

How many units would impress the publisher?

Q: How much can an author reasonably expect to influence hardcover book sales of a novel? of a picture book? through his or her own promotional efforts? How many units would impress the publisher and make the author's efforts worthwhile?

An author can expect that a hardcover edition of a novel is intended for sale to libraries. Not much can usually be done to change the market potential for such a book. In the case of a novel, it would be wiser to wait to do promotion until the book was published in paperback because then it would be available widely in bookstores and sold to schools as well. A picture book is different because the hardcover is likely to be the primary edition. Often picture books are not put into paperback at all, except if they are reprinted for bookclub editions, or if the book does well enough to warrant a less expensive paperback version for the consumer market. For this reason, a picture book author should expect to promote a hardcover.

The impact of the author's promotional efforts will vary depending on the subject of the book and on the author's resources. An author should ask herself: "Is there something unique about the book that will lend itself to promotion?" Do I have the time and inclination to arrange appearances at bookstores and schools, handle publicity, or look for ways to tap into new markets?"

In general, it's better to view time spent on promotion as part of a long-term investment in a career, rather than to trying to quantify the impact of promotion on one book. Specifically, according to Anne Mau, director of marketing and subsidiary rights at Orchard Books, "the number of units of a book that would have to be sold by an author before being noticeable to a publisher depends on the house's expectations for that book." These expectations are based on previous sales of the author's titles and how similar books by other authors have sold in the past. Barbara Fisch, senior publicist at Harcourt Brace said that, "for a newer author's book, the sale of 50-100 copies at one or two author events would be an impressive number."

The best strategy, though, is for authors and illustrators to find out what kind of promotion they are good at and then incorporate time for those activities into their work schedules. 2:3/95