



BY POORNIMA APTE

Contributing Writer

arrie Kohs of pucciManuli, a children's store in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, had heard about a dance performance based on the kids' book "What Do You Do With an Idea?" being staged in Philadelphia. She figured she might as well make the most of the opportunity and decided to host a series of events: Kohs partnered with publisher Compendium to host a book signing with author Kobi Yamada and even invited the dancers to the store. Kohs also organized school visits and arranged for a group of students to attend the performance.

Kohs wins high marks for this event because she took advantage of an area opportunity and even better, brought it home to her own store. Understanding that the central player here was the book, she stocked up plenty of copies and created a smashingly successful book-oriented event. Gift retailers indeed occupy such

a unique place in that they bring different worlds together, say industry experts. "Small businesses can be such a community hub, and stores should take advantage of their ability to bring people together [for book events]," says Angeline Candido, marketing manager at Compendium.

THE MAGIC OF BOOKS

Kohs was able to pull off the author event so successfully because of the enormous popularity of its key driver, the endearingly illustrated book. Indeed, your customers are hungry for neatly packaged sentiments. A card is good but doesn't feel substantial enough. A book is just the right antidote for such situations, say industry professionals.

"Most of your customers aren't likely poets or wordsmiths. They'll appreciate being able to select from

an assortment of heartfelt gift books featuring neatlypackaged sentiments through which they can express their love, appreciation, and concern for others," says Becky Brandvik, senior director, Tyndale Gift & Specialty with Tyndale House Publishers.

Candido echoes these sentiments. "Books carry such rich meaning, and each title offers a different message," Candido says. "A book about appreciation can highlight the recipient's generosity. A friendship title can honor years of companionship and love. By giving someone a book, you're inviting them into a deeper shared connection. You're telling a story about your relationship."

WHY BOOKS WORK IN GIFT RETAIL

And it's not just human connections that books serve to highlight. Books are extremely malleable and probably the best cross-merchandisers that retailers can play with. Did we mention they take very little room?

"Books add a strong element of storytelling to a vignette," Candido points out. "Use a book like a billboard. It's an easy way to communicate upcoming holidays and other gift buying occasions. For instance, if a store wants to put together a Teacher Appreciation Week vignette, they could take a book like 'Because I Had a Teacher' and display it with chocolates, candles, and fun stationery. It will act as a reminder to customers to pick up something for their children's teachers."

"Books incorporated into topical themes always aid in discoverability. For example, we have a book 'So Much To Celebrate' by Katie Jacobs that is a wonderful addition to any party/hosting display," says Laura Minchew, senior vice president and publisher, gift books and Tommy Nelson children's books with HarperCollins Christian Publishers. "Devotions from the Beach is a perennial bestseller in gift stores when merchandised with other beach themed items," Minchew adds.

Sometimes it's important to remember that not all customers are book people but there are ways of drawing them in, Candido says. For easier merchandising, Compendium's collections offer an assortment of products based around some of their bestselling books. "Store owners can quickly bring in one cohesive, curated assortment of products and develop a merchandising vignette theme. It makes a strong and striking statement. Customers can purchase a variety of products or the specific piece that speaks to them," Candido says.

LET'S GO SHOPPING

Since books are retailing in so many different contexts, sourcing them from vendors who know and speak books is important, says Patti Stracher-Lee, event director at UnBound at BookExpo + BookCon. BookExpo, to be held



Dancers from a Philadelphia production based on the kids' book "What Do You Do With an Idea?" are on hand for an in-store event at pucciManuli, a children's store in Ardmore, Pennsylvania.



Author Kobi Yamada signs a copy of his best-selling book "What Do You Do With an Idea?" for a young fan at pucciManuli, a children's store in Ardmore, Pennsylvania.



The Believe collection from Compendium Inc. sprinkles a touch of inspiration when needed. Circle 273.



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PAGE-TURNERS

While books are universally loved and every kind of gift book has its own special place, retailers attending BookExpo or other shows are probably noticing a few trends in the industry, Candido says. These include guided journals, books of encouragement and interactive titles. "Overall, we feel like the conversation is changing in society," she says. "With the rise of Brené Brown and Elizabeth Gilbert, there's a new comfort in expressing emotion and being vulnerable with each other. Our gift books and journals offer a way to share and connect."

"Lifestyle books are so popularwhether it is home design, cooking, or personal style," says Minchew. "Décor books are far more than looking pretty, they are now about reflecting your personality and purpose in the space you live," she adds.

Minchew has seen that devotionals are a top-selling category in every sales channel, including mass market and gift stores. "These short bites of inspiration sell well whether they are author-driven or topically based," she says.

The key takeaway is that books do the heavy lifting for your customers in terms of expression and they work for all occasions. Even better, they fit well into your store and can add to your bottom line in style.

"We often say that we're in the reminder business," Candido says about gift books. "People are busy, preoccupied, and generally stressed out, and we offer reminders to focus on what's true and real within each of us — the stuff of life that makes living worthwhile. Books allow someone to pause, reconnect (with ourselves and each other), and celebrate life's goodness. It's almost a luxury in such a fast-paced world." GS

Learn more about our Gift Shop contributors on page 14.









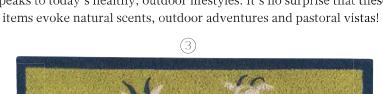
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