ASA Professional Development Seminars

*Capitalise on Creativity: Making money from your writing*

Adelaide, 11 February 2010

The Author as Brand Name: how the bookseller can help
Presented by Justin Chadwick,
Mary Martin bookshop, Adelaide

As requested by members, the ASA is providing papers from the professional development seminars in PDF format for downloading. The information that follows summarises the content covered in the seminar and reflects the personal views of the presenter. Please note that the views expressed are not related in any way to ASA opinion or policy.

---

*The Australian Society of Authors acknowledges the CAL Cultural Fund for its generous support of the ASA’s professional development seminar program.*
The Author as Brand Name: how the bookseller can help

This seminar discusses the processes involved in getting your book into the hands of the reading public. It discusses, in detail, how books are marketed and why - including the sell-in process, publisher promotions and advertising, author events and reviews as well as alternative approaches. Other topics for discussion include how best to position yourself and your book for maximum gain, market niches and target markets. But most of all it covers the way booksellers can help in the promotion of books and authors.

Introduction to the process of purchasing

Every year there are tens of thousands of books published and sold by publishers to book retailers. From this vast array of titles the book buyer must make a selection to stock their business with. Limitations can be placed immediately, especially for specialist bookshops which will only be looking for a specific subject or type of book. Examples of these are art gallery bookshops, which concentrate on art and photography titles, or gardening shops that will only take gardening books.

Other limitations may be a particular focus, such literary fiction, which will exclude many mass market fiction titles.

Decisions for selecting a particular title over another is not just based on the bias of the business, other significant factors include whether the author has been published before, the quality of the story or content, the topic, the graphic design, the price, the format.

Previous publications
If an author has had a book previously published it can help the book buyer to see what the sales of the previous title or titles was. It is a little cheat, but can save time.

Quality of content
Regardless of how good the sales person is, or the look of the jacket, if the content is not good, that is, it is not well written or edited, it will not be bought. All books have an editing budget and once that budget is used the content will not be changed any more, resulting, occasionally, in a disastrous result, especially for the poor reader.

Topic
Not only is the way it is written important, but also what is being written about. Many books are published on rather obscure topics, and many of them work, just think of the success of The Surgeon of Crowthorne - who would think that a book about a dictionary would be interesting and have mass appeal? Having a timely topic, such as current affairs issues, is good, but generally has a short shelf life.
Graphic design
No matter how good the content is, if the book has a horrible jacket it will not sell. Just think of wine labels and how that influences people’s buying habits. Publishers invest a great deal in graphic design for book jackets and, often, they get it just right, but occasionally the best intentions can result in disaster.

Price
No one wants to pay too much for anything and books are a great example of this, with the result that there is price sensitivity. For the buyer this ends up in focussing on books at price points which will be most successful, less hardbacks and more paperbacks.

Format
Formats, whether it be hardback, C or B format paperbacks also dictate purchasing. Over the last ten years there has been a move toward the larger C format paperbacks for crime fiction. I suspect the reason for this is that people just don’t want to wait for the next dose of their favourite crime author or character.

But these aren’t the only factors to consider. Probably the hardest is time. I usually spend a full week every month in appointments looking at new titles. These take about an hour at a time, depending on the time of year and the publisher. During these appointments I will see between 30 and 100 books. So to see all the titles and make a decision is tight. Some titles are easily dismissed (as discussed before, due to relevance), but others are, obviously, not.

The usual method of delivery is by presentation on a laptop, which will show the cover image, the title information, such as price, format, page extent, publication date, as well as author details and a blurb.

Publishers will use numerous tactics to convince the buyer of the merits of particular titles. These can come in numerous ways including:

• Extracts
• Gimmicks
• Reading copies (advance proofs)
• POS, such as posters, flyers, chapter samplers
• Newsletters
• Publicity programs
• Author tours
• Festivals
• Window competitions
• Consumer competitions.
Introduction to the marketing of books

There are numerous methods that publishers use to market book product. As discussed above there are methods when selling to the book buyers, but the end consumer needs to be told of the book as well, without just relying on them going into a bookshop. This marketing can, generally, be placed in one of two categories: push or pull marketing.

Push marketing
Push marketing is where demand for the product is created from the “push” of the publishers themselves. This will be accomplished by utilising the sales force who will see book buyers and sell the book, and marketing departments who will create demand through promotion, such as author events, merchandising and POS.

Pull marketing
Pull marketing is when consumer demand is built by promotion through publisher advertising, reviews, instore placement and catalogues. These can be effective, though advertising can be expensive.

Other forms of marketing

• *Internet* With the growth of the internet many publishers and authors are creating websites for promotion, or social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook or blogs. The effectiveness of these can be questioned, but uptake in certain areas has been reasonable.

• *Networking* One of the best forms of marketing is networking. Here authors and publishers can use contacts in diverse areas to build a profile which will allow content to stand out or be better positioned in the consumer’s mind. A good example of this would be the placement of sailing books in a maritime museum shop.

• *Interviews* Interviews, either in print or electronic media (such as radio or TV) can boost author profile and increase book sales, many by creating interest.

But marketing is not just promotion and advertising, other areas which need to be considered include the other three P’s. Product, Place, Price.

We touched on these a little before in regard to the sell-in process, and of these “place” is most relevant.

Place
Place is marketing speak for distribution. But they don’t say distribution because it doesn’t start with a P. Anyway, place includes warehousing, delivery, but most importantly where it will go. Not all books, as we have seen earlier, can go everywhere. Some are specific for certain markets. You need to know what your market is. Does the book have broad appeal, is a
mass market title? Or will be more specialised, belonging in an independent bookshop.

Many authors need to be aware that the agent will do a lot for them, sending manuscripts to the correct publisher or publishing house. This will get the manuscript into the right hands and hopefully to the top of the pile.

Self publishing versus publisher
One of the decisions you may need to make will be whether you want to go down the path of publishing with a publishing house or if you would prefer to do it all yourself. There are advantages in both avenues. Being published with a publishing house has the advantage of their expertise, including editors, designers and the sales force. But the downside of this can be loss of control of your idea, major changes which you may not be happy with and little monetary return. Remember most authors will be lucky to get 10% and most likely 6%.

Self publishing will mean that you do all the hard work and reap all the rewards. There are a number of printers in every capital city who can do a respectable job with book production and have the facilities to help authors to put together their book. They downside is that it is you who has to invest all the money, which means you could easily be a few thousand dollars out of pocket.

Post-publication
So the book has been printed and is now being shipped around the country to booksellers. What happens next?

Launch
The traditional method to tell the world of a new title is a book launch. These can be carried out in all sorts of ways; in a bookshop, at a specific site that is relevant, in a hotel or function room. The list is endless and is only really limited by the imagination and the budget.

There are three methods of book launch: publisher, author and bookseller.

Publisher launches will entail the publisher’s publicity department organising the function and liaising with the author and location. This will include the invitations, food and refreshments, stock and publicity. Author and bookseller launches are much the same, but the person who does all the running around is the author or the bookseller.

As a recommendation, if you are published and the publisher does not want to spend much then do a lot yourself. Firstly, you will feel happier with your friends and family around you after all your hard work has been done, and secondly, it is always a good way to create interest.

It will pay to be adept at public speaking. People want a little performance and if you dislike standing up and speaking it may pay to get some coaching
or read a book on the subject. This will also help if you ever speak with the media, especially electronic media such as radio.

Relationship with booksellers
Self publishing
If you have self published your book be prepared to hear “Sorry, not today”. Booksellers are approached multiple times a week by authors with self published books, and there are limits to all bookshops. But many will take stock on consignment, mainly to help local authors. Consignment is an arrangement where the bookseller and author come to an arrangement where the liability remains with the consignee (the author) with no monies passing hands until the books have actually been sold. This reduces the costs for the bookshop and means that the author has an outlet.

Meet your bookseller
It helps to create a rapport with bookseller. Introduce yourself and your title, ask if they would like books signed, or offer the service next time they have stock come in. Be flexible, don’t expect miracles, as they are busy people and have a lot of stock to worry about.