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How to Have a Successful Bookstore Event

by *Melissa M. Williams*

WITH THE RIGHT PLAN AND MARKETING, you can almost guarantee a sell-out bookstore event. As an author and a publisher of children's chapter books, I've always made my goals selling lots of copies and, more important, selling out, for one major reason: I never want books returned to my publishing house. Returns expenses eat into, and sometimes eat away, any profit I've made at an event.

To reach my goals every time, I have carefully learned each step necessary for creating a successful bookstore event. Over the past four years, bookstores have hosted my events about 15 times, and 25 to 200 guests have come to my table during each one. On average, I sell 50 books at these events, but I have sold as many as 120. I also see an influx of online sales afterward, much as I do after school events.

It is essential to prepare long before your bookstore event, and preparation has to include creating a plan to get people to the store and a plan to make the event memorable. I arrange for most of my bookstore appearances to occur when a new book launches and to last four hours, and I announce a schedule of activities that will happen throughout the day to keep the fans there (you can see an example in the flyer shown on page 6).

My favorite activities for my kid readers include an illustration trivia game, drawings for my stuffed animals, reading times, and question/answer sessions.

The resulting "special event" feel produces more energy, which encourages more sales. If customers are enjoying themselves and/or seeing their kids having fun at the bookstore, I guarantee they are making phone calls to family and friends, spreading the word to come out and experience the excitement.

The timeline that follows should help you create your own special events.

Months Before

As soon as you've determined what the release date of a book will be, you will want to establish, or renew, a relationship with the manager or the community relations manager at the local bookstore where you'd like to hold your event, and get them to agree to host it. Events don't have to be only on pub dates, though; you can even create events for backlist titles using a holiday or news peg.



To get people involved, Melissa Williams sometimes invites kids to sit behind the table with her and read the dialog in one of her chapter books while she reads the narration. It's a blast, she reports.

Let the manager know what you will need on the day of your event. And don't be shy about discussing what you will be doing to get people to come. Tell the manager about your direct marketing efforts and contact lists, and ask about how the store can and will market to its lists. Never rely on the bookstore to market for you, but do ask the manager to take flyers you will provide (see page 6 for an example) and display them on the counter a week or two before your event.

Also talk with the manager about a realistic number of books to order. Along with the information about your direct marketing efforts, information about how many books you've sold at past events will help you and the manager decide what that number is.

In-person marketing, especially in the children's market, in combination with social media marketing has always guaranteed greater attendance at my events. So it makes sense to order more copies of a book marketed directly to kids and teachers on a two-week school book tour that involves hand-outs and flyers than of a book I'm releasing in the summer and marketing only through the mail and social media.

Weeks Before

Treat your event as if it were a huge party or fundraiser. If you are excited about your book, the energy will be contagious.

Create a standout flyer that can be posted and attached to email announcements. The flyer should include an image of the book along with information about it and a list of activities that will take place at the bookstore event.

Order giveaways, such as posters of your book cover, bookmarks, or character stickers. I even release stuffed animals for each of my series.

Have posters and bookmarks made ahead of time (sites such as NextDayFlyers.com offer good quality at a good rate, and they are quick).

Utilize every major social media outlet. Invite all your Facebook friends to your event individually and also make the event public. It is very important to do both.

Create a blog post with all the details of the event, and ask your colleges to link to it on their Facebook walls and through Twitter. Tweet about the giveaways you will be providing.

Submit an article to local publications in the bookstore's area. Send an announcement to your contacts through an email blast program like Constant Contact. Send direct and personalized emails to people who bought your earlier books and people who have hosted previous events with you.

Send a press release to media outlets in the area, including radio, TV, magazines, and newspapers. I've even used paid for advertising in my local city magazines and neighborhood newsletters. By saturating the market, you can make the event stand out.

On the Day

Remember—this is not just another book signing. It's an event with prizes, giveaways, and activities. If you are a children's-book author, be sure to offer games, contests, a poster

all your guests can sign, character coloring sheets, and maybe even a real-life animal to keep kids there all day. For my *Turtle Town* book event, the store manager got into the act by bringing her pet turtle.

Take pictures and let everyone know the photographs will be posted on your blog and/or your Web site (this is an easy way to build traffic). And always bring picture release forms and get them signed.

Also, always provide a signup sheet so you'll be able to add to your contact lists after the event.

Afterward

Blog immediately while the memories of the day are still fresh. Don't wait to thank everyone for coming. Share the excitement of this event, again using social media, so people who missed out will want to go to your next event.

And don't forget to tell everyone how to order your books after the event.

Keep sounding excited. I've never met a bookstore manager who told me to tone down the excitement. They usually join in and love seeing the fun reflected in sales. ♦

Melissa M. Williams is the author of the chapter book series for kids Iggy the Iguana and Turtle Town, the owner of LongTale Publishing, and the founder of the Literacy Foundation, Read3Zero, which offers publishing opportunities for kids. She is a full-time public speaker in and out of the school system and teaches creative writing and publishing for children and adults. To learn more: iggytheiguana.com.

The Turtle Town Book Release Party
with author Melissa M. Williams
at Barnes & Noble

Prizes & Contests All Day

Come by to see your favorite author of the Iggy the Iguana Series as she releases the first book in the BRAND NEW TURTLE TOWN SERIES, *The Inner Puka* at Barnes and Noble! Everyone who comes by on Saturday will have a chance to win brand new prizes, bookmarks, posters and pencils from the new collection!

Schedule of Events

- 11:00 Autographing and Q&A with Author
- 11:30 Chapter Reading of Turtle Town
- 12:00 Drawing for FREE Snap Shell Stuffed Animal
- 12:30 Illustration Trivia Game with Prizes
- 1:00 Autographing and Q&A with Author
- 1:30 Drawing for FREE Turtle Town Poster
- 2:00 Turtle Town Art Contest (Winner's Art will appear on the website: www.turtletownbooks.com)
- 2:30 Autographing & Chapter Reading of Turtle Town
- 3:00 Drawing for a Turtle Town Mystery Prize

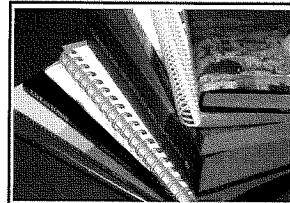
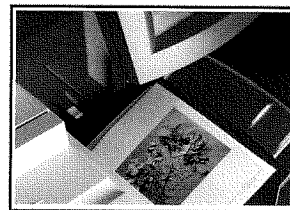
Saturday, June 25th • 11:00 am - 3:00 pm
Barnes and Noble, The Centre in Copperfield
7026 Hwy. 6 North, Houston, TX 77095

Visit the author's websites:
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A flyer like this one has many uses. For instance, it can be displayed at bookstores, posted in various locations, and attached to emails.

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