



LAUGHING BEAR 114 NEWSLETTER

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The Surviving Small Press: Libraries

I love selling to libraries. Once you sell them something, odds are they'll buy everything you publish. And if you put out a magazine, they will almost always renew their subscription. The tough part of selling to libraries is getting your foot in the door. But once you establish a relationship with a library, unless you do something drastic to upset them, they'll be loyal customers for life.

The important thing to remember in library sales is to follow their rules. If they give you a vendor number, put it on all invoices and correspondence concerning your account. Be prepared to bill in triplicate. Don't expect to be paid in advance, and don't get alarmed if you have to wait four to eight weeks for payment.

If you sell one of your books to a library, be sure and let them know about the other books in your catalog. Especially when dealing with small publishers it is not unusual for them to want a complete set of your publications. And add them to your mailing list for future books. Use the shipping address they provided (unless they specify otherwise) for your mailing list, and again include any vendor number they assign you.

I have a few library customers who've been with me since the newsletter started in 1976. And at least one not only buys whatever I publish, but I've heard from several publishers that they buy books and

magazines reviewed in the newsletter as well.

If you have a book you feel as a wide appeal for library patrons, as opposed to one that would end up in a special collection, consider printing a clothbound edition. Books put out in a library's general collection for the public to check out should be cloth (hardback). Because of the wear and tear of being checked out, paperbacks have a short life in libraries.

If a paperback is purchased for a general collection, the library will usually send it out to be "library bound", which means they'll remove your cover and rebind the book in a generic cloth binding. Obviously, if you have a cloth edition available, the library will prefer it to paper even though it costs more.

Books kept in special collections, usually chapbooks and special editions, will not be available for the public to check out or handle without special permission. Therefore they can be perfectbound (paperback) or stapled.

Regarding discounts, there was a rule of thumb when I started out that the standard library discount was 20%. But there really is no reason to offer a discount on single book or small orders. If a main library wants to buy 10 copies for its branches that's another matter. A discount for volume is not unreasonable, but you shouldn't be penalized for selling a single book to a library. There are enough extra

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Direct and Co-op Mailings

Direct mail is definitely an efficient way to reach a lot of libraries at once, and co-op mailings cut the cost, but there are some factors to consider when doing either.

While libraries buy books throughout the year, there are a window of time when they are more likely to consider solicitations than others, and that is just before or just after the ALA convention. Other times they buy books requested by the library patrons or ones that for some reason they decide on their own they need.

Like all governmental entities, libraries operate on annual budgets. The one time they get to cut loose and go shopping is at the ALA. Then they do the bulk of their buying for the year. There are also regional library association conventions, but you'd have to send out mailings to just the regional libraries to get the timing right. The ALA is a bigger target.

What they do at the ALA is collect flyers and other promotional materials to take home and review to build their orders. If your flyers arrive just before or after the ALA, they stand a good chance of at least getting looked at before they are added to the pile of flyers the librarian lugs home from the ALA – and it is not unusual for a librarian to come home with several suitcases, boxes, and bags of

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expenses in time and effort to do the paperwork and billing on a library sale without cutting the price, too.

When a library does place an order with you, they'll send a purchase order. The PO includes the shipping address, billing address, PO number, a description of exactly what they want, and a price. Read the PO carefully. If you send the book to the wrong address or bill the wrong address, your payment can be delayed considerably.

The price listed on the PO will usually be taken from *Books in Print*, but sometimes it is just an estimate. If it is within a few dollars, go ahead and bill the correct amount and ship the book, but make a notation on the copy of the PO you send back with the bill. If the price is way off, contact the library before shipping the book and invoice.

I had a book published in the 70's that a library sent a PO for in the early 90's. The PO was for the original price of \$3. However, since there were few copies left I raised the price in my catalog to \$50. I called the library and explained the situation. They still wanted the book and I shipped it and got paid the asking price plus postage.

In the case of back issues of a magazine or a book that has been in print for a long time, they may offer an amount more than retail. In that case it's up to you whether to just ship it or contact them and verify the price.

Several years ago the New York Public Library sent me a PO for issues 1 through 62 of the newsletter at \$20 per issue. I went back and forth over whether to contact them and confirm the price or just send the issues and hope for the best.

After putting together the issues, many of which were out of

print so I had to make copies from old ditto and mimeograph masters (the first issues were printed on a school-type ditto machine), I decided to just send the package and see what happened.

I got paid much more than my old estimated back issue price of \$1 per issue. On the other hand, I put a good 40 hours plus expenses into putting that complete set together, so I was paid well, but not as exorbitantly as it sounded at first.

Another bit of information that some libraries include on their purchase orders is the vendor number. If you get one, be sure to put it on the invoice, shipping label, and all correspondence you send to the library.

In the case of the Seattle Public Library, they need a vendor number to show you are a registered vendor in the city, and unless you provide the number they cannot pay you. When you first sell a book to them, they'll send you a registration form to fill out and return. After that you'll get paid promptly as long as you include the number.

Some libraries will try to get you to donate books. Whether you do so is up to you, but remember your publishing is a business that relies on sales to keep going. The Denver Library used to call me every year when I was living there to send a free subscription to their Western History collection.

I maintained that if they didn't think enough of the newsletter to buy it, they didn't really want it; and it didn't have anything to do with Western history anyway. They tried to tell me it was my civic duty, and I told them I felt I did my share of civic duty by paying the income, sales, and property taxes that paid for the library. I'd be glad to donate overstock books to help raise money for the library, but it wouldn't be right to give the newsletter to one library and charge the others.

One Way to Almost Certainly Sell a Book to a Library

There is one almost infallible way to sell a book to a library. Go to your local library with your library card in hand and ask the librarian to order your book.

Take the ISBN, title and author, publisher's name and address, Library of Congress information and distributor (if you have them), and tell the librarian you are a local author (or publisher).

The purpose of a public library is to collect books their patrons (the folks holding library cards) want. In most cases, if you go in with a request for a book they don't have, the librarian will try to get it from one of their branches, and if none of them have it they will order it.

If you are a local author and/or publisher there is an extra incentive for them to have your book since another of the library's functions is to collect local publications.

This may sound like a really inefficient method of selling one book, but that's how I sold my first magazine subscription to the Seattle Public Library and they've been a steady customer for 23 years. Besides the old magazine, they've bought books and the newsletter.

Another alternative is to let your friends and relatives request the book at their public libraries. Just send them the information they need to give their librarian. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can even insert a card with the information in your book and ask readers to request that their local library order a copy.

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Mailings *(continued)*

brochures, catalogs, and promotional giveaways.

It may seem like a good idea to send your materials when the librarians don't have a huge stack of promotional paper on their desks, but during the rest of the year the librarians are dealing with other business and your flyer is their version of junk mail. It is usually thrown away.

This situation may seem grim, but there are ways to improve the odds of your mailing getting the librarians' attention.

(1) Use a targeted list. There are tens of thousands of public and collegiate libraries, and the last estimate I read had 9,000 public libraries alone in the U.S.

Most are inappropriate for your book no matter what it is. There are medical, law, engineering, science, architectural, corporate and other specialty libraries that have no interest whatsoever in anything out of their field. And even for public libraries, you need to send the flyer only to the main libraries, not every little branch, because they don't do the ordering.

Don't rent a list or get in on a co-op mailing based on numbers alone. Find out what's on the list.

For a good, free list try the one on the Laughing Bear web site. I spent a lot of time cleaning it up. It may as well get some use.

(2) If you are participating in a co-op mailing, try to get into one with other publishers doing the same kind of books you are. Mixing cooking, crafts, education, and travel is fine. Those subjects complement each other. But if the person coordinating the mailing publishes business books and you publish poetry, your flyers may well end up in unsympathetic hands.

(3) If your mailing is going out before the ALA, try to tie it in. If you are exhibiting, ask them to visit your booth. If not, say you're

sorry you can't be there, but here's what you would have been showing. Be creative. Send them a pre-convention promotional giveaway like a map showing restaurants around the convention center printed on the back of your flyer.

(4) If the mailing is going out after the ALA, tell them thanks for coming by if you exhibited or sorry you missed them (not mentioning it was because you weren't there).

(5) Your flyer is your book's resume. Treat it like one. Make it one page and easy to scan for the important points. Include ordering information or your distributor. Do not include an order form; they'll make out a purchase order if they intend to buy. For additional pages, use reviews, a copy of the cover, an excerpt or synopsis.

(6) Try to get into a small co-op mailing. If your flyer arrives with a couple hundred others it may cost less, but it will be less effective than with a couple dozen.

(7) If the mailing is going out another time of the year, try to find a tie-in to an event (Small Press Month, Gerbil Awareness Week), a news story, or anything that makes your book timely.

(8) Don't use sales gimmicks like limited offers, free shipping, or other tactics you may use in a mailing to individuals. If the library wants the book, they'll pay full price with shipping, if they don't want it they won't buy it under any circumstances.

(9) Mention your distributor on your flyer, but if you don't have one, don't worry. If the library prefers to order through a distributor and you don't have one, they will contact one they deal with and the distributor will contact you. That's how I got mine.

(10) Respond to purchase orders immediately. If the library says the book arrived damaged, send out another copy by return mail. You'll have a loyal customer for life. Take care of them.

Library Journal

Library Journal helps sell books in two ways: through reviews and advertisements. And if they do run a review, they will probably ask if you want to run an ad with it.

If your book is reviewed in *Library Journal*, you have a major selling tool. The review by itself may sell a few books, but being able to quote the review on your marketing materials adds a lot of credibility to your mailings.

Buying an ad in *Library Journal*, even combined with a review, is not the best idea for a small publisher in most cases. The cost is high and the odds of making enough off the ad to pay for itself if you've only got one book are against you.

If you are publishing a number of books, however, and are willing to invest now for returns in the future, running recurring ads in *Library Journal* can pay off.

A one-time ad in any magazine is a waste of money. The way advertisements work is by repeatedly flashing your message to the reader until it becomes subconscious (like the logo for Coke and the Oscar Meyer wiener song). Sooner or later, theoretically, the reader will buy your book instead of another because when confronted with a choice between two similar objects, most people will choose the one they recognize even if they don't have any rational reason to believe it is of higher quality.

So, while it may sound like a good idea to run a single ad in the issue with your review, it most likely won't make enough of an impression to justify the expense. The value of the review is more in being able to quote it later than in the possibility that it will directly sell books. Buying an ad to go along with it just changes the review from valuable free publicity into a major, unnecessary expense.

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American Library Directory

R.R. Bowker (<http://www.bowker.com>) publishes the *American Library Directory*, which lists 37,500 public, academic, and special libraries in the United States. At \$259.95 and 4,300 pages, this is not a reference book for everyone, but if you want to put together a list tailored to your needs, and you have a lot of time on your hands, this is the book for you.

You may ask, who would go through all that just for a mailing list? Well, I had a lot of time on my hands a few years back and a copy of the 1979 directory, and that's how I came up with the library list that's available on the Laughing Bear website.

The nice thing about the directory versus a mailing list is that it gives enough data about each library to let you decide if it should be included.

I eliminated all law, medicine, science, corporate, and similar specialty libraries. I eliminated branch libraries and libraries with annual purchasing budgets of under \$500,000.

I then looked for small press and rare book collections, large general interest collections, and I tried to include at least one library from each state plus the major universities and big city libraries even if they missed on some criteria.

There were various other criteria, but the points given above pretty much got the list down to the final 188 libraries.

My reason for doing this was I couldn't afford to rent a list at the time and I couldn't afford a huge mailing. But I wanted to do a mailing anyway.

Should you make a list this way? Not necessarily, but I think if you go to a library and spend some time browsing through the directory you'll get some useful insight into how libraries buy books.

Announcements

- **Bueno Books** (Elizabeth Reid, ed.) has moved to PO Box 847, Round Rock, TX 78680-0847.

Bueno Books is currently featuring a selection of five Spanish/English bilingual books in a *Se habla español* tote bag for \$39.95 ppd, a 25% discount. The regular price is \$53.00. The books include Spanish instruction, grammar, slang, cooking, and puzzles.

- **Six Strings Music Publishing** (Yoichi Arakawa, pres.; PO Box 7718, Torrance, CA 90504-9118 <http://www.sixstringsmusicpub.com>) is starting a new series of *101 Basic Guitar Series* booklets. The first, *Reading for Guitar* (\$6.95), teaches beginning and intermediate guitar students how to read music in standard notation and tablature. Other booklets in the series cover major and minor pentatonic scales, blues scales, and chords.

- **Renditions** (Jenny Eagleton, ed. asst.; Research Centre for Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong SAR; <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions>) is a small press that publishes paperbacks and a biannual journal of Chinese fiction.

- **Global Estonian** (Viido Polikarpus, pub.; Estonian Archives Building, Maneezi 4, Tallinn 15019, Estonia; <http://www.eestimaja.ee/GE>; \$3 + \$7 p&h per copy to the U.S.) is a new quarterly magazine meant to introduce Estonia to the English speaking world. The magazine covers all aspects of Estonia – politics, the arts, travel, and education.

- **The Paper Expert** (<http://www.thepaperexpert.com>) is a new web resource for publishers, catalogers, printers and other users of print and paper. It will help you determine your paper needs, do your own cost estimates, and explore possibilities you may not have thought of for your projects.

- **Amherst Writers & Artists** (P.O. Box 1076, Amherst, MA 01004; <http://www.javanet.com/~awapress>) has come out with its 1999/2000 program listings. The schedule includes retreats, training, and “writing & walking” and “writing & yoga” programs in Scotland, Mexico, and Peru. Write for more information.

- **Benjamin Franklin Awards 2000** (Publishers Marketing Association, 627 Aviation Way, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266; <http://www.pma-online.org>). I don't usually care much for awards programs because there are so many meaningless ones, but the Ben Franklin Awards have come to carry some weight in the publishing community. Write for information on entering. Deadlines are Aug. 31 for books published Jan. 1 to June 30, and Jan. 31, 2000 for books published July 1 to Dec. 31, 1999.

- **House Organ** (Kenneth Warren, ed.; 1250 Belle Ave., Lakewood, OH 44107) issue 27 is devoted entirely to an excerpt from *Notes From the Cistern (A Love Letter)* by Tom Birdwell. *House Organ* is a small literary magazine that consistently features the cream of small press writers.

Advertising: *Laughing Bear Newsletter* does not accept classified advertising. However, press releases, review copies, and samples of products can be sent to the editor at the address below. If deemed useful to *LBN* subscribers, they will be mentioned in the newsletter.

Insert ads, in the form of flyers inserted in newsletter mailings are welcome. Send 200 copies of the ad with \$50, and the ad will be mailed with the next issue of the newsletter. There are no deadlines. Contests or any other events or promotions that solicit money in the form of reading or entry fees will not be accepted.

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