

Can We Talk About Shelf Talkers?

by **Stephanie Bond**

If you're a typical romance bookseller, one of the favorite parts of your job is hand-selling—making a personal recommendation about a book or an author to a customer. There is no better feeling than when a customer returns and thanks you for introducing them to a great read. And hand-selling is a win-win situation because it creates a bond with the customer that will keep her coming back to your store. In a perfect world, you could sit in a comfy chair by the entrance to your store and hand-sell books all day long. You could chat on and on about up-and-coming books and authors, and your customers would revel in the special attention.

But let's face it—in the real world, you don't even get to read as many books as you'd like, and most of your day as a bookseller is likely spent on administrative tasks or simply facilitating customers through check-out lines. So more often than not, you find yourself stripping or returning a book you had high hopes for, and feeling disappointed that your beloved bookselling job has been relegated to moving widgets in and out the door. You and your employees simply can't be everywhere in the store at the same time.

Or can you?

Shelf-talkers are an ultra-productive replacement for hand-selling in situations where booksellers are simply too busy or aren't blessed with the gift of gab. A shelf-talker is a small advertisement that hangs on the front of a shelf beneath the spotlighted book. The easiest way to create a shelf-talker is to use index cards and tape them securely on the shelf edge. Here are a few suggestions for creating effective shelf-talkers:

- Use colored index cards to draw the customer's eye, or colored ink on a white card.
- Keep the message on the shelf-talker brief and to the point—think of it as a tiny commercial.
- Utilize shelf-talkers throughout the store to train customers to look for them.
- Update/change shelf-talkers regularly or when inventory is depleted.

Get all of your employees involved in creating shelf-talkers for their favorite books and authors. Hand-written shelf-talkers are fine as long as the writing is legible. In fact, customers judge hand-written endorsements as more believable!

In addition to utilizing shelf-talkers for recommendations and reviews by you and your employees, you can use shelf-talkers:

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- To spotlight new authors, or authors who will be signing books at an upcoming event: BE ONE OF THE FIRST TO DISCOVER THIS TALENTED NEW AUTHOR!
- To draw attention to a sequel or to a series: THIRD IN THE “HOPE LIVES” SERIES! or SEQUEL TO _____!
- To highlight autographed books, or books with special offers or discounts: COUPONS INCLUDED IN BOOK! or AUTOGRAPHED BOOKS MAKE GREAT GIFTS!
- To inform readers of writers with multiple pseudonyms: DID YOU KNOW THAT _____ ALSO WRITES AS _____?
- To compare the book to other books or to movies, or to compare one author to another: IF YOU LIKED THE MOVIE _____, YOU’LL LIKE THIS BOOK! or IF YOU LIKE BOOKS BY _____, TRY THIS AUTHOR!

Shelf-talkers are inexpensive, effective tools that allow you and your employees to interact with your customers using a non-intrusive approach. Your customers will appreciate your assistance in finding books they will truly enjoy.

Conduct your own experiments by comparing sales of books with shelf-talkers and books without. Soon you’ll be sold on shelf-talkers! ~**SBond**