Update Your Marketing to the 21st Century

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You most likely use 21st century Internet-enabled book-marketing processes. However, your sales are probably occurring at dial-up speed if you are implementing mid-20th century marketing actions.

You wouldn’t put up with a 1930s-era phone system, or forego the benefits of modern technology, but that is what you are doing when you fail to sell your books to non-bookstore buyers. These could be retailers (discount stores, supermarkets, airport stores) or non-retail buyers (corporations, associations) who could buy in large, non-returnable quantities.

Selling to these special-sales buyers is not a major leap for many publishers. In many cases, you already have the programs in place to do it. Selling to non-bookstore retailers uses many of the distribution partners with which you already work. Begin there, and then expand your sales to build upon your current base, giving you a solid foundation and focal point to grow your sales.

The most difficult marketing battles of the future won’t be fought in bookstores, but with a mindset that current practices are the best and only way to sell books. Here are several techniques that can support you in your fight to free yourself from the status quo.

**Have the courage to start**. You can’t build business growth unless you take the first step. Do that by thinking minimum instead of maximum. Do not look at special sales as a big project requiring you to change your business model overnight. Instead, what is the minimum you can do to get started? Just commit to spending 15 minutes a day for the next week thinking about how a corporation could use your content to help them. How about an association? Could a school use your material? Then next week spend 20 minutes a day searching for potential companies, associations and contacts in the home-school market. As you begin to experience success your enthusiasm will overtake you and you will launch yourself into a new way of doing business – without giving up the old.

Each week ask yourself, “What one new challenge, that if mastered, could give us a unique performance advantage?” One is to join the Association of Publishers for Special Sales ([www.bookapss.org](http://www.bookapss.org)) to associate with others who have made that mental leap.

**Get 2020 vision**. Where will your business be in the year 2020? Commit to a goal and plot the course that will lead you to it. Become serious about reaching it by making marketing innovation a part of every planning conversation you have with yourself or employees. Frequently ask penetrating questions such as, “If we want to grow a profitable business, what should we be doing differently?” History is not destiny. Look in new directions for profitable growth opportunities

**Encourage creativity**. Hold regular brainstorming sessions to generate new ways to promote, distribute and sell exiting products. Develop new products for existing markets, or new ways to sell existing products to new buyers. How can you sell your current front- and backlist products to non-bookstore retailers and buyers in corporations, associations, schools, the military and government agencies?

**Focus on causes, not symptoms**. Publishers may say, “Sales are down. We have to do something.” And they may send out more press releases. Instead, find out why sales are down. Is it a seasonal decline? Are sales down in one segment or geographic area? Is it a product deficiency or are you selling the right product to the wrong segment?

Perhaps sales are flat, or even increasing, but revenue and profits are down. You may need to adjust pricing or sell books in larger, non-returnable quantities to corporate buyers. Find out why conditions exist before you decide what to do. Prescription before diagnosis is malpractice.

This is a good time to put these ideas into effect. As you begin planning for 2018, give yourself and your staff permission to succeed in new ways. Drag your marketing activities kicking and screaming into the 21st century and your business could expand significantly in 2020 and beyond.

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