

# Pretty Faces or Lion's Claws?

Anna Shirochenskaya, of Triad Christian Publishing ([www.triad.ru](http://www.triad.ru)), shares her thoughts on cover design.

I recently visited a big secular bookstore. I love to watch for the latest trends. Topics seldom change, but I was shocked to see what happened to the covers in just a couple of months.

I saw dozens of masterpieces. Eye-catching. Artful. Imaginative. Clever. Provocative. Tastefully spot-varnished. I never saw so many astonishing covers in the United States or in Europe.

I was sad and proud at the same time. I was proud that Russian book design soared, and sad knowing how much the covers of Russian Christian titles drag far behind.

We must be wise as serpents, designing our covers, and meek as doves, musing over the books of our

competitors and all the publishers who are doing covers better than us. Watch. Analyze. Admire. Learn.

## *Pretty face or lion's claws?*

Covers are the “pretty faces” of your books. They are designed to make a customer look at the book, pick it up from the shelf and, ideally, buy it. A cover is to the eye what smell is to the nose. It should be lovely to look at, whatever that means in your culture.

A good cover will make a book stand out. Competition among publishers in Russia is extremely high, and this is reflected on the covers. But the higher the competition, the more book covers have to change their function from pretty face to lion's claws, becoming the means of survival for your titles in the bookstore. This means they are picked up and bought.

Therefore, there is no such thing as a good or bad cover. Even the ugliest covers can benefit a book, *if they help it sell*. Even the prettiest covers are useless if they do not result in sales.

## *More than just a pretty face*

A cover has many elements. It may have a central graphic or be pure text, but note: a pretty design is not enough. The title should intrigue a customer enough to browse through the book, or appeal directly to his or her need.

Back cover copy should be clear and easy to read. It should show how your book differs from other titles on the subject. One of the biggest mistakes in translations is using the copy from

the original edition for the back cover. Write your own copy. It should appeal directly to your audience.

Watch your spine. You should stand on your head, if necessary, to make the spine duplicate—as closely as possible—all the functions of the front cover. Your designer has to be a genius to do this. Unless stores have enough space to show every book face-forward, you cannot relax about the spine.

A series gives your books greater visibility. A serial cover requires more planning, but it always pays off.

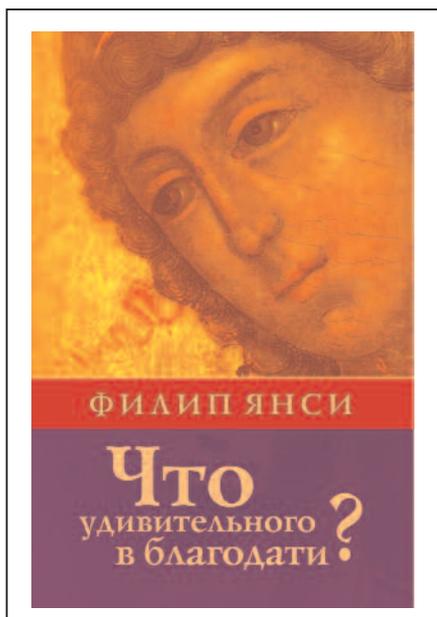
Love your designers. Praise them. Support them. This will entitle you to ask them to change what you think is unsuitable in their covers.

Your covers should have a special look. For example, we like the back cover to be an extension of the front. Hundreds of details can make your covers your trademark.

## *Conditional beauty*

“You have some really good books, dressed in very unattractive covers!” I heard those words on my trip to Ukraine. People there prefer much brighter colors than in the central part of Russia. We redesigned the cover of one of those unfortunate books. The sales increased substantially—both in Russia and Ukraine.

Covers become outdated much faster than content. Redesign the covers of your backlist titles every two or three years. This will do your sales good! I once saw books by a famous Orthodox author done as a co-edition



Triad's version of Yancey's bestseller *What's So Amazing About Grace?* has a very religious look.