

Use Your Newsletter to Sell More Books

by Patti McCall (*your Advertising & Newsletters BookPro*), Queen Anne Books, Seattle, WA

When new customers visit our store, we love it when they leave with armloads of books. However, even if they don't buy a thing, we hope they take home a lasting impression of our genuine passion for reading and of our commitment to our customers. We always give them a memento: our store's monthly newsletter, "Books 'n' Bookings."

Content: Our first newsletters were one page, double-sided. We weren't holding many events so each issue had a few reviews and book news such as award winners, holiday titles and upcoming releases. Seven years later, our newsletter is four pages, with one page devoted to a Calendar of Events and the remaining three almost entirely filled with staff reviews. These reviews, a written form of handselling, are the key to our newsletter's success.

Our customers really want to know what we've been reading and recommending, and they enjoy the breadth of voices that come from multiple contributors. Queen Anne Books is lucky to have not only a staff of voracious readers, but also employees who enjoy writing. Mid-month, I post a notice in our office letting people know the deadline for next month's newsletter and, lo and behold, my email inbox starts to fill up with reviews. I use Microsoft Publisher so layout is an easy matter of cutting and pasting. Then I include the book cover image downloaded from

the publisher's website or from Ingram. There are usually three-to-five reviews per page – each one thoughtful, personal and interesting.

By far, our customers' two favorite newsletters of the year are the "lists." In June or July each staff member compiles a list of seven favorite "Summer Reads." And, in January, we publish a "Best of the Year" with employee picks for 10 favorite books from the previous year. Each employee's #1 pick is reviewed, making these lists concise resources. I often get requests for these flyers long after the month has passed. The ability to archive online brings me to the website...

Multi-tasking: Writing a review requires time and thought, so we try to get the most out of each contribution. First, the majority of the content from the "Books 'n' Bookings" is also cut and pasted into our Book Sense website (www.queenannebooks.com) so customers who have moved out of the area or who don't want another piece of paper to recycle can still check in and see what we're reading. Our popular lists are archived online for reference. Another plus: as soon as customers read a review on our site, they can click immediately to purchase, boosting online sales.

We also use some of the content to compose Constant Contact (a service through the ABA) email newsletters to keep customers up to date on events and store favor-

ites. We don't use snail mail for our newsletter for three reasons: the cost is prohibitive; all of the information can be found on our website; and Constant Contact is better suited for last-minute event notification.

Costs: We print our newsletter for less than \$100 a month, but I also factor in the cost of our website and Constant Contact in our advertising/newsletter calculations, for a total of about \$365 a month.

By taking advantage of publishers' Newsletter Co-op we more than make up our costs. Most publishers offer \$50 newsletter co-op for a review of one of their titles. Publishers' rules differ (how many words; inclusion of a picture, etc.) but I no longer worry about those details since our reviews are always longer than the minimum and always include a cover image. Instead, I can focus on presenting my claims, and the publishers really seem to be working to make that easier through innovations like paperless co-op.

If We Can Do It, You Can, Too!

Go on, explore your store's creative side! Make your employees published authors by including them in your newsletter! Take a little time and not too much money to create a publication which reflects the qualities and personality of your store. You'll sell more books, and the newsletter will pay for itself.

Reach Patti at qaabooks@qwest.net or 206-283-5624.