

Foundations of Marketing Strategy

Robinson Malkomes, editor at Edições Vida Nova in São Paulo, Brazil, provides a succinct overview of promotion and publicity for Christian publishers.

As a result of the nearly free and highly democratic dissemination of information via the Internet, consumers today are well informed and demanding people. This creates new challenges for publishers, both in marketing specific products, book series or product lines, and in marketing the publishing house's identity and brand.

Marketing for a specific product

Marketing is a company-wide task and cannot be limited to one department. Whether a product is in the pre-publication, launch, or post-publication stage, remember that effective marketing requires teamwork.

1. The pre-publication stage. Do not assume that before a book is published, all marketing responsibility rests with the editor. Here is an overview of marketing strategies that can take place before a book is launched.

Be committed to the product. Whenever possible, introduce new products to other staff members; sell the idea to them. One editor at Vida Nova was profoundly affected by a manuscript on church conflict management. During the publishing house's weekly worship service, he shared a

message based on a chapter of that book that had a great impact on his life, and his message influenced his colleagues. The sales staff still refer to that chapter in their communication with clients. Not only is their knowledge of the book an effective sales tool, but it communicates their commitment to Vida Nova's products. After all, why publish a book if the staff is not going to commit its efforts and resources to marketing the book so it can reach and bless others?



Get authors involved. Ask authors to fill out a questionnaire containing biographical data and a photo. Request the questionnaire even

before you make a commitment to publish the book, and then use it to evaluate the feasibility of the project. Authors are and always will be the best salespeople for their books. They are eager to see their "child" coming to the world in great style. They want to identify the exact audience for the product.

Ask the author to summarize the book and highlight its most useful and unique features. Should the publishing house choose to publish the book, the author's answers can serve as the basis for a marketing campaign. Contracts should specify the activities the publishing house expects the author to do to promote the book. Authors will want to announce that their "baby" is coming soon, creating an expectation in their future readers. Follow up with authors. Provide materials and support as they promote the product by speaking in churches, seminars and conferences.

Write intelligent promotional pieces. Prepare data sheets and book announcements. Write to the people most likely to buy and read the book. The author's questionnaire, the editor—and the translator—can assist the marketing team by expressing their thoughts on the product's value, what publishing expert John Huenefeld calls the "compelling

unique feature” of the product. To be really successful with a given product, it must be the first in its field. If it can't be the first, then it must be the best. Save time and money by composing promotional text that can be edited as needed for back cover copy, magazine ads, catalogs, or letters to reviewers and others in the media.

Prepare a media kit. It contains all the promotional pieces already mentioned and a press release. Attractive media packages are not optional; they are absolutely necessary. Otherwise, they will end up in the trash can. Find and cultivate the best media contacts. Marketing is a people business, so the more relationships a publisher develops, the more success he or she will experience. Patience, persistence, and attention to detail bring long-term rewards.

Seek endorsements. Include them as part of the marketing plan. Place them on the back cover, in a foreword, and in other resources. Obtain recommendations from opinion makers. Never minimize their influence, and treat them well. Minister to their needs and provide them with free literature and other information. Two-way relationships with opinion makers are a virtually indispensable avenue for any book marketing enterprise.

Publish book excerpts. Select book excerpts to generate interest in the product. One easily executable idea is to print one signature of the book and send it to the publishing house's preferential clients list. Quality printed material can have the effect of “making readers' mouths water.” A sales department can collect book orders before the official launching as a direct result of such an initiative.

A house organ like a bulletin, a newsletter or even a small journal may also be an excellent avenue for promoting new books. Remember, though, that such publications should not be like cheese in a mousetrap, intended only to catch new orders. They must offer good information and not only advertisements. Combining product and

good service is more than a trend, it is a well-established marketing reality.

Use electronic media. Place news about forthcoming products on the publishing house's Web site. This is not necessarily expensive, and can expose the product to thousands of people, especially if the site is listed with the major search engines. Some products may deserve a special Web site available even before the product release. Use such sites to create the sensation that readers need the forthcoming product. As to e-mail announcements, avoid sending unsolicited messages. They may work against the company's image and product.

Provide distributors with quality information. For many publishing houses, distribution channels are both a blessing and a headache. There is always a feeling that distributors and bookstores could be doing a better job promoting the products. Spend time and energy convincing distributors, colporteurs and bookstores that they share the publisher's Christian mission, that they represent much more than mere revenues. Work to increase their commitment to the products they are selling.

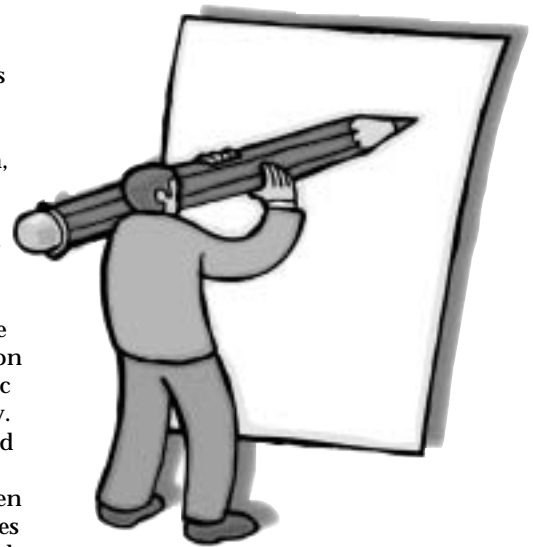
Commitment goes hand in hand with knowledge, instruction, and education. It implies high quality information. More than anyone else, the authors and publishers know how a particular book contributes to the Christian market. Therefore, they need to be wise enough to educate distribution agents. This might seem optimistic or naive, but it works. Give it a try.

2. The launch stage. Adapt and use some of the previous suggestions for the launch stage of a given product. There are some procedures especially appropriate to the launch phase, however, as listed below.

Arrange a public launch party. It can be a grand celebration or a modest party, depending on the expected performance of the product. Churches, museums, hotels, art stores, large bookstores, restaurants, malls, universities, and even amusement parks (for children's

books) can be good public places for book-launching events. Be creative. Also, remember that these events must often be packaged as more than mere book launchings. Regardless of the importance of the book or the fame of the author, add value to launch events by inviting a famous singer or band, a Christian man or woman engaged in sports, a respectable politician or a well-known Christian leader.

Autographed copies can be magical. Organize author signings. Obtain extra autographed copies and send them to bookstores with a sticker or a card that points out that these copies have been autographed. Autographs help readers feel they received special attention from the author. They seem to invest in books with more legitimacy or authority. Use autographed copies for reviewers or broadcasting contacts. If possible, send personalized copies to each key contact. They will get more attention than the ordinary ones.



Get the author on the road. Author tours can be a great way of getting public attention for a given book. There will be times when a title will justify a national tour investment, but even a mini-tour can have advantages, especially if it can be organized around the author's normal ministry or vacation travels.

One word of caution at this point: author tours bring better results with well-known personalities and when the subject is a current issue of interest to many people. And, remember: never underestimate the reality that the publishing house must liberally supply the author with material for tours. Also, the publisher must ensure that there are enough books in the stores to answer the anticipated demand. Failing at this point can be synonymous with wasting the author's entire effort and the publisher's financial investment.

Organize a virtual tour. This is a less expensive way of exposing an author and his or her book to the public. Have the author give a virtual speech immediately followed with a question-and-answer real time session. Though this idea has limited reach in some countries where the Internet is still far from being a democratic way of communication, it can appeal to certain audiences.

Use mass media. Appearances on mass media are a very powerful way

of getting publicity, but are more effective when handled by a public relations professional. Any PR specialist can flood the media with information about a book or author. Compare public relations to scattering seeds from a windy mountain top. The seeds will fly away in all directions. Many of them will certainly bear good fruit.

Use advertisements. The easiest way to publicize a book or product is through advertisements. Place ads with care. Consumers today are not naive persons. Send a clear, direct and brief message in product ads; do not state the obvious. Respect the consumer's intelligence.

Take advantage of other marketing paraphernalia. Bookmarks, stickers, buttons, key rings, T-shirts, caps, calendars, shopping bags, balloons, postcards, and pens are useful book promotion tools. They need not be expensive, but must be attractive. Other items for bookstore publicity may also bring very good results but can also cost much more and require bookstore cooperation. Such items may include cards or labels

that draw attention to books on the shelf ("shelf-talkers"), counter displays, window displays and floor displays, posters, in-store video ads and special handouts.

3. The post-publication stage. "Most publishers have a front-list mentality," says David Chilton, a self-published author. "They put all their sales efforts into the first six months the book is out. That does not give you enough time for word of mouth to help. Make readers your marketing team." Chilton encourages publishers to consider efforts beyond the launch stage. While many of the suggestions above may also be adapted to the post-publication stage, additional ideas include:

Offer seminars and consultations. Many books lend themselves to seminars and consultations. Invite experts, opinion makers and others for a one-morning seminar on a subject covered by the book. Maximize the author's presence at such events. This kind of initiative does not need to be time-consuming nor expensive.

Venezuela's people do not love reading, and most believers have little interest in literature. To succeed, promotion efforts must be well thought out.

Fronty publishes and distributes materials for children and youth. We have tested many ways to promote our material. Our efforts range from personal promotion to presentations at churches, in libraries and in doctor's offices. We wanted to have a greater impact, so we focused on adolescence and youth, a topic of great interest to Christian and secular audiences. In this area, Fronty has products that are unique and satisfy the necessities of the market.

We contacted Lucas Leys, an author specializing in this topic, and shared our dream of bringing him to Venezuela. He agreed to come, so we planned a series of workshops, conferences and even sporting events, taking into account the different market segments who could have interest in the subject of adolescents and young people, and directing the publicity towards them. We invited pastors, church leaders, youth workers, Sunday school teachers, parents and, of course, the adolescents and young people of Maracaibo.

We partnered with a new ministry specifically for adolescents and young people that had the resources necessary to support the workshops we planned. Our organizations had compatible goals, and a strategic alliance would help us to successfully bring about the events scheduled for July 4-7, 2002.

This effort had five principal results. 1) We saw the greatest retail sales in Fronty's history. Though the author we had invited



Lucas Leys, an Argentinean author, autographs books at a Fronty workshop in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

was not well-known in Venezuela, the quality of his workshops compelled the public to buy his books. 2) We had a wonderful opportunity to promote Fronty and its ministry. 3) Our position in the market as a company that offers excellent services and products was reinforced. 4) Our line of products entered into new bookstores and new distributors. 5) The ministry we partnered with plans to repeat this type of activity in the future, offering us an open door to promote our products.

We had no experience organizing events, and few staff members to devote to the effort, but we took a risk, and it paid off. Each risk is an investment in the company, and we look forward to the risks to come. — Zeida Severeyn and Esther Alcántara

Organize study or discussion groups. These do not always require the physical presence of people. Take full advantage of the Internet's capacity for multisynchronous meetings, where effective communication can occur regardless of the time and place.

Use advertising inserts. Sent with customer invoices and statements from banks, phone companies and credit card issuers, statement stuffers, flyers and other inserts can reach potential readers at a low cost. The costs must be low enough to justify the risk of sending advertisements via a negative buying environment (the recipients are being reminded of a debt).

Marketing a product line or series

Product lines or series can give a publisher recognition for expertise. The publishing house can issue books on a given subject written by many different authors, or it can specialize by publishing the books written by a specific author. Both strategies will help to build name recognition for the publishing house. Audience age and even specific formats or media (paperbacks, e-books, CD-ROMs, audio-cassettes) can define a product line or series.

The suggestions presented above on marketing a specific product are adaptable to marketing of a product line or book series. Here are a few more thoughts:

Be present as an insider. The series editor should be an insider in the communities of readers that the publisher is attempting to serve. He or she must understand their needs and expectations. If a company decides, for instance, to publish a series on Christian counseling, the series editor's budget should permit him or her to obtain key reference books and competitor's titles in the area, to purchase subscriptions to important periodicals covering the subject, to attend relevant seminars, and to have membership in the most important special-interest organizations associated with the series area of knowledge. Knowing the right audience for the series and being known by potential commu-

nities of readers can make all the difference for effectively marketing a book series or a product line.



Seek counsel.

Invite qualified people to serve on advisory or reference boards. This will make it easier to keep in fine tune with the exact audience for your product. Specialists can enthusiastically suggest projects for the publishing program and serve as influential cheerleaders for a product line or book series, enabling wider distribution.

Marketing strategy

A publishing house's general marketing plan should build the company's image. Have a clear picture in mind of the image that the company should present to the public. Ingredients like confidence, loyalty, commitment, association between product and service, concern over environmental matters, and so on, are increasingly present in today's marketing initiatives. Companies rise and fall according to their marketing strategies.

Make sure the public identifies with the publishing company's priorities. When Vida Nova recently celebrated 40 years of service, one Brazilian pastor clearly identified with the organization: "Christian publishers love and publish books

because they point to the Book. They love the Book because it points to Jesus." Vida Nova's marketing has successfully connected with its public.

While consumers do not have time to pay attention to every book that comes to the market, remember the key is, as much as possible, to keep the audience informed and excited about the products.

Do not forget that both publishing and marketing are a people business. Dealing with people requires attention to details, empathy and cordial service.

Last, but not least, commit the publishing house and its products to God in prayer. Experience God's presence.

Rely on God's guidance to be a real blessing for His church and for this world. ❖