

Shanti Arts Publishing

The Details of Buying and Selling Books

When it comes to the buying and selling of books, there are a few things to be aware of and a few choices authors need to consider.

First—Bookstores

It is commonly believed that getting books on the shelves of bookstores is the key to bountiful sales and financial success. Sorry to tell you, but this is not so. Getting books in bookstores is not the same as selling books. Many of the books in stores, perhaps as many as 60%, never get sold; they are returned to the distributor, wholesaler, or publisher for a full refund. Yes, bookstores expect a full refund for returned books, and there is a reason for this; they would go out of business otherwise. If a book doesn't move off the shelves within a few weeks or a few months, it's returned for a full refund. This is good for bookstores, but not so good for publishers and authors because most returned books get destroyed. ([Here](#) is more information on this subject.) However, bookstores should not be ignored; one simply has to have realistic expectations.

Many authors reach out to Barnes & Noble, but many also find them less than receptive. B&N has a list of [requirements](#) that need to be met before they'll consider stocking a book, and every book we publish meets all of their requirements. If you have any questions about this, please contact us.

Independent bookstores tend to be more receptive about stocking local authors' books and hosting events than national chain stores. But, in general, authors are often underwhelmed by the reception they receive from bookstores. Don't worry about it. Again, have realistic expectations.

If you approach bookstores or gift shops about selling your book, it is best to do so in person with a copy of the book to show. Then a few questions usually come up. The first has to do with returns. Whether bookstores buy books from me or from Ingram, returns will be accepted. This is often a deal-breaker with bookstores; they want to be able to return books for a full refund if they do not sell within some period of time. The second question that often comes up is whether they may carry the book on consignment rather than buy the book from the distributor, wholesaler, or publisher; consignment means they pay nothing unless a book sells. For consignment arrangements, bookstores get the books from you, and if a book sells, you receive your portion of the sale. A few words of advice: be sure you sign an agreement with the bookstore that specifies how many books you are leaving with the store and how much money you will receive if a sale is made. The standard is that you get 50% to 60% of the book's list price; be sure your agreement specifies "list" price so that if the store manager decides to sell the book at a discount, you still get your full payment. Once you leave the bookstore having left them with copies of your books, keep in mind that you will likely not receive any checks unless you call the bookstore now and then to find out if copies sold. In other words, you need to contact the store regularly and repeatedly to find out if copies have sold and to get paid. If you decide to get into any consignment arrangements, be aware that you will need to follow up. Keep accurate records of where your books have been placed and what the financial arrangements are.

Then there is Amazon. People have lots of mixed feelings these days about Amazon, but most of the books sold through retail are sold through online retail, and most of those are sold through Amazon. Every book we publish is sold on Amazon. Authors can support Amazon sales by creating an author page, which is fairly easy to do.

Authors can also encourage readers to post reviews on Amazon. Reviews get a wide circulation and are used to disseminate information about books to potential readers.

Second—Events

Events are a very important way to promote and sell books. Events includes release parties, receptions, open houses, readings at bookstores or galleries, presentations for clubs or associations, workshops . . . the list is endless. If you hold events at bookstores or galleries, the owner or manager will most likely want to do the selling. Advise them to contact me to make arrangements about discounts and returns. Alternatively, they may contact Ingram (they'll know who they are), but often I am willing to provide a slightly better discount than Ingram.

For some types of events — release parties, receptions, open houses, presentations, workshops — you will sell books yourself. Note that your contract with us indicates the types of discounts we offer you for book purchases. Generally we offer a discount of 20% and bigger discounts for large orders. Note that when you sell books under these circumstances, you can sell it for the list price and your “take” is generally more than what you’d get as a royalty from a retail sale. You can also sell the book at a discount, if you wish to make it attractive to buyers or don’t want to worry about making change, and still often keep more than what your royalty would be.

These are the most common issues that come up when authors finally have their books in hand and are thinking about selling them. If you have other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Also, be sure to read our piece on [Marketing and Promotion](#).