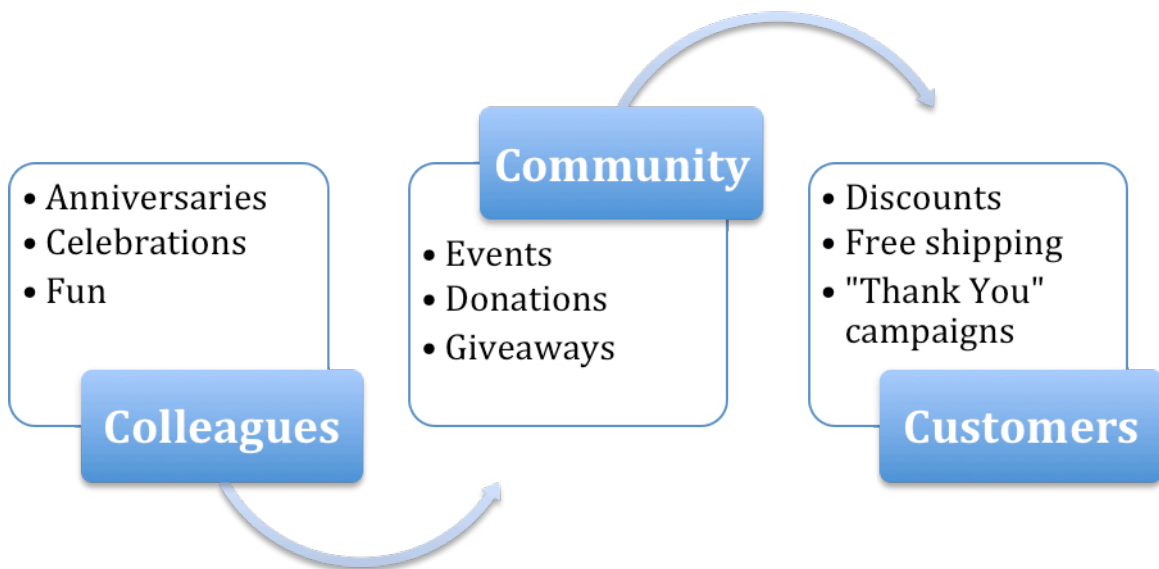


## Growing Connections That Count by Kathleen Welton

In the era of social networking, online business networks may not offer the best route to profitable interaction for publishers, and they certainly don't offer the only one. The flesh-and-blood social networks that include your company are very important, as I've found by working to strengthen connections with my staff members, my community, and my customers. Here's how I picture them:



And here are just a few examples. Once you grab on to the idea, you most likely will think of many other ways to strengthen connections with people you can reach out and touch.

### **Growing Connections with Colleagues**

#### \* Author visits

Meeting an author is always a special event. Most people who work on a publishing project never get to do that. Once a famous author called to let me know that she was in town and wanted to come to the office to personally meet and greet everyone who worked on her book. She made it a point to shake hands with and thank each and every person who had come in contact with her book. Wow. That was memorable. Arranging for colleagues to meet at least some authors is not usually difficult.

#### \* Celebrations

There are lots of opportunities to interject a bit of fun in the workday. In my opinion, staff meetings are always better when food is available—bagels, cookies, fruit, popcorn, whatever. Two women in my office made us all happy when they arranged a monthly celebration for birthdays. One day a month, we all brought in snacks and, at an arranged time, we all gathered for 15 minutes to share a nice spread arranged by the window, enjoy time together, wish happy birthday to those born in that month, and wish each other another month of good cheer.

\* Gift bags

These don't have to be as elaborate as the ones given away at the Oscars. In this case, it's the thought that counts. Some ideas include coffee mugs or something similar filled with Godiva chocolates, or t-shirts, candles, or, of course, books. A gift bag left at a co-worker's desk as a welcome back from vacation (or from illness) treat is one way to provide a boost.

\* Outings

It's generally not hard to find an occasion for an off-site event--celebrating the successes of the past year, kicking off the new year, launching a new project, and the list goes on. The outing can be as simple as a pizza party or going bowling or to a sporting event for the afternoon. Make sure there is a good agenda if a meeting is part of the activity.

## **Growing Connections in Your Community**

\* Donations

Public libraries are perfect for donating excess books in good condition. You might even make donating an annual event. Librarians are always appreciative of and in need of good books for their collections.

\* Partnering with others

It is also possible to partner with other organizations by donating books or speaking at schools, hospitals, prisons and events run by not-for profits. The organization Compassion Works For All at [www.justusfriends.org](http://www.justusfriends.org) offers some good information on reaching out to the prison community.

\* Customer service week

The first week in October is generally a great time to boost morale, celebrate with colleagues, and inspire future success. A little goes a long way, especially with sales reps who deal with customers on the phone all day or with those employees who pick and pack books and boxes all day in the warehouse. Showing care and concern with a smile, handshake, and box of donuts or bagels means a lot. For ideas beyond a simple thank you, see [www.csweek.com](http://www.csweek.com).

## **Growing Connections with Customers**

\* Free shipping and other discounts

Email campaigns, postcards, package inserts, and blog posts are all effective ways to get the word out about discounts and increase sales. Free shipping offers that last a short of time -- a week, for example -- give potential book buyers extra incentive. Discounts on the next purchase for completing a customer survey also work well—and this is an inexpensive way to get valuable feedback.

\* Books for special occasions

We all know that books make great gifts. These days, it is even more important to underscore the importance having a nice book to hold in your hands. Being mindful of special occasions and events has traditionally been a way to sell more books. There is something to celebrate every day, week, and month of the year besides the traditional holidays. March has National Wildlife Week. May is Arthritis Awareness Month. September 19 is National Gratitude Day. Golf books and Father's day are a winning combination. There are more than 365 days and ways to promote your products every year.

\* Thank-you campaigns

In his book *The Thank You Economy*, Gary Vaynerchuk presents compelling evidence that the companies that will see the biggest returns in today's marketplace are the companies that prove they care about their customers. Company anniversaries can be good opportunities to thank customers and offer a second product at a special price like 25% off. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is the perfect time for "Made in America" campaigns, especially with books on topics such as the U.S. Constitution.

\* Customer appreciation sales

I have used postcards that I call "karma cards" to reward customers and thank them for their business with discounts and free shipping offers. These promotions work well around milestones such as celebrating years in business, reaching revenue targets, and either beginning the new year or ending the current year. For some reason, sales increases made up for any losses caused by discounts given.

\* Free stuff

Everyone likes to get something for nothing. Think of enough freebies so that you can offer customers a different one every month—10% off all orders in June; a free copy of an overstock book for orders in July; free notepads or bookmarks in August, for instance. Make each one seem special.

According to Robert Quillen, an American journalist and humorist, "If you count all your assets, you always show a profit." In my experience, paying attention to the connections that count can make a big difference in the bottom line.

Kathleen Welton is a veteran print and digital publishing professional and has been a member of IBPA/PMA for more than 25 years. She is grateful for the opportunity to connect with members and be part of this unique organization. Two new books by her -- *The Little Book of Gratitude Quotes* and *The Little Journal of Gratitude* – are now available in paperback and eBook formats. To learn more about them, visit [www.littlequotebooks.com](http://www.littlequotebooks.com).