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Book Business

It's 'Tea Time' for Random House

An interview with Chelsea Vaughn, Random House's director of business development, about the company's new book-club venture with Celestial Seasonings.

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Acup of tea and a book: It's a dream date for many readers, and Random House Inc. has found a way to take advantage of that. The publishing giant has teamed up with tea company Celestial Seasonings to create a Web-based book club, open to anyone who drinks tea.

And it seems most readers do. The book club, "Adventure at Every Turn" (www.CelestialSeasoningsBookClub.com), was created after a Celestial Seasonings survey showed that 70 percent of tea drinkers claimed that reading books is their favorite pastime. The tea company chose Random House as a partner for its club because it lends the program credibility, says David Ziegert, Celestial Seasonings acting general manager.

The "Adventure at Every Turn" Web site provides readers with resources to host their own book clubs, such as suggested Celestial Seasonings tea flavors, entertaining activities and more. Visitors also can sign up to receive a free book-club starter kit that includes tea samples, recipes and bookmarks.

Random House title "The End of the Alphabet," by CS Richardson, published by its Broadway Books imprint, launched the book club in December 2007, and a new book will be featured every other month. All of the books will continue the theme of adventure, world travel and global cultures.

Book Business spoke with Chelsea Vaughn, director of business development at Random House, to get the details behind this new partnership.

Who came up with the idea for the Random House-Celestial Seasonings partnership?

Vaughn: Burson-Marsteller, Celestial's public relations agency, came to us with the idea for the book club in October 2007.

What are your goals/expectations for the partnership?

Vaughn: We hope that it will increase awareness and sales for the featured titles.

It's also a relatively new kind of promotion for us, so we're interested in the levels of online and offline activity the book club generates—how much it drives awareness, engagement and sales.

How do you come up with the featured books for the book club?

Vaughn: ... We discussed the kinds of books that Celestial was interested in with Burson-Marsteller, and then reached out to [our] divisional marketing managers for suggestions of titles that would work. The marketing managers came back with a lot of great ideas, which we've passed on to Burson-Marsteller and Celestial. They're reading the books now, and we're looking forward to discussing [the] prospective title selections [they've chosen] for the spring.

How is Random House marketing the book club?

Vaughn: Celestial Seasonings is doing most of the marketing for the book club, but we are featuring it in our newsletters and in a banner on our site to get a sense of our audience's reaction to [it].

Do you have any ideas as to what the demographics of the book club members will be?

Vaughn: It will be especially interesting to look at where the book-club participants come from—in-store advertising, online marketing, messaging on the tea boxes themselves, or other sources. One of the great things about online marketing is the additional data you gain about where people come from and their behavior once they are on your site.

What are some other marketing ventures Random House has been involved with recently?

Vaughn: Our divisions are constantly trying new and creative marketing approaches. Some of these include Bantam Dell's presence [The Bantam Dell Book Café] on the online community SecondLife [which features a store, where consumers can browse books before following a link to the Random House Web site to buy them, and events such as "live" readings]; and personalized editions of "The Poky Little Puppy," from our children's books division, [which include an individualized dedication and photo].

Amanda Baltazar is a Washington-based freelance journalist who specializes in writing about business.

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