

Selling to Non-Bookstore Retailers

By Brian Jud

There are many non-bookstore, brick-and-mortar retailers through which you can sell your books. These include airport stores, supermarkets, gift shops, discount stores and others. Your current distributor may already be selling to them, so check with them before pursuing retailers on your own.

Otherwise, creating a retail-distribution channel is a good way to start your special-sales efforts because it is much like selling through bookstores. You work through distribution partners, the discount structure is similar, and books are displayed on shelves. Fiction usually outsells non-fiction in the retail setting. On the other hand, unsold books are returned, and you are paid in 90 - 120 days. Here are some things you can do to profit from selling through retailers.

1. **Define your target readers.** Who are they? The worst answer to that question is, “Everybody who likes (your genre).” If your target readers are in a low-income demographic then you want your book in Walmart, not Neiman Marcus. In what form will they buy it? If your target buyers are in an older demographic category, they may prefer a large-print version. Where do they shop? You want your book sold in those locations. Is your content seasonal in nature? That might dictate when they purchase your content.
2. **Know the customer of your customer.** You may have the best book in your category, but that category may not be important to a retailer’s customers. The customer of a Hallmark store is different from one at Spencer Gifts. Who shops at airport stores? Supermarkets? Discount stores? Understanding your target readers will direct your efforts to the appropriate retailers.
3. **Know why retailers decide which books to carry.** There are three major factors that influence the products chosen to place on the shelves. One is store traffic. Will your promotion help build the number of people who come to the store? More people shopping there should increase the other two criteria: profit per square foot and inventory turns.
4. **The least important item in the decision process is your book.** Buyers want to know your platform size and what promotion you have done and will do, thus increasing the factors described in point number three. If your book doesn’t sell, the retailer will replace it with another product and return your book to the distributor. They do not want your book on their shelves, they want it at their cash registers.
5. **Know how the middlemen work before submitting your book for possible distribution.** For example, Choice Books (<http://choicebooks.org/>) manages the title assortment on the displays it sets up and services in retail locations. Titles are tailored to store demographics and sales history, and they specialize in selling bibles (adult & children's), cookbooks, devotionals, family living and fiction. If your content does not meet the needs of their customers, Choice Books will not accept your book.

ReaderLink (<https://www.readerlink.com/>) is the largest full-service distributor of hardcover, trade and paperback books to non-trade channel booksellers in North America. This includes the biggest names in retail across multiple retail channels. This broad customer base is unique in the industry and highlights our unmatched ability to service many different types of retailers, from mass merchants to grocery stores.

6. **Retailers don't sell books per se, they *display* them.** It is up to you to promote your book and drive prospective customers to the stores. Work closely with your distribution partners to support their salespeople and give them information about your upcoming promotion and sales tips about how your book is different from and better than competitive titles
7. **Is your book produced to expected quality?** Walk the stores so you understand the topics, pricing, colors and dimensions of the books sold there. Is your spine of sufficient width to be seen on the shelf? Does the rear cover identify the BISAC subject heading under which your book should be shelved? Does it show the bar code and price of your book?
8. **Work with your distribution partners at all levels to offer creative solutions to increase their sales.** Offer to conduct store events (vs. book signings) to increase store traffic. Give them ideas for cross merchandising. If your book is about cooking steaks, create a display to place on the supermarket counter near where the steaks are sold. Sell the same book in large quantities to Lowe's for them give as a free gift to people who purchase a grill there.

Promote your book so your distribution partners (middleman and retailer) are more profitable selling your book than another one. If not, it will be returned since it is relatively easy to find a replacement product. But when two companies are linked by mutual value, what was purely a financial transaction becomes a co-created partnership fed by trust and loyalty.

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