

Can you provide information on the marketing and development of children's coloring books?

Q: Can you provide information on the marketing and development of children's coloring books? I am very interested in helping children continue the enjoyment of learning through coloring.

I spoke with Randy Kessler, National Accounts Manager for Dalmatian Press, a company that specializes in producing coloring and activity books. Many of their products are based on licensed characters, but the company welcomes proposals from illustrators who have characters they think could work well in other formats, or who want to propose new ideas for individual books or licenses. Terms are negotiable and the company has bought art as an outright purchase, paid for some on an hourly fee, and has arranged for others on a royalty basis. He says that they should be queried much the same as a traditional publisher with art samples and a concept description. The company is also interested in ideas for other materials that can be packaged with the coloring or activity book, such as crayons, paints, stickers and glitter. While most of their publishing has been with mass market licenses; such as Scooby Doo, Powerpuff Girls, M&M's and Mr. Potato Head; they also did well with the coloring book for Rainbow Fish.

While the books don't have much text, they do have a concept or theme to keep the child engaged in the activity. Most are for preschoolers, and topics can be seasonal (ie. the beach), tied to a holiday or destination (ie. Halloween, the zoo), or centered on popular subjects (cats, dogs, dinosaurs, baby animals). There are some books for older children (ie. SpongeBob SquarePants, the Adventures of Jackie Chan), but even those tend to sell to a pretty young age group. The idea is to develop something that has widespread appeal because these are intended to sell in the mass market. Sales outlets include Toys 'R Us and specialty toy stores; Barnes & Noble, Borders and independent bookstores; Wal-Mart; Target; craft stores; Scholastic Book Fairs; grocery stores and consumer catalogs. Quantities can range from 5,000 units to hundreds of thousands for a popular line.

If you're interested in pursuing this further, Randy Kessler says, "It's a little different than querying a traditional publisher. Since the cover is what sells a coloring or activity book, you should submit a cover design and then a description of what the rest of the book would look like. Explain what other materials could be packaged with the book and what the story line would be. Expect that it will take 12-18 months to produce the book, depending on the complexity of the materials required." Some characters can be difficult to do in this format, particularly if they have very specific style guidelines on how they need to be portrayed (think Charlie Brown and his yellow — or sometimes orange — and black zigzagged shirt), or more recently, Calliou. Kessler points out that it's more fun when the image offers more portions to color. At the same time, the picture needs to be simple enough for young children to color without getting frustrated. For more information, contact the editorial office at Dalmatian Press at 615-370-9922. 11-12:02