

HOW TO SELL YOUR OWN BOOKS AT AN EVENT

The retail environment has changed dramatically in recent years, and authors find they are often doing presentations where the only option for book sales is if they do it themselves. If retail sales aren't something you have any experience with, don't worry; it's not especially difficult and lots of authors have learned to enjoy it—and the extra money they make (i.e., royalty plus retail sales net). If you find yourself at a venue with no bookseller, here's how to sell books yourself:

1. When arranging the event, ask the venue coordinator if it will be okay for you to sign and sell books at the conclusion of your presentation. You want to be sure they haven't already invited a retailer to do this. If they haven't, then it's usually not a problem.
2. Ask the venue to have a table ready for you to use for a book signing, preferably near the exit of the room. And be sure at the start of your presentation to announce that you'll be selling and signing books at the end of the event.
3. Make sure you understand the state's requirements for resale and acquire any appropriate permits (i.e. your business license and a reseller permit, as is required in Washington).
4. Contact Mountaineers Books customer service at 800/553.4453 ext. 137 (206/223-6303 ext. 137) or customerservice@mountaineersbooks.org and order your book at the author's discount (which is our wholesale price).
 - a. The customer service manager can help you figure out the quantity that will fit a particular event.
 - b. Provide the customer service manager with your reseller permit, which allows you to avoid paying sales tax on your purchase (but remember that you will need to submit your sales and tax to the appropriate state agency, and pay the sales tax you collect).
 - c. Have the books shipped to you, prepared for you to pick up at our distribution center, or sent to a place that you can receive them near the venue (i.e., a motel or a friend's home where you'll be staying).
 - d. Be sure to order with enough time to have the shipment arrive—no less than two weeks prior to the event, unless you'll be picking them up at our distribution center.
5. Your selling supplies should include a mobile credit card reader app like Square (more about this below) downloaded to your smart phone, tablet or laptop, connection to the internet either via the phone's cellular data or wifi, cash change (see the "Author" tips below) if you plan to accept cash (which is nice to offer, but is less necessary since virtually everyone has plastic), pens for the signing, and a flier, postcard, business card, or bookmark with your website URL and social media handles on it that you can stuff into the books you sell.
 - a. Remember that it's your responsibility as a vendor to understand and acquire the required state and local business license as well as assess the correct retail sales tax .
6. If possible, bring someone to help you with the book sales.
 - a. Have your helper run the transactions for you while you sign and chat with your book buyers. You'll want to give the helper instructions for how to handle this before the event begins.

- b. If the helper isn't comfortable processing the sales, they can still assist you by getting books ready for you to sign, handing you both the book and the buyer's credit card, keeping your stack of books organized, and doing small tasks you ask of them (i.e., getting a glass of water for you, replacing a dry pen, organizing the line, etc.). Again, 10 minutes of training your helper will avoid problems later once the signing gets going.
7. When you've finished your presentation, remind the audience that you'll now be signing books. Move immediately to your signing table before your audience starts wandering away. Often fans will approach you at the front of the room right when your presentation ends, but politely ask them to walk and talk as you make your way to the signing table.

SQUARE (there are similar apps from Paypal, Intuit, and other vendors)

Square is a free credit-card processing service that you can get by creating an account at <https://squareup.com>.

The Square app and simplest credit card reader is free, though the card reader may take up to two weeks to arrive by mail (they're available for purchase at many retail locations if you need it faster). You pay a small transaction fee for each sale. The sales revenue, less the fee, goes right into your bank account. Square allows you to process credit card sales without having to establish your own account with each card company (i.e., Visa, MC, American Express). It can also track cash sales and sales tax. It is a very easy app to set up and use. Square will be your most helpful sales tool.

Note that the credit card processing requires connection to the internet via the phone's cellular data or a local wifi connection. It's a good idea to inquire in advance if an internet connection is available. Here's a short "getting-started" video that explains how Square works: <https://squareup.com/help/us/en/article/5123-square-get-started-guide>



TIPS FROM AN EXPERIENCED BOOK-SELLING AUTHOR

By Bill Thorness, author of *Cycling the Pacific Coast*, *Biking Puget Sound*, and *Edible Heirlooms*

Here's my M.O. when selling books at an event:

- Print up signs with the book prices on them – flat fees for cash/check, full price for CC transactions. Club discount or donation amount if I'm doing something special.
- Carry a dedicated money envelope (mine is soft plastic bank sleeve with a zipper) to put cash and checks in, rather than leaving them on the table or stuffing them in your pocket. Add a "bank" of cash for making change to the envelope and a note saying how much it is.
- When I take cash or check, I sell for a flat fee to make it easy for everyone (\$18.95 or \$19.95 book = \$20, \$24.95 book = \$25). I am willing to give the discount of no tax to work with round numbers. Being asked for change with an odd number with tax is not worth it. One time a helper had a calculator and was adding tax to peoples' orders, which contradicted my printed sign, so some got overcharged. Looked bad.

However, with Square, I do charge tax, because it's easy and there are Square fees that get deducted. But if you travel around, you have to set the correct tax rate for the location. It's easy to forget to do that.

- Do a pre-event inventory count and write it on a slip in the envelope. I only open one box at a time so inventory is easier.
- Boot up the Square reader at the venue and test it to make sure it is online and works before the event. Need to make sure your "mobile data" is turned on and you have a strong signal. You might want to log onto the venue's wi-fi, but if it's an unsecured connection, I'd be worried about running credit cards on it. I've had to say no to CC sales because of lack of signal.
- Make sure the phone is set to a bright enough screen to see easily in the available light, and that it won't go into sleep mode. If you have fingerprint ID or a password on it, make sure you're close enough to add that in again if someone else is processing sales for you and the phone security requires another login.
- Do a brief training with the person who'll be using the Square reader or taking payments. Even if they've done it before, a reminder is helpful.
- Pull out only a certain number of books for the table, so you can easily keep an eye on the quantity. Pull out more when it gets low. I purchased a couple of foldable stands so that I can set up one copy of each of the books for a nicer display.
- Do a post-event inventory count (at home or next day is fine) and record the sales on a spreadsheet or some other computer file for tax and inventory tracking purposes. Makes it much easier at the end of the year.