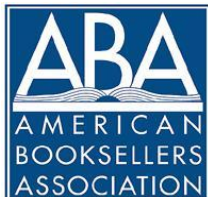


# HANDSELLING



1/22/2014

CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH RESULTS



Handselling comes in many forms, saves you time, and improves your customer's experience. And most importantly, good handselling procedures will increase your bottom line.

## WHAT IS HANDSELLING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

HANSELLING IS A RECOMMENDATION THAT RESULTS IN THE SALE OF A BOOK OR OTHER MERCHANDISE BY ENGAGING A CUSTOMER THROUGH A VARIETY OF MEDIUMS.

The term “handselling” covers a variety of customer/bookseller interactions – not just a chat at the register or in the aisles. For instance, handselling is a part of all of the following:

- Shelf-talkers featuring staff picks
- The store newsletter
- Social media
- In-store conversations

Handselling is one of the most important customer service strategies for independent bookstores because it directly impacts your bottom line. Most customers define customer service as ease and efficiency – getting what they want and getting out. The three Cs of handselling are:

### Customer Satisfaction

Handselling helps you establish customer relationships while meeting customer’s needs.

### Competitive Advantage

Handselling can differentiate you from your competitors.

### Create Value

Handselling can create additional sales and increase customer loyalty.

“ALMOST ALL UNPLANNED BUYING IS A RESULT OF TOUCHING, HEARING,  
SMELLING, OR TASTING SOMETHING ON THE PREMISES OF THE STORE.”

PACO UNDERHILL, WHY WE BUY: THE SCIENCE OF SHOPPING (SIMON & SCHUSTER)

## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

We live in a world that subjects us to a continual flow of information. The practice of

handselling is a way to help your customers navigate that flow by offering them a filtering system. Other examples of filtering systems that consumers use include:

- Netflix: Roughly two-thirds of Netflix views are made as a result of recommendations.
- Consumer Reports: "...founded in 1936 when advertising first flooded the mass media. Consumers lacked a reliable source of information they could depend on to help them distinguish hype from fact and good products from bad ones."
- Recommendation websites like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and CNET attract millions of users.

### COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

As independent booksellers, you know your books and you have relationships with your customers. Both of these things are vital to the success of handselling. The better you are at creating these relationships – whether it is in the aisles of your bookstore, on Twitter, Facebook, or your store blog – the more trust you will engender from your community of customers.

### CREATING VALUE

If two booksellers on your staff sold two additional books per day through handselling, and each book was \$14, the store would sell an additional \$20,440 per year in books. For a \$500,000 store that is about a 4.33% increase in sales. Even if they sold two additional books every other day, it would still have a large impact on the store's bottom line.

Personal interactions with customers create powerful customer relationships. Good handsellers on your staff give customers a personal connection to your business and can also improve your store's image.



A cardinal rule of business is that it is easier to get existing customers to buy more than it is to get a new customer to buy at all. Studies show that once a customer has an item in her hand, she is more likely to buy it.

## CREATE AND NURTURE A HANDSELLING WORKFORCE

YOU CAN CREATE A GREAT HANDSELLING TEAM THROUGH YOUR HIRING PRACTICES, TRAINING, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT.

- Hire people who love books AND who love people.
- Train your staff to be handsellers.
- Promote handselling by providing ongoing opportunities to improve handselling skills, and create incentives for handselling.

## SPECIAL ATTENTION: CHILDREN'S BOOKS

CHILDREN'S SECTIONS ARE MORE COMPLICATED AND ARE MORE IMPORTANT FOR HANDSELLING.

You will find varying estimates that between 70 and 80 percent of sales in the children's department are hand-sold. This means it is imperative that you do not take your staff's handselling skills for granted. Let's look at some strategies for both your customers and your staff to have a successful interaction.

Make it easy for customers to find what they want before they ask.



- Clearly mark category divisions in sections so that customers can easily find what they need before they have to ask you for help.
- Structure the sections so that they flow naturally for better browsing.
- Provide a map of the children's section. Add a clearly marked "recommended" section (or one in each category) with staff-picks and printed reviews.
- Make use of focal displays such as end caps, tables, shelf-talkers and IndieNext List displays to highlight holiday themes, author, events or key titles.
- Provide special sections for frequently requested themes.

### Make it easy for your staff to answer customer questions.

- Make sure your staff can quickly run searches by keywords in your POS system. Make thematic booklists and cheat sheets.
- Have a regular mechanism for staff to share new titles with each other such as a list behind the counter, galley stacks of suggested reading, etc.
- Ask new staff who have never worked with children's books to review a store reference book or online resource that lists children's titles.
- Subscribe to review magazines such as PW, The Horn Book, School Library Journal or Booklist (ALA).
- Encourage your staff to connect with colleagues online by joining the ABC Children's Group Discord, Facebook groups dedicated to bookselling, or posting in the Bookseller-to-Bookseller forums on BookWeb.org. Email ABC Children's Group Manager Gen de Botton for a unique link to join the ABC Discord.

## THE HANDSELLING PROCESS

### LISTENING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT HANDSELLING SKILL.

Use your book knowledge (gained from reading books or reviews) and your people skills to create a dialogue with customers. Ask questions based on your conversations, listen, and recommend.

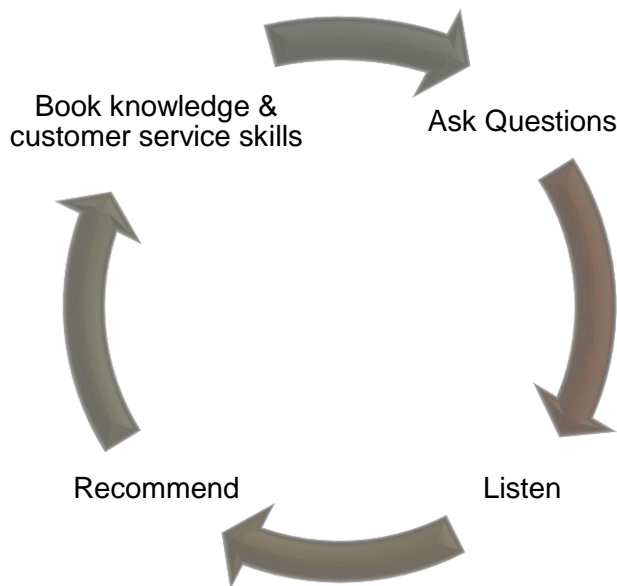
If you make a recommendation that is not eliciting interest from the customer, probe deeper, listen, and recommend again. Continue the process until you are able to find the right book or item. If the person is buying a book for themselves, you might ask some of the following questions:

- What is the last book you read that you really liked?
- What type of book are you in the mood for?
- What is one of your favorite books or authors of all time?
- What do you like most about a favorite book?
- What are your interests/hobbies?
- What books have you read recently that you disliked?

If the customer is buying a book for someone else, try questions like these:

- What is the occasion?
- Do they like to read?
- What is their relationship to you?
- Do you want a book or a gift, or both?

If your questions are not helping you to find what the customer wants ask a fellow bookseller to help.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR HANDSELLING

- When a customer is looking for an out-of-stock book
- When customers are looking for a gift
- When customers are browsing
- When additional items can be added to a purchase

## HANDELLING MYTHS

### OPPORTUNITIES TO HANDELL ARE ALL AROUND YOU!

**MYTH:** You have to be the one to recommend the book.

Use reviews from trusted sources – fellow booksellers, IndieNext List, book reviews, sales reps, etc.

**MYTH:** Only booksellers at the information desk or working the floor can handsel.

Booksellers at the cash/wrap can also recommend books. The Fountain Bookstore (Richmond, VA) puts a “staff picks” section right across from the register. Every employee is familiar with the staff picks books as well as in-stock books from the

same author or in the same genre. When a customer picks a book from staff picks, the bookseller at the register has the opportunity to handsell those additional titles.

**MYTH: You can only handsell to people in the store.**

If a new book comes in that you know a certain customer will like, send that customer an e-mail or give them a call. Handsell through website recommendations, newsletters, tweets, Facebook, other social media sites, etc.

## HANSELLING TO GROUPS

### HANSELLING TO A GROUP CAN BE MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN HANSELLING TO AN INDIVIDUAL.

Give group presentations to local businesses, current customer groups, etc. on new and recommended books. Ask if you can sell books after your presentation or hand out promotional materials. Become active with your local media and participate in regular community TV or public radio programs about books.

Encourage customers to handsell to each other. Add value to your store's image as the place for people who love books, know books, and enjoy sharing recommendations amongst themselves.

- Feature customer reviews on your website or in your store newsletter. Kepler's Books (Menlo Park, CA) launched a feature on its website where customers recommend books, especially children's books. Kepler's created partnerships with local schools for children to review their favorite books, and the store received more than 200 reviews in the first two weeks. This is also a great way to give a "child approved" stamp of approval for books.
- Create a book club recommendation forum.
- Give galleys to customers to generate feedback.

## REMEMBER

HANSELLING IS A BOOKSELLER RECOMMENDATION THAT RESULTS IN A SALE OR SALES. GOOD HANSELLING PRACTICE IMPROVES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, GIVES YOU A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, AND CREATES ADDED VALUE.