



Case Studies on Marketing Books in the United States

*A Guide for
Canadian
Publishers*

Association for
the Export of
Canadian Books

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Association for the Export of Canadian Books
1 Nicholas Street, Suite 504
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Introduction

What is Marketing?

Broadly defined, book marketing can be described as anything that puts a book into the maximum number of buyers' hands. Yes indeed, there are tried and true industry practices that include, for example:

- sales to retail, wholesale and library accounts
- publicity
- advertising
- subsidiary rights
- book club sales, and
- special sales.

There is no single right way to market a book. There are many right ways. Publishers may be limited by their marketing budgets, but there is no limit to creative approaches that can be used to market a book and maximize sales.

This report is written for Canadian publishers who are attempting to expand their markets into the US. The first three chapters deal generally with the nitty-gritty of marketing; Chapter 4 presents five case studies to give you a sense of various strategies you can adopt to market your books. You'll find up-to-date case studies of publishers who successfully marketed their books despite limited budgets, and those who did so with larger budgets. There are case studies for publishers who were able to place their books on the bestseller list, and those who created word-of-mouth campaigns that led to impressive sales with profitable results. At the end of the report, there are templates to help you organize your marketing campaign.

Although the US market is highly competitive, using some fresh and creative marketing ideas combined with old-fashioned elbow grease, Canadian publishers with titles that appeal to US readers will be able to successfully compete. One key step for successfully marketing in the US is for Canadian publishers to "think outside the box." Happily, as the case studies reveal, there are numerous examples of success stories demonstrating the wisdom of doing just that.



Chapter 1

The Editorial Process is a Key Component of the Marketing Process

In a report about marketing, why does the first chapter focus on the editorial decision-making process? Because a brilliant marketing plan will not make a book sell—a marketing plan can bring attention to a book, but a book has to sell itself. In other words, the book has to be intrinsically worthy of being published. It has to fill a void. This may seem obvious, but there are roughly 60,000 trade books published annually in the US. Each year, those 60,000 books do battle for increasingly limited shelf space. Every book that you publish has to be carefully scrutinized *before* you decide to publish. As a wise old marketing director once told us, “A dog is a dog no matter what market it barks in.”

Positioning Your Book

By the time a book is handed to the marketing department, the editorial department has in almost all cases researched similar or competitive titles. If there are similar titles, editorial has determined: how the book differs from the competition, what more this title adds to the subject at hand, how it is *unique*, whether or not the projected retail price is in line with the competition, and if the retail price is higher than the competition, what justifies the higher price point? Perhaps this book's author is an expert in a particular field, or the book has colour illustrations throughout, or the book has a workbook section with tear-out pages. Any of these examples might justify a higher retail price, but the point is that you must know the competition and you must position your book so that it stands out. (See the Comparative Book Template in Appendix A, which will help you successfully position your book.)

After a thorough analysis of the competition, make sure your editor has done a realistic profit and loss statement on the book. Be sure to get the sales and marketing team involved, since they need to commit themselves to the success of the book along with everyone else. Is the sales and marketing director able to give constructive feedback to the editorial decision making? Does the sales and marketing director think the editor's sales projections are realistic? Does the sales and marketing director feel that he or she can reach projected sales with the proposed marketing budget?

The sales and marketing staff need to have a vested interest in the success of the book. Once the staff of the publishing house is excited about a forthcoming book, this excitement will gather momentum. It will be passed along from the editor to the sales and marketing departments, from the PR person to the media, from the sales reps to the book buyers. If the sales or marketing department staff feel that the book has been foisted onto them, problems will flow from there.

The Importance of a Sales Handle

Once your book has passed through the editorial scrutiny and you have decided to take the plunge and publish it, you will need a sales handle for the book. A publisher or editor may be enthralled by the latest acquisition but he or she needs to be able to describe the book *concisely*, preferably in two minutes, and have a clear sense of who will want to buy this book and why. Ultimately, all the work that your publishing team has put into a book will be pared down to a two-minute presentation to a busy bookstore buyer. However, well before the book is presented to the store buyer, it will be sold many times over. So early on, publishers need to devise a sales handle—a quick description of the book's content and its target market.

Blurbs, Introductions, Forewords

Blurbs are quotes from people who either have a recognizable name or a noteworthy title. These quotes usually go on the back cover or jacket copy. Occasionally, if the quote comes from an especially big name, the blurb will go on the front cover.

A blurb is most useful when the person giving the quote is a well-known author who writes books on the same subject, or in the same genre, as the book you are publishing. A quote from Deepak Chopra can turn an unknown self-help author into an overnight success. A quote from Amy Tan would boost the sales of a first-time novelist. If a famous author cannot be persuaded to provide a blurb, often a professional with an impressive title is almost as good. A business book about productivity would be helped by a quote from the CEO of Procter & Gamble or the CFO of AT&T. A scholarly book on artificial intelligence would benefit from a blurb by a university professor.

Some publishers delegate the responsibility of blurbs to the marketing department. We believe it is in the purview of the editorial department to solicit blurbs since blurbs usually come from other authors.

Another helpful marketing strategy that comes within the purview of the editorial department is finding a well-known person to write an introduction or a foreword for your book. Once again, you don't want just any name, but one that is germane to your book. It can be a famous person, or an expert in the field. Keep in mind that you should think globally. If you are trying to sell books in the United States, try for a name that will be known in the US as well as Canada.

Make Your Author an Ally

Just as it is important to generate enthusiasm for a book from your entire staff, it's equally important to generate your author's help and support in the publishing process. Your author can be an invaluable source of marketing information. Who better to identify the market for her book, who will buy this book and why, what magazines and journals are likely to review the book, or what newspaper would welcome an op-ed piece?



If you are fortunate enough to sign an author who is a good speaker, promote your author at conferences, exhibits, seminars, lectures, bookstore signings, slide shows and demonstrations. Take advantage of your author's strengths.

Every publisher should create and use an author questionnaire. Ask your author for a list of colleagues and friends, especially those who could be classified as movers and shakers. Be generous with galley or review copies. Let your author send out 50 or more review copies. Review copies can be the most effective and one of the least expensive methods of generating the most powerful marketing tool there is: word of mouth.

See Appendix B for a sample author questionnaire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR

Carla Ruff has worked in sales and marketing for over 25 years with a variety of publishers, including Random House, Chronicle Books and Nolo Press. In her current role as a consultant, Ruff specializes in providing publishers both large and small with creative sales and marketing plans and customized distribution solutions.

Carla Ruff
666 29th St.
San Francisco, CA 94131
415-826-9008 (Phone)
415-826-4206 (Fax)
carlainsf@aol.com (E-mail)

Thomas Woll has 30 years of experience in the areas of trade, direct response, and professional publishing, most at senior management levels. His experience spans all areas of trade book publishing, including editorial development and planning; new product search and acquisition; sales and marketing; rights; production and manufacturing; budgeting; and, strategic planning. Woll has lectured frequently at industry events and served on industry panels such as the Association of American Publishers Executive Council. He teaches at NYU's Center for Publishing.

Cross River Publishing Consultants, Inc.
3 Holly Hill Lane
Katonah, NY 10536
914-232-6708 (Phone)
914-232-6393 (Fax)
Info@Pubconsultants.com (E-mail)
www.pubconsultants.com
Thomas Woll, President