

Marketing Books—Getting the Discussion Going

The old proverb is, “You can’t tell a book by its cover.” Book publishers add, “But you can sell a book by its cover.”

This article focuses on marketing. Marketing is positioning a book in the purchaser’s mind, while sales (and distribution) is getting the product into the customer’s hands in exchange for a fair price. Both are essential for successful book publishing.

The marketing of books includes the three “P’s”—the right product at the right price at the right place. It includes the new digital realities of marketing as well as more traditional ways to create awareness and desire to purchase.

Covers are tremendously important in marketing. They urge customers to purchase a particular book or to choose between multiple options. Some believe that subtitles are also important, convincing the reader that this book is a worthwhile investment of time and money. The cover needs to attract the customer and to give a promise. Many do this by featuring an endorsement by a famous or respected person on the front and also on the back cover. Publishers sometimes ask famous authors to endorse each other’s books.

Which brings us to marketing books by showing the covers. Publishers’ catalogues or web pages are designed to show off their products. Catalogues are expensive to print and distribute, but now, electronic distribution is a big help. The ultimate “catalogues” are designed by eSellers such as Amazon, who not only display books from many publishers, but also give reviews, endorsements, chapter readings, and “other books you might like.”

How do you get your print catalogue to potential customers? Some put it in a shipment with other books. Others actually print a mini-catalogue in the back of other titles, filling out the pages with similar titles. What has worked for you, or hasn’t worked? Do you need a print catalogue, or can you stay with an electronic version?

Can you join your catalog with other publishers to increase the choices for readers as well as saving costs? Years ago Tyndale House placed racks of books in non-bookstore markets. When we increased the number of titles on display from 32 to 48, sales dramatically increased because people had more choices. The more choices the buyers have the more likely it is that they will find titles they want.

In all marketing, we know that word-of-mouth advertising is very powerful, whether it is one customer telling another, or a noted person or pastor recommending a book.

We also know that sampling is powerful. Book purchasers standing before a display of books first look at the front cover, then turn it over to look at the back cover, then tend to leaf

through the book—possibly seeing if something inside catches their eyes. This is the ultimate sampling.

How do we harness these two powerful concepts for greater sales and distribution? What can we do to promote reading, both of our own company's titles and those of other Christian publishers? These are questions that our Africa Speaks conversation could enlighten. Perhaps as we exchange our ideas we will spark unique ways of marketing our Christian books.

Let's get the marketing discussion going.

End Note: We have downloaded two examples of sales sheets. One is from Livr'Afrique, a catalogue, and the other is from Oasis, an information sheet about the *Africa Study Bible*.