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Selling by the Book


When businessmen talk about examining their books these days, they may not be referring to debit and credit ledgers. Among U.S. companies, books have become so popular as sales tools that last year this category outstripped all other come-on devices except toys. More than 150 U.S. corporations—including Chrysler, Black & Decker, Weyerhaeuser, Phillips Petroleum, Carnation and G.E.'s Hotpoint Division—use books in sales campaigns. Last week the Aluminum Co. of America launched one of the biggest book campaigns yet. For 500 an Alcoa coupon, it will send out a 310-page paperback called Mealtime Magic Cookbook, which contains hundreds of recipes for indoor and outdoor cooking—many specifying Alcoa wrap. Alcoa has ordered a printing of 100,000 to start.

Into the Living Room. Most companies pick out existing books that suit their needs and have them imprinted with name or message. Ford Motor Co. drew young buyers into showrooms by passing out 100,000 paperback copies of How to Prepare for College. United Airlines uses paperback travel guides to whet tourist interest in the cities it serves. Colgate-Palmolive is giving out sports books as premiums in its shaving-cream kits, and Squibb is pushing its new artificial sweetener, Sweeta, by giving away a sugar-free cookbook with each bottle. The biggest book user are insurance companies and banks, which pass out Merriam-Webster's pocket dictionary, home medical guides and dozens of others to push salesmen into living rooms or to locate loan prospects.

This fusion of books and promotion has attracted more than 40 book companies into the field. Dell Publishing Co., a leader in general paperback sales, three months ago started a new corporate division to handle books for business. Venerable Doubleday & Co. doubled its sales of such books within a year, in 1964 printed 3,000,000 books for 25 corporations. Deepest in the book business is little Benjamin Co., a 20-man organization that distributes the books of 20 publishers, including Pocket Books, Bantam, Golden Press and Simon and Schuster. Headed by former Advertising Executive Roy Benjamin, 48, the company offers a choice of 10,000 titles (including 60 cookbooks), this year will sell more than 5,000,000 books to business.

Specially Written. Almost all promotion books are paperbacks, and most of them are nonfiction; they are usually purchased by corporations at bulk rates. Dr. Benjamin Spock's child-care books, used widely by drug and food companies, head the giveaway bestseller list—business has distributed more than a million so far. The most popular current titles include the R.C.A.F. exercises and How to Protect Yourself on the Streets and in Your Home, an insurance-company favorite. Publishers have also begun commissioning new books specifically for corporate clients. More than 200,000 copies of Benjamin's Coffee Cookbook, written for General Foods' Maxwell House Division, have been grabbed up. Special books have been written on gun ammunition for Olin Mathieson Chemical Corp.'s Winchester-Western Division, on bowling for AMF Co. and on photography for Eastman Kodak

Publishers are now looking for even wider corporate fields. Doubleday has started an "Executive Choice" program, through which businessmen can send specially bound bestsellers to executive clients. Benjamin next month will open a London office: so many U.S. companies are selling in Europe that the book habit is catching on there, too.

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