called Messages To Our Fathers (http://messagestoourfathers.wordpress.com). As pleased as I am with the basic idea, I think I may have miscalculated by not putting it under the auspices of my own blog, so there may soon be some rectifying. At any rate, I remain committed to highlighting other authors, so please consider me for your blog tour or guest post.

Promotion is hard work, harder than I ever imagined it would be. For every initiative that works well, a half-dozen fail miserably. Despite my over-reliance on the pronoun in this piece, I grow weary of the word "I." I try not to lose momentum when a bookstore signing goes poorly or a

radio interview is a mess because the host didn't acquaint himself with the book. I find that I hungrily co-opt the best ideas from other writers. Romance writer B.J. Daniels (http://www.bjdaniels.com/) told me that she has a snail-mail list several hundred addresses strong and sends each one a postcard to herald the arrival of a new book – and that the sell-through rate is fabulous. That one particularly appeals to me as it's a throwback. It's easy to lose oneself in a world driven by Facebook and Twitter, but sometimes, nothing beats a personal touch. With all credit to B.J., I'll be stealing that idea.

So tell me, Blood-Red Pencil pushers: What are your best promotional practices? How do you keep going in the face of setbacks? I promise I won't steal *all* of your ideas. Just the best ones.