



Give It Away to Get It Back:
Using Thought Leadership Marketing to
Build Your Children's Business

Presented by
The Association of Booksellers for Children (ABC)
www.abfc.com



What is a Thought Leader?

A **Thought Leader** is an individual or company who is recognized for innovative ideas, and the ability to share their ideas and insights broadly within their organization or the outside community.

*“What differentiates a Thought Leader from any other knowledgeable company is **the recognition from the outside world that the company deeply understands its business, the needs of its customers, and the broader marketplace in which it operates.**”¹*

The term was coined in 1984 by Joel Kurtzman, editor-in-chief of the business magazine *Strategy & Business*. He came up with it to define interview subjects who contributed new thoughts to business.

Since then, the term has spread from business to other disciplines, and is used in contexts ranging from development, to internal management, and marketing. It is seen as an increasingly vital driver of business success in the current New Economy marketplace.

What is Thought Leadership Marketing?

Thought Leadership Marketing is looking for opportunities to demonstrate extensive and specialized knowledge in a way that genuinely impresses your community, and that builds your reputation for being both innovative and expert among the customers you want to cultivate.

For Children’s Bookstores, this means creating a marketing plan that places heavy emphasis on educating your public and reaching out into the community to build genuine relationships based on your expertise in literacy, and what’s new—or old and waiting to be rediscovered—in the marketplace for young readers.

The key strategy is **outreach** to new areas of the community who may not already be doing business with you.

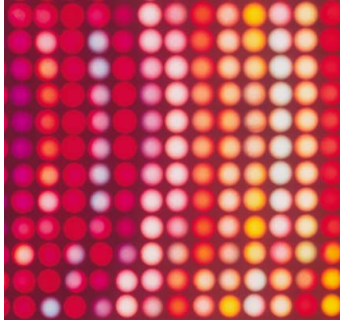
These relationships will result in increased traffic because people will trust your innovation and knowledge, and want to work with you. If done right, it should also result in institutional sales, which really boost volume.

To be clear, this is not about a **selling** relationship. That comes later. Trust is built on reputation and reputation is generally NOT built on advertising. It is built on what others say about you.

“Thought leadership requires a spirit of generosity - generosity of one's time, intelligence and knowledge. It requires a trust that by being open with what you know, and by sharing your time and knowledge, the world will reward your efforts.”¹

Thought Leadership Marketing is a long range strategy that pays off exponentially.

¹ Elise Bauer, Technology Business and Marketing Consultant; www.elise.com/web/a/be_a_thought_leader.php, 11/03



The Good News is You're Already Doing It

To some degree most children's booksellers have been doing one or more of the things below already. Which is exactly why using this strategy as a tool to build children's book business is such a good fit.

What IS different is placing these activities at the center of a Marketing Plan. Right now, most of us think of these as programming, not marketing.

What Activities Fall Under Thought Leadership Marketing?

- Structured book talks that are focused and professionally presented
- Teacher in-services with CEC credit
- Looking for creative partnerships with local schools to create value-added programming
- Teaching a children's book class at the local college
- Writing a review column for the local press
- Setting up an educational information center in the store, and make easily reproducible materials that customers can take away about education, literacy, child development, and more.
- Representing your store and actively participating in the administration of a Buy Local movement

In short, anything that creates a public perception OUTSIDE the store that you [and your staff] are experts in the field of children's books and literacy, and that you share your valuable knowledge honestly and enthusiastically with your community. You need to venture forth.

Where Do Sales Come In?

The idea here is that you will be cultivating new customers who will inherently trust you, be impressed with your knowledge, and will build a relationship with you that will result in sales down the line.

If it's a teacher, maybe it will be a large school sale. If it's a conference director, perhaps you will sell a couple of hundred books for a speaker appearance. Perhaps it's just that a parent will give you great word of mouth and starts to get her friends in.

In this day and age, people want to work with people they trust, and stores that use these techniques successfully will see a bump in their bottom line over time.



A Word About Resources

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking how can I possibly add anything to my plate? I am already working harder than is humanly possible. I don't have staff or resources to do any of these things.

First, you don't have to do all of these things. Pick the ones that are the most scaleable for your store. You may not have the time to teach a college course, but you can definitely keep an eye out for articles of interest for your customers, and run some copies to give away. Second, Thought Leadership Marketing is a long-range, sequential strategy. Start small, and build your network so that you can do more and more. The more you do, the more it pays. The more it pays the more resources you have to put back in.

Given the state of the retail climate, the stores that survive will be the stores that figure out how to leverage these assets. The old model of reaching new customers doesn't work very well. We need new strategies to reach new customers.

Surfing the New Economy

Twenty, or even ten years ago, when channels of communication were clearer, advertising still worked and customers were happy to take what you had when you had it, it was relatively easy to reach your customers. If you had something to promote, you could put up a sign, take out an ad in the local paper, or direct mail a letter to your customers. It was obvious to customers where to go if they wanted a book. Outreach to the community, like talking to parents and teachers, was programming not marketing—an ad-on to the core function of stocking and selling books.

Today we find ourselves in the middle of one of the most dynamic periods in retail history, the likes of which hasn't been seen since the industrial revolution. In some ways we are in an economy that shares more with the early 19th Century than the 20th.

Customers are so bombarded by advertising, mailings, and information, that there is a diminishing return, with very little information actually penetrating. At the same time consumer choices and niche markets are exploding. With choice comes confusion. We're back to a pre-advertising world, where word of mouth rules and consumers are focused on their own experience rather than the mass market. While we were busy doing any of the hundreds of key tasks of running an independent bookstore, the consumers changed the rules on us.

Welcome to the New Economy.

Let's look at some of the implications of this shift in consumer culture.

Old Economy	New Economy	Your Customers
One place to get something	Many places to get something	Could buy a book from hundreds of possible channels, around the corner or across the world.
Limited choices controlled by the producer	Infinite choices controlled by the consumer	Customer has heightened expectations about their shopping experience and selection. "Life by keyword search."
Everyone is watching/reading the same thing	No one is watching/reading the same thing	Customers getting information from thousands of places; most of which you aren't seeing yourself
Find a customer for your product	Find a product for your customer	The same old thing is no longer good enough. You need to figure out what your customer wants/needs
Features	Benefits	Must create a perception of real value
Service	Hospitality	Customer must feel engaged

Given this fundamental shift and the fact that customers have taken control of the shopping experience, our best competitive advantage now lies in three areas: expertise, shopping experience, and innovation.

A Thought Leadership Marketing Plan for your children's business addresses all three.

- **Expertise:** Any one who has worked for any length of time in a children's book section knows that parents and other adults are hungry for information to help them filter the copious number of children's books they are presented with. This is something that a good independent bookstore can always do more meaningfully than the competition. Sharing your ideas and information with the community in a public setting is the most effective way to build a reputation for expertise with new customers.
- **Shopping experience:** If a potential customer views you as a children's book expert, and your store as a destination for great honest advice, they will seek you out, because they know they will have a fulfilling shopping experience that comes from finding the right book, as well as the wonderful and unexpected.
- **Innovation:** If you present your store as a unique community resource that stocks a selection of fantastic books that are relevant, interesting, and different from the chains, they will come looking for your creative choices. (When given the choice, a consumer will always pick an option with more [unique] choices.)²

² Seth Godin, *Meatball Sundaes*, (Penguin, 2007; pp.104)

BRINGING IT HOME

The Three Keys

- Make education and information one of the core missions of your business
- Give away knowledge honestly and generously, no sales pitch
- Create value for the consumer; think of what they need, not what you want

Get Started

Write a store philosophy that incorporates these Thought Leadership principals: Sharing Expertise, Adding Value, and Building Community

This will only work if everyone is onboard. Ideally the tone should be set from the top. Think of this as a movement, not a brand campaign. Include why you are doing it, and how you are doing it. Incorporate it into a Buy Local philosophy if you have one. Share with staff, and with customers. Follow up on any leads.

Here's an example:

Here at ABC Store, we love books, and we love our community. We are committed to sharing our expertise with our customers and our community in any way we can. We are always looking for opportunities to build relationships, and to partner with other local business and educational institutions to share our knowledge and our love of books. We believe that by investing in our local community, we all win. Please let us know if you'd like us to speak to your organization, or create a resource that you would find valuable.

"Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community." - Anthony J. D'Angelo

Sincerely, the Staff of ABC Books

Brainstorm with staff about opportunities to share knowledge locally

Chances are good you already have contacts in your databases to talk to; start modestly. If you have a teacher or librarian as a customer, see if you can do a book talk for their school's staff.

Create an education center in your store

This is probably the most cost-effective strategy of all. Ask Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) to return a daily report to you on a keyword search on topics that might be of customer interest, like Education, Literacy, Child development, etc. Make any article of interest available to your customers as a flyer to take home. Add ABC and Booksense picks resources to this center, as well as best-seller lists, RIF monthly reading calendars (<http://www.rif.org/parents/resources/monthly.msp>), and any other easy to reproduce resource that will add value for your customers. Delegate this job to a reliable staff member. Make sure the store name is on everything.

Begin to capture refined data on your customers

Don't just ask for e-mail addresses; ask for interest categories as well. Make a quick checklist that captures targeted interests like parenting, education, grandparents, ages & reading levels, etc. You can see where your customer's interests are, and can target your efforts. Down the road, when you actually do a program, you already have a database to market to.

Expand Your Efforts

Develop a standard format and tools for creating and presenting book talks each season

- These should include defining the number of books you will present in a standard time frame. (Teacher in-services are often an hour, for instance.)
- Create a blank powerpoint, and/or worksheet template that you can just cut and paste new books into.
- Develop a quick in-store system for capturing the galleys/materials to show at your talks. Make a presentation system that is standardized, and grab-and-go.

Develop a single information sheet describing the types of talks the store offers

This should live on the web, and you should put a link to it in the footer of your e-mail signature. Also have hard copies available in the store.

Work strategically to develop a local network

- Join local educational and business associations, look for opportunities to mix with a wide group of community members.
- Call PTA's, school librarians, local colleges. Collect key contact info. Offer them free book talks.
- Set up book talks to local teachers & parents for Back To School and Summer Reading
- If your community has a summer camp fair in winter, consider setting up, and giving away great summer reads for camp materials.
- Offer your local press a regular review feature. It can be
- Ask contacts for additional suggestions of people to contact, and ask if you can use their name

Build on Your Success

Partner with the local district to offer educator in-services for in-service credit

Contact your local school system to find out about getting qualified to offer in-service credit

Develop a Community Reads program

Check the national list of "One Book Projects" at The Library of Congress/Center for the Book for a comprehensive list of programs by state. <http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/one-book.html>

Propose panels & talks at conferences regional conferences

Each state has a Reading Association. Do a Google search for your state's reading association, and explore making a panel suggestion for the next conference. Think about including authors, and pick a topic that is of interest to the Association. Feel free to ask the educational coordinator what they might be interested in for future conferences.

Cultivate the press

Make sure you know who your local reporter is who covers the educational and parenting beats. Include them in any event invitations, and let them know you are always available to them to answer questions when they are under deadline.

Last thought

Remember, the main goal here is to get out in your community and build relationships. This kind of marketing is slow to grow, but in the end it will come back to you exponentially, and it takes advantage of the best asset you already have: You and Your Staff.

There is no one way to do it. The key is understanding that new customers will come to you once they know that you are genuine, and that you are an expert they can trust for their business.

In the end it is all about being yourself.

“You Can’t Out Amazon Amazon.” –Line on the wall of Walmart Online Division Headquarters

Further Exploration

Godin, Seth. *Purple Cow*; Portfolio, 2003

Godin, Seth. *Meatball Sundae*; Penguin, 2007

Meyer, Danny. *Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business*; HarperCollins, 2006

Underhill, Paco. *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*; Simon & Schuster, 2000

Marketing Challenge: Traditional vs. New Marketing - <http://www.marketingprofs.com/6/stroll109.asp>

Elise.com: be a Thought Leader - http://www.elise.com/web/a/be_a_thought_leader.php

Seth Godin’s Blog - <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>

About the ABC

At ABC, we believe in great books.

We also believe in the power of independent business, and we know what it takes to run a successful bookstore.

It takes knowledge, resources, smart decision-making, and support to stay competitive in today's aggressive retail climate. Since 1985, ABC has been making independent booksellers stronger through its programs, communication tools, and strategic alliances. ABC connects booksellers, publishers, and other book professionals all over the country, and provides a virtual space for ideas and community. Through ABC booksellers speak with one voice to keep independent children's bookselling strong.



The Association of Booksellers for Children (ABC) is a non-profit 501(c)6 Trade Association governed by a Board of Directors, with a membership that includes Bookstore, Booksellers, Publishers, Authors & Illustrators, and many other industry professionals.

At ABC, we take children's books seriously!

Become an ABC member

No matter if you are returning or joining ABC for the very first time, we'd be delighted to count you among the more than 600 stores, publishers, and industry professionals who build their children's business with ABC.

For one small membership fee, you will receive a wide range of benefits depending on your category, including catalogs and broadsheets to help drive sales, educational opportunities to help you stay ahead of your competition, and newsletters and a list serv to help you stay connected.

For a full list of benefits, and to join ABC go to www.abfc.com and click on the "Join Us" tab.

Welcome to the Association of Booksellers for Children!