

## Things I Wish Publishers Knew About Book Selling

In a room high above New York City on a beautiful spring day, a group of 21 booksellers gathered together to share experiences with each other, and to use these commonalities to make the book business better. Publishers, we hope you can take away from this list ways you can make the fruits of your labor fly off our bookshelves and into a reader's hands.

### Book Design Do's and Don'ts

#### DO:

- Consider repackaging backlist in a similar style when an author has a new release.
- Put the name of a better selling book by the author on the jacket of a new release.
- Keep titles & author's name on jacket covers clear and prominent. Same on the spine.
- Create jacket art that reflects the message and feel of the story
- Send the creative designers and art department staff to bookstores to study how books looked shelved. Consider how your book's color & design will look squeezed in next to other books or in a waterfall display.
- Print ISBN bar code in a readable size.
- Place price on french fold and in one place only. Remember that books are often gifts and consumers want to remove the price.
- Include Readers Guides – those are a keeper!
- Provide high resolution art of book covers & author photos on your web site (or the wholesalers and BookSense) for use in store newsletters and websites. Also have bios and book descriptions on your web site.

#### DON'TS:

- Don't wrap the book title around the spine.
- Jacket with die-cuts don't work – they arrive damaged; don't fit on shelves
- Folk art on African-American titles don't sell in cosmopolitan cities – viewed as too cutesie
- Books that are too tall don't fit on shelves.
- Don't assume books will be displayed face out.
- Reprints don't have to be the same art as the original edition.
- Matte white jackets tend to get filthy.
- Certain glossy books stick together and look shop worn very quickly.

### Displays & Dumps

- Dumps work well in kid's departments (where kids like to climb on them), but are used infrequently in the main sections because of space constraints.
- Dumps do sell books
- Narrow dumps are easier to use.
- Don't have attachments on the dumps that stick out and impede traffic in the store.
- FYI - Booksellers do recycle dumps.
- Dumps are often ordered for the discounts. Don't hold books if the dump itself is out of stock – ship the books.
- Make dumps easy to assemble.
- Dumps for hardcovers need to be stronger.
- Headers on dumps that are eye-catching sell books. Make these removable so they can be placed on top of bookshelves.
- Counters are generally too small for a lot of POS items, but they do move merchandise that would get lost in the store, or have a price point that is perfect for impulse purchases.
- Make more posters available. Booksellers hang them back to back for more visibility. They are used more often than bookmarks or postcards for promotional displays.

## **Events & Author Promotion**

- Independent bookstore appearances should occur first if multiple appearances are in the same market; this is the only way events can be profitable for independents.
- Publishers should remind authors not to say “get my book on Amazon” when they make television & radio appearances, especially if they have an event at an independent store..
- Answer honestly all requests for an author appearance even if it is to say no. Don’t tell booksellers that an author “isn’t touring” if they will make appearances.
- Work out a better system to handle shipments to outside events. Phantom inventory is a nightmare.
- Publisher should follow-up to make sure books have been received.
- Send call-tag with books.
- Prep the author and tell them that they will have to speak, since signings-only are not a crowd pleaser.
- Can publishers do anything to close the revolving door in the publicity departments? Stores have to reintroduce themselves every season to the publicity department. Better record-keeping will save time for publishers and booksellers and maintain goodwill with long-time customers.
- Expand your horizon beyond the same stores on the same-old tour schedule.
- Drop in signings: don’t be surprised when a small store only has a very small supply of books. Why not have the author sign in-house and make the autographed copies available?

## **Coop**

- All reps should have a current list of available coop.
- Coop should be easier to use and claim.
- Credit from coop should be the same net as publisher invoices – 30 days.
- Don’t turn down a store request for coop because advance approval hadn’t been secured. Be happy your books were promoted!

## **Sales Catalogs**

- Title and ISBN must be prominent and bold. This is the key information a bookseller needs when filling in an order.
- Must be sized to fit in a file drawer
- Have to be able to write in it (no black or glossy paper)
- Reconsider putting backlist in every season’s catalogs. Consider a backlist catalog instead.
- List carton size
- Send catalogs out to all booksellers
- List an author’s hometown and make sure all reps know of the authors in their region.
- Update data on Books In Print – it is an important tool for booksellers that is often out of date.
- Customers rely on booksellers for book details, but a bookseller can’t read every single book. Catalog copy (and sales reps) should inform booksellers if a book has any unique passages, twists, or sensitive subject matter (sexual, religious, drugs, language).

## **Sales Reps**

- Stores are totally dependent on them – no big surprise there!

A great sales rep should:

- Inform stores about local authors
- Get to know everyone in the store and their reading interests (and give ARC to them).
- Be honest when recommending a book to a store.
- Call in-between visits
- Notify accounts of frontlist shipping dates
- View booksellers as customers, not nuisances.
- Be trained to help stores with coop

## **Selling Direct to Consumers by Publishers**

- This is a major problem for independent booksellers.
- Other industry manufacturers don't sell direct to the consumers; conflict of interest
- If publishers offer deeper discounts than booksellers can provide, they are hurting their primary customers: booksellers!
- Provide a link to BookSense.com on your web site for orders from consumers
- Discounts to corporate clients should be less than those available to booksellers.
- Investigate the source of books sold on the street.

## **Consumer Marketing**

- Movie tie-ins don't sell except for some teen movies. People want the original story. Movie-tie in covers don't usually sell.
- Appearances and mentions on NPR and talk shows (radio & TV) sell books.
- Book reviews sell books.
- Be more specific and targeted in the advertising vehicles. Look into alternative presses, magazines, and vehicles based on the book's subject.
- Keep stores informed on media coverage.
- Put advertising money into the midlist which needs the help instead of the bestsellers that will move anyway.
- Use bookseller reviews from BookSense in your advertisements. Independent booksellers are creating bestsellers and want the support and recognition (and those authors in independent stores).
- If a book is from a series (education or otherwise), list all the books (without ISBN's) in the book.
- Series books have to have a sales record before bookstores will order into the series.

## **Trends**

- Editors & Marketers are welcome to visit stores and hold focus groups with our best customers to get a feel for what is trendy.
- Don't over-saturate a trend with so many books from so many houses.
- Broaden your landscape - there is more than one "trend" happening at any moment.
- Booksellers are noticing a publisher trend towards "brands" of books within a house. Focus more on the quality not the quantity of product.

## **Shipping / Receiving & Billing**

- Packing list should be on top of the box, not buried under all the books.
- Packing List must include invoice #, discount, date.
- Enforce on-sale dates and penalize vendors who defy those rules; provide a better mechanism for reporting violations.
- All stores, big and little, should receive shipments of bestsellers. Too often smaller orders are deferred yet chains have a huge supply.
- Get rid of freight-pass-through.
- Detail out-of-stock, cancelled or out-of-print on packing list and invoices.

## **Miscellaneous Thoughts**

- Why are new hardcover releases advertised at online sites as "used" when they aren't even in bookstores yet?
- Focus more on good books, not a big list. Too many books are published and a smaller percentage being sold.
- Every publisher should have a liaison to the independent bookstore market.
- This group is opposed to Print on Demand; POD books tend to be low-quality and difficult to order.
- Good books are going out-of-print too soon.
- Remember that collectively, independent stores are selling more and deeper into your list.