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***'BETWEEN THE COVERS'***  
*What the publisher doesn't tell you!*

# Between the Covers

## What you publisher doesn't tell you

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I was fortunate enough to attend a booksellers/distributors seminar recently, where I was privy to a lot of insider information not normally available for the public ear. From this seminar, I was able to garner valuable information of what happens behind the scenes in the book trade. Such as considerations from bookstore owners on how to create the right layout for their bookstore, and also information on marketing, finance, store presentation, as well as how to handle and create media events. The highlight of this seminar was the information presented by a well know publishing house about what happens behind the scenes when an author is accepted for publishing.

Firstly, don't be misled about getting rich when you are accepted for publishing, unless of course you happen to have an idea that keeps the books continually rolling off the presses, such as recent well-known author.

Let's not jump too far ahead, to start with there is the pre-acquisitions meeting where 300 out of 400 manuscripts get the Dear John letter attached to it and returned to sender. And that's every week! Sound familiar?

Some publishers will look more favourably at manuscripts received from literary agents, and it is also a plus for the author to have a literary agent manage their contract, they usually have the 'smarts' to know the marketability of your book and what to hold onto and what to release in the contract, or they should.

After the acquisitions meeting comes the publishing meeting where they discuss the distribution of advance material to key decision makers, this is where the 100 'kept' manuscripts goes through a gruelling process to work out whether the author is 'noteworthy', 'articulate' or has a marketable quantity in order to attract reader attention. Publishers look at authors in two ways, one is how publishable the manuscript is, and whether the author is a saleable commodity to be able to boost sales of the book.

From the distributions meeting, things move on to discuss and make decisions on the advertising and marketing of the book such as the format, price, publicity as well as the sales initiatives of the book. One of the main things that needs to be come out of these meetings is 'The Pitch', which will help drive up the sale of the book. Another important issue to be discussed is when to release the book, for example the time of year can also help boost the sales, i.e. Mothers day, Fathers day, Christmas day, depending on the type of book. This means that it will sell better during a specific time of the year, such as books on love or romance novels released for sale around Valentine's Day will do better than at any other time of the year. Which all seems logical!

Marketing an author's book is much easier for the publisher if an author has been published previously. One of the drawbacks of publishing first time authors is finding out whether they have any unpublished manuscripts hidden under the bed, or whether they are capable of producing more books in the future. Another thing publishers look at before accepting a book for publication, is finding something that is unique about the book, hopefully something that hasn't been printed before, this makes it easier for the marketing department to find an angle to 'hook' the buyer.

The marketing aspects involves taking on the project 6 months before the targeted release date, and that includes needing to have a book cover, a blurb about the book, format, price and size, worked out well beforehand.

While the marketing and sales department are working on 'how to sell' the book, the editorial department is working quietly behind the scenes with the author. One particular book was mentioned where the manuscript was acquired by the publisher in July 2007 and was then geared for print release on father's day the following year. After the editorial meeting between the author and the editor, the author went away and spent the next 3 months working on the task of rewriting the manuscript. Once that was completed, the author and editor spent a month on some intense line editing. The manuscript was finally completed in March 2008.

Even though the book was completed, it now had to go through some more editorial work, this time from a legal aspect, where the manuscript needed a legal read of the proofs to determine if there were any warranted legal obligations that needed to be addressed, i.e. names, places, people, etc. Once this stage had been completed, it was sent around for a closer proof read for spelling and typos, before the final print run. The book was now ready to be printed in May.

The aim now is to promote the book with media attention for hitting the market in September. The publicity department now kicked in to find the right pitch, and found one that made the book take on a unique aspect, as it was the first book of its kind to be published. This also coincided when the publisher found out that a similar book was due to hit the market about the same time but from another publisher, so time was of the essence to get this book to market first.

One of the publicity activities for this book, included a presentation to booksellers, and luckily the author was a very marketable 'product' in himself, his appearance and profile, and the fact he was very articulate, being able to carry himself through any presentation and public speaking events, helped increase the sales of his book.

The marketing department approached various TV media shows such as Andrew Denton, Kerri-Anne, 60 minutes, ACA, Today, Tonight, Australian story, to get their author an interview, but to no avail. The author did get on talk back radio shows and did a few 'meet and greets' at a few bookshops.

Then comes the fun stuff, the smoozing with booksellers, after all, you need to impress these people, as they are the people who sell the books to the public. Some publishers work together with some booksellers to promote the author in the local media, thereby drawing sales to the book and the bookstore. There is also a catalogue that is sent out to booksellers from publishers, providing them with information on up and coming books into the marketplace so that they are able to order stocks well in advance for specific periods.

The sales department identify the market for the book and create a sales strategy to achieve specific targets and advise the booksellers of why they should buy the book. They literally pick out specific details that draw in the bookseller, and why the publisher believes in the book, and then develop an ongoing sales strategy, such as a range title, capitalising on ongoing author presence and publicity, updated 2<sup>nd</sup> format opportunities, new title release and any feedback from an organisation that monitors books, like Nielsen BookScan.

In this case, the smart literary agent withheld world rights to this particular book so that if the book is ever picked up by Hollywood, then the author and agent are in the frontline for 'show me the money!'

But isn't that every writers wish?

Keep writing, you just never know!