

# Bookseller Survey

May/June is time for the BookExpo conference where industry professionals gather with booksellers to talk about future lists. Here are tips about marketing to bookstores in response to our agency survey and also advice on marketing novelties from Kristen McLean, Executive Director of the Association of Booksellers for Children, [www.abfc.com](http://www.abfc.com).

## Bookseller Survey

We recently asked booksellers from various parts of the country their views on working with authors and illustrators — what worked well in making store appearances successful, what materials and information should be provided and what they considered a turn-off when being approached by individuals hoping to work with their children's or general independent bookstore.

Those who responded were very open to the idea of having authors and illustrators contact them directly about doing an appearance at their store and email was often preferable for the initial contact, though a couple of people – Hannah Schwartz of Children's Book World in Haverford, Pennsylvania and Alison Morris, who writes the ShelfTalker column for Publishers Weekly's Children's Bookshelf and works at Wellesley Booksmith in Wellesley, Massachusetts, preferred in-person and telephone contact respectively. Peter Glassman of Books of Wonder in New York City suggested authors submit a copy of their book with their request unless they know for a fact that the store already carries their book — in which case, they should state this fact in their request, since the event coordinator is usually not the buyer and so not necessarily familiar with every title in the store.

But making contact doesn't ensure you'll get an event and if you do, you should be prepared to play a role in its success. First you must convince the bookseller that you can conduct an interesting and entertaining program that will appeal to their customers. According to Iris Yipp at Magic Tree Bookstore in Oak Park, Illinois, if an author or illustrator has an activity that is appealing for young people beyond reading the book, that means a lot. Valerie Lewis from Hicklebee's Children's Books in San Jose, California said, often a workshop-style presentation is successful. For example, I've had illustrators come and lead collage workshops, another showed children how to make puppets. We put it under our "class" category and charge a fee that covers the cost of the book. Ellen Richmond of the Children's Book Cellar in Waterville, Maine recommended doing something to generate excitement. Brian Lies was the perfect guest. He came with props, an activity, a painted car he parked outside the store. All I had to provide was the place and have the books in stock! Booksellers also advised preparing mailing lists to invite your family and friends and put the word out across your social and professional networks to help them drive traffic to the store. Ask the bookseller whether they would like you to provide them with a list, or if they'd prefer that you to do outreach directly.

Bring your own promotional material –bookmarks, posters, buttons and postcards were suggested by quite a few stores. Amy Baum at the Red Balloon Bookshop in St. Paul, Minnesota said, Educator guides are always a hot commodity...Anything that can be used in the classroom. Diane Van Tassell at Bay Books in San Ramon, CA shared that she finds little hand-outs are a

good idea- chocolate, rulers, handcuffs, something that goes along with the book- of course, chocolate is always a favorite. There were also other items booksellers said stood out over the years:

-I once had an illustrator create a backdrop for our store window that worked beautifully with her book and others of that genre. That window stayed up in our store for a month...then it went on to another independent in another city. It was a brilliant thing to do! (Valerie Lewis)

-Sallie Wolf had the kids bring their favorite vehicles and she brought her own collection to share. She had already tried out her fun Traffic Jam style party so we really benefited. The kids had a super time playing and totally enjoyed her lively reading. She also had a cake made up in the shape of the truck (Iris Yipp)

-The absolute best, bar none, has been Brian Lies' Bats at the Beach....It included many aspects, but from our standpoint, they had a complete program that they brought in, set up, ran, and picked up afterward....The program took beach themes and bat themes, and created a little setting within the bookstore (a beach umbrella and towels) in which there was a dramatic reading, followed by a craft, creating "bugs" out of marshmallows, gumdrops, toothpicks, etc....They did the same program in many venues, so their costs were modest, as were ours (Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Children's Bookshop in Falmouth, MA)

Authors and illustrators should also respect the bookseller's opinion when they're told an event or book is not of interest. It is hard to tell an aspiring or fledgling author no because you know the turnout wouldn't be good...especially in a small town, says Vicki Worsham from Man in the Moon Children's Bookshoppe in Monroe, GA. We know our business, and our market. If a book is one we think we can sell, of course we want to help promote it. If it's not, then please respect our knowledge of what interests our customers, what we can afford to advertise, and the limits of our psychic and physical energy, agreed Carol Chittenden. Ellen Richmond advised authors and illustrators to, Make the offer, the pitch, and let me mull it over. If I don't jump at the opportunity, don't take it personally. I'm not only making a judgment on your book(s), I'm making a judgment on my customers and what will appeal to them.

Alison Morris says, The same is true when it comes to making the decision about whether or not to carry a book on consignment, by a self-published author or someone being published by a small press we don't usually order from. A good buyer knows his or her market and knows what will or won't work in it. If an author isn't local or doesn't have local friends and family who will come in to ask for their book AND we have to jump through hurdles to get it or return it to them if it doesn't sell, etc., etc. it's almost never worth the effort on our part to carry that title. There are simply too many other books competing with it for space on our shelves, and most of them have a better chance of selling, because they're generally better-produced (meaning their cover art is more appealing, plot synopsis is well-written, etc.) and have been better-marketed. That having been said, if a self-published book wows me and I think our customers will gravitate to it, by all means I'll go the distance to get it. The main thing to remember is that a buyer's decision regarding your book isn't personal — it's business. We don't buy books simply based on what we "like." We buy books based on what will sell.

So what else can help? Those who do their homework not just about my store but about the area in general and who connect with our regional children's bookseller's group usually have the edge, concludes Luan Stauss of Laurel Book Store in Oakland, California. 5:6/08