

ATTENTION: Customers up for Grabs

by Stephanie Bond

The average romance reader visits bookstores more often and spends more money per visit than other readers. The proof? One out of every two paperbacks sold in this country is a romance novel! If you're not devoting a good portion of your shelf space to romance, you're losing sales. Here are a few ways to grab those loyal customers and fatten your sales:

- Romance offers something for everyone! Learn the types of romance—historical, paranormal, suspenseful, futuristic, inspirational, etc.—to better communicate with your customers.
- If you don't carry series romance novels (romances which are replaced every month), consider adding them to your retail line-up. Although the short shelf life requires more expedient shelving and turnover, selling series romance is an excellent way to get a customer "hooked" on romance and, therefore, back into your store for the next month's releases.
- Ask all employees to read a few romance novels so they're prepared to hand-sell to the high-volume romance customer base.
- Establish a "staff recommended" table or shelf and offer a discount on those romance titles.
- Post a few neon colored index cards with a note such as "If you like the movie , you'll like this book" to help attract new readers.
- Move the romance section to a high visibility area of the store and devote as much shelf space as possible to the genre.
- Since romance readers respond to the beautiful cover art of romance novels, display books cover-out on the shelves.
- Let authors know you welcome promotional materials, and what works best for you: bookmarks, excerpts, posters, signed cover flats, shelf-talkers, etc.
- Consider shelving anthologies separately, and steer your customers toward them when they're looking for gift books.
- Start building a mailing list of romance customers to invite to special events

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- Set the mood. Romance readers love a romantic environment, so hang a lace panel here and there, serve hot tea or chocolate to browsers, and pipe in soft music.
- Sheer volume draws attention—a floor stack of one or two titles always stops foot traffic, even if the book isn't on a bestseller list
- Experiment with slightly larger orders to obtain a higher sell-through. For instance, you might discover if you carry 10 copies of a book, you'll sell 6 (60%), but if you carry 15 copies, you'll sell 10 (66%).
- Display romance novels in other sections of the store women frequent (cookbooks, self-help) with a sign such as "How long since you last curled up with a good romance novel?" Ditto at the check-out counter.
- Cross promote merchandise in your store. For instance, if you spotlight a historical novel set in Ireland, you might include in the display a coffee table book on Ireland, a CD of Irish music, and a travel video of the country.
- Carry at least one romance review magazine and display it in your romance section; readers will utilize the magazines to find more books that interest them.
- Organize a romance reader bookclub to meet regularly in your store and discuss their favorite romance novels and novelists.
- Cater to your romance customers by offering to special order back titles of their favorite authors, or calling when you receive a new book you think they'll enjoy.
- Ask your romance customers what trends they're following—allow them to guide your ordering process.
- Consider ordering non-fiction books that will appeal to romance readers, such as titles on collecting romance novels and book cover art, or how to write a romance novel.

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- Consider carrying a line of young adult romances to capture romance readers (and customers!) at a younger age.
- Romance customers beget romance customers—ask them to spread the word to their friends that you want their business.

Romance sells! Begin to foster relationships with romance customers, maintain a wide selection of titles, and challenge yourself to spotlight romance for one year—then watch your sales climb! ~**SBond**