

Inventory & Ordering: Best Practices and Takeaways

When it comes to getting titles on shelves, both independent presses and independent booksellers face major challenges. Over the course of three conversations, booksellers and publishers came together to identify those challenges and seek solutions. Meeting with sales reps, officials from Edelweiss, and the directors of regional associations, these conversations focused on three pain points that currently prevent efficient and effective inventory & ordering processes:

- Building Relationships
- Creating Awareness
- Establishing Procedures

<u>Best Practices for Building Relationships</u>
Relationships (both in terms of knowing individuals and knowing brand identities) are key to cutting through the noise of the modern book industry. Knowing more about the people and companies you interact with allows you to focus on and prioritize their offerings and needs. Both publishers and booksellers can improve their relationships by taking the following steps.

Booksellers can:

- Host rep or indie press nights with other bookstores or for their customers
- Create individual users for booksellers in your Edelweiss account
- Nominate titles for indie next and submit reviews so publishers know who you are and what your interests are
- Indie-specific programs (subscriptions, book clubs) increase your store's visibility to publishers

Publishers can:

- Develop more versatility in newsletter sign ups, using tags and segments that allow booksellers to select which types of promotions they receive.
- Include brand identity information in their edelweiss pages, and make sure reps are conveying that branding during calls or meetings
- If possible, use Edelweiss' Publisher360 to analyze which booksellers are responding to their catalogs
- Attend and participate in in-person trade shows to the extent possible (regionals will work with you on pricing)

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Best Practices for Creating Title Awareness

Independent publishers have to compete with major international corporations for booksellers' attention, not to mention the day-to-day responsibilities of working in or running a bookstore. Even booksellers that prioritize indie presses are not able to stay on top of the newest releases from all of the indies putting out books. Here are some ways to create awareness:

Publishers can:

- Work with their regional associations directly to find promotional opportunities that fit their budget
- Include identifying features on print galleys so booksellers know they're from an independent publisher
- Submit your specials to NAIBA's "Publisher Offers" spreadsheet
- Access regionals' "Bookseller Reading Preferences" databases, if available, for targeted promotions and galley mailings
- Create easily accessible lists of backlist bestsellers

Booksellers can:

- Prioritize indie presses when ordering
- Use "Saved Filters" function in Edelweiss searches to quickly and easily see catalogs from presses they prioritize (once they've identified indie presses that they're interested in)
- Use Edelweiss Communities to learn about indie titles in specific genres
- Participate in your regional's "Bookseller Reading Preferences" database, if available
- Seek out indie press backlist bestsellers when completing orders

Best Practices for Establishing Procedures

The efficiency and efficacy of inventory and ordering procedures depend on the tools available and the information included within those tools. Here are some ways booksellers and presses can improve ordering procedures:

Booksellers can:

- Separate indie press ARCs from big five presses and keep them longer
- Attend indie pub events online and make staff aware of them
- Focus on themed displays that include indie press and backlist titles
- Sign up for the Independent Publisher Caucus's bookseller newsletter
- Send Edelweiss suggestions for improvements, such as
    - identifying whether a publisher is independent or an imprint
    - Adding a "request arc" button to each title's listing
    - support@abovethetreeline.com

Publishers can:

- Simplify co-op requirements (or, where possible, have them apply automatically) and clearly state guidelines and deadlines (especially in communication with their reps).

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- Be as thorough as possible with metadata and BISAC codes so bookseller filters will catch titles of interest
- Have all graphics uploaded to Edelweiss on time
- Clearly communicate date ranges and other important details of promotions in advance of the promo start date to Edelweiss, reps, and booksellers.

Action Items and Areas for Potential Progress

Publishers and booksellers also identified a few ways to work together that might improve their models that don't currently exist, but with a bit of concerted effort are achievable. These ideas are noted here to ensure accountability and to inform future iterations of Indie-to-Indie conversations.

- A consumer-facing campaign raising awareness about the mutual support between indie presses and indie booksellers
- Future discussions with other ordering platforms like PubEasy and iPage
- Further investigations into ways the industry can streamline Co-op, both for automatic co-op and submission-based co-op.

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