

When do books benefit from niche marketing? How much time should be spent exploring this area?

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Niche marketing can be an effective way for authors and illustrators to impact the sales of their books. While it is not advisable to slant a book just to fit a niche, it is smart to consider what non-traditional avenues can be pursued beyond the book trade, book clubs, and gift outlets. These can be retail outlets, such as gourmet shops for a cookbook, garden shops and nurseries for books on plants and insects, and hospital gift stores for books about a child's hospital stay. They can also be organizations, such as The Association for the Care of Children's Health, or Planned Parenthood, which might buy and redistribute special interest titles. Two excellent examples of niche marketing are from campaigns done for Boyds Mills Press books.

The first was for a book entitled Granddaddy's Highway, which was about a girl traveling cross-country with her grandfather in a tractor-trailer. The truck shown in the illustrations was a "Yellow Freight" truck, so Boyds Mills approached the trucking company and negotiated the purchase of a quantity of books. The company also had some success selling the book into truck stops and publicizing it in truckers' magazines, such as Trucker's Connection, RPM Magazine, and Over the Road.

The second campaign was done by Author Cris Peterson for her book, Extra Cheese, Please!, a Boyds Mills bestselling title. To promote her book, Cris, who is also a dairy farmer, made sure to get copies of the book to fifty agricultural journals across the country. She also researched contacts through the Dairy Association of Wisconsin and the Agriculture Department to get on a speaking circuit and to get her book into special programs. One program that has purchased large quantities of her book, is "AG in the Classroom," which helps teach children where their food comes from.

Authors and illustrators who have books that could benefit from a niche marketing campaign should either provide their publishers with contact suggestions, or pursue areas the publisher won't cover. It's often not clear at first which segment of a niche market will prove profitable for a book, so it's worth experimenting before doing a large-scale mailing, or telephone campaign. The benefit to exploring a market niche is that a book that succeeds will have much less competition from other children's titles and can get special attention. 8:9/95