

Engaging Your Community

by Susan G Mathis, and Karen Whiting, with Angela Breidenbach

There are many ways to engage your community, serve, and find volunteer help. Here are a few:

- 1. Get to know and engage your customers.** Train your employees to always welcome customers, ask what your customers like to read and see how they are doing. Ask about hobbies and family. Then when you see the customer return, continue the conversation or mention a new book that might be of interest. Discover problems they need solutions for and match the books.
- 2. Host story time for little ones.** Hold a weekly story time and read to young children. Offer a discount for any books you read during story time. Offer a second book grandparents at a distance can read over Skype, Facetime, or Google Hangout while video conferencing with children.
- 3. Start a tween kid's book club.** Have older children come to listen or read and to share about books they're reading. Pick a book to read as a group and discuss at a future meeting.
- 4. Make author events fun.** Encourage author events and market them as more than having "Mr. Famous Marriage Guy" at the store for a book signing. Call it something creative like "Steve, Salad, Smiles, and Scintillating talk about marriage." Invite community members to bring a salad to share and take photos of their smiles. Couple it with love stories from your married customers that can be put on heart-shaped cutouts to display.
- 5. Provide kid activities.** Rather than constantly run videos, provide printouts to let children do an activity while visiting the store. Need printout ideas? [CAN has a lot online.](#)
- 6. Use a suggestion box.** Keep a suggestion box near the register with paper and pens. Invite customers to suggest local authors, events, or activities they'd like to see at your store...and do them.
- 7. Hold book fairs at local churches.** Churches that don't have church bookstores or church libraries need you! Offer to do a book fair for them a few times a year. Ask for demographics and types of books the congregation may enjoy. Bring and set up a portable bookstore with a selection that matches the denomination or church demographic. [CAN has a topics/issues page.](#)
- 8. Give exclusive discounts.** Have special days for exclusive discounts for churches that announce it in their bulletin.
- 9. Host bake sales and workshops.** Invite churches to let youth groups or other groups hold a bake sale in front of your store. Add your display of specials for the day, cookbooks, or a coupon for bake sale shoppers. Invite churches to hold single mom days helping moms learn skills they need to fix household, yard, and car problems.

10. Help short-term mission volunteers to earn money. Compile a list of books and special prices for people who want to raise money for short-term mission trips. Let them take orders from friends, family, and at their church. Give a percent of the sales toward their trip.

11. Participate in the local community events. Work with the local chamber of commerce to find out about special days, sidewalk sales, etc., in which your store can participate. If there's a historic day, display books related to history and historical fiction with a special price that week. If there's a local historical fiction author, invite them to be your guest.

12. Recruit volunteers. Ask frequent shoppers or members of your church to volunteer to help with special days or to welcome customers. They could hand customers tip sheets of gift ideas before special holidays, take photos of special events or of shoppers, and new displays to put on your Pinterest and social media. Thank them with a gift for serving.

13. Enhance Social Media. Ask teens or young people to volunteer to help with your social media. You might develop a customer column in your newsletter or on your website or find guest bloggers by asking moms or other groups of readers to blog about what's happening in your community, review books, or suggest good books to read.

14. Engage your local library and church libraries. Send emails/flyers to librarians about the new releases you carry that they might want to order. Hold a librarian evening to discuss new books and ways to engage readers. Invite authors to be present or video conference in to the event via Skype, Facetime, or Google Hangout to talk about their books.

15. Hold a music event. Invite local musicians to play and showcase students of local music teachers. The music can be a nice background for shoppers and provide an outlet for musicians to display their talents.

16. Host an Engagement Party. Invite engaged couples to come and hear a speaker on preparing for marriage. Give a discount for premarital resources.

17. Post on Community News board. Post a bulletin board for community members to add news (new babies, weddings) and offer services (lawn care, dog sitting, etc). It shows you care about your community.

Susan G Mathis is an author, editor, and international speaker. Her books, *Countdown for Couples: Preparing for the Adventure of Marriage*, and *The ReMarriage Adventure: Preparing for a Lifetime of Love & Happiness*, are great books for premarital events.

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