

A Quick Fix on Sales Options

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Different sales channels require different mindsets and deliver different results—not only for different categories of books but also different titles. Thus you need a different plan of attack for each project. Your goal, however, should always be to pick the three to five sales channels that will work best and make the most money for any given book.

Here are the 10 sales channels that I recommend cultivating—depending on the type of book you have. Not all of them will yield sales for you the first year. Not all of them will be right for every book. But creating a good mix by paying attention to each channel's ups and downs, as well as the opportunities that it offers, is like creating a well-balanced stock portfolio.

Chain Bookstores

These include Barnes & Noble, B. Dalton, Walden, Borders, and Books-A-Million. This sales channel will most likely represent the bulk of your sales if you have a national title or a "big hit." Typically, distributors handle the chains (as well as wholesalers such as Ingram and Baker & Taylor).

Independent Bookstores

Independent stores are "the bread and butter" of publishing success according to Bill Hoar, a sales representative for Chesapeake & Hudson, a Northeastern regional trade rep organization. He is optimistic about sales opportunities in this channel even though many see it as a shrinking market. "People are still buying books," says Hoar. He argues that publishers should focus on independent storesap.fce sales will be steady. "You won't see big upswings in sales, but you won't see big downswings in sales from independents either," he says.

Specialty Wholesalers

Some of the majors include Sam's Club, Costco, BJ's, Staples, Office Max, and Office Depot. Working with this sales channel is a tough way to make money

Getting your book placed is difficult, especially if it's not a national bestseller. In addition, returns can be as high as 50%. Ask yourself, "Is this worth pursuing?" "Can I afford 50% returns?" "Will they jeopardize my business?"

Online Outlets

We're talking here about online book retailers such as Amazon.com and BN.com as well as numerous portals and publicity outlets, such as Yahoo, MSN.com, and AOL.com, and sites related to your book's subject. The major online book retailers are important for all publishers. Many other online outlets provide publicity as opposed to real sales opportunities, so you'll want to consider how much time and energy to expend on chasing them down.

Events, Conferences & Other Special Sales Opportunities

If you are a speaker or have the opportunity to conduct professional events, this area is a good one to explore. It is also a good sales channel if you have an inspirational message or publish in the areas of health & wellness or business.

Every once in a while, you can hit it big with a special sale. With certain books, it is possible to make a large sale to a single company or lots of small sales that add up to a big sale. As an example, when the book *The 100 Best Stocks to Own in America* first came out more than 10 years ago, the sales manager cultivated relationships with companies that had the top stocks mentioned in the book. He sent them advance galley information and kept in touch regarding the book's publicity and so on. That strategy resulted in numerous small sales of 100 books at a time, and it also resulted in a huge sale to one company worth \$225,000. In addition, that check came within 30 days and these sort of sales are typically nonreturnable!

Libraries

I love libraries and especially book sales to libraries. Developing a long-term relationship with this market is not only worth the effort but also great fun.

According to Ron Shank, Associate Publisher of *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* the following are some good reasons to keep libraries always in

mind:

- The library market for adult books has exceeded \$2 billion annually for several years now.
- Libraries spend an additional \$800 million or so annually on children's books.
- Public library budgets grew at a modest pace through the '90s.
- Over the past five years, the net increase in materials acquisitions budgets for libraries has been 39.5%.

Library Journal's most recent budget study, "LJ Budget Report 2002," published in January, indicates that public libraries expect further increases this coming year, even in a tough economy. Of course, they will see some budget problems in the coming fiscal year, but these will tend to be short-lived and much less severe than drops in other market sectors.

Shank's opinion—which he has heard book wholesalers voice too—is that libraries facing budget restrictions will look to trim in areas other than the materials budget. For instance, they might reduce staff, shorten hours, and

postpone major expenses (automation systems, large information

databases, etc.). They will not, as a rule, reduce their purchases of good

books since books are what the public sees first and demands most.

Libraries acquire materials to serve the needs, wants, and tastes of their

local communities and for "collection development"—i.e., to keep a library's

collection of books and other materials fresh and up-to-date in as many subject areas as the library can afford. Because they focus on being a complete resource rather than on "sell through," libraries buy many types of books in many subject areas, with attention to quality. Nearly all publishers stand to benefit from exposure in the library market because library users are book buyers and they recommend books to their friends and colleagues.

Domestic Subrights

Rights sales that involve book clubs, magazines and newspapers, reprints and electronic formats are important avenues to explore. Getting to know these markets can be fun as well as a useful learning experience. For example, I have found that book club buyers are interesting people who have excellent thoughts on books that are selling; they may even give you an idea for your next book. However, generating subrights sales can be extremely time-consuming, and you may wish to consider using an agent unless your distributor provides this service.

Specialty Markets

When Don Tubesing, Publisher of Pfeifer-Hamilton, first published *The Quiltmaker's Gift*, he was able to make the book profitable by targeting 2,400 quilt shops. "Not only were there no returns, but they paid their bills," says Tubesing. With the book off to a great start in the appropriate specialty stores, he could begin to build sales in other channels, including independent bookstores. Specialty markets such as health food, sporting goods, and gift stores can provide excellent ways to launch certain books and to keep them selling.

Direct Mail

According to Robin Bartlett, Director of Sales & Marketing, American College of Physicians, the current thinking on direct mail for small publishers favors sending inexpensive postcards to potential clients that refer them to the publisher's Web site. (See the article, "How to Create & Produce Your Own Promotional Postcards," on page **XX**.)

Another major rule of thumb about direct mail for small publishers is that \$75 is the magic price point. Publishers who have books priced in the \$25 to \$35 range or below will find it extremely difficult to generate orders worth \$75 and therefore extremely difficult to do direct mail profitably.

Bartlett encourages publishers to use inexpensive, well-written letters and order forms, as opposed to elaborate promotion pieces in four colors, and he notes that mailing First Class can be a good option for small lists because that will deliver a better response than mailing Third. Publishers should test both to determine which way gets the best return on investment.

International Sales

As with other subrights sales, sales to buyers overseas can be time-consuming. Revenue from them should be considered frosting on the cake unless you have a book that is a big hit.

Creating Your Best Mix

As Tubesing says, "Don't beat yourself up if you can't work in all sales channels. If a sales channel is not working for you, cross it off your list and don't worry about it!" His advice is to look carefully at each sales channel and evaluate whether or not you have the people to handle transactions there. If not, perhaps you will want to hire someone to do that for you.

Kathleen Welton is a 22-year veteran of the book publishing industry who has been involved in all its aspects, from acquisitions and content development, to sales, marketing, and licensing. Recently VP and Publisher for Hungry Minds (now part of John Wiley & Sons), she was involved in the start-up and publication of more than 150 titles in the ...For Dummies® series. Her experience also includes 17 years with Dearborn Financial Publishing, Dow Jones-Irwin, Praeger, and D. Van Nostrand. A former PMA board member, Welton offers information about her consulting services at www.akabooks.com.

Mix Well

The following chart shows the sales channels that are reasonable to pursue depending on what type of publishing you do.

Sales Channel	National Publisher	Regional Publisher	Professional Publisher	Niche Publisher	"Big Hit" Publisher
Chains	X	X	X	X	X
Independents	X	X	X	X	X
Specialty Wholesalers					X
Online	X	X	X	X	X
Events			X		X
Libraries	X	X	X	X	X
Sub Rights	X			X	X
Specialty Markets		X	X	X	X
Direct Response			X		
International	X			X	X