**Nine Critical Signs of Trouble When Selling Your Books**

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Selling your books to non-retail buyers in businesses, schools and associations can result in large, non-returnable sales. Their orders for your books can range from a few hundred to several thousand at a time. Completing a sale to them is different from selling through retailers because you contact the prospective buyer directly, not through a distributor. This usually entails several meetings in which you present the benefits of your content and negotiate the final agreement.

Over the course of these discussions, you are creating a relationship that could yield recurring revenue and profits for years. It is a process in which both sides want the best deal for themselves, but understand that the other needs to benefit, too. It should result in a win/win proposition for both parties.

However, not every sale will be in your best interests. Some buyers may think you need them more then they need you, and then try to take advantage of that viewpoint. The saying “caveat emptor” (buyer beware) applies under these circumstances. If you sense a negative gut feeling while meeting with a prospect, take notice. It may portend larger issues that could surface later. The earlier you can determine if a possible deal is not good for you, the sooner you can end the process and go on to the next prospect.

A buyer may hold a $50,000 check in front of you pay for 20,000 books shipped in two weeks. You might take it thinking you can make it happen. But once you have accepted payment it is too late to wonder if it was a good fit or not. You are legally and morally bound to fulfill the contract – or perhaps pay a penalty.

There are several reasons why a large sale may not be good for you. Here are some examples of red flags to which you should pay attention.

1. **Constant rescheduling of meetings.** People are busy and things may unexpectedly come up, so it is not unusual that an appointment may need to be rescheduled. Yet, when it happens multiple times, it’s an indication that you may not be high on the person’s list of important tasks. It could be a legitimate timing conflict, a stalling tactic or a tacit admission that your proposal is just not important. Inquire into the reasons for altering the schedule after several changes.
2. **Delayed or nonexistent communication**. Large book purchases require detailed communication to manage atypical orders, for example in the case of customization or various delivery locations. Interested, professional buyers are extremely conscious about getting back to potential vendors quickly, communicating with them clearly, and treating them as if they were valued suppliers because otherwise you are going to go somewhere else. If promised feedback is inordinately delayed – more than a week -- it shows an inability to communicate properly. That can cause problems completing the order, problems for which you may be later blamed.
3. **Disparaging team members**. Orders for 20, 30 or 50,000 books (which are not out of the question) require coordination among several departments. These might be marketing, Human Resources, sales and purchasing. Every organization has some natural tensions among different departments but observe the dynamics between the people on their teams. How do they interact with each other? Do they interrupt each other regularly? Does one person dominate the conversation, shutting the others down? Do they talk in a constructive way, or do they do so disrespectfully? Internal turmoil may be an indication of how you could be treated.
4. **Conflict of values**. A values mismatch is a big warning signal. Get clear on what your most important values are before you start the negotiating process. For example, if you have a value of quality and saw the movie *Elf*, you probably cringed when in an effort to save money the publisher shipped the children’s books with two blank pages. Similarly, you would be wary of a prospect’s desire to indiscriminately cut corners to lower costs, or to print overseas if you prefer to print in the U.S.
5. **Lack of clarity in answers to your questions.** Writers know they should *show* and not *tell*, thus helping the reader understand and get involved with what the author is trying to communicate. Similarly, when selling books to corporate buyers you should *ask* about their needs and not *tell* about your book. As you ask questions throughout the negotiation process, observe how clear or precise the answers are. For instance, your compensation may be based on the success of the marketing campaign. It is difficult to determine success with the goal, “We expect to sell a ton of products with this campaign.” A more precise answer such as, “Our objective is to increase sales by 15%” will enable you to calculate your payment.
6. **Bait and switch**. Your proposal shows the price for purchasing your book is based upon the quantity ordered. An order for 5,000 books may be priced at $5.00 each, while an order for 10,000 books may each sell for $4.00. Invariably, a potential buyer will say, “I’ll give you a purchase order for 5,000 books if you price them at $4.00.” You may think an order for $20,000 is better than no order. However, since your price is based on the printing cost you might lose money, or at best break even by accepting the offer.

**7. Lack of connection**. A successful long-term relationship is based on trust. A good start is an engaged two-way conversation that leaves both parties feeling energized and excited about the possibility of working together. When there is a lack of energy or connection the buyer may not seem engaged. That is not a good sign.

**8. Excessive number of meetings**. You can probably close a small order for a few hundred books on the first sales call. But the negotiation process for a more substantial order may take a year or more. A heads-up arises when the number of negotiations becomes excessive. There could be legitimate reasons for the multiple meetings to account for personnel changes or reduced budgets. But if there is no explicable reason causing the process to drag on for an extended period, find out why and then decide if you should pursue the order. Your time is valuable, so decide how you will spend it.

**9. Ultimatums**. A take-it-or-leave-it offer is a situation with which you should always be wary. The tension caused by forcing you to make a quick decision is rarely good for a positive, win/win order. You may still be negotiating with another buyer but succumb to the pressure for the security of having a guaranteed sale versus tolerating the uncertainty that remains with your other prospect. Instead of accepting the ultimatum, counter with a different offer, varying the price, terms or delivery method.

Most of these are caution signs for the buyers, too. They may end the process if during the negotiation period you constantly reschedule meetings, delay communications, disparage others, are evasive when answering their questions, feel a lack of connection, and/or you offer an ultimatum.

While no one can perfectly predict how the negotiation will turn out, staying alert to these potential cues during the negotiation process can help weed out suboptimal sales options. Being observant in your discussions as well as attuned to how the process is managed, asking strategic questions, and doing your due diligence can help mitigate the chances of you making a bad decision for an unprofitable order.

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