

MUCH ADO ABOUT ANTHOLOGIES

by Stephanie Bond

In the romance genre, the word ‘anthology’ refers to a collection of short stories. And romantic anthologies have never been more popular.

Generally, a common thread links the stories in an anthology—the same subject matter (a blind date), a holiday (Valentine’s Day), a similar tone (super sensual), or linked authors (southern writers). The stories within one volume might be connected in some way, but more often, the stories stand alone.

Anthologies are assembled in various ways. Sometimes authors get together to come up with an idea for an anthology, then submit it to an editor for approval. Sometimes one author comes up with the idea, submits it for approval, then other authors are invited to participate. But more often, editors formulate ideas for anthologies to fill holes they perceive in the market (such as a sudden surge in ‘bride’ books).

Anthologies also allow publishers to ‘test’ an idea. For example, the success of a Harlequin ‘Love & Laughter’ anthology paved the way to launching a separate romantic comedy line by the same name (now called Duets).

Or if an author is gaining momentum, participating in an anthology allows her to get another title on the shelf outside of the regular schedule. Similarly, if a publisher wants to boost a new writer, she might be paired with a veteran author in an anthology.

Yes, anthologies are good for everyone—the readers, the writers, and the publishers. But anthologies pose special problems for you the bookseller, namely: Where do you shelve them? And *how* do you sell them? Here are a few tips:

- Anthologies are typically listed under one author name, the ‘lead’ author, who is usually listed first on the cover. So if you shelve books alphabetically by author, you might want to include a couple of copies under each author’s name to increase the reader’s chance of finding the selection.

- Consider shelving anthologies in a separate area, such as an endcap, then put up a sign that says "Romantic short stories" (unfortunately, ‘anthology’ isn’t very reader-friendly).

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- Anthologies are great tools to entice new readers to romance by giving them a taste of multiple authors for the price of one book. If you have employees who are reluctant to read romance, an anthology might be a way to ease them into the world of romance, and help to familiarize them with this best-selling genre.
- Anthologies are wonderful gift books—instruct your employees to push them for Mother’s Day. Or decorate the anthology endcap with balloons, and a sign that says: "The perfect birthday or get-well gift."
- If your store sponsors a bookclub, encourage the group to adopt anthologies, then compare the stories in their discussion.
- Consider offering a discount for one month on just the anthology titles—once readers try one, they’ll be hooked on this method of discovering new and exciting authors.
- Since anthologies are excellent impulse purchases, place a few selections on the checkout counter, or on a table for customers to browse while they’re standing in line.

Anthologies are here to stay, so the next time you unbox an anthology title, think of it as a vehicle to attract even more readers to the wonderful world of romance! ~**SBond**