Give Back at Buyback Program Helps Independent Bookstore Provide a Sustainable Solution on Campus

Located on the Oregon State University (OSU) campus in Corvallis, with additional locations in Portland and Keizer, the OSU Beaver Store is a non-profit, self-supporting independent college bookstore serving the students, faculty and staff of OSU. The bookstore partners with Better World Books (BWB) to provide students with the opportunity to do something good with books easily even when the store can't buy back. BWB also works with the store to clear their warehouse of surplus stock.

The Challenge: Large Volume of Books for Buyback

It's the scene at every college bookstore at term's end. Students are done with and want to get rid of their books. Ideally they want money for them, but even when there's no value they need an outlet for discarding them. According to James Howard, Academic Materials Manager at the Oregon State University Beaver Store, the store was finding it increasingly difficult to process efficiently the large volume received each term. "We have a large warehouse in which to store books, but we were trying to manage one-to-two pallets of returns a term," Howard says. "Our mission is to meet the needs of OSU students. To do that we needed a tool to manage all returns, not just those with value that we could buy. Working with BWB allows us to serve our students more fully than was previously possible."

As the campus bookstore, the Beaver Store works actively to demonstrate its support for campus sustainability initiatives. Prior to forming the partnership with BWB the store recycled locally but the organization they worked with simply couldn't handle the volume the store generated.

What would other wise be an enormous investment of staff time, "BWB can handle the volume of books we need to process each term. They pick up the items, they either sell them, donate them to support literacy in Africa, or they recycle them."

BWB Program Serves the Bookstore and the Students

Howard says the Beaver Store has been working with BWB since 2008 and has seen how BWB's approach to college campuses has evolved over the years. Today's programs, he says, are far more collaborative than in the past and reflect BWB's commitment to supporting the work of independent campus bookstores.

"Independent stores face an ongoing challenge on campus to demonstrate our support for students and for campus programs," says Howard. "We try to react positively to the campus climate when possible. Part of this is aggressive pricing to help control costs for students. But beyond that we need to demonstrate our value and the contribution we make in concrete terms. BWB gives me the tools I need to do just that."

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The OSU Beaver Store participates in the BWB Give Back at Buyback program. Bins are readily available for books which have no value to the store, so that every book will be reused or recycled, with absolutely no items ending up in landfills. "Students are glad to know that their donation through Give Back at Buyback might support literacy in Africa or at the very least be recycled. BWB makes it really easy for us to give students this option."

BWB: Tool in the Campus Bookstore Toolbox

Howard sees the BWB partnership as a primary tool in telling the story of the bookstore's role in reuse and recycling. He plans to leverage the value of the BWB program more strongly through active promotion, including the bookstore's website where there will be a link to the BWB metrics report. "BWB provides us with compelling metrics that help me tell the story of how we are part of the sustainability solution, not part of the problem," he says. "Armed with the statistics on our recycling/reuse program we can quickly dispel any possible negative perceptions about the bookstore and our role in managing no longer wanted materials."

Although the BWB program generates revenue for the bookstore Howard says the true savings is in terms of labor costs. Rather than needing 4-5 people to sort through items at the end of each term, the bookstore turns that massive job over to BWB. In addition, Howard says any revenue generated is of secondary importance compared to the ability to demonstrate that the bookstore is a good steward in handling students' excess material.

Highlighting the Benefits of Working with BWB

Howard says he recognizes four primary benefits of partnering with BWB.

- **Effective management of no-value stock.** BWB provides efficient management of surplus stock as well as student discards. Previously, the store was trying to manage this on its own, doing a lot but achieving little economic gain and creating more work for a limited number of staff. BWB made setting up shipments very easy and has created professional-looking promotional materials to build awareness of the program.

- **Supports sustainability initiatives on campus.** The store can point to the BWB partnership to show how its processes support campus sustainability initiatives. This sheds a very positive light on the bookstore.

- **Helps alter the campus narrative about the bookstore.** The campus bookstore isn't always seen positively, Howard says. Students complain prices are too high on the front end and not high enough on the back end. "The way we manage our surplus through BWB and the metrics we receive help us create a positive narrative about our commitment to the environment."

- **Provides an opportunity to partner with the campus.** "As an independent store we are on the campus but not part of the university per se. We look for opportunities to show our support. Our BWB partnership allows us to show we're part of the solution."

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OSU Beaver Store Metrics
(7/1/2008 - 12/31/2013)

Total # of books reused and recycled	14,221
Landfill space saved	31 cubic yards
Trees saved through reuse/recycle	230
Funds raised for the Beaver Store	$5,156
Books donated to Books for Africa	1,669
Funds raised for Books for Africa	$3,050

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