



How to get your book in a bookshop: a guide for self-publishers/independent authors

This guide aims to help independently published authors get their book stocked by mainstream and online book retailers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Getting ready

Before you finish publishing your book and well before you approach your chosen booksellers, you will have:

- Researched your book's genre to know where your book fits.
- Had your book professionally edited and designed.
- Ensured your book has an attractive cover that fits the genre. Professional cover design is recommended. No matter how good your writing is, don't let your book down with a cover that looks amateur.
- Ensured that the book has a spine (perfect bound, not stapled); that the title is printed on the spine (check the direction!); and that there is a 13-digit EAN barcode (based on the ISBN) printed on the back cover.
- Considered your suggested retail price against other similar books, and know your wholesale pricing for bookstores, usually 35% to 40% off the RRP. You'll need to know your print costs to work out both of these.
- Listed your book with Nielsen Title Editor. It's free for indie authors to register as a publisher and list their books. This important book metadata flows is used by the entire industry.
- Started work on your book publicity campaign, sending copies out for review and pitching relevant media outlets for interview opportunities.

Preparing your material to present to booksellers

A bookseller needs to know several things to consider whether your book is likely to be of interest to their customers.

Ideally, collate the following information into a concise email for their consideration:

- All the new title information (which can be put into an Advance Information Sheet (ATI) and attached to the email or included in the body of the email in bullet point form.)
 - Book title
 - Description (back cover blurb)
 - ISBN
 - Format (paperback, hardcover, etc.)
 - Genre (adult fiction, non-fiction, etc.)
 - Publication date
 - RRP
 - Wholesale price
 - Postage and packaging if applicable (see note below)
 - Requested payment terms
- A brief author bio
- A JPG image of the book cover
- Briefly why you think your book might suit their store and/or any sales points, such as a main character with dyslexia or ADHD in a junior fiction book that appeals to certain readers
- A sample chapter or a few interior pages with illustrations (for picture / illustrated books)
- Links to any reviews for your book

- Any comparison titles or authors with books similar to yours
- Any local tie-ins relevant to the bookshop
- Any local publicity you've done or are doing: promoting your book is critical to the book finding readers.
- What you'll do to support the bookstore, i.e., listing them as a stockist on your website, promoting on your social media

Be aware:

- Publishers usually pay the freight or P&P costs, and this expectation also carries over to indie / self-published titles. If you intend to charge P&P, consider covering part of the cost yourself. Make any P&P charges clear in your covering email.
- Many bookstores stock indie/ self-published books on consignment terms only, which means the bookshop pays the author only when the books sell and has the option of returning unsold stock within an agreed timeframe (usually 3 to 6 months).
- An alternative is "sale or return (SOR)" where the bookshop pays for the stock according to the payment terms of your invoice but has the right to return unsold stock for a full refund.
- A busy bookseller may not appreciate an unplanned visit to their store to tell them about your book. Consider emailing or calling first to make an appointment. You'll want all the above information to leave with them.

Suggestions:

- Pick your time of year carefully. Many new writers are launched in the beginning of the year. If you release too close to Christmas, your book will get lost on the shelves. If you come in February or March, bookshops often have the space to display your book where it has a better chance of selling.
- Consider how you can promote your book and direct people to the bookshop to drive sales. Encourage local friends and family to buy your book from your local stockists. Book sales data is sent to Nielsen BookScan from bookshops, so if your book sells very well, it will get noticed around the book industry.
- Consider trying to get your book distributed by one of the established wholesalers like Bateman Distribution, Upstart Distribution, Nationwide Book Distributors or Bookreps NZ. Do your research to consider your retail pricing versus print costs. A wholesaler will expect a margin (as a guide, c.15% of the RRP). It's a significant benefit to the bookseller being able to order your book from an established wholesaler (normally just a click of a button, and one less invoice to process through their accounting system).
- If you use a New Zealand printer, some offer distribution to booksellers and/or wholesalers on your behalf.

Please don't:

- Call the bookshop on a regular basis to check on sales. Their website may possibly show stock numbers of your book.
- Send the bookseller an Amazon link to preview your book. Yes, Amazon may be another outlet for your book, but most bookshops choose to have no commercial dealings with Amazon because of the negative impact they have had on bookshops.

Other aspects booksellers consider when choosing books to stock:

- Every bookshop has a finite amount of space and monthly budget. They can't buy every book available.
- Booksellers understand what their customers like to read, what genres sell well, and what books are on a topic of relevance or interest locally.
- If they read and love a book themselves, you can be sure they'll telling their customers about it.
- Booksellers consider if they know an author, how their books sell locally or nationally, and if a new author is local and likely to have a local following and/or supportive friends and family.
- Booksellers consider book marketing and promotion being generated by the author and/or media coverage.
- Booksellers care about book format and design. Sometimes a stunning cover can be the swaying point between a book being stocked or not.

If the bookstore agrees to stock your book:

- Respond promptly and be prompt with your delivery of books to them.
- Include a professional invoice with your payment terms as outlined in your earlier email.
- If they've listed your book on their website, check stock numbers of your book to see when you should ask if they need more copies.
- If your book sells reasonably well, booksellers will expect to be able to reorder more stock, and promptly. If you are not reprinting your book, for any reason, be courteous and let your bookstore stockists know.

If the bookstore declines to stock your book or doesn't respond to your email, remember:

- Don't take personally nor expect an explanation. Time does not allow an explanation for every indie published book decline. Most booksellers receive many submissions from self-published authors each week.
- Don't be disheartened. What works for some bookshops doesn't work for others. What sells huge numbers in, say, Rotorua, might not sell in Timaru and what sells in Timaru may not sell in Christchurch.

What can you expect from a bookshop?

Despite the many one-way tips above, getting a book into a reader's hands is very much a team effort between an author, a publisher and a bookseller. You can expect:

- In all circumstances, to be treated with the respect and consideration you'd expect any business to give to a potential business partner.
- If the book sells, to be paid promptly in accordance with the agreed payment terms
- To be given prompt consideration to reordering more stock.
- If the bookshop is included in any social media campaign or promotion around a book, to participate actively in that campaign.

This guide was created in collaboration between Renee Rowland, Booksellers Aotearoa NZ, Jenny Nagle, NZ Society of Authors and Kate Gordon-Smith, Relish Media & Communications Ltd. The authors wish you all the success in the promotion and sale of your book.