

I'd Rather Be Remaindered Than Pulped

by Mark Mouser, University Bookstore, Seattle, WA

Recently I came across a copy of an article written by E. Lyle Goss, one of our store's early managers, in the August 1938 issue of *The College Store*. In it he talks about how "we watch the remainder market closely, and if we find books that we know will please some of our customers, we are quick to order them and bring them into the store to sell at a price that is very attractive to the customer. We can make a reasonable margin and the customer is getting a very good buy."

Sixty-eight years later, that's still our approach to remainders. But some things have changed. I'd say we watch the market obsessively rather than closely these days. And we don't stack bargain books quite as high as we used to. With more competition and less traffic, we've moved to shorter stacks and more titles in order to maintain that atmosphere of "you snooze, you lose."

The biggest change for us has only developed in the past 10 months since we added used books to our shelves. When our friends at Powell's taught us about used books they also opened our eyes to handling remainders in different ways. I know a lot of stores are years ahead of us, but we had just always put bargain books on bargain tables. By selectively feeding copies onto our shelves we've been able to play with the margin in all sorts of ways. It's been a liberating retail experience to finally be able to build solid margin into our in-

ventory with used and remainders.

What's really been driven home for me in the last year is how important it is to respect ALL types of books equally whether they're used, new, or remainders. In discussing the overstock market with certain publishers, I've been told that the remainders and hurts cut into the new book sales and they don't want their books out in that market.

I'll agree that the dynamics of hurts and remainders (and used) have changed with their increased visibility on the Internet. It's made a big difference going from bargain table impulse purchases to online price comparisons. But it's a different world now, and it's not changing back. Having the remainder market much more visible is the price that publishers should be willing to pay for all those sales they're getting through online sellers, price clubs and chains.

If publishers want to reduce massive returns, they need to get a handle on print-runs and overbuying and offer a discount that would actually compensate stores for buying non-returnable. The solution isn't to start pulping thou-

sands upon thousands of perfectly fine books (which our progressive industry calls recycling) or withholding them so long from the remainder market that no one really cares anymore.

Let's recognize publisher overstocks for what they are: a miscalculation that is no reflection on the quality of the book. They've

been a part of the book business forever and they are one of the few parts of the business that can help independent stores survive with a truly unique selection and the opportunity for margin.

Let's get great books out of the pulping machines and into people's hands. There are very few people on this planet able to build a library of any size when required to pay publisher's list price. But there are millions of people able to build libraries from bargain tables, used books, and new books. I think that's something that all of us in the book business will want to support.

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