

Maintaining Customer Reading Lists

By Stephanie Bond

How many times have you seen customers read back cover blurbs, the first few pages of a book, then the last few pages of a book, yet return it to the shelf with a frown, declaring, “I don’t know if I’ve read this book. Maybe I have...it kind of sounds familiar, but I’m not sure.”

Perhaps she *has* read the book, or perhaps she read only a synopsis or an excerpt in a review magazine or online, or has heard the title or premise in a reader chatroom. Or maybe she’s read a book by the same title, but by a different author. Or perhaps the cover simply looks familiar—the great thing about publishers giving an author a “look” is that the reader hopefully identifies the branding with the author. The downside of a distinctive “look,” however, is that all the titles for that author can look the same! And since romance customers are typically voracious readers, it’s easy to lose track of titles and author names.

One way to alleviate the problem is by offering to maintain customer reading lists at your store. Your filing system could be as simple as a piece of notebook paper with the customer’s name, on which you allow them to record their purchases when they check out, or refer to as they shop. (If you’re extremely industrious, you could maintain the lists in a computer database, but remember to back up your data!) The objective of maintaining the reading lists at your store, of course, is to keep the customer coming back—the list will make a romance reader feel attached to your bookstore. Keep in mind the customer might wish to record books she didn’t purchase at your store, and that’s okay...as long as *you* keep the list! To let her know how important her list is, consider using special paper (store letterhead will lend a feeling of “ownership” to your location), or by offering a discount after recording, for instance, the 25th book sale. There’s just something about lists that motivate people!

To take the project a step further, use the list to boost sales—especially backlist titles the customer might not be aware of, or titles in a mini-series she might have missed. And what a great reference for gift-giving if a friend or relative comes in to purchase something for that customer, or if a customer is homebound and sends someone else to do their book-shopping.

Maintaining a reading list for your best customers is a great, inexpensive way to set your bookstore apart and to build customer loyalty!

* Please note that a reading list should be voluntary on the part of the customer, and you should inform your customers that your store’s records might now or in the future fall under the jurisdiction of the Patriot Act, which continues to evolve, but concerns the government’s right to subpoena your customer records to track book purchases. ~**SBond**