

Two Great Ideas from Our Northern Neighbors

By Steve O'Keefe

While in Toronto as the guest of the Organization of Book Publishers of Ontario (see cover story), I was able to complete nine out of 10 one-hour consultations with publishers who won BookMark grants. The representative from Pedlar Press could not make it, and the consultation had to be conducted by telephone. We set up a time for the call, and Beth Follett, publisher of Pedlar Press, phoned me. The conversation began in a now-familiar pattern.

"I'm only calling you because the Government of Canada has given me ten thousand, Canadian, and part of the deal is I must endure a 1-hour consultation with you. It doesn't really matter what you say, and I don't understand why you have any special expertise to guide my business." Words to that effect.

To which I answered with my now-stock reply: "I only answered the telephone because the Government of Canada paid me three thousand, American, to talk with you and other publishers. The only thing I know about Pedlar Press is what I read in your grant application. I'll do my best to share some advice based on that, and you can take it or leave it as you please."

What You Are Looking For

After our introductions, everything settled down and Follett told me a little about her press and her marketing plans. Her press has a rather Zen-like theme for the coming year: "What you are looking for is what is looking." Pedlar Press is known for extraordinary design and publishing works that are "progressive," "outsider," "difficult pleasures," filled with "fresh ways of seeing" and "mind-expanding originality." I liked the theme, despite its esoteric nature, in part because it is based on a quote by St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and merchants. It was her marketing plan I had problems with. It called for spending \$4,000 in newspaper and



magazine advertisements and \$4,000 on a Web site.

About 10 minutes into our conversation, I laid a Zen concept of my own on Follett: "The marketing of books should reflect the content and design of those books. Your marketing plan is anything but 'mind-expandingly original.' How about some 'fresh ways of seeing' marketing?" And so began a long riff centered around a clever idea buried in her grant proposal.

Follett had success in getting non-bookstore retailers in Toronto to use her books in window and shelf displays, and she wanted to expand on this, placing books in clothing stores, hardware stores, Laundromats, and the like. I suggested that placing books in unconventional settings was a perfect way for her to echo her mission in her marketing tactics. Hiding books in retail displays fulfills the promise of "what you are looking for is what is looking."

I suggested Follett spend some money on dozens or hundreds of extra books and give them to retail proprietors

to use for display. Tell them they may sell the display copies and keep the proceeds, and that you will stop by in a month and replenish any sold books at a 50 percent discount (cash, nonreturnable). In short, she is recruiting retail outlets for her books in places where books are not normally sold. This should yield more than a few new retail outlets that reach her core target audience: upscale Torontoans. She liked this idea very much.

I also suggested that Follett follow a similar pattern online. That is, instead of using the money to muscle-up her Web site (which could use some toning, but not \$4,000 worth), that she "hide" books online at the Web sites used by her target audience. In fact, many of the retail outlets where she wants to display books have Web sites. If they agree to put the books in their stores, they might also agree to display excerpts at their Web sites. Then her books would be next to two cash registers where books are not normally sold: bricks and mortar stores in Toronto and virtual stores online. People shopping online for upscale kitchen gadgets might be surprised to find tidbits of challenging fiction near the shopping cart. What you are looking for is what is looking.

Taking an Idea Out for a Stroll

Another great idea from Canada came from Joy Gugeler on the marketing staff for ECW Press, publisher of—you guessed it—"extreme cutting-edge writing" by Canadian authors. Gugeler's plan was to conduct a Literary Walking Tour of Toronto landmarks mentioned in three of ECW's new releases. The concept of authors leading walking tours is a brilliant alternative to bookstore readings.

Many authors of both fiction and nonfiction invoke the geography of their surroundings in their written works. And book marketing often starts from a strong base of regional support and radiates outward through the media into distant markets. How many bestsellers

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have followed the well-worn path from regional hit to national phenomenon?

The idea of walking tours led by authors is a natural. Instead of awkward recitations in dimly-lit back rooms, authors take the target audience out into the fresh air where they engage in storytelling surrounded by the settings for

ECW
Press

their works. The bookstore can be the starting and ending point for the walk, with a book signing session at the end of the program. The back room can be used when the weather is inclement (in Toronto, that's roughly October through May).

Let's take this marketing concept a step further. ECW's proposal suggested producing literary maps featuring spots mentioned in the books. Why not include an ad for the host bookstore, and ads for merchants who happen to be along the route: cafés, eateries, bicycle shops, etc.? If they buy ads, they'll probably agree to display the free maps in their stores. Maybe they'd be willing to take a few copies of the book, too, and place them next to the cash register?

If the first couple of author tours go well, you could turn it into a series. Maybe the Canadian Government would support a program of Literary Walking Tours featuring Canadian authors in their native habitats? Maybe they would provide bus transportation for tours beyond a comfortable walking distance from the bookstore? God Save The Queen!

Let's keep walking this idea around for a moment and see where it leads. Literary Walking Tours could be the answer to independent booksellers' prayers. They take advantage of natural strengths of indies: mostly urban locations in historical districts with plenty of landmarks within walking distance. These tours will bring the locals back into the store. The tours provide new outlets for marketing literature in the form of tour brochures. They make for

good press: calendar listings in daily and weekly newspapers, articles in entertainment guides—free publicity instead of paid advertising.

Literary Walking Tours dovetail with a growing interest in health and fitness, and a movement toward walking as exercise for baby boomers who no longer have the knees for more strenuous play. This demographic matches nicely with the core target audience of most bookstores: middle-aged women.

We're almost done with this outing, but I have one more stop to make. Many of the destinations on this low-cost author tour—whether retail outlets, libraries, historic buildings, or other landmarks—also have Web sites. Maybe their sites will display notices about the walking tours, including the tour schedule? Some of them might agree to display excerpts from the books, including an author bio, jacket copy, and a link to an online bookstore.

Sometimes, what you are looking for is what is looking. And sometimes you have to take a walk to find it.



No Comment

PRESS RELEASE
FROM Canadian Subsidy Directory
DATE: Fri, 24 Oct 2003
SUBJECT: CANADIAN SUBSIDY
DIRECTORY YEAR 2003 EDITION

The new revised edition of the Canadian Subsidy Directory 2003 is now available. The new edition is the most complete and affordable reference for anyone looking for financial support. It is deemed to be the perfect tool for new or existing businesses, individual ventures, foundations, and associations.

This publication contains more than 2,000 direct and indirect financial subsidies, grants, and loans offered by government departments and agencies, foundations, associations, and organizations. In this new 2003 edition, all programs are well described.

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~ About ~

Patron Saint Productions

Patron Saint Productions is a publishing consultancy specializing in online marketing strategy, campaigns, and training. It was founded by Steve O'Keefe, a 20-year book publishing veteran who has launched online marketing campaigns for more than 1,000 books and dozens of publishers.

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Online Marketing Campaigns

Patron Saint Productions provides the following services, all designed to light a fire under a book during the month of publication. Ask about discounts for series promotions.

New Book Launch

A comprehensive campaign including a media component (e-mail news releases), excerpt distribution, discussion group postings, and online bookstore displays. Price: \$2,750.

Chat Tour or Online Seminar

All the services of the New Book Launch Campaign, plus a week-long author chat tour or online seminar. Price: \$5,500.

Web Site Promotion

Includes directory registration, writing meta tags, linkage campaign, e-mail news releases, discussion group postings, and site-of-the-day submissions. Price \$2,750 + registration fees.