

# *Turn Browsers into Buyers*

by Stephanie Bond

It's the phrase you hear most often as a bookseller when you offer assistance to a customer: "I'm just browsing." (Variations: "I'm just looking," and the more depressing "I'm killing time.")

The bad news is bookstores are prime targets for looky-loos. *But the good news is bookstores are prime targets for looky-loos.* Most retailers spend enormous amounts of money to entice customers to simply walk through their doors—as a bookseller, you have that battle half-won. The other (and harder) half of the battle is how to turn browsers into buyers. Here are a few tips to loosen the wallets of potential customers:

**Ask a good leading question.** Instead of asking "May I help you?," master a greeting that will open a dialogue between you and the customer, such as "How may I help you?" or "What may I help you find today?"

**Come bearing gifts.** Keep bookmarks of current releases, and flyers of special offers and discount programs nearby (in your hand or apron pocket) to give to browsers—something in the material might spark a sale.

**Stay in touch.** Be sure to revisit the browser with another leading question such as, "Did you think of something I can help you find? Perhaps a gift for an upcoming birthday?"

**Identify and redirect "sidekicks."** "Sidekick" is a term for a person(s) who accompanies a reader into a bookstore, then complains or leans on racks until the reader is ready to leave. You might want to direct sidekicks to other areas of the store, whether it be to the map section, the calendar section, the magazine section, or to a comfy chair. The longer that primary reader stays in your store, the more she will buy!

**Merchandise to browsers.** Arrange non-book items including mints, candy, newspapers, magazines, and greeting cards where browsers tend to loiter—on the perimeter of the store and next to seating areas.

**Embrace browsers.** Whether the person buys something or not, be sure to invite them back to your store with a friendly line: "Come back to browse anytime!" Chances are, the customer will return and eventually buy something.

Challenge your staff for one week to try to close every customer who walks through your door, to turn every book browser into a book *buyer*! ~SBond

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