

Commercial Selling with a Ministry Attitude

Bob Munce, founder and president of Munce Marketing Group (www.muncemarketing.com), recalls how his experiences in Africa helped him begin his work in the U.S.

After several years of running Christian bookshops in Kenya, our family moved back to the United States. We were not sure what the Lord had planned for us to do next, but we were ready for a new challenge.

Two great literature needs stood out in our minds. First, we realized that good Christian books were financially beyond the reach of many people who wanted them. Second, we knew that Bibles with extensive study notes could only be afforded by a few wealthy individuals. With very little money and no backing by any church or other organization, we set out trusting God to supply the contacts, money, and ideas we needed to help deal with this problem.

I remembered that during our time in Africa, we had occasionally purchased close-out and remainder books for our stores, at 60-70 percent discount off the retail price. This helped us to stock our shelves and make a profit. So,

I decided to call publishers that we had worked with when we were in Kenya, to see if they wanted a traveling representative to English-speaking areas of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Thirteen publishers agreed to pay us a commission on sales. One

Bibles that had an one-eighth of an inch crease on 32 of the pages. They sent us a sample. Every word could be easily read, even on the damaged pages. We promised to pay in 180 days. We always tried to pay our bills before the due date, so our business partners

So, our first international bookselling journey began in the spring of 1979. We had to photograph all the book covers by arranging three book covers per photo in order for everything to fit into a small photo album. I traveled by myself with one suit and very few extra clothes. Everything fit into one carry-on bag.

I had my passport, visas, and an international health card. One of my visas was for the Republic of South Africa. At that time, South Africa did not have diplomatic relations with other African states. I heard from another passenger on my flight from New York to West Africa that I would not be admitted into most African countries if I had a South African visa. That was distressing news. What would I do if I couldn't enter a country? Would I be stuck for several days in an airport trying to get another flight out? What if my small supply of money ran out?

Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean, I began to

We started out with very little money.



publisher even promised to pay half the airfare for the first trip. That was a day of rejoicing and praise to God!

In our calls to publishers, we mentioned that we would also like to deal in remainder books and Bibles.

One company sent us 8,000 assorted books with the understanding that we would pay for them only after we collected the money.

A second company was willing to sell us 14,000 study

favored us as a customer.

A large secular book company heard about us, and called. They said the government had a moratorium on foreign debt and they did not know how to fill out the forms to get paid for the books they had sold to a government agency that owed them a substantial amount of money. If we would write a paper on what they should do, they would pay us a substantial fee.



Bob Munce, founder and president of the Munce Marketing Group, displays some promotional materials used with member stores.

chew some gum and took tiny pieces of it and stuck the pages of my passport together where the South African visa was stamped. (Fortunately, there were no other visas on those South African visa pages.) I did not get caught, and the trip was a success.

Eventually, the business grew until we were renting a warehouse and had thousands of books and Bibles in stock. I once bought 78,000 unbound Bibles and put a leather-grained Kivar cover on them. They were gold stamped with "Holy Bible" on the front and spine. These were small, nice-looking Bibles. We sold them for less than U.S.\$1.00 each.

We were able to make a special arrangement, with the sympathetic publisher of a study Bible, to print an edi-

tion for export only. This gave us a consistent product we could offer at a low cost. In addition, to keep costs down, we only sold the Bible in a box of 20 copies. Since that was the way they came from the printers, all we needed to do was take a box off the shelf, put a label on it, and affix the postage.

The Bibles cost \$8.00 each, so a box cost \$160.00 plus \$20.00 for shipping and handling to anywhere in the world via mail sack, book rate postage. The \$180.00 had to be sent in advance so there was very little handling and no bad debt.

Some people objected, but we stuck to our policy. Everyone paid the same price. A small ministry that bought one box paid the same price per Bible as a big ministry

that bought 5,000 Bibles. Some wanted extra discounts, but we pointed out that our price was the best and that larger ministries were helping the smaller ones by paying the same price. When we explained our philosophy, every one of them said that they liked the policy.

This Bible project was a big success. We shipped copies of this Bible to 47 countries around the world—not bad for a man-and-wife publisher with three sons who helped wrap, pack, and ship after school!

After researching what was available in the public domain, we found two very good study Bibles. We contacted a copyright lawyer, and he assured us that it was legal for us to reprint them and that we would not be

infringing on anyone's copyright. We would therefore not have to pay a royalty and could keep the price low, so we went forward and published them.

These Bible projects accomplished important objectives.

First, they met an important need. People needed low cost study Bibles.

Second, other publishers, much larger than we were, copied what we were doing. This brought more study Bibles to the market.

Third, our Bibles brought attention to the other books we had for sale. On the other items, we gave credit and engaged in more traditional ways of doing business, and God blessed our efforts.

If you must sell at low prices but need income for your ministry to survive, ask the Lord for wisdom and creativity. I learned from my own experience that a small publisher should try to find at least one bestselling item. When people see a product that meets their spiritual needs, they say to themselves, "I need that." Make sure the price is low enough for them to be able to buy it and be pleased with it. Satisfied customers will tell their friends, or even buy another copy to give to their friends, and you will be successful.❖