**Get More Business from Existing Customers**

**By Brian Jud** 

Selling books to corporate buyers in large, non-returnable quantities is a profitable way to build your publishing business. As an added benefit, satisfied buyers can place blanket (recurring) orders for future, planned deliveries. These are even more profitable since it is easier and less expensive to sell to existing customers than it is to find new ones.

Nurturing recurring revenue with one customer is different from getting the initial order. These buyers need to be reminded of the benefits of your content -- at the point in time they are about to make a new buying decision. If you contact them on a regular basis, your chances of a positive reception are improved.

However, book marketers typically concentrate on the *transaction*, i.e., the point in time when prospects buy their books and become customers. Communication usually ends there, and the book marketer goes off to the next prospect. Instead, create a *dialogue* with your customers, maintaining contact over time, smoothing the way for future purchases.

The concept of customer dialogue helps you keep track of each buyer’s needs and enables you to reach them with the right message at the right time. This may be difficult because your various corporate buyers are probably at different stages of the purchasing process at different times.

Sometimes called *transitional marketing*, customer dialogue takes the focus off individual transactions and places it on the purchasing process. It recognizes that people make decisions over time, and buy according to their schedules, not yours. Focusing on a transaction is like watching each frame of a movie. The concept of transitional marketing focuses on the purchasing *process* and can be likened to watching the entire movie.

Conduct transitional marketing by examining purchasing patterns of existing customers to enhance the process in your favor through the proper timing of your message. It borrows from a common practice among retailers who focus on the recency, frequency and monetary (RFM) value of transactions. Retailers use RFM information to differentiate among customers, and then time an appropriate message to motivate them to purchase different products (titles) and/or buy more frequently and in larger quantities. You can easily create a spreadsheet with data to track:

* the recency of sales of each title to specific retail and non-retail buyers.
* the frequency of sales of each title to these buyers.
* the monetary value of sales of each title to them.

 With this information in hand, the next step is to establish a *dialogue* with your customers, tailoring individual messages that encourage them to buy now and buy more. For example, you might offer corporate buyers a time-limited discount to persuade them to buy your titles now. Similarly, you could offer a frequent-buyer program to gift shops. And when selling to associations, you might propose greater discounts, a combination of titles, or more favorable payment terms encouraging them to buy more frequently. The essence of transitional marketing is that you make an individual offer to the right buyers at the appropriate point in time to favorably influence their buying pattern.

 Your dialogue with customers considers not just when to communicate, but what to say to each. For instance, when customers change their buying habits it triggers a different follow up (or follow *through*) message.

* When one customer buys a different title (recency), send information on how to combine orders for different titles to reach a higher discount.
* If people buy frequently, you could suggest they place fewer orders, but in larger quantities.
* Or, if one stops buying, your communication would inquire as to why, setting the stage to win the customer back.

 This concept does not mean you should eliminate marketing for new prospects. Continue such acquisition dialogues but begin them in general terms and make them more specialized as prospects respond and become customers. Transitional marketing, as it applies to dialogues with existing customers, includes these types of communications:

* Thank you notes for recent purchases, with additional offers.
* Re-purchase reminders to get people who haven’t purchased in some time -- or who stray from a regular purchase pattern -- to buy now. It may re-state benefits or offer an incentive to acquire additional copies.
* Promotional alerts communicate exclusive offers such as a special discount, more favorable terms, or a price reduction to increase the size of the purchase.
* Win-back letters inquire into the reasons why a customer stopped doing business with you (or hasn’t purchased in a significant time) and attempt to rectify the situation.

 Communicating a broad message only to prospective buyers can reduce the effectiveness and increase the cost of your book-selling efforts. Transitional marketing will tailor your promotional material to the situation and recipient. Keep accurate records to track sales in three ways (RFM), and then respond to each customer, moving him or her to buy more now, and buy more frequently.

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