**Off-Site Events**

**Planning & Managing**

When you have an opportunity to draw a crowd that is larger than the one you can accommodate in the store, it’s good to have a variety of off-site options. Since your ultimate goal is a great turn-out where you can sell more books, here are some considerations for planning and managing the event.

**Venue Options & Community Partnerships**

Many bookstores have ongoing relationships with organizations that can partner in marketing the event and can offer facilities for you to use for free, like:

* Public library meeting room
* College or university facilities
* Public or private school auditoriums
* Church sanctuaries or social halls
* City or township meeting rooms
* Community theaters or indie film houses
* Community board room at banks or companies
* Public broadcasting studios for live audiences

With your venue contact, discuss:

* audience seating capacity
* location and furniture for the featured speaker(s) - table, chairs, podium
* audio/visual equipment
* store signage (podium sign, projected logo on screen, etc)
* location of tables for merchandise
* location of signing table and direction for autographing line
* location and tables for refreshments
* trash/recycling bins indoors and outdoors
* access to the facility for set-up
* parking, including reserving a space for your speaker(s)
* what marketing materials you’ll provide – and when – for joint promotion
* whether your partnering organization will be a part of the introduction to the presentation
* who you should thank from the partnering organization
* any free tickets you’ll offer your partnering organization

When you’re establishing these relationships, make sure you list them in your publicity kit that you share with publishers. This will show them you are capable of hosting a variety of events both inside the store and with partners in your community.

**Ticketed Events - Managing Attendance & the Autographing Line**

You’ll want to gauge attendance to ensure you have adequate seating and have a plan to efficiently manage the autographing line to keep waiting to a minimum.

* Use the customer’s register receipt for the featured book as the ticket for the event. Number or assign a group to each customer’s receipt so you can call customers in groups of 20 to 25. You decide whether one receipt is good for one or more attendees.
* Charge a nominal ticket price for attendance, knowing some people will have already purchased the book elsewhere. Some booksellers refund the ticket price if a copy of the featured book is bought after the ticket has been purchased.
* Sell tickets that include the price of the featured book. Each ticket is now a guaranteed sale of the book.

Ring up the sale of your tickets on your POS. Ideally, set up a department for “Event Tickets” and add each ticketed event as an item to purchase (like you would for selling each unique non-book item). Record your customer’s name, email address and phone number with each purchase so you can be in touch with details about the event and later, invite customers to other events.

**Promoting Event Logistics & Special Perks**

For off-site events, the logistics can get a bit complicated, so you want to find a way to communicate to customers with clear, friendly language without seeming overly cumbersome.

Try something like this:

“We expect a large crowd to welcome {author name} so to ensure you have a seat, please obtain a ticket from {store name} in advance. Your purchase of one copy of {title} will entitle you to {number} ticket{s}. We’ll have general seating, so be sure to arrive early.”

You may have to add details, depending on:

* whether the author will personally sign copies or whether the books are generically pre-signed
* if the author will sign just the most recent release or backlist too
* whether customers will be called to the signing tables by group
* if parking needs any explanation

If your author/presenter is available to join you for a reception before the event, you may wish to designate a green room area or private space for V.I.P customers. This is a perk your best customers (or loyalty program members) will appreciate.

You may also consider offering a special package: one copy of the featured book, priority seating, and the reception with the author.

**Managing the Event**

Popular authors and events held elsewhere are one of your greatest opportunities to gain new customers. You want to make sure everyone has an enjoyable experience and is invited to visit the bookstore.

**Checklist of items to take to the event**

* Featured book & select backlist
* Gift for speaker
* POS equipment for selling merchandise, pens & back-up credit card processor (with forms)
* Store bookplates (to use for author’s signature in case you run out of books)
* Store signs with logo - one for podium or presentation area & one for sales table
* Promotional items - store bookmark, newsletter or other print materials
* Sign-up list for customer newsletter
* Sticky notes for personalizing autographs
* Refreshments

**Staffing & Roles**

Large scale events are an opportunity for you to not only use bookselling staff, but enlist the help of volunteers. Many of these tasks can be easily delegated with some instruction.

* Event Facilitator - to oversee the event, thank partners, ensure presenters have water before the event begins, introduce the author/speaker, get final audience count
* Set-up & tear-down (bringing books and supplies, setting up chairs, display tables, stage area, signing table, and refreshments)
* Parking Attendant
* Greeter
* Usher{s}
* Photographer
* Assistant to author/speaker - gets author to sign copies for customers unable to be present for the event and gets extra stock signed at the end of the event for in-store sales
* Booksellers to ring up sales
* Assistant to call customers to autograph line in groups
* Assistant to work the autograph line, clearly print names on sticky notes & place on autograph pages for each customer and asking people how they found out about the event
* Other

**Introducing the Program / Thanking Your Partners**

Your greeting to the audience should be brief, yet filled with appropriate “thank yous” and an interesting and professional introduction for the program.

Know that there should be no introduction that assumes this “author needs no introduction”. Find out a few things about the author that isn’t readily available on their website or in the bio on their book. Add a personal story.

**Facilitating the Presentation**

1. Welcome the audience and introduce yourself and your role with the bookstore
2. Thank your venue host/partner for the event
3. State the name of the program and introduce your author/presenter and invite the audience to offer a warm welcome
4. Facilitate audience Q&A
5. {after the presentation} - Thank the author/presenter{s}
6. Explain logistics for the autographing line
7. Thank the author again and present “thank you” gift, thank your host/partner for the event
8. Thank the audience and invite them to the bookstore

**Event Follow-up**

Whether you do these things yourself or enlist support, make sure you take care of a few last items.

* Thank staff and volunteers
* Upload sales into store POS system, secure cash and any POS paperwork
* Record sales for the event - # copies sold, total $ sales
* Separate merchandise: items to be featured on the sales floor, stock to be returned
* Post photos on social media and send to media contacts
* Send follow-up report to publishing contact with: # in attendance, # books sold
* Write thank you notes: host/partner and author

Safety and security are sometimes factors …

Safety and security may be an additional consideration should you need police assistance for directing traffic or monitoring any potential protest activity. Should you have any concerns, call to explain the nature of the event and ask for support.