



The Best Marketing Tool Never Used

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Every day I hear authors and publishers lament that sales are down, and they don't know why. Then they continue doing the same things they have always done, and expect different results. However, there is one marketing tool that can make an enormous difference in one's sales, but it is rarely – if ever – used. It is market research.

People think of market research as a ponderous, expensive technique that must be implemented by professional data gatherers. But you can conduct simple research -- often for free — to help you plan and implement new marketing actions that can increase your sales, revenue and profits.

Here are a few simple steps you can take on your own to discover the cause of poor sales, and provide some ideas for taking corrective actions.

1. **Identify the problem or opportunity.** Let's say sales for Title A are down in Segment B
2. **Analyze existing information.** A review of the sales of your other titles shows they are selling well in Segment B. Furthermore, you discover that sales of Title A are also down in Segments A and C. Further analysis shows that Title A has a low cost, a competitive price, and has been historically profitable. Facebook "Likes" and website click-throughs seem to be on target.

At this point you feel that although there is a problem, the potential for Title A is sufficient to warrant further examination before disposing of it. You have some current data, but not enough to suggest a remedy. So, move on to Step 3.

3. **Gather additional information.** The data you have on hand is necessary but not sufficient to make a decision about the future of Title A, so you look for outside information (primary research). This could be *Publishers Weekly*, *Shelf Awareness*, segment-industry periodicals, government reports, or a survey of customers.
4. **Analyze all the information you have acquired.** You know that the content of Title A is still relevant and it is a profitable book (when selling). And you found that sales of Title A are down in Segments A, B and C, while sales of other products in those segments are increasing. You feel that a change in marketing strategy is warranted.
5. **Make a decision, and take action.** You decide to revitalize Title A by rearranging the promotion mix, changing its positioning message and offering a limited-time price decrease.

6. **Evaluate the results of your actions and make necessary changes.** After six months of tracking sales you find that although unit sales have increased, profits have declined. So, you decide to change the cover, restore the price to its former level and add a new rep group.
7. **Repeat.** In a given time period you go through this again – for each title and segment. At some point, you may decide that any additional changes will not sufficiently increase incremental sales enough to make a profitable difference. Then it is time to retire that title and focus on your others.

Book marketing is not a one-time event. By gathering and analyzing information to direct (or re-direct) your strategy, you can manipulate your products, distribution, pricing and promotion actions until you find the best combination for each of your titles and each segment in which they compete. Nobody ever said book-marketing was easy, but it can be profitable.

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