

# The Author's ADVOCATE



## Special Newsletter

January 2006

Published exclusively for the authors and associates of  
Infinity Publishing and Buy Books on the web.com

### Knocking On Barnes & Noble's Door

I'd like to start 2006 by sharing our history of dealings with **Barnes & Noble**, the world's largest bookstore chain, and the unique dismal dynamics orbiting around once removed and now distant relationship with the bookselling giant. I'm writing this based on over 6 years of personal efforts to forge a win-win relationship with B&N that would have benefits fairly distributed all the way around.

In the early years of **Infinity Publishing**, we sold to both Barnes & Noble retail stores and to their on-line bookstore at bn.com. As one of your Author's Advocates, I would approach various B&N management types at **Publishing Marketing Association (PMA)** meetings and at the annual **Book Expo America (BEA)** with the express purpose of trying to find out what we needed to do to increase our sales to B&N retail stores and to have our better selling titles included in their on-shelf inventory – especially when one of our authors is doing an in-the-store event. About the only thing B&N would agree to would be to honor special orders for Infinity titles and perhaps a consignment arrangement with the author for books they brought into the store as part of a community service event.

I bluntly asked B&N's long time Director of Small Press & Vendor Relations, why due consideration isn't being given to stocking some Infinity titles – especially titles that are already selling well through bn.com and books with a local connection that would have regional interest???

She simply said our books aren't returnable and they're POD. I quickly pointed out that by produc-

ing books as needed we could develop a working relationship beyond the way returns have been traditionally handled. I went on to explain that traditional publishers who secure a book with a paid advance do not pay royalties until the sales of the book have earned back the advance and pending returns are settled. Infinity is the publisher of author-originated books and royalties are paid monthly on each and every book sold. I was shocked that she dumped us in with the POD publishing services who were laboring with an ugly reputation for failing to fill book orders correctly in a timely fashion.

I assured her that our in-house production team takes pride in delivering quality books on time – most orders are shipped within 24 to 48 hours. Our *just-in-time book publishing system* replenishes the on-shelf inventory as needed. Most quality control issues are a result of the old adage "*haste makes waste*". Our production schedule is based on the timely replacement of sold inventory. Thusly, there's less haste, less waste and more time for quality assurance.

I pleaded that Infinity is different because we earn our profits from selling books. I invited her to be a guest at our authors' conference to meet our authors and to see their reactions as they learn book marketing skills from leading industry professionals. My litany of pros sharing their expertise failed to impress her. Her parting words were to let her know when we had a working return policy.

Special orders came in, and orders actually increased from bn.com. And then it came to pass, with much due diligence and concept development

completed by your publishing team at Infinity, that we announced our unique return policy. It was quickly proclaimed by many booksellers to be one of the fairest and most liberal return policies in the industries. Unlike other publishers' return programs there is no charge to Infinity authors. Independent bookstores were delighted to learn they could order returnable books at 40% off cover.

Naturally, I was in touch with B&N to share the news of our return policy. Alas, my efforts were again fruitless. They wanted to see just how well our return policy worked and I should check back in 6 months.

During those 6 months we noticed that if an Infinity title was listed as available from **Ingram**, B&N was now ordering those Infinity titles from Ingram. This was shocking because it cut into the author's royalty. When B&N ordered directly from Infinity the royalty is based on the selling price of the book – a \$10 book sold to B&N at 40% off cover earned a royalty on a \$6 sale. However, now B&N was ordering that same Infinity book from LS/Ingram at the deep discount of 55% and the selling price is only \$4.50!!! Both the author and Infinity are coming up shorted on this deal, because B&N wants to centralize their ordering process and not have the hassle of dealing with lots of small publishers. Excuse me, but I don't think a publisher with over 3,000 titles can be considered a "small" publisher!!!

We also implemented our seamless proofreading/copy editing service to help authors improve the quality of their books. We could offer B&N a list of Infinity titles that have been professionally proofread. As an added inducement, we offered to sell fully returnable titles directly to B&N retail stores at 50% off cover and we'd even work our royalty payments so the author would earn a royalty based on the 40% discount selling price.

Sadly, more of our titles were ordered by B&N via the LSI/Ingram connection that left us feeling disconnected – except for the orders that came regularly from bn.com. Overall, we continued to enjoy increasing orders directly from Amazon, independent bookstores, and other national chains.

From our most recent exchange with B&N, we learned that they were waiting 10 to 12 days to

receive orders from Ingram. We quickly assured them we'd guarantee prompt delivery of all B&N orders – just like we do on all orders. We repeated our offer of a 50% discount to B&N, guaranteed fully returnable books, and offered a heads-up whenever one of our authors was scheduled for an appearance in the national media – B&N could have sold lots of books off-the-shelf when Infinity author Terry Shulman appeared on *Oprah*.

All of our ongoing efforts have been to no avail. B&N stated in no uncertain terms that they would continue to order Infinity books only from **Ingram** (non-returnable) and that was that. I feel it's important for you to understand that we have effectively addressed their every concern. We placed an attractive package on the table that would increase B&N's profit margin on Infinity books, increase royalties to our authors, and get them books faster. In short, we have done everything we can do to create a win-win situation, but B&N doesn't appear to be interested in being in the winner's circle with us.

We will continue to keep the window of opportunity open for B&N; however, the corporate world moves in mysterious ways. There's always hope that there will be a change in their policy that will benefit our authors. I wish this could be more joyful news, but sometimes there's a special joy that comes from knowing what's happening – or not happening!!! At Infinity Publishing, hope springs eternal and hopefully we'll eventually bring about a reconnection to orders coming in directly to Infinity Publishing from B&N retail.

### **Authors' Wine and Cheese Gathering San Diego Mission Valley DoubleTree**

If you're going to be in San Diego on January 26<sup>th</sup>, please plan on attending our wine and cheese get together from 6 PM to 9 PM at the DoubleTree Hotel in Mission Valley on Hazard Drive. This will be an evening for networking with other authors and publishing professionals on the eve of our 1-day authors' conference on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Please RSVP to Michelle at 1-877-BUY-BOOK.

Best wishes to you from your publishing family here at Infinity for a most successful 2006.

Take care and enjoy often...John