



University of Montana Celebrates Buyback and Sees Sweet Results

About The Bookstore at The University of Montana

- Relied on social media and word-of-mouth to spread awareness
- Placed no barriers on the entry to ice cream giveaway; even students that didn't sell back their books could participate
- Saw a significant increase in their fan base and reach

MBS Textbook Exchange, Inc.

- Huge variety of buyback materials and support
- Nations largest inventory of used and new books
- Automated, state-of-the-art warehouse ensures accurate orders are out the door in 24 hours

We all know sometimes textbook buyback gets a bad rap with students. With this understanding, The Bookstore at The University of Montana is continually looking for new ways to change perception during these events.

A new take on buyback

Most college stores face similar situations. As **University of Montana Bookstore Marketing Coordinator Matt LaPalm says**, "All stores fight the same battle. Keeping your store a positive place in the eyes of students is difficult, especially if they don't get the cash value they expect during buyback. So, our goal is to take relatively short funds and deliver as much enjoyment to our students as possible at the end-of-the-year."

"In the past, we've thought of buyback with a very short-sided view, promoting it just as a way to get cash for books," he continued. "But, recently, we realized it's more than that; it's the end of the school year too and, for that reason, we needed to market it as more of a celebration or festival than a singular event."



Offering a delicious incentive

Two years ago, the store discovered an effective incentive during their spring buyback, which helped accomplish that goal. LaPalm and his staff had considered several options, but with a budget of just a dollar or so per student, it was difficult to find an item that fit the bill. That is, until someone mentioned ice cream.

“Giving away ice cream effectively doubled or tripled the value for each student; everyone loves it!” he described. LaPalm contacted a local ice cream vendor, who happens to deliver from a truck, making it easy for him to distribute treats to the students.

“We were lucky to partner with a much beloved ice cream shop in town, so we got an extra boost of excitement from students,” he added. “Plus, by working with a small business partner, we were able to reinforce the fact that we’re a local business, too.”

“**It was the best-case scenario, because it was a promotion that reinforced a positive experience outside of the store. Students still seemed to be talking about it even after it was over.**”

– Matt LaPalm

Keeping it low cost

Rather than spend money advertising the initiative, the store relied on free resources such as social media and word-of-mouth to spread awareness. They even talked to some of the professors on campus, and had them announce the promotion to their students during the final week of classes.

“We wanted every dollar we had to go to the ice cream,” he said. “And, it turns out that, when you have a good giveaway, that’s all you need. It really promoted itself!”



Changing students' perspective

They decided not to place any limitations on the promotion, so any student who wanted ice cream could stop by the location and grab their free scoop. The store simply agreed upon a dollar figure of \$2000 with the vendor, which broke down to about \$1 per person, and then opted to serve until that limit was reached.

“It lasted for about two hours on our budget, and we were happy with that. We chose not to place any barriers to entry on the giveaway, because we felt that defeated the purpose,” he explained. “Our goal was to generate goodwill during buyback. If a student decided not to sell their books because they felt the dollar amount was unfair, we didn’t want to tell them they couldn’t have any ice cream, either. That would have only made the situation worse.” Instead, the ice cream became a conversation starter between buyers and students, and made a significant impact on their feelings about the experience.



"It really changed the entire mood of the conversation," LaPalm said. "It made it more two-sided. Instead of just offering a price that they knew maybe wasn't the best, our buyers could soften the message with a mention of free ice cream; so it really brought joy to everyone involved." After the event, the store posted pictures to their Facebook page to draw attention to the exciting offerings at their buyback. As a result, they saw a significant increase in their fan base and reach.

"It was the best-case scenario, because it was a promotion that reinforced a positive experience outside of the store," he said. "Students still seemed to be talking about it even after it was over." Although the store didn't see a big boost in their buyback or sales for the day, LaPalm says the effort paid off in other areas.

"I can't say that there was an ROI in terms of dollars, but it was undoubtedly a success," he emphasized. "We saw an increase in something intangible: positive feedback. And, at a time of the year when that can be hard to come by, it's so important. Students walked out with a good feeling about our store, and that's what we were trying to achieve."

