

## Amazing Author Events (tips from authors)

By CAN president, Angela Breidenbach

Plain Jane author signings have gone the way of the horse and buggy, sad as that it is, the change in the way we consume entertainment has changed the way we interact in our culture. Social media, discount stores, online purchasing makes it both easier and harder to connect on a human level with customers and readers. We've learned in order to connect, we have to create events to bring people into stores rather than hold simple signings. An author signing has to be a natural byproduct of these more creative events rather than the focus of them.

With that in mind, I'd like to share some ideas from the Christian Authors Network members and other retailers with you. None of these are the "be all, end all". Nor is this a list of "do only this and succeed". The ideas shared are to help stimulate creativity in planning that will spur ideas and success for all of us. If one seems like it fits your store, use it. If not, feel free to adjust to the setting and community you have or spin off into better ideas that might be more suited to the clientele you serve.

### Sample Event Ideas

**\*\*Hold mystery dinner theatres**—Using an author's mystery or crime novel, the author can read a chapter or two of the novel as the entertainment. Then talk about the research, characters, setting (real or fictional), or any other interesting topic related to the book. Then serve dessert leading up to the signing. This works great as a partnership with a local church or community center. Then the bookstore acts as the sales agent at the event.

**\*\*Invite historical authors to share on genealogy**—This topic is hot, hot, hot! Ancestry.com and searching out our ancestors has become a huge hobby across the world. Creating an event with an author who has an expertise in this area is brilliant. But other authors who are experts in historic events and countries (like Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Germany, etc.) can really help bring a place and time in history to life for readers who want more information about their own pasts or might be fascinated to learn about a place and time.

**\*\*Teas and/or coffee chats**—Creating weekly, monthly, or seasonal events. Weekly teas/coffee chats can be scheduled for book clubs and Bible studies. But expand that idea to a monthly tea or coffee chat and invite an author to speak. Serve hors d'oeuvres or tiny desserts (themed to the book) or just fun chocolates. Make it a special night that your clientele can count on to meet, mingle,

and enjoy sweets as a treat while getting to know an author on a more personal level. The topic is based on something interesting from their book like recipes the characters would make/eat, gardening tips, historic stories, pet training, fashion, etc. Anything that relates to the book will help create a well-rounded event plan.

**\*\*Open your store to hobbyists like knitting, quilting, or needlework clubs—**Invite authors to participate by either having them present training on the hobby or reading their novels that have a character with the hobby while people knit, crochet, or work on quilts. Often authors write their own hobbies into their novels. Then the hobbyists can pick up a copy of the book or sequel and have it signed at the end of the meeting time. This is also a great activity to partner with a non-competitive store such as a quilt shop or knitting store where classes are held. The bookstore can provide a small display of books and connect the author into the event. Both stores win and are in a supportive relationship. The bookstore can create a small display of the hobby with the book and promote the event. Or they can trade by holding part 1 at one store and part 2 at the other. There's no rules except those the non-competitive businesses agree to for the events. All are blessed by additional foot traffic and sales through cross promotions.

**\*\*Video conferencing with authors at a distance—**In this economy, it can be pretty difficult for anyone to afford travel expenses any more. One great work around is using Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, or private video conferencing applications and platforms. For book clubs and events, invite an author to speak via one of the video conferencing options. Tools that help present professionally for large groups are big screen or a large blank, light-colored wall, speakers, and a projector. (If you have a big screen TV, it works as your speakers and your screen just by connecting it to a laptop for the presentation.) Set a time, a theme, and be sure to allow a few minutes at the end for a Q&A period. A microphone for the audience or facilitator who can repeat the question from the attendees to the author/presenter really helps make sure the author and audience can interact well.

**\*\*An idea from CAN member, Twila Belk:** When my husband and I owned a bookstore years ago we did a variety of activities.

**We held a "God Is Awesome" party** as an alternative to Halloween. I didn't want my own children trick-or-treating, so I created a big event that allowed them to have fun and not feel as if they were missing out. Open to the community, we promoted it to our customers and through churches. Kids (and adults) dressed up in Bible-related costumes. We gave prizes for different costume categories. The party included carnival style games, and we tried to give them a Bible theme, and lots and lots of prizes and candy. We also featured a puppet show from a local church

youth group. Many of our customers got involved in helping with the games and activities. We were in a small mall and took over the inside. Most of the other businesses were closed, so it didn't bother them.

**March for Missions.** During the month of March, if customers brought in their church bulletin, 10% of their purchase price would go toward the missions/charity organization of the church's choice. We gave churches bulletin inserts so they could promote it to their congregations.

**Just who is Twila?** *Twila Belk ~ The Gotta Tell Somebody Gal, A writer and speaker who loves braggin' on God, Manager/PA of bestselling author Cecil Murphey, Now available—Raindrops from Heaven: Gentle Reminders of God's Power, Presence, and Purpose (coming from BroadStreet Publishing, February 2015)*

**\*\*An idea from CAN member, Kathy Howard—7 Characteristics of Effective Small Group Leaders** is a workshop to take small group Bible study leaders to the next level in their ministry. Christian bookstores that stock Bible study materials could invite Bible study and small group leaders from churches in their area. In fact any teacher-styled training like this could work the same way.

**Another workshop "Slaughtering the Sacred Cow of Busyness"** developed from a chapter of Kathy's book *"Fed Up with Flat Faith."* It's very practical and relevant for all women today!

**Just who is Kathy?** Kathy Howard ~ Unshakeable Faith for Life, Christian speaker & author

Having a conversation with a local author on their books and the ideas the author has can unlock a myriad of ideas to create amazing author events. Events that sell books for your store by partnering with the authors—that's a win/win! I hope you'll enjoy a brainstorming chat with a Christian Authors Network member. I know any one of us will enjoy helping support your business through amazing author events! Click on the links in this document to visit the website and meet the members of the [Christian Authors Network](http://ChristianAuthorsNetwork.com).

Our goal at the Christian Authors Network (CAN) is to support your business because when you succeed we succeed. It's all about working together. May God bless you, your employees, and your business!

~Angela Breidenbach

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