

# THE THRILL OF SALES

*Isabel Hickey (hickey\_i@hotmail.com), founder of Christian Traders International, shares her joy in the effective sales and distribution of Christian products.*

“Of making many books there is no end,” (Eccl. 12:12), and for selling books there is an art, an anointing needed. You must have the qualities of a gentle man, show the love of a special woman, the eagerness of a child. Your heart must be open, like that of a flower, to receive what the Lord has for you as you fulfill your calling.

If you are a publisher, you have something to be shared, a message to tell the world. If you are a bookseller or distributor, you are called to disseminate information and ideas. Publishers and booksellers seek to share God’s love in the community.

### *Products that convey the message*

Know your products. Sell them with enthusiasm. Your stock reflects your commitment to the Christian faith, to ethics and morality. The products you sell every day help customers, retailers, wholesalers, librarians—readers—to understand who they are and what they should become in Christ. You help shape the legacy they intend to leave.

Because of this, selling is like running with comrades, cycling across South Africa (from one ocean to another), climbing a mountain, or cross-country skiing. It requires the use of all one’s senses. The emo-

tion of the activity must be felt. It requires that you perceive what you are becoming while climbing, and that you remember your purpose... communicating God’s love through the products you place in your customers’ hands.

### *Effective product placement*

Recognize the distinction between selling books and simply

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serving your customer. It is not always necessary to have aggressive selling. Gentle encouragement in the direction of your publications can do the trick. You can reach your daily, monthly or break-even sales goals.

Sensitive selling through careful stock knowledge can transform the sales of any publisher. Keep in

mind, there are definite selling process steps:

*1. Collect information about your customer/client.* Never qualify or misjudge customers. Listen to their ideas, not just their words.

*2. Approach and relate to your customer or client.* Establish rapport and build trust. (A very powerful tool: sell the relationship, not the product. If your customers like you, then there is an automatic transference of their positive attitudes to the product you are selling!) Have initiative.

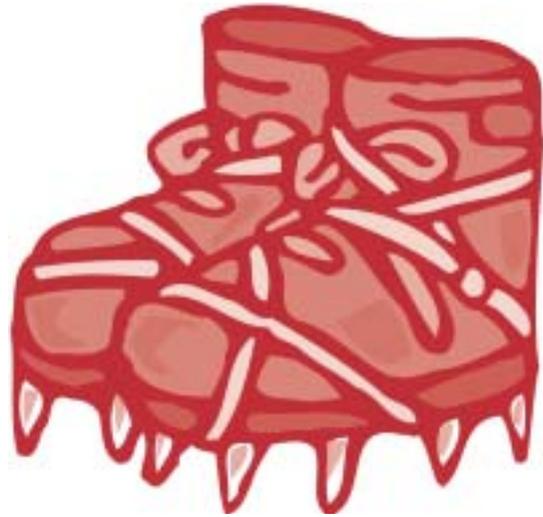
*3. Present and demonstrate the merchandise.* Know what benefits your customers are looking for.

*4. Overcome objections.* Whatever the objection, listen attentively and handle it quickly. Do not argue or interrupt your customers. Do not offend. Look and act professional at all times. Serve one customer at a time, unless it is a group presentation. Keep personal problems out of discussions. As you present the product and handle concerns, seek to satisfy every single customer. Use words to express, not impress. Be mentally tough.

*5. Make the sale. Aim for the end result.* The key is to help your customer decide on how they will buy, not whether. Always ask for the sale



*"You communicate God's love through the products you place in your customers' hands," says Isabel Hickey, who attended Cook's International Christian Publishing Institute in September 2002.*



by using effective closing questions, such as "Shall we go ahead and get started with your order?" Strike a balance between speed and terms. Will the bookseller/publisher give better service by providing faster turn-round to the customer, albeit at a lower margin?

**6. Build future sales.** Follow up. Contact customers after a sale,

show appreciation for them, and ask for continued business. Prove that you are dependable by making sure you offer service after a sale is completed. Handle complaints promptly. Remember, nobody wants to be stuck with the wrong books. Do post-purchase evaluations and minimize returns. Make use of cross-selling opportunities.

**7. Visualize success.**

Selling is an ongoing learning experience. "The person who has had a bull by the tail once has learned 60 or 70 times as much as the person who hasn't," wrote Mark Twain. Be open-minded in learning the little things that make a big difference. Systems and practices may change dramatically; but the essence of bookselling will not.

**Mutual commitment**

Publishers must recognize that the needs of their clients can be quite different. Customers can range from bookshops and wholesalers; to those who operate book tables and stalls; to churches; to organizers of book parties, shows and fetes, book agencies; to coffee

shops and gift shops. All of these customers need to be regularly restocked; all of them desire good relationships with their publishing colleagues.

Book buyers and booksellers should understand that the many financial pressures in publishing lead Christian publishers to seek ways to increase market share and profitability, as well as to increase the total market for Christian books. This has led to direct selling and marketing by publishers. Also, publishers are sometimes frustrated by a lack of professionalism within the Christian bookselling community and may attempt to bypass the bookshops completely. This can lead to considerable friction within the trade.

As professionals, publishers and booksellers will naturally seek to be as successful as possible in all their dealings. It is important to recognize that sometimes there will be necessary differences in each one's approach. Nevertheless, a broader range of available titles plus a faster supply equals increased sales.

Publishers and booksellers have the great privilege of distributing Christian product. All sides should be committed to achieving the widest possible distribution, and thus, committed to one another's success. ❖

**I WANT TO SHARE THIS BOOK WITH YOU  
EXPERIENCE IT WITH THE WORLD!  
TAKE IT AS A FRIEND IN YOUR ARMS  
SEE IF IT WILL ENDURE THE TEST OF TIME**

**I KNOW YOU NEED IT  
IN WHAT YOU DO NOT SAY  
I KNOW YOU'LL READ IT  
ONE FINE DAY...**

**SOFTLY, TO YOURSELF  
EARNESTLY, TO YOUR SPOUSE  
WHOLE-HEARTEDLY, TO THE CONGREGATION  
APPRECIATIVELY, TO YOUR KIDS**

**WITH MY EYES I SEE  
THROUGH THE FIELDS  
OF YOUR MIND,  
ACROSS TIME ZONES**

**I COLLECT BASKETS OF INFORMATION  
AS IT GOES AND GOES,  
ERASING THE BOUNDARIES  
BETWEEN YOU AND ME**

**—ISABEL HICKEY**