

# ***CHECKLIST TO HOST A SUCCESSFUL BOOKSIGNING***

**by Stephanie Bond**

Hosting a book signing can be a fun and exciting event for you and your customers—if you do it right! Following are a few tips to make the event as successful as possible. To get started, schedule a booksigning to take advantage of your high traffic times. Although most autographings take place on Saturday, don't overlook the power of the weekday lunch hour, heavy shopping days like the week before Mother's Day, or even a Sunday afternoon.

## **Four weeks before:**

- Contact the Romance Writers of America (RWA) office (281-440-6885) to find out how to reach the local RWA chapters in your area.
- Contact the local RWA chapters for names of authors who have books available at the time of your signing. (Hint: Multi-author signings are usually more successful, especially when preceded by a thirty-minute Q&A session on "How to Get a Book Published.")
- Contact the author(s) for his/her availability, and willingness to participate. Ask the author to send you a biography and promotional photo, along with a list of books published to date. Let them know how you plan to use the materials, so they can provide them to you in the most convenient format.
- Ask the authors if they have any special promotional tools they would like to bring. Some historical authors, for instance, might have a costumed mannequin they could bring to draw attention to the event. Also, if an author is going to bring a huge backdrop or other prop, you'll need to know in advance.
- Give the signing event a name and arrange for it to be listed in your in-house calendar of events. Coordinating successful marketing events is one way to get noticed within your organization.

## **Three weeks before:**

- Finalize the authors' titles, ISBN's, and the quantity of books you should order.
- If the autographing is preceded by a Q&A session, ask authors for reference titles they will recommend to the audience.
- Order authors' titles and reference books.
- Ask local RWA chapter and the authors if they can provide you with labels of their reader list in the area for mailing flyers; also ask if they will post the event on their web site.
- Print flyers advertising the event to put in customer bags and to distribute to mailing list
- Post a flyer in the romance section of your store.

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(page 2)

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## **Two weeks before:**

- Fax press releases to local newspaper and radio stations.

## **When the books arrive:**

- Double-check titles and quantities.
- Distribute a copy of each book among employees and ask them to read it before the autographing.

## **One day before:**

- Set up the autographing table to pique the interest of customers. A tablecloth and flowers are a nice touch. Display photos and biographies of the authors. Setting up the table early also gives you an idea of how traffic flow will be affected and allows you to make adjustments if necessary.
- Gather store giveaways to add to the table: pens, bookmarks, discount coupons, newsletters, 'autographed copy' stickers.
- Phone authors to confirm arrival time.

## **The Day of the Autographing:**

- If you have a P.A. system, make frequent announcements before and during the signing to invite customers to the table.
- If a Q&A session will precede the autographing, provide chairs for onlookers. Provide water or other refreshments for authors.
- Provide a clerk to assist the authors; instruct the assistant not to hover at the table, but instead to work the store, informing customers about the signing, and to check in with the authors occasionally.
- Facilitate a customer sign-up sheet to start building an in-house mailing list for romance events. You might entice customers by having a drawing for a gift certificate or a free book. Take pictures of the event for in-house newsletters, local newspapers, etc.
- Consider offering special amenities for the autographed books: a discount, free gift-wrapping, etc.
- Ask authors to sign the books they don't sell; often timid customers will return later to purchase the books after the authors leave. Exchange business cards with the authors.

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*(page 3)*

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## **The Day After the Signing:**

- Leave the autographing table set up to stimulate post-signing sales. Ask employees to hand-sell leftover copies of the books.
- Consider creating an 'autographed book' section in your store and steer customers in that direction for gift-giving; re-shelve leftover books to both the romance section and the 'autographed book' section.

Record the success of the book signing. Focus on all the variables—authors, number of books I sold, time of year, day of the week, time of the day—in order to make adjustments for subsequent signings. ~**SBond**

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