

12 Things You Can Do Right Now To Help Your Books Sell Themselves

1. **Show off your quirks.** People are shopping in your store because it has personality, and they love the sense of discovery that they get in independent stores – so don't be afraid to add an unexpected backlist title or two, feature off-beat themes that reflect your staff's interests, and include personal recommendations. Choose props and accessories with character whenever possible.
2. **Keep it fresh.** Displays will start to get stale after a week or two. You can extend their useful life by switching things out and adding in new titles, but don't hold on too long, even to displays that are performing well. Take the time to overhaul your main display areas at least a couple of times a month. You'll get a great ROI on the time you spend, and you'll have more opportunities for experimentation.
3. **Experiment, then watch and learn.** Don't be afraid to try something new. Observe the ways that customers interact with your displays, and watch your sales to see what's working. What gets picked up? What sparks comments and conversation among shoppers? It's easy to get stuck in our assumptions about what works and what doesn't. Instead of basing decisions on your own habits, be sure to make regular changes, then watch to see what others respond to – and be open to having your assumptions challenged.
4. **Lead the customer where you want them to go.** Remember that customers are moving through your space, not standing still and regarding the view like you do. The vast majority of shoppers turn to the right when they enter a store, so give them something interesting to find there. In an individual display, give customers enough to look at that they take their time to explore, and create a visual path through the display that keeps them moving around the table. Avoid creating visual blocks, like straight lines where you want customers to go around a table, or flat, two-sided displays that end abruptly. If you're not sure how your displays are influencing movement, see #3.
5. **Consider color.** Beyond the meme-worthy "I don't remember the title, but it was blue," display, you can make displays more appealing to customers by combining items that harmonize. You can pick seasonal colors (think the Valentine's Day endcap at your local big box), or start with a particularly beautiful book, and then pull in titles whose colors harmonize. Colors don't need to match – in fact, some contrast will make your display more engaging. For bonus points, choose face-outs in a neighboring section that match – or contrast with – the colors in your display.
6. **Give it some height.** Unless you want your display to read "bargain basement", don't display books in flat expanses across your tabletops. Create height and spaces to explore with boxes (wrapped in paper or draped with fabric remnants) at varying heights, wooden crates, small furniture, stacks of books (a stack of the same book works, of course, but you can also build height and interest with assorted spines facing that tell a story of their own).

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7. **Create contrasts.** If you have a couple of front tables, make sure their displays are different from one another. Within a display, make sure you include books – and sidelines! – of many shapes and sizes. This can be a challenge when all the new fiction is nearly the same size, but you can build in contrast with props, risers, color, and cover designs. A display should help a customer select the item they want from a glorious bouquet, not force them to find a needle in a haystack.
8. **Pick a theme.** An effective display theme can be as obvious as “Christmas” or as abstract as “_____”. The theme of your display tells a story, so pick one that will be meaningful to your customers. Will they connect with an upcoming local event? Do they look for the MWConX “brand”, or a recent set of award-winners? A theme can build on a reason to purchase (like back-to-school), or it can help readers find things that are related to something they already like (books about Wonder Woman).
9. **Invest in good props.** High-quality materials will help customers see your products as special and worth investing in. You don’t have to spend a lot, and we’ve found many of our favorite props at thrift stores and junk shops. Book stands and easels might seem almost invisible, but they make a huge difference to the look of your display – and also its sturdiness. Customers don’t like knocking things over any more than you do, so make it easy for them to handle things without wreaking havoc on your display. Visual and tactile textures can help reinforce your theme, and enhance the physical pleasure of handling a real book.
10. **Move beyond the front table.** Even if you only have a foot or two of shelf space in a section, you can make room for a small vignette that tells a story. Many bookstore shoppers head straight to their favorite sections to browse, and they love to discover things that fit their interests. Capture their attention with a display that goes beyond a few face-outs.
11. **Consider quantity.** Sometimes a big stack of the latest hardcover is what customers want to see – in fact, some may hesitate to take a book they think is “your last copy.” Stacks can also create height, fields of color, and visual interest. But sometimes, large quantities can make an object feel less special, too – or for an unknown author, lead the customer to believe the book isn’t selling. Think about whether an item is an impulse buy, a gift with gravitas, or the kind of book that inspires a special trip on release day, and display quantities accordingly.
12. **Wow them with the window.** Window displays are a powerful tool to draw people into your store (even those who aren’t planning to come in), and they also set the mood for those who come in on a mission. If you use books in your window, make it easy to find the window display books in store -- repetition sells. As an alternative to books in the window, artistic installations are ever-easier to invent in the age of Pinterest, and they can have a powerful effect on your store’s brand. Aim to have windows that communicate the best possible version of what customers will find in the store.