Library Marketplace -- Orientation for New Library Sales Reps

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Library Marketplace — Orientation for New Library Sales Reps

by John Riley (Sales Director, Eastern Book Company) <jdriley@attbi.com>

My wife always hates it if I say that I am a traveling salesman. Sales Director, Sales Manager, Director of Marketing are all ok. Once upon a time we were known as Book Travelers or even Book Peddlers. In this era of euphemisms, where a dishwasher is jokingly referred to as a hydro-ceramic engineer, we all seek to elevate our titles, perhaps to compensate for our lack of sports entertainer salaries.

A few rules of the road for a new salesperson.
1) The big building in the middle of the campus in usually the library.
2) If you are late for an appointment, call ahead to re-schedule, even if it is a question of 15 minutes. Usually you will just meet 15 minutes later than scheduled. Librarians have tight schedules, just like you.
3) When you are late, slow down. You’re already late.
   a) You only get in accidents when you are in a hurry.
   b) If the librarian is late for your appointment, you can always read. (There are way better magazines in the library than in a dentist’s office.)
   c) If the librarian forgets your meeting and you’ve driven 200 miles out of the way to get there . . . remember you’re in a library, ergo: no screaming aloud/alone.
4) A sales call is like a blind date . . . you never know what you will get.
5) Never make “cold calls.” The very last time I tried one I walked in on a competitor who had a pre-arranged appointment . . . exit left . . . wipe egg from face.
6) Don’t talk about PromptCat around the catalogers.

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An Interview at Schoenhof’s Foreign Books

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Every week scholars, students, tourists, and wanderers visit Harvard Square by the thousands. Most reach Cambridge on the MBTA subway system and emerge from what all of Boston calls the T to walk in Harvard Yard. shop at the Harvard Coop, see a museum, hear a show at Club Passim or the House of Blues, or just immerse themselves in the street life bred by America’s most celebrated university.

For a few pilgrims, the very first aim is just around the corner from the T station, a modest store at 76A Mount Auburn Street, where two small window displays recently held selections of Chinese poetry and children’s books in Spanish. Inside, in addition to shelves of books in these two languages, are language-learning materials in some 700 other languages and dialects, as well as fiction and academic non-fiction from 50 countries. Schoenhof’s Foreign Books, with a clientele equal to the worldly nature of its stock, is a destination within a destination.

Many librarians have visited the store, and many more have sent orders to Schoenhof’s on behalf of their libraries. What they and other customers seldom know is that the store on Mount Auburn isn’t the only Schoenhof’s location. In a quieter, residential precinct of Cambridge, about a ten-minute walk from the Square, is a non-descript brick building on Green Street housing the Schoenhof’s warehouse and offices. It’s from here that the business founded in downtown Boston in 1856 by Carl Schoenhof, who sold books to the city’s German immigrant community in their native language, is run today.

Schoenhof’s was a mom-and-pop operation until the French academic and literary publisher Editions Gallimard acquired the business in 1981. By then the store had long since shifted focus away from Boston’s immigrants and toward the city’s academic community. That change had begun late in the prior century, when Schoenhof’s made French a specialty, stocking the works of Zola, Flaubert, Rimbaud, and other gants of the era, on the way to becoming a pan-lingual Harvard Square institution after moving to Cambridge in the early 1940s. French literature, however, after a hundred years plus, remains the store’s backbone. Schoenhof’s stock holds more volumes in French literature than in the entire language-learning inventory of dictionaries, phrasebooks, textbooks, and other course materials from every corner of the world.

Carl Schoenhof’s present successor, Judy Townley, is a diminutive, soft-spoken woman...continued on page 57