

## Make Your Mark Through Marketing

By Chuck Robinson

“If you build it they will come” is a great line from a great novel and movie. As a business marketing philosophy—often adopted by booksellers—it leaves a great deal to be desired. They will come when they are invited and invited and reminded and reminded. In other words, when marketing is used effectively.

It’s important that you’re clear that I’m talking about marketing and not just advertising. Marketing, as Jay Conrad Levinson defines it in his *Guerrilla Marketing* books (which every bookseller should own and regularly re-read) is “everything you do to promote your business, from the moment you conceive of it to the point at which customers buy your product or service and begin to patronize your business on a regular basis.” He places particular emphasis on everything and regular basis.

I constantly hear from small businesses owners that they don’t have enough money to market. But the best things in marketing—like the song says about the best things in life—are free. When I attended ABA’s Prospective Bookseller School in the last millennium one of the teachers there said, “get your name in the newspaper for everything except drunk driving.” Now, you can probably think of at least a couple of other things for which you don’t want your name in headlines but, you get the point. Send press releases about everything—new staff members, donations you’ve given (no matter how small), new lines you’re carrying, events at the store. Are you wondering about whether you should send a press release about something? Take my advice—when in doubt send it out. Did you attend PNBA or BEA? Did you put that in the newspaper?

If you’re not in email contact with your customers change that tomorrow. There are numerous email services for managing email newsletters. Constant Contact is one that is affiliated with ABA. Go to [www.bookweb.org](http://www.bookweb.org) and click on the link. Email newsletters may not be free but they’re close to it. You can segment your list and reach folks by interest categories and track results of your efforts.

If you publish a printed newsletter consider trading ads with other publications. You can also sell ads in your newsletter to other businesses. This will not only off-set your cost, it will add credibility to the publication. And, don’t forget to use co-op advertising dollars for books you write about in your newsletter. Several publishers make this readily available.

Are you regularly selling books at outside events? Don’t have enough staff, you say? Why not consign the books to the sponsoring organization and give them a percentage. Have them hang your banner and pass out store information brochures.

How about a radio program? Many local stations are looking for content but even if you have to pay for ads and it’s handled like an interview program it could be pretty effective. At least a couple of bookstores have actually created their own full radio programs (Square Books and A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books) and we used to produce a cable TV program several years ago. Newspapers and other publications may be looking for book reviewers also.

The most important thing to remember is to be open and creative. There are dozens of opportunities to market our bookstores staring us right in the face. We just need to recognize them and take advantage of them. Though we believe Village Books has done a lot of other things pretty well over the years, we're certain that had we not continually aggressively marketed our business we wouldn't have lived to be twenty-five.

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