

NEWSSTAND DISTRO 101

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Direct-to-retail distribution can be tricky but with patience, a good distributor and some knowledge of how the system works, almost any publication can find a home on the racks. Here are some tips to help you manage your expectations for newsstand distribution and sales.

1. *Keep It Local.* What you want is the broadest exposure possible considering the limits of your target market. In other words, your best newsstand bets are going to be in and around the areas from which your content derives. Sending your magazine about coastal living to the Prairie and Northern provinces probably isn't going to yield many sales.
2. *Do More Marketing.* Newsstand visibility can lend your magazine clout when it comes to selling advertising, but not as much clout as in-depth subscriber research, careful market research and proven newsstand sales. Simply put, magazines don't always sell themselves. Marketing is key.
3. *Don't Expect To Get Rich Quick.* The economics of newsstand sales are such that small magazines should not expect their revenues from single copy sales to match their expenses. As stated earlier, think of the newsstand as a marketing tool, and build gradually. Only the largest-circulation magazines (selling in the millions of copies) can achieve the economies of scale necessary for profitable newsstand sales.
4. *Know The Averages.* Newsstand distribution, as an industry, is competitive. Some distribution companies are heavily focused on profits and blockbuster sell-through rates—50% and higher. However, small magazines traditionally and on average achieve moderate sell-through rates—30% is considered good, and many small magazines perform well below these numbers. A 45%-to-50% sell-through rate is considered cause for celebration.
5. *Go Independent.* Even though your small magazine is not destined to sell out in all the national chain retailers, a viable market of independent and smaller chain stores exists. What's more, this market is appropriately scaled to respond to individual customer requests and interests, as this "class of trade" thrives on carrying both the larger titles and smaller, niche titles.
6. *Run Spot Campaigns.* Many independent retailers sell prominent areas of their shops to be used for short-term promotions. Use these areas when you can to help boost sales of a certain issue and raise your overall visibility. (Promotional space deals are usually brokered between distributor and dealer.)
7. *Ship Wisely.* It is the publisher's responsibility to ensure the magazines arrive at the distributor. Depending on which courier service you've chosen and how well your magazine is packed, the shipment can arrive in anything from mint condition to tattered and torn. Using a professional courier service is strongly recommended. Shipments sent by post can be very delayed. If possible, get a guarantee from your courier that all pieces sent will arrive on the same day, and inform your distributor of the number of pieces or boxes, and copies in total to expect.
8. *Think Like a Distributor.* Your distributor verifies the quantity shipped and checks that there is a proper 13-digit barcode along with the correct UPC number on the cover, and that the barcode scans correctly and if the information on the cover is accurate (date, season and price). To avoid the cost and delay involved in correcting errors, contact your distributor any time a major change is being planned, such as a change in price or publishing schedule. Ditto goes for special issues.
9. *Slow And Steady Wins The Race.* Increasing draw is a conundrum for small magazines and efficiency the watchword. Over-saturate the newsstand and you simply end up with more returns (i.e. unsold copies) and a lower sell-through rate, but ship too few copies and dealers may sell out without noticing and you get little visibility. A good distributor can help carefully adjust your draw, taking the guesswork out of the process. By monitoring your sales, your draw will be increased incrementally to find the saturation point with existing and new retailers.
10. *Understand The Chain.* Once your magazine arrives at any retail outlet, your distributor's influence is negligible. Distributors can advise and encourage dealers, but ultimately the dealer decides what titles to carry and in what quantities. They also control the placement of magazines—timing and positioning—and when to call in reorders. **If you've got any special requests of dealers, speak with your distributor before contacting the newsstand.**

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