

Upper Access, Inc. gains exposure, expands customer base and jumpstarts backlist sales



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Steve Carlson
Publisher of Upper Access



ABOUT GOOGLE BOOK SEARCH

Google Book Search enables publishers to promote their books on Google. Google scans the full text of participating publishers' titles 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. Publishers will receive a share of the revenue generated from ads appearing on their content.

About Upper Access, Inc.

Located in Hinesburg, Vermont, Upper Access, Inc. is a small, independent publisher of non-fiction books, focusing specifically on books designed to improve the quality of life. So far, it has published 30 titles, covering topics ranging from herbal remedies to dealing with personal loss. A supporter of independent publishing, Upper Access also provides consulting services and business software for other publishers.

Challenge

As a small publisher with limited funds for marketing, Upper Access, Inc.'s biggest challenge is spreading the word about its books.

“The more people know about my books, the more likely they are to buy them,” says Steve Carlson, Publisher of Upper Access. “Like many independent publishers, Upper Access is basically a one-person operation. I do everything I can to increase the amount of information people have.”

Since Upper Access typically publishes one to three new titles per year, a second critical challenge is spurring interest in its older titles. “For a small press our size, it's wonderful just to make a living publishing books that help people. We take the time to be sure that each title is the best in its field or subject area,” says Carlson. “But when you publish only a few books a year, most of your revenue comes from the backlist. A topic that was hot when a book was first published may no longer have the same broad appeal, so it's essential to keep these books visible to people who are interested.”

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Solution

Carlson heard about Google Book Search in 2004 through a marketing newsletter for authors and publishers, and joined the Partner Program to increase exposure and jumpstart sales. Carlson closely tracks how customers discover Upper Access books, and after analyzing customer feedback, website visits and sales figures over a 10-month period, he was able to identify a pattern.

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“For instance, we have a book to help doctors notify people about the death of a patient. It was published back in ‘94, but a medical conference organizer found it this year, and every few months we see another order for 12-24 copies. Another example is a local history museum in Massachusetts that’s been buying one of our books – it was never one of our bestsellers, but the information it contains fits perfectly for them. And we have a customer who’s very interested in memory recovery – a hot topic in the mid-‘90s – who found a book we published on the subject and now buys 10 copies at a time for her friends.

“My sense is that these are people who are looking for the best information on a topic, not for books necessarily – otherwise, they’d probably go to Amazon or their local bookstore. They may have just been searching on Google and happened upon a book. That’s the value Google brings.”

Upper Access has benefited not only from increased exposure and sales, but also a better return on investment.

“For all practical purposes, I consider it free publicity,” says Carlson. “And the best part is that a significant percentage of the sales are through my website, so they’re at full retail price. With Amazon Advantage, you get less than 55 percent; with distributors, it’s an even smaller cut. And with bookstore sales, you’ll often see a 10-30 percent return rate. But when people order directly, they don’t return books. So these are ideal sales.”

Upper Access has included its entire active catalog in Google Book Search, and plans to expand the partnership by submitting each new title upon publication.

