



Seven Stories Press drives direct sales and boosts exposure for backlist titles

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Lars Reilly

Technical and Sales Operations



ABOUT GOOGLE BOOK SEARCH

Google Book Search enables authors and publishers to promote their books on Google. Google scans the full text of a partner’s title so that Google users can see books that match the topics they are searching on. When users click on a book search result, they’re taken to a Google-hosted web page displaying a scanned image of the relevant page from the book. Each page also contains multiple “Buy this book” links, which enable users to purchase the book from online retailers. Users may also see contextually targeted Google AdWords ads on these pages. Partners receive a share of the revenue generated from ads appearing on their content.

For more information, visit <http://books.google.com>.

About Seven Stories Press

Based in New York City, Seven Stories Press has a well-earned reputation for bringing to independent publishing some of the most important voices in contemporary fiction, poetry, and progressive politics. Its titles have been honored with numerous awards, including the National Book Award for Poetry and the Firecracker Alternative Book Award for Best Book of the Year in the Politics category. Seven Stories has a full-time staff of 10 and publishes 30-40 books per season, both in English and, under its Siete Cuentos Editorial imprint, in Spanish. Through sublicenses with overseas colleagues, these books have been translated into and published in virtually all languages around the globe.

Challenge

An independent publisher that actively seeks to engage its readership online, Seven Stories’ biggest challenge is increasing sales, especially direct sales from its website.

“It’s become clear over the last five years that the channels through which books are being sold are changing, and people don’t buy books from bookstores as much as they used to,” says Lars Reilly, who manages technical and sales operations for Seven Stories. “Anytime we can sell directly from our site, it’s great. We receive the full revenue from the sale, and our customers know that by coming to us, they’re supporting independent publishing.”

Another top priority for Seven Stories is driving interest in its backlist titles. Explains Reilly, “It’s always our goal to sell these books, even beyond what we call the ‘perennial backlist’ – books that continue to sell reliably over time, but simply in smaller numbers. Selling three copies a year of a deeply buried backlist title is far better than selling zero copies.”

“Dark Alliance has been out for years, and it’s no longer available in bookstores. But someone recently published a book about the author, and people are evidently searching for him online. Now we’re selling three, four, five, sometimes upwards of 10 copies a week directly from our site. These sales are all gravy to us.”

Solution

After hearing about the Google Books Partner Program through trade magazines and its online catalog management company GiantChair, Seven Stories joined the program in February 2005. With limited funds for marketing, Seven Stories works hard to find smart, cost-effective ways to capture attention and reach its readership online. Joining the free Partner Program “seemed like a good idea that could be implemented for little to no cost.”

The result, says Reilly, is that people are finding and buying a surprisingly wide range of books, often clicking directly through to the Seven Stories website using the ‘Buy this book’ links. “That’s as close as you can get to landing them in a bookstore.”

Many of these books, such as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Gary Webb's *Dark Alliance*, are backlist titles that Seven Stories wasn't expecting to sell. "*Dark Alliance* has been out for years, and it's no longer available in bookstores," explains Reilly. "But someone recently published a book about the author, and people are evidently searching for him online. Now we're selling three, four, five, sometimes upwards of 10 copies a week directly from our site. These sales are all gravy to us."

Another title that's been getting a lot of page views in Google Book Search is *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, a book by Howard Zinn and Arnold Arnove that features the source material for Zinn's widely read *People's History of the United States*. "Someone might be looking for the original book and stumble on this one at the same time," says Reilly. "We're seeing more sales, but even if people don't buy the book, in the long run this kind of exposure can be just as good. People are becoming aware of this book, and it's beginning to take off in academic circles."

In addition to joining the Partner Program, Seven Stories uses Google AdWords so that people searching on Google see text ads for its books if they're relevant to a particular search. The company also recently set up Google/Seven Stories co-branded search on its website. "Our relationship with Google has been really great, and really useful," says Reilly.

Seven Stories currently has 200 titles in Google Book Search, and plans to continue adding new books. Says Reilly, "Our goal, with the rare exception that an author doesn't want their book up, is to have all of our books live on Google Book Search in short order. And going forward, it will be every book as it goes to the printer."

