GETTING BOOKSTORES TO CARRY YOUR BOOK

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**Overview**

While we have some success in getting our books into bookstores, small presses are at a serious disadvantage. We fare better with independent bookstores—and authors are generally more successful at approaching their own local stores than is a publisher from afar. Below is information about how to approach your local bookstores.

There can be a certain danger in working with bookstores. For a full explanation, see our Distribution and Sales Policy.

**Chain Stores**

The Stores (not many left)

Barnes & Noble. B&N, which is about the only chain left, does not automatically carry our books, but these stores can carry them as easily as they carry the works of large publishers. It is getting the book noticed that is the issue, and catalogues and mailings don’t necessarily do the trick. Getting local B&N stores to carry local books is considerably easier than convincing national headquarters to carry all our books – with small publishers, interesting HQ in countrywide shelving of our books is not likely to happen; there are too many books coming out each month from all publishers for bookstores to carry them all; they have to pick and choose – and, when it comes to small publishers, they will usually choose books by local authors because local sells better. You are right there in town; you can help get your book noticed by direct approach to the bookstore. B&N will want as a minimum (in our experience) 25 reviews at 4 or 5 stars *on the B&N online bookstore site*. (Amazon reviews do not count.)

Sam’s Club. We can engage with individual Sam’s Clubs to carry your book—and have done so. Unfortunately, the minimum quantity of a couple thousand books required by Sam’s Clubs far exceeds our ability to subsize the printing and shipping costs, given the requirement for right of return and likelihood that 90% or more of these thousands of books will be returned. If we can get the total volumes required to a few hundred at a time, we could manage, but so far, that has been a nonstarter.

Target. Our books are carried at the online Target stores. We get little say in whether or not individual books are taken on by Target, and we do not see a pattern as to topics. You can check from time to time, and if your book appears at the Target site, let us know so we can add that information to your book page. (We do check, as well, but not highly frequently.)

Staples. As with Target, our books are carried at the online Staples stores. The conditions pretty much parallel those of Target, but Staples selects books that often differ from those selected by Target.

Walmart. Our books are also carried at the Walmart online stores. Same conditions as for Staples and Target.

Approaching the manager of the bookstore

It is best for an author to ask to talk to the sales manager of the store. You probably will not have to make an appointment unless the manager is not in when you drop by. Take a copy of your book and press release (print it out in color). Be prepared to do/show the following:

* Explain who you think in your community will buy your book (and how you know that they will actually purchase);
* Explain how you can help facilities sales.
* Make sure that your book has a minimum of 25 reviews with 4-star and 5-star ratings on the Barnes & Noble website. Take the URL for your book on B&N online.
* Let the manager know the ISBN of the book, that the book is available from Ingram and at normal bookstore discounts), and that MSI Press has a right of return policy (on most books\*).

Think your approach through carefully before you walk through the door and be prepared to explain it almost as an elevator speech. Have succinct points and information at the ready.

Holding an event

Events are things that bookstores do, and they like them. They can bring in new customers, and they provide something interesting with which to entertain customers who are in the store. Talk to the events coordinator and offer to do a book signing (these are easier to “sell to the store right after a book has been released – a lot harder later unless there is some special connection between the book and a local event). Tell the events coordinator how you can help to advertise the book event and who you will be able to get to come to it who might not normally shop at the bookstore. (Bookstores love new customers.) Please be aware that some bookstores plan 2-3 months or more in advance. So, you should make arrangements before your book comes out. All too often, bookstores, including B&N, overorder books and return the leftovers. (They rarely put the leftovers on the shelf.) Every returned book cancels out two or more book sales, so if you set up an event, if it is at all possible, let us talke to the bookstore about the number of books to order. Some bookstores will order directly from us, and we can control that quantity better. Some, like B&N, go through their HQ and have a standard volume. For B&N, that is 25 copies. New authors, in our experience, almost never sell even half that many. If you end up with an event at B&N, you will need to do a lot of hustling to get at least 25 purchasers into the store in order to not lose money on the event. With a lot of effort, it is possible to sell out your books – we had one author locally do that within an hour, and B&N took extra books from us on the spot, working out something creative to meet HQ’s direct purchase requirements. But that is rare, the only case we know of, and the groundwork put in by the author’s friends made the difference.

What you will need

B&N can be a hard sell, and definitely if you have no reviews on the B&N online bookstore site, neither you nor we will be able to convince the local store to carry your book. So, if someone you know is reviewing your book, ask that the review be posted on both Amazon and B&N. I have stood by while the manager of our local store called up the book at the B&N online site and made a determination of whether to carry the book. The decision is typically based on

* the number of sales (with a new book, they won’t expect a lot),

* the nature of the comments and the number of stars (less than a four-star rating on average will not excite a bookstore owner; fortunately, we are pretty good at publishing only good quality books so most of our books are 5-star books),
* and the number of reviews (less than 15-20 is not impressive (so get all your acquaintances to help out by writing and posting a review, which they will only be able to do for B&N if they have purchased at least one book—on any topic—from B&N since it went online; surprisingly, some people never have).

Once you have everything together (the good book reviews, the book & press release, and a plan for helping the bookstore to get sales, such as a book launch, an upcoming radio or television show you will be on where you can mention where to buy the book, etc.), you are ready to talk to the bookstore manager. If you are successful, your local store will order copies of your book through the B&N headquarters (they generally do not order direct from publishers or distributors). If your book sells well, they will consider stocking it. (That means that you may have to market it locally periodically through various public activities, to keep the book selling and on the bookshelves.)

**Independent Bookstores/”Mom & Pop” Stores**

You can approach these in similar ways. They have less shelf space than B&N yet are more likely to help out a local author—and to see value in carrying local works. They generally prefer to order through Ingram or Bowker (they can order our books through either), but some might want to take your books on consignment (you leave the books and they pay when all have been sold). We are willing to work with local stores on consignment, and if that topic comes up (or if in advance you want information), we can send you a consignment sales information flyer and blank contract; just let us know.

For more information, see the document, About Bookstores.

\*See our right of return document at the Author Hub; it explains those minority of cases where right of return is not available. Specifically, when books enter negative revenue because of the number and cost of returns, we cannot continue to offer right of return. As a rule of thumb, if the rate of return falls at the average for all of our books (or fewer returns), there will be no problem. Complete details are available in the Right of Return policy document at the Author Hub.