

Unity Books Wellington

From: Unity Books Wellington
Sent: Tuesday, 8 April 2014 2:54 p.m.
To: emma.rawson@fairfaxmedia.co.nz
Subject: RE: media query Attn Tilly,

Hi Emma

Might have provided too much – you can pick the best from it.

I realise (sorry) I haven't read Unlimited magazine – would you have time to send a copy down to me?

Best wishes

Tilly

Hi Tilly,

Here's a couple of questions for you.

- We've heard some independent booksellers have had good sales recently - is this true for you, and if so what kind of growth have you seen (statistics or sales figures always helpful if possible)

It's a little bit early in April to have the financial year result but we do expect to see growth this year - thanks mainly to Eleanor Catton and her NZ publisher Victoria University Press.

- What's been the biggest challenge for your business in the past few years?

The incredibly high operating costs, including the rent

- How have changes in the book industry affected Unity Books, and how have you adjusted to that change?

Unity Books Wellington sells e books (Kobo, with millions of titles, which can be downloaded to all devices except kindle) but the southern hemisphere e book 'phenomena' hasn't really been that phenomenal.

The much bigger phenomena is online shopping. This has been evolving for a while now and it means customers (on the street) are increasingly often also consumers (online, some sourcing offshore and some sourcing locally including from us). There are many political and social aspects to this, and Unity Books Wellington is inevitably part of that, and we also support our trade organisation Booksellers NZ's activities for GST equitability in imports.

The NZ book trade has always had a good quota of very likable mavericks; memorable people who run truly great and culturally exciting businesses. But the thing is, amazon is determined to dominate global publishing and bookselling, and if anyone wants to know more about their colonisation and tax avoidance strategies we recommend a critical analysis by Brad Stone called 'The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos & the Age of Amazon'. It's a bit of an eye-opener.

Our online shop is well established now and we've always got newly packed boxes and parcels stacking up ready for the couriers. And in peak times we hire temp staff dedicated to the online shop.

Our library supply – part of the shop’s culture since the 60s – has taken a knock, and it’s hard to compete with the big multinationals who specialise in city libraries. But we keep good niche contracts and this revenue helps with our margins.

Most distribution is ex-Australia, and we direct import stock as well. But we’re big on the local and NZ publishing accounts for over 20% of revenue.

Our strategy has never been about discounting and deals – we’re talking about authors’ intellectual property here. It’s risky in such ‘discounted’ times to run the shop on RRP but we’re only on indie margins and it’s always been about having the best writing. And we run a dream sale bin at the side door.

- How do you retain customer loyalty, and stop customers heading to overseas online stockists?

We have to look after street culture. Wellington is a fairly vigorous place anyway, but even Wellington runs the risk of deteriorating into a strip of chain stores and bars.

We are indies. Unity Books Wellington is strengthened by an incredibly wide catchment of people who happen to be into books. It’s this vast variety of people who make the place irresistible – they make the shop busy beyond being merely a shop.

But loyalty is earned. We know it has to be worth it for all customers. Especially now, with so many people dealing with staggeringly tight house-hold budgets, we are conscious of our responsibility to serve well. Everyone notices great service; it’s such an ‘up’ experience. So the staff is the main thing, and they’re front of the pack – cluey, energetic and funny. Then there’s the books. Our stock buyers are the best. The word curatorial might sound a bit nobby for a shop but the word comes from the Latin to ‘take care’ and so we’re picky in a deep stockholding sort of a way. It’s part of the Unity DNA.

Other strategies include our newsletter which is a great stimulant. Our event manager is always busy sorting the 45 minute lunchtime events and also a lot of launches. We do book reviews on Newstalk ZB and Nine to Noon; for these we select the absolute best reads from the previous fortnight. Some of us are writers and photographers; our social media has a bit of IQ.

- Tell me about your culture vulture vouchers?

It’s a joint project with our mates at Aro Street Video and Slow Boat records on Cuba Street. These are \$25 vouchers called the Culture Vulture which can be bought and redeemed at any of the three shops; a kind of cross-fertilisation. Hilarious art work by Stephen Templer. They’re pretty hot.

[do you need a pic?]

- Is there anything about the local book market that I haven't covered - that you'd like to add?

Quite a number of the mavericks in NZ publishing and bookselling are baby-boomers. They are thinking about succession planning but they are thinking about this at the very time the NZ (and international) economies stopped creating all those 37 year old recovering teachers who have enough passion and capital to buy and drive a maverick semi-digital business in a digital time. A lot of middle and working class inheritances went at least half down the gurgler in 2008. NZ is only a “rock star economy” for a limited number of rock stars. Having said that – I am a practicing optimist - I do believe there will be another (but different) bookshop renaissance in NZ.

- Just some facts - What is your job title at Unity books, how many staff are there, and how long have you owned the business?

Manager and sometimes buyer for 23 years; 16 staff; co-owner for 9 years in halves with Unity Books Auckland

Thanks so much for your time, really appreciate it.

Cheers

Emma

UNITY BOOKS

the best of both words

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THORPE-BOWKER INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOP OF THE YEAR 1999, 2002, 06, 08, 09, 11
THORPE-BOWKER REGIONAL BOOKSHOP OF THE YEAR (NORTH ISLAND) 2012
CAPITAL TIMES BOOKSHOP OF THE YEAR 2005, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12

From: Emma Rawson [<mailto:emma.rawson@fairfaxmedia.co.nz>]

Sent: Tuesday, 8 April 2014 10:59 a.m.

To: Unity Books Wellington

Subject: Re: media query Attn Tilly,

Hi Tilly,

It's SST - but Unlimited has a column space in the business section every week. We're both Fairfax so we donate content to them, and they give us a nice Unlimited credit so people know about our mag.

Cheers

Emma

On 8 April 2014 10:42, Unity Books Wellington <wellington@unitybooks.co.nz> wrote:

Hi Emma

I'm a bit confused – is this story for SST or Unlimited?

Thanks

Tilly

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From: Emma Rawson [<mailto:emma.rawson@fairfaxmedia.co.nz>]

Sent: Monday, 7 April 2014 6:18 p.m.

To: Unity Books Wellington

Subject: Re: media query Attn Tilly,