



# Be The First to Find The Next Big Trend

By Brian Jud

Publishers are always looking for the next big trend so they can be the first in bookstores with a book on that topic. But once you hop on the bandwagon, it's usually too late. By the time a trend is established, any opportunities it presents have most likely already been captured by competitors. Fortunately, there is hidden treasure waiting for entrepreneurial publishers to find and benefit from uncovering new opportunities.

Picture an iceberg, with the visible, smaller portion representing sales through bookstores, both bricks and clicks. The massive, hidden portion exemplifies the opportunity for profitable, non-returnable sales to businesses, schools, associations and the military. Although sales to these buyers have been known to the major publishers for years, the opportunity has remained hidden from the rest of us. However, it is still there, an embryonic trend waiting for innovative, open-minded people to build the special-sales bandwagon.

Anomaly-driven strategy requires being open to unexpected ideas that may overturn long-held assumptions, such as only selling through bookstores. Only if you are willing to question your existing business model and embrace ambiguity will you be able to identify the diamonds hiding in plain sight.

We usually cannot see what we are not looking for, so non-bookstore sales are often missed. We may not see them -- or ignore them -- because people are predisposed to confirmation bias, focusing on what aligns with their preconceived notions rather than what violates them. So, you must be prepared to challenge yourself. Let's look at what that process involves.

## **Take an external perspective.**

As companies grow, publishers focus on internal processes rather than changes in the outside world. But anomalies that signal new trends are most likely to appear in the external world. Therefore, adopt an outlying perspective.

A good first step would be to look at the retail world peripheral to bookstores. There are airport stores, supermarkets, discount stores, gift shops and other retailers that sell books off the shelf to your target readers. Fortunately, the process

of reaching these outlets is the same as through bookstores. Engage a wholesaler or distributor to do the selling for you.

### **Look for the next right answer.**

Expanding into the market for non-bookstore retailers is a good response to the search for new opportunities. But it is not the only answer. Do not stop with the first right answer you find. Always seek to find the next right answer, and the best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas. Don't ask, "How can I..." Instead ask, "In how many ways can I..." Example: "In how many ways can I sell my children's book? To PTAs, daycare centers, children's libraries, museums, zoos, parks, moms' groups, toy stores, supermarkets, airport stores, homes-schooling associations, etc." What is your next right answer?

### **See the small parts of the big picture.**

In 1866 an Iowa farmer watched the construction of the transcontinental railroad near his fields. After seeing the track laid and a locomotive steam through, he thought, "So that is what railroading is about: tracks and trains." What didn't he see? Among many other things, that he could get his products to more markets more quickly, and that once there they would have to compete against products from many more places. He saw the obvious steel and wheels (compare to bookstores) but he didn't see the hidden opportunities (non-traditional sales).

Here is an example to transfer this concept to selling books. Instead of selling what your books *are*, see the larger perspective of what your book's content *does*. Michael Andrew Smith's *Business-to-Business Golf: How to Swing Your Way to Business Success* is a book that can help salespeople develop successful business relationships while playing golf with their clients. He could market to companies that sell sporting goods, or appear on national or local television and radio shows. But much of his effort would be wasted on people who are not interested in his subject.

The essence of special-sales marketing is this concept of breaking the mass market down into smaller pieces, each more relevant to your particular title. Once these niches are selected, you create and implement a separate marketing strategy for each.

Start by asking, "How can corporations, associations, schools or the military use your information for their benefit, and purchase large, non-returnable quantities?" The total market for sports products is made up of several smaller segments. These could be school athletic programs, retail sales through sporting-goods stores or

even in the sporting-goods section in stores of larger retailers such as Target or WalMart. But few of the people in these segments are prospects for Michael's book. He is targeting one sub-segment: salespeople interested in using golf to improve relationships and sell more of their products.

Instead of creating a mass-communications program, he could chose to implement a strategy of marketing only to people who could use the information in his book, through online stores such as [www.GolfWarehouse.com](http://www.GolfWarehouse.com) or The Golf Warehouse Online Golf Store (<https://www.tgw.com>) and golf pro shops. Mr. Smith could barter advertising space for might be interested in articles about business-to-business golf, as would editors at magazines whose readers include salespeople and business executives. And there are niche catalogs catering to golf-related books and products, including <https://jandmgolf.com/catalog/>

Sales managers might purchase *Business-to-Business Golf* to give to their salespeople. Firms that manufacture golf equipment & accessories could use it as a premium or as a self-liquidator. The national PGA and the state PGAs might use it as a sales promotional tool to promote golf as a business sport. Michael could approach associations like National Association of Sales Professionals (<http://www.nasp.com/>) the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (<http://www.hsmi.org>) or the Canadian Professional Sales Association (<http://www.cpsa.com/>) to speak at their conferences or have them use his book as a premium.

All these opportunities existed well before Mr. Smith published his book, but they do not appear until sought. The key to sales success is to leverage open-mindedness. By definition, anomalies are undefined when spotted, but their potential can be assessed by estimating their potential impact. Does the anomaly point to opportunities that plug significant gaps in the landscape of current offerings?

### **Take action.**

Having identified potential new opportunities, the final step is to act upon them. Test an idea rapidly and iteratively to validate the idea and learn more. The process may reveal other anomalies that might prompt you to rethink and expand your idea.

Anomalies inspire us to test and improve and perhaps change our theories and models of how the publishing world works. Success lies in our ability to identify

new patterns in the data we now have access to. Variance-driven innovation can help companies spot them and shape the nascent patterns forming around them.

Identifying and acting upon anomalies involves more than just having access to new ideas. It requires an ability to imagine their potential implications . We must recognize that ideas, plans and business models are just that—and then be flexible about updating them over time. That means questioning assumptions and asking what if the reality were otherwise; adopting multiple, perhaps even contradictory, models in order to test various angles; and thinking in analogies to widen the range of models available to us.

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