



LAUGHING BEAR NEWSLETTER 104

Feb.-March 1998; edited by Tom Person; Copyright © 1998 by Laughing Bear Press; ISSN 1056-0327; Estab. 1976
P.O. Box 613322, Dallas, TX 75261-3322; 817-283-6303; e-mail: editor@LaughingBear.com
http://www.LaughingBear.com; \$12/12 issues, \$14/Canada, £12/UK & Eire, \$22/other

The Surviving Small Press: Database Marketing

Database marketing (DM for short) is a hot concept with the big publishers, especially magazines. And there are techniques and theory that can apply to small publishers as well.

Database marketing is a system that includes everything you're doing already to market your books. Take data you receive from as a result of your marketing, put it in a database, analyze it to build profiles of prospective customers, and then apply what you've learned to make future marketing efforts more likely to show results.

For example, if you send out a direct mailing to a rented mailing list, the return will likely be less than 1%. You have no way of knowing whether the other 99% didn't like the description of your book, weren't interested in the subject, are interested but need more encouragement, or maybe your timing just wasn't right.

You could take the names and start a mailing list of people who've bought the book, and that's a step in DM, but that doesn't do you much good unless you've got another book coming out.

In an example of database marketing, if you had a book on your family history,

for instance, you would still send out a flyer selling the book, but it would include an offer for something like a free family tree planner. You'd make the same number of sales as you would before, but you'd also accomplish three very important objectives for future marketing.

From the responses you receive, (1) you get a list of people who have not bought your book yet, but who are prime prospects for a second mailing. (2) You get people involved in your subject. When you do the second mailing, they will be more open to it and familiar with you. (3) If you still get a small return, you can confidently abandon that strategy and try something else.

The core concept of database marketing is to make your marketing efforts accountable. You do that by encouraging people to respond even if they don't buy. And then use that information to do better next time.

In small press, we have three distinct customers: individuals (including single copy sales to libraries), booksellers (distributors, booksellers, and other retail outlets), and the media (you need convince magazines, talk shows, and other outlets to choose yours over all the other books they receive to review).

(Continued on page 2.)

Database Software

There are plenty of companies who'd be glad to put together a database marketing software package for you, but for most small presses, off-the-shelf software should be more than adequate.

The most flexible and powerful kind of database to use is a relational one like MS Access or Paradox. They give you complete control over how data is entered, stored, manipulated, displayed, and printed.

Unfortunately those are also the most difficult to learn and time-intensive to keep up.

I used Paradox to set up a database for a construction management company and loved it. But then I had the luxury of hundreds of hours to learn it and set it up. If you're trying to run a press at the same time, you'll probably want something simpler.

Computer and office supply stores carry lots of programs for mailing lists and most let you put in phone numbers, e-mail, notes, and other data as well.

I use My Mail Manager from MySoftware Company. It comes with templates for several kinds of lists, and you can add any other data fields you want or start from scratch. It sells for around \$80, and will check zip codes and add postal barcodes.

LAUGHING BEAR NEWSLETTER 104

Database Marketing

(continued)

Information you receive from individuals can help market your books to booksellers and the media. In fact, it can give you an advantage to be able to say you put together a pamphlet (or whatever) on your subject, and received several hundred requests. It shows there's a public demand for your subject.

In turn, media coverage through reviews and interviews builds more public interest. And if you can get the media to mention the offer, the promotion takes on a life of its own. You no longer have to choose who to send it to or pay for the postage. And you can track the effectiveness of different magazines by the responses you receive. This can help you gauge which magazines to place ads in for future promotions, which reviewers to keep on your list for future books, and who should receive press releases.

Database marketing helps you tie all your marketing together. Responses from direct mailings can help you work up brochures for book fairs, decide what needs to be on your web site, and gives you material for press releases and other publicity.

There are two things you need in advance to try a DM plan: something to give away and specific information you need to receive to make it worthwhile.

The offer needs to be something worth the person's time to request. It needs to be related to your book, involve the person in your subject, and stand out from all the other stuff they could send away for.

The best giveaway is something you already have. Something that demonstrates your knowledge of the subject. Self-publishers have an advantage in this regard. Putting your book together, you gathered information and learned aspects of your subject that no one else knows. You've done all that research, you used it to write the book, now why not recycle it to help sell the book?

Look at the way movies are promoted these days. A year ago, *Titanic* was expected to be a \$200 million flop. Then last fall how-it-was-made segments began showing up on television. That marketing strategy got movie goers involved in the film the way trailers and ads never could. People who love special effects got sucked in, and enough of the love story was revealed to sell that aspect of the film as well.

The same goes for books. In the family history book example, by giving readers some of the tools you devised to research your own family, you get them interested and involved. Of course you use examples from your book to show how it's done. Hopefully enough so that they'll want to buy your book.

In the meantime, you've got to ensure you can use the requests you receive. A name and address are enough to put together a mailing list for follow-ups, but a little more information can give you an advantage in that you can target mailings to particular groups of prospects.

You need to decide which questions to ask and how you'll use the answers. You don't have to make people fill out a long questionnaire (they probably wouldn't anyway).

Just ask a few key questions so you can group them based on interests and then direct custom mailings to each group.

At my web site, for instance, the sample newsletter request form asks whether the person's small press participation is as a book publisher, magazine, writer, and so forth. When the time comes to do follow-up mailings, I can write a letter targeted to each of those groups' specific interests and how the newsletter addresses them. I also ask for their e-mail address to make up an electronic mailing list.

The family history publisher may want to group respondents by those who'd be likely to give the book as a gift, those who want to take their history back as far as possible, and those who are just interested in leaving a story about their immediate family for their grandkids.

Many of you are literary publishers. You may not think this kind of marketing applies to you, but there are still things you could know about your readers that would let you know who is most likely to be interested in what you publish.

For literary works, rental lists are even more hit or miss than for more easily defined subjects. If you could put together something from your own experience, like a directory of poetry reading venues, then with the offer, you could ask a few questions to pinpoint respondents' interests: Are they a poet or publisher, what magazines do they read, whose work do they like.

You've got to know who your potential readers are to reach them.

LAUGHING BEAR NEWSLETTER 104

Database Marketing and Your Web Site

One invaluable benefit of having a web site is the ability to gather information from visitors which can be stored automatically in a log file. The log file is in a format that can be downloaded from the site and transferred directly into a database. You don't need to retype the information or even reformat it.

To do this you need to use a CGI script. But fortunately you do not need to learn CGI programming. Matthew Wright has a web site called Matt's Script Archive at <http://www.worldwidemart.com/scripts>. There you'll find free scripts and instructions to build forms, counters, shopping carts, and all sorts of interactive tools.

If you'd like to know how scripts work, you can buy Matt's book, *CGI/Perl Cookbook* (\$44.99, John Wiley & Sons) anywhere computer books are sold. It has all the scripts from the book ready to use on a CD-ROM, plus all of Matt's Script Archive and more. The scripts are broken down line by line to help you write your own.

I've mentioned this book several times, but only because it is the best single source on the subject I've found. It was recommended by my web host.

CGI scripts are at the heart of interactive web sites. They are what make the pages come alive for your visitors. And they make your site more valuable to you by allowing you to collect and utilize information about who visits your site, as well as take online orders for your books and let visitors download files from your site.

Announcements

● I'm switching from America Online to MindSpring, so the laughingbr@aol.com e-mail address is being retired. From now on use tom@laughingbear.com, editor@laughingbear.com, or laughingbear@mindspring.com. They will all go to the same place, so just choose whichever is easiest for you to remember. The web site, <http://www.LaughingBear.com> won't change.

● **Portable Plateau: Journal of the Ozark Writer** (Michael Hoerman, ed.; Ridge Runner Press, PO Box 755, Joplin, MO 64802) is a new tabloid literary journal for the Ozark region.

● **The Funny Things Kids Say Will Brighten Any Day, Vols. I and II** by Grace Housholder (\$15 each or \$25 for both) was reviewed in LBN 103. The address for the publisher was an old one. The book can be ordered directly from the author by calling 219-347-0738.

● **Portsort Illustration Directory** (Woody Coleman Presents, Inc., 490 Rockside Rd, Cleveland, OH 44131; 800-486-1248) has launched a new and unique internet database of illustrator talent. The site features 12-image portfolios and profiles of the illustrators. Find it at <http://www.portsort.com>.

● **Hong Kong movies.** Liz Cass (485 Murray St, Milpitas, CA 95035) is working on the 6th issue of her zine (she didn't mention the title) about Hong Kong movies and actors/actresses. This issue is devoted to Chow Yun-Fat. She would greatly appreciate contributions of articles, pictures, news, or anecdotes. She'll send a copy of the issue.

● TIPS Products

International (Paulette Ensign, pres.; 12675 Camino Mira del Mar #179, San Diego, CA 92130-2572; <http://www.realvoices.com/booklets>) provides consulting services for publishers of booklets.

● **Snowbound** (Alan Mäkinen, pub.; 3023 N Clark St, 708, Chicago, IL 60657-5205; \$4.25/issue) is a new annual literary, hockey, and music zine.

● **International Titles** (Loris Essary and Harry Smith, directors; 931 E 56th St, Austin, TX 78751-1724; e-mail: leint@eden.com) will be exhibiting and selling foreign rights for clients' books at the Warsaw and Prague International Book Fairs in May and the Australian Publishers Association Australian Book Fair in June. Contact Loris for more information about taking part in the exhibits. For BookExpo America, contact Harry Smith at 718-834-1212.

● **Kit Zine** (James D. Harvey, exec. pub.; Thinking Man Studios, 27 E Central Ave R5, Paoli, PA 19301) includes poetry, comics, news about bands, labels, and zines.

Advertising: *Laughing Bear Newsletter* does not accept classified advertising. Press releases, review copies, and samples of products can be sent to the editorial offices. If deemed useful to *LBN* readers, they will be mentioned in the Announcements section of the newsletter. Insert ads, in the form of flyers inserted in newsletter mailings are welcome. Send 150 copies of the ad and \$50 and the ad will go out 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.**

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by Laughing Bear Press, provided that US\$.35 per copy (\$1.00 for an entire issue) is paid directly to Laughing Bear Press, P.O. Box 613322, Dallas, TX 75261-3322.