

GREETINGS etc.

The Business of Greeting Cards and Stationery Products

MARCH/APRIL 2002
An EDSELL Publication

Little Professor Teaches "Journal"-ism

A large selection of journals makes this Michigan-based bookstore a destination for more than just books.

Todd Grubbs knew he was losing potential sales, soon after he and his wife, Jane, along with his brother-in-law Chuck Allen, purchased the Little

Professor in 1997. A portion of our "side line" sales," he says, explaining that the "side-line" category makes up 15 percent of sales and includes



Little Professor Book Center of Brighton, MI, is a store of its own, independently owned franchise bookstore.

Journals Unlimited, Inc.

What's Selling: "We have over 30 titles of themed journals available in our 'Write It Down' series," says Ruth Hanna, president. "Our journals are not hard on the inside. We help to get the writer started with undivided lines/wordings to complete, allowing plenty of extra writing space."

What's Selling Them: "Our journals can be found in a wide range of retail environments... ranging from gift shops and stationery stores to sporting good outlets."

What's Buying Them: "Our customer base is as broad as our retail. We offer everything from a Fisherman's Journal to a Mom's Journal. With so many titles available, our journals attract an eclectic audience, from sports enthusiasts to wine connoisseurs."

Changes in the Market Since 9-11

"We have definitely noticed an increase in journaling since the September 11 terrorist attacks, especially in such titles as 'My Personal Journal' and the 'Daily Devotions, A Prayer Journal.' In these uncertain times it seems journaling is becoming very popular with all ages and is not just for women. Writing our feelings down is a way of coping with our fears, dreams and needs. Sometimes you are not quite sure how you feel about something or what you would like to see happen and you yourself put it into writing. It really gives you direction and a feeling of well-being."



Journals Unlimited has top-quality offers like 'Daily Devotions, A Prayer Journal' (\$14.95) in its 'Write It Down' line of journaling journals.

Resources:

Bush Dance
www.bushdance.com
Carta Products, Inc.
www.cartaproducts.com
CQ Products
www.cqproducts.com
Journals Unlimited, Inc.
www.journalsunlimited.com
Marianne Richmond Studios, Inc.
www.mariannerichmond.com

"Customers also tend to gravitate towards themed journals at Little Professor, especially when aided by Grubbs' seasonal cross-promoting techniques. "Nearly three-quarters of our customers are women, and they love to write down holiday memories. So when we put out a holiday display, it's easy to include themed journals in it," he says. "While Christmas and Mother's Day are the top two journal-selling seasons respectively, another has developed thanks to the state's Michigan location: hunting season! "Duck hunting season is huge in Michigan, and people—especially sons for their husbands—like to buy these journals as gifts," says Grubbs.

He also uses back-to-school displays in August and September to call attention to smaller journals that children can use to keep track of the books they read for school. "We take advantage of the fact that educators are requiring kids to keep journals by calling parents' attention to these displays. That starts



the parents thinking about Little Professor as a place to find journals, and not just a bookstore."

Which is just how Grubbs wants his store to be perceived. When he and his partners bought the 11-year-old franchise store seven years ago, people thought of Little Professor as a "teacher/education" store rather than a general bookstore. Through advertising on the radio and in phone books, sending out press releases on author and

books, journals are 80 percent of our sales, spread over the holidays. He has to sell more journals everywhere, even next to the paper area at the bookstore store, as in Little Professor throughout the

whole adults like them a bit larger, many like a hardcover book." Journals Unlimited, Inc., a local Michigan-based journal manufacturer that Grubbs first discovered at a local street festival, recently introduced a line of "mini" versions of its popular "Write It Down" journals. "The mini-journals are inexpensive [at \$3.99] and a huge seller for us," he says, mentioning that he will fill shelves in just over a month.

While hard journals tend to sell best,

journals are displayed throughout Little Professor, since approximately 50 percent of its journal sales are impulse purchases.

Blattner book signings, making out coupons and catalogs, and becoming active with local charities and chambers of commerce, the store helped to establish a customer loyalty—and implied sales by its third year in business.

Grubbs credits journals and the store's other specialties in building Little Professor's success. "Journals are items that created an additional identity for our store and helped turn non-book readers into customers," he says. "We pride ourselves on giving people what they want, and they appreciate it by coming back and doing business with us."

(Larry Siegel is a Glendale, CA-based consultant who assists retail chains in creating loyalty and frequent-buyer programs as well as advertising and promotional campaigns. He can be reached at lg@larrysiegel.com.)