Rich Kallman

Keeping Bookazine a family affair


Richard Kallman has worked at Bookazine, the independent wholesaler started by his grandfather and great uncle, since he was 17. "I graduated high school on a Thursday and started working on Friday," says Kallman, who just turned 40.

Jokingly referring to his on-the-job training as the "University of Bookazine," he says, "I did everything, from working on the loading dock to pick, pack and returns." When his father retired in 1997, he and his older brother, Robert, took over the running of the company. Kallman handles sales, Robert finance.

In the last decade Kallman’s "education" coupled with his brother's financial acumen have served the Bayonne, N.J.–based company in particularly good stead. While wholesalers like Pacific Pipeline, Golden Lee, Koen Book Distributors and more recently Advanced Marketing Services have closed, Bookazine is gearing up for its 80th anniversary in 2009. Kallman attributes Bookazine's longevity to he and his brother never overreaching. "We always stayed with what we knew. We didn't get involved in any deal that didn't make sense to us—price clubs, supermarkets or drug stores," he says.

That doesn't mean, however, that Bookazine is still the same company Kallman took over. The company was one of the first wholesalers to focus on airports as a viable area for serious book sales and is now a key supplier to that market. In recent years, the Kallmans have accelerated the diversification process, which also includes sales overseas. Earlier this year, Bookazine solidified its position supplying LGBT product by acquiring Publishers Distributing Company, part of the financially troubled gay and lesbian media company PlanetOut. Last fall, it signed with entertainment chain Trans World Entertainment to put manga in 800 of its outlets, which include F.Y.E., Sam Goody and other brands.

At the same time, Bookazine has thrown its resources into strengthening its ties with its independent customers by underwriting bookseller participation in shop local alliances. Currently it supports Buy Local initiatives administered by NEIBA, SIBA and NAIBA. In the future, says Kallman, "You will see us try our hand in many different parts of the book business, excluding opening a store." For example, he
would like to re-enter the library business, especially wholesaling to school libraries, which the company
did before its move to Bayonne from New York City in 1992.

Unlike many in the business who worry about the high price of gasoline, Kallman looks at today's high
fuel prices as an opportunity. "With the cost of shipping, it may become more efficient for booksellers to
work with wholesalers," he says. "Publishers are starting to take a different look at wholesalers, too.
Remember, I'm putting together 30 to 40 publishers in one box." He would like to see publishers and
wholesalers come up with a new model for working with booksellers.

As a wholesaler, Kallman finds it frustrating to sell a product over which he has no control. "I'm an
extension of Random House's warehouse and Simon & Schuster's warehouse, but I have no input as
far as content or pricing," he says. "A lot of times the price is too high." The most frustrating aspect,
Kallman says, is having no control over a publisher's allocation of inventory. "We try to satisfy all of our
customers. If we don't have the book, we can't sell it." For initial shipments of bestsellers like Barbara
Walters's *Audition*, he sometimes receives less than half of his order.

But Kallman isn't complaining too loudly. He clearly likes what he does and is already looking for ways
to make the business viable for a fourth generation, his son and daughter, ages six and nine.
“Bookazine is part of who we are as a family,” he says. “Some of my best memories are of spending
time with my father and brother working in the warehouse.”

Profile

Name: Richard Kallman

Company: Bookazine Co. Inc.

Title: Executive v-p and co-owner

Age: 40

Hometown: Born in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Education: University of Bookazine

How long in current job: 23 years

Dream job: Kite-flying instructor on the beach with my kids

Passionate about: Supporting education
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