

Events at Small-to-Medium-Sized Stores

by Mary Gleysteen of Eagle Harbor Books on Bainbridge Island, WA

Eagle Harbor Book Company's reading series has grown from 3 or 4 events a year (whenever a Bainbridge Island author had a new book) to our current 6 or 7 programs a month. Here's what we've learned along the way:

Successful events result in publicity for the store, attract new customers, sell books, create goodwill, contribute to a sense of community, and are entertaining and informative for customers and staff alike. While signings alone are generally agonizing for the author and bookseller unless the author has a huge local following, a reading, lecture, or slideshow will draw a greater audience and sell more books.

Local authors are usually thrilled to promote their books. When we think that the audience or sales for an author may be disappointing, we host a joint reading with 3 or 4 writers. They get more exposure and we get more customers.

We book many of our authors at PNBA tradeshows, giving them a written description of our store and reading series, and a copy of our newsletter. We also visit publishers' booths, asking to be included in author tours. If the publisher wants a guaranteed audience or supporting book order that we can't meet, we try to collaborate with other book stores, schools or community groups in hosting the event.

We check publishers' catalogs to see where authors live. We've had success in phoning writers who live within a couple of hundred miles of our store and inviting them, even if they are not on a publisher's tour. Once booked, we follow up with a confirmation letter and directions to the store.

If the visit is arranged through the publisher, the publisher covers travel and expenses. A store can offer the author dinner, a gift book, store discount, etc., but it is generally not expected.

Some wholesalers and most publishers have special terms for author events, minimizing penalties for returns. We try to order more books (including backlist) than we think we can sell at the event to avoid the embarrassment of running out and to create an impressive display in the store prior to the event. We ask the author to sign unsold store stock, since it's okay to return signed copies.

Publicity is key to a successful event. We send press releases by email to local and regional media outlets with links to the author's and publisher's websites, and we attach j-pegs of the jacket and author photo if we have them. We offer our press list to the author or publicist and encourage them to send out press kits and review copies.

Publicity expenses can be offset by co-op from the publisher. If the publisher doesn't have a formal co-op program or your store doesn't qualify for it, ask for copies of the book in lieu of co-op.

We use our newsletter, monthly events calendar, posters and bookmarks to announce upcoming readings. We display the books prominently in the store and the window at least 2 full weeks in advance and advertise with flyers at the counter and a sandwich board on the sidewalk.

At our store, the author generally reads or talks for 25 minutes, followed by a question and answer session for 20 minutes and a booksigning. After the event we send a thank you to the author and follow up with a thank you call to publicist, rep and sales department reporting on attendance and number of books sold.

*Key to the success of any event is staff enthusiasm. We love to discuss events with other booksellers. Feel free to call us at 206-842-5332 or email maryg@eagleharborbooks.com; and check out the section on events in *Bookselling for Dummies* (0-7645-4051-3) for more information.*