

CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO BOOKSIGNINGS

by **Stephanie Bond**

Everyone loves a successful book signing event, but let's face it—there are times when sponsoring a book signing simply doesn't make good business sense:

When your home office doesn't support signings—some companies are afraid of overly-optimistic orders for autographings that could result in high returns and/or aged inventory.

When your space is limited—you barely have room for your customers to pass each other, much less space for a full-fledged author signing, or a multi-author signing.

When your store is 'off the beaten path'—you rely more on special orders and Internet sales than on foot traffic.

When you can't afford to invest in substantial stock for a signing—you're uncomfortable asking an author to come in for an autographing when you can only afford to order a few copies of her book.

When authors decline to participate—your local authors might be publicity-shy or in high demand.

So what's a bookseller to do? A couple of creative alternatives to live-author book signings are 'drive-by signings' and 'un-author signings.'

Drive-by signings. In a drive-by signing, an author stops by the store to meet the staff and sign copies of her books that are in stock. Drive-by signings are becoming more popular with authors who are pressed for time, especially big-name authors who can't devote hours to every bookstore in one city. To become the go-to bookstore for drive-by signings:

1. Contact the Romance Writers of America chapters in your area for the names of local published authors. For chapter contact information, go to http://www.rwanational.org/chapter_links.stm, or call the RWA home office at (281) 440-6885. Most local RWA chapters have their own website listing their published author members and contact information such as email address/website/P.O. Box address. You might be surprised to find a bestselling author living just around the corner!

(continued)

© Stephanie Bond, Inc. All rights reserved.

Article first appeared in *Romance Sells*, a publication of Romance Writers of America.

CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO BOOKSIGNINGS (page 2)

by **Stephanie Bond**

2. Contact each local author individually and ask to be placed on the mailing list for new releases. Ask to be placed on the bookseller list *and* the reader list—booksellers are typically notified months ahead of a release, and readers are notified nearer the actual release date; for drive-by signings, you'll want to be reminded when the book should be on your shelves/loading dock.

3. When you receive notice of a new release, check your inventory—if you have at least a half dozen copies on hand, contact the author and ask if she'll do a drive-by signing. Arrange a date and time and tell her where the books will be waiting: at the checkout counter, at the information desk, etc. Make it easy for her!

Note: Authors are most interested in pushing their new title the first couple of weeks after the release date, so don't delay. On the other hand, don't hesitate to ask her to sign backlist titles when she arrives to sign stock of her new release.

4. Introduce your staff and take an instant photo of the author to display with the autographed books. Your customers will think they missed a big event!

5. Place the autographed books on an endcap with special stickers or bookmarks, and encourage employees to hand-sell.

6. Send the author an email message when all the signed books have sold—she'll be back!

By developing a low-maintenance drive-by signing program, you'll be able to offer a wide variety of autographed romance novels to compete with larger stores, and you'll score points all the way around—with authors, with customers, and with sales!

Un-author signings. The first time I heard the phrase 'un-author signing' was at an RWA Bookseller retreat when Tina Wood of Read It Again books in Orlando described her creative idea for sponsoring a 'remote' autographing on a shoestring budget:

- Tina used bookcovers and her computer scanner to create beautiful full-color bookplates. She then sent the bookplates to the respective authors and asked the author to sign and return them in a self-addressed stamped envelope. Tina then staged an 'un-author' signing of 15 big name romance writers who returned the bookplates. She promoted the event, placed the bookplated books on tables, served refreshments, and had a huge turnout!

© Stephanie Bond, Inc. All rights reserved.

Article first appeared in *Romance Sells*, a publication of Romance Writers of America.

CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO BOOKSIGNINGS (page 3)

by Stephanie Bond

- If you don't have a scanner and/or color printer or the time to make custom bookplates, many authors offer free signed bookplates through their websites. An un-author signing is a great alternative if no published authors live in your area or if authors are unwilling to conduct drive-by signings.

You don't have to sponsor elaborate signing events to connect with authors and to make autographed books available to your readers—you just have to be innovative! ~**S**Bond