

Cleaning Orders

Ask any online bookseller that has been selling used books for over a year and I'm sure they will tell you that they've probably cleaned more than a full time maid! No, I'm not talking about vacuuming, dusting, or doing laundry. The majority of the cleaning you will be doing is for your books. You will be wiping down books, removing dirt and labels, bookmarks, and any unnecessary papers from inside the books to make it look its best for the customer.

When I first started out with a few dozen books, I would thoroughly clean each one with water and place them on the shelf. This way I wouldn't have to clean it whenever it sold. I've since learned a little more. Can you imagine having an inventory of 5,000 books and cleaning each, individual one BEFORE you sell it? I sell a lot of books, but not all of them sell. I've had books sitting on my shelf for months that may not ever sell! If I would have kept up that routine, I'd be wasting a ton of time cleaning some books that will never sell! I've since learned to clean my books after they've sold, and have upgraded to rubbing alcohol and Goo Gone.

These steps will help you get much better feedback and outstanding reviews from your customers. Your goal here is to make the book look as new as possible. Along the way, you'll find other methods that help you achieve this goal. If you do, I'd love to hear about them. Drop me an email and I will share your insights on my blog.

Before you get started cleaning, you have to gather your cleaning supplies. Have these products, at all times, in your cleaning arsenal:

- **Rubbing Alcohol** - This will be a staple for you. You can buy generic isopropyl alcohol just about anywhere. It works great for cleaning dirt and grime from books. It is also non-abrasive and evaporates quickly. If you pick up a used book that doesn't really look that dirty, put some rubbing alcohol on it and rub it down - your white cloth will usually turn dark brown or black. There have been many hands on a typical used book, and it has been on many different shelves. Rubbing down every book you sell will not only get it clean, it will kill a lot of germs that have accumulated on the book.
- **Goo Gone** - Goo Gone is a name brand product by a company called Magic American. Goo Gone is made to remove sticky substances, such as the residue from stickers and labels. This product contains a citrus element that makes it smell like oranges. You need to use caution when applying it because it can bleed through pages and some covers that are unsealed. It can leave a very greasy residue behind if you don't completely remove it afterwards. It may sound like a hassle, but I haven't found any other product that will remove sticky residue as well as Goo Gone; however, I would use it only if rubbing alcohol will not remove the residue. I've heard stories about using lighter fluid to remove sticky residue, but I have not tried that. Use at your own discretion. You might want to practice on an old book you do not intend to sell.
- **Cloth Rag** - I started out with disposable paper towels to clean books; they would fall apart on me, and pieces would get on the books. A simple cloth rag instead of paper towels is more economical and durable. I just use a small hand towel that I stole from my bathroom (don't tell my wife!). It works great. Once it gets too dirty, just throw it in the washer and it's good to go again!

- **Heat Gun** - I have only used a heat gun once, because I heard that it was a good way to remove labels. It worked pretty well but also removed a little of the cover off the book. It's risky because you can easily get it too hot and damage your merchandise. If you are very careful, it can be a great way to remove stubborn labels from books.

Your next step is cleaning each book from top to bottom, inside and out. This step includes a few different areas to really concentrate on to ensure that you have done a good job. Your customer will really appreciate the attention to detail. Try these three steps:

- **Remove loose material** - The longer you are selling used books, the more stuff you will see stuffed inside books. You will find bookmarks, pieces of paper, small pens, paper clips, and much more. I've found interesting photographs in some of my books. You never know what you're going to find! Maybe you'll find someone that used cash as a bookmark! Fan out the pages and see if anything comes out. Sometimes people have used paper clips to clip pages together though. Be sure to remove anything that makes the book look used.
- **Remove dirt** - This will entail taking out your cloth and rubbing alcohol. This combination has never let me down on even the nastiest books. It will remove 100% of the dirt and grime that accumulates on a book. Place your cloth on top of the open rubbing alcohol bottle, turn it over, and use that small bit to go over the book a few times.
- **Remove labels** -. Removing labels is the hardest part of cleaning a book. You will get some books that have labels that have been applied for years that refuse to come off. Once they do come off, they'll also take part of the cover with them. You may get lucky and get the labels that come off with ease. If you purchase remainder books from retail chains, you'll always get the easy labels that will peel right off. The trick to removing labels is to either heat them up a little with the heat gun or use Goo Gone. If you get a stubborn label that refuses to come off, try to tear as much off as possible very slowly and see if it is peeling the cover off with it as well. If not, you can get as much off as possible and then spray some Goo Gone onto a paper towel and start rubbing the area. The label will eventually come off but it sometimes can take a little while.

If you ever get some books that came from a library (generally called ex-library books), these will typically have plastic covers on them called Mylar covers. They may also have a few labels and a pocket in the front or back. Don't mess with trying to remove these labels. You can simply state in your description that the book is an ex-library book. I used to try to remove all labels on these books and it took me forever. Finally, I started describing the books as ex-library books, cleaning them up the best I could, and shipping them out. There have been no problems at all, as long as the buyer knows what to expect.

If you follow all of these tips, you should never have any customer complaints about the condition of your books. Cleaning books can be a tedious process, but it is very important to the overall success of your business.