

Book Sourcing Case Study #3

University infiltration

In the last two case studies, we looked at a bookseller who made \$25k a month sourcing from recycling centers, and another who sources entirely through dumpsters while working just 8 hours a week.

In this one, we're going to hear from a far less interesting and dynamic subject: Me.

Very recently I moved a block from a major university (as in, top 30 in the country-sized). I stand in the front yard, look at the school, consider how many millions and millions of dollars worth of books are in it's boundaries, and how I might get them.

It was one of these ponder-sessions that gave birth to an idea. I'm giving the full report on this experiment here for the first time.

Here's what I did:

I drew up a quick flyer with the following text:

"You Have Too Many Books. I'll Take Them Away and Give You Cash."

I specialize in scholarly non-fiction, and pay cash for collections large or small."

My phone number and email address were at the bottom.

I printed 300 copies and went down to the Engineering building complex (which is three connected buildings). I wanted to be sure I was there after most people had left, juuuust in case someone took offense to my flyering. Most buildings on campus officially "close" between 7pm and 9pm, but university buildings are so large and porous I was confident I would find a way in. Which I did.

From there, I sought out two things: The faculty mailboxes, and their offices.

I made my way through all three buildings, slipping flyers under doors, and in every mailbox. If they ignored the one in their mail, there was another one waiting in their office. What's that statistic about people needing exposure to an advertisement 7 times before it's effective? I was almost 1/3 of the way there.

I did the same in the Physics building.

Then I went back to the Engineering buildings a week later.

The idea here is pretty simple: A university is going to have the highest concentration of valuable books anywhere. I'm not just talking about textbooks. All university press and esoteric scholarly titles have a high likelihood of value. Professors also often receive regular review copies from publishers. Tons of high-quality, valuable books. It's that simple.

The offices were easy to find. The faculty mailboxes took a little more hunting. I found that mailboxes are located on each floor of a department, not just the first floor.

I also left them in faculty lounges and on bulletin boards.

Of the roughly 250 flyers I distributed, I received a surprisingly high response. I planned to consider it a success if I got even one phone call or email. If I could accomplish that, whether or not it resulted in a buy, I at least knew I had something I could tweak to success and scale up. One big collection from a professor could be worth many many thousands.

I got 7 calls and emails.

I asked them these basic questions:

- How many books do you have?
- What subjects?
- What years were the books printed? Recent or pre-2000s?
- Are they textbooks, or non-textbook scholarly titles? (I didn't plan to make visits for fiction or mainstream non-fiction, but didn't expect professors to have many of

these books anyway.

Here are the early results from the first round of this campaign (still in its early stages):

- Buildings flyered: 4
- 7 emails / phone calls for 250 flyers (this does not count flyers that went to the same people twice).
- 5 worth following up on in person.
- 2 “collections” (one as small as 5 books) of no value.
- 3 inquiries worth my time. One wasn’t a lot, in fact just a single book worth \$70 (I paid \$5). One was 10 boxes of (200+) astronomy books. I paid \$100 (my first, low-ball offer) for the collection, and I expect to make over \$2,000 when all the smoke clears.



(I hope you’ve gotten a lot out of this series. 110 pages of info just like this is in Book Sourcing Secrets, going live on Tuesday night at midnight.)

Thanks for reading.