

# **Summary of 'Working successfully with Libraries and Bookshops' seminar from the Self-Publishing Conference 2013**

This sheet offers a brief summary of the main points covered in the above session.

## **Maggie Boyd, Leicestershire Libraries**

Libraries are under pressure and their budgets are being cut. This means that librarians no longer have the time or budget to select books in the way they used to.

Books are now mostly 'pre-selected' by library suppliers and then supplied ready for shelving at the libraries (based on the number of issues an author / title has)

It is very hard for self-published authors to get their books taken up by libraries, but there are a few things you can do to help yourself:

Make sure your book is listed with the library suppliers (i.e. Askews)

That your book is a suitable format for libraries (i.e., not ring-bound or flimsy).

If the book has a local connection, the Local Studies Librarian is likely to be interested.

Very specialist and niche (or controversial) books are unlikely to fit well in general libraries when budget cuts are so tight.

Customers can pay £1.00 to request a title for a library – and the library will then get that item into their stock.

She recommends that you visit your local library to ask about the ordering process – taking along a copy of your book to show the librarian in question.

Some authors think they can donate books to the library and this means they will automatically appear on the shelves – this is not always the case. When you donate you agree to the terms and conditions of the library, which means they can dispose of the books as they wish. (I.e. if it's not suitable for the collection the library can sell it.) As there have been so many cuts in the library service, the back room staff needed to process new stock have also been affected, and so they often struggle to get donated books on the shelves (especially when library suppliers are supplying new stock already prepared for shelving).

*Please also see her handout 'Maggie's 7 Steps' available for download from the conference pages.*

## **Debbie James, The Bookshop, Kibworth**

Don't feel sorry for your indie bookshop. They are usually community-focussed vibrant shops. Debbie runs 4 reading groups and lots of events.

Everything she sells in her store is at full cover price, she does not discount because she believes all the books she sells are worth the price on the cover. Have faith in your product in the same way.

Build a relationship with your indie bookshop before you want them to sell your books! Do you know what kinds of books they sell? How the shop orders and selects stock? Have you been there to buy books recently? Do the staff know you? Making sure your book matches the range the shop already stocks and proving you understand the area and customers will help you work with your indie.

Send an Advance Information Sheet to the store in advance of publication and follow that up with a visit, bringing a copy of the book with you. But make an appointment in advance (via email) to do so rather than showing up on spec.

Always ensure you have a RRP price on the cover and your barcode scans – it makes the bookshop owner's life much easier and they will be more inclined to work with you.

Do you understand how the book trade works? Can the bookshop order your book from their usual wholesalers or can they only buy from you? If they can only buy from you, are you able to offer the terms the shop needs (say 40% of the cover price). Will you supply your book on a sale or return basis? You'll need to be able to invoice for the books and deal with potential returns etc.

There is a real trend at the moment for beautiful books, so make sure your book has an attractive cover. Debbie has noticed that people increasingly buy books as gifts and attractively produced books sell well for the gift market. But avoid unusual sized books that do not sit well on bookshelves. There is a difference between a book standing out because it is beautiful and standing out because it doesn't fit on the shelf!

@kibworthbooks

## **Sarah Taylor, Troubador Publishing**

### *Setting a cover price:*

Price your book reasonably – too low and there's not much profit margin for retailers, too high and it's too expensive.

Price your book according to the market – if you try and sell your paperback novel at £14.99 you won't make a lot of sales.

Price your book according to the print costs – if you're printing a full-colour, photographic hardback book, this will cost more to produce. You can therefore justify a higher cover price.

Price your book bearing in mind that retailers only pay you a percentage of the cover price – they'll never pay the full price of a book – and you'll make what's left over.

### *Retailers:*

A bookshop will expect a trade discount of 35-55%. Wholesalers will take a discount towards the upper end of this scale. Wholesalers list hundreds of publishers' titles for sale, and supply a huge number of retailers. They act as a middleman so that retailers don't have to deal with multiple publishers. The leading wholesalers are Gardners and Bertrams. If you're handling your own distribution (i.e. not using a self-publishing services provider to distribute your books) then you'll need to open accounts with them both.

Wholesalers, retailers and libraries need certain information to be able to find and order a book – bibliographic data. That's all the unique data about a book (ISBN etc). Retailers to get this information from data aggregators like Nielsen. Make sure you understand ISBNs and supplying bibliographic data. If you are using a self-publishing services provider this is usually covered in the services they offer, but check.

Bookshops like to see an Advance Information (AI) sheet. An A4 sheet with all of the information that they need to make their stocking decisions – it lists all of the relevant bibliographic data, including the category, target audience, supplier and synopsis and cover.

Retailers also get information about new books from other sources – *The Bookseller*, customer orders, wholesaler catalogues, book repping companies.

Chain retailers and wholesalers make decisions 3-6 months in advance of publication. Timing is especially key for events like Christmas – generally retailers start choosing their titles for Christmas in the late summer.

Retailers are likely to order conservatively at first. They have limited shelf space, and don't want to end up sending back lots of copies – retailers generally only buy books a sale or return basis, which means that if they have unsold copies, they can return them up to 12 months after the purchase.

### *Amazon*

You can either supply books to them directly via their vendor account – what they call their Advantage system – in which they order from you directly, but require a 60% discount. If you want to do this, you'll need to apply for and set up an account and then supply the books on consignment.

Amazon also have a Marketplace, where you'll supply books to customers directly, (a bit like eBay) with Amazon processing the ordering and payment information and passing it on to you to fulfil the order.

### *Waterstones*

They make buying decisions centrally, at their head office, with buyers for specific areas and categories – like children's books, non-fiction, and fiction. They'll want to see the AI and a copy of the book if you are handling your own distribution and will order via the wholesalers, usually Gardners. You can access info about Waterstones' buying policy on their website.

### *Print on Demand.*

POD copies are printed when they're ordered. Retailers generally only order copies of books if they can return them – on what they call a sale or return basis. However, POD books are generally supplied on firm sale – which means that the book cannot be returned. A bookshop therefore won't generally stock POD titles. This is worth bearing in mind if your main audience is the retail trade.

@matadorbooks