

Are Devotionals Good for Business?

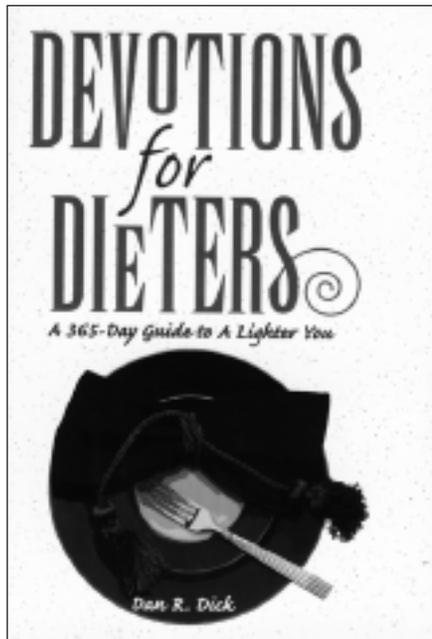
Kevin Engel, an international Christian publishing consultant in Australia, looks at the formats available for devotional literature today.

When people accept Christ, they are urged to read the Scriptures. Daily Bible reading systems, such as the Scripture Union's daily notes, are recommended to them. Later, they might be introduced to additional daily devotional books such *Daily Light*, *Streams in the Desert*, *Come Ye Apart*, and many more.

At the beginning of the year, Christians often want to follow daily reading plans. For example, an excellent series of booklets promises readers that, if followed daily, it will guide them through the Bible from *Cover to Cover* in one year. However, believers often drop out of such programs. Business or family pressures, travel, sickness, volunteer work and other obligations hinder them. They find they cannot keep up, so they give up their daily regimen. Does this mean that there is no future for "devotionals?" Not at all!

What do publishers think when they hear the expression, "devotional publishing?" Do they immediately reach for the small daily helps to Bible reading? Do they picture useful commentaries or explanatory notes? Many of these materials are readily available in numerous languages. Scripture Union notes, *The Upper Room*, *Every Day with Jesus*, denominational devotional plans, *Cover to Cover* and Bible Reading Fellowship materials are just a few sold regularly around the world. Is there

anything else in the devotional range, other than notes and year-long plans? Publishers must be aware of the many possibilities for devotional literature.



The trend in the United States, according to Publisher's Weekly, is "to specify, specify, specify the target audience" for devotionals, as illustrated by Barbour's book for dieters.

Brief, focused devotionals

One successful series in Spanish is based around themes such as *Thirty Days with Jesus* or *Thirty Days in the Psalms*. There are several titles in this list, which is attractively produced and

priced for the local economy. Readers do not have to commit themselves to a whole year of reading or pay a year's subscription in advance. The titles, published by Certeza in Argentina, are ready for use when there is a felt need. Students find the series particularly helpful. The books are pocket-sized and can be used when travelling or at quiet times.

Such a series makes economic sense. Publishing funds are not tied up for a whole year. The sales of early titles fund further publications. Instead of one new title to cover a year, one might aim at three or four separate titles. This is one way to make devotionals profitable. A similar series can be developed with well-known local leaders or authors who can write brief titles on relevant themes or books of the Bible. Another series could feature the writings of a world-renowned scholar.

Shorter self-contained devotionals help readers overcome the "boredom factor." Though believers do not like to admit that anyone would get bored with their daily Bible reading, a fresh approach, new authors, or a different format can help to keep readers alert and interested.

One Australian title, *Business Praise, Conversational Prayers*, is aimed directly at Christian business people. It covers such areas as customers, people, community, growth, finance and personal

attitudes. It is produced economically but to a standard that would be acceptable by the local business community.

2. Gift books

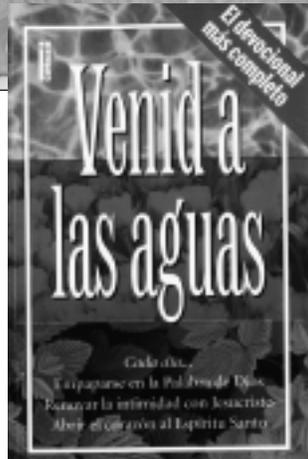
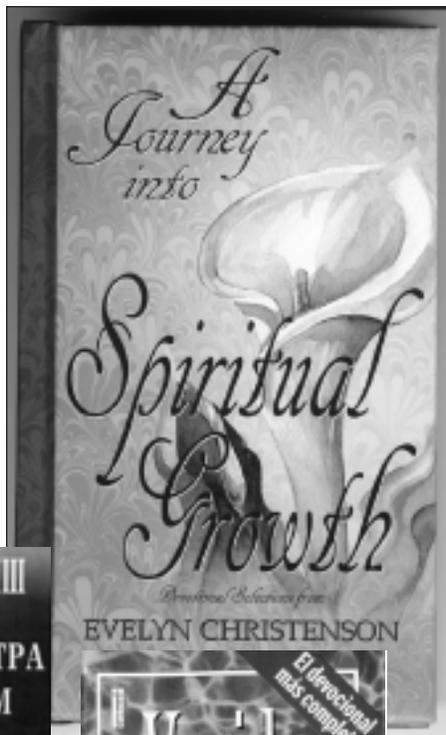
Gift books, such as *Your Daily Walk*, are very popular devotionals in many affluent countries. Some devotional gift books that include beautiful illustrations (for instance, *Every Day Light*) are even suitable for use as gifts to non-Christian friends. However, the titles produced in Europe or the States can be very expensive, and at times, their content is not very relevant to people in developing countries.

Some gift books deal with such subjects as living with grief, comfort for the sick, promises for the discouraged, and so on. These books are only about 32 pages with a biblical thought and a word of help on each page. Depending on the local economy they can be illustrated in full colour or produced in a two-colour format.

3. Diaries and journals

Daily diaries with Bible verses and illustrations

Attractive formats, lush artwork and well-known authors are a hallmark of devotional gift books. Shown here are books from Victor (US), Alpha and Omega (Serbia) and Certeza Argentina.



It was long ago. I remember the picture very well: A mountain, snow, wilderness, and flower blossoming under the sun. Below the picture I read: "For your Word is fresh and alive..."

I do not know if anything has impacted me more than this Bible verse from an old calendar. Sometimes I feel this first encounter with the Word of God was a turning point in my life. This small portion of devotional literature fulfilled its purpose.

—Zivko B. Jorgacevic, Alpha and Omega Belgrade, Serbia



Pictured above are calendars from the China Sunday School Association (Taiwan) and from Gospel for Asia Publications (Nepal).

trations are best sellers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Asian countries. Diaries are published in a variety of bindings. Special editions are produced for pastors, students, women, business persons and even military personnel. Each of the special editions contains an introduction with extra information relevant to that group's needs.

This has also been a profitable line in Australian publishing, especially for pastors and ministers.

4. Calendars

Monthly calendars in a range of sizes, from a few centimeters wide, up to size A3, are very popular. Tens of thousands of calendars are sold each year! Annual wall-hanging type calendars are a

constant reminder that the times of Christians are in the hands of the Lord (Ps. 31:15).

A publishing house might produce credit-card size annual calendars with a key bible verse. This is a publishing area

where a number of publishers working in the same language can cooperate and produce many thousands of cards at a minimal price.

Daily calendars are also an option. There are small desk or table calendars with a thought and verse for every day. In the United States these are sometimes called "day starters." They make good gifts and can be produced cooperatively with other publishers in a local language.

Christmas and Easter greeting cards using the same material can be added to your marketing plan.

5. Devotional workbooks

In workbooks, a Bible passage is featured along with some key questions. The book provides spaces in which the reader can supply the answers or their own thoughts on the day's reading. These can be produced for short periods covering a month or more. The time scale of the workbook depends on what the local market can afford.

6. Prayer books and church-related devotionals

Publishing houses associated with a particular denomination can consider what it recommends for daily devotions. Independent publishers might approach local churches and inquire about their needs.

In Tanzania, a best seller for many years has been *Kila Mtu Mwanafunzi wa Biblia (Every Person a Bible Student)*. This became a standard title, which was used as a weekly course in preparing new Christians for full church membership. It was priced within the local buying power because of the large numbers printed in each edition. It could also be



This best-selling Tagalog devotional (Garden of Prayer) from the International Correspondence Institute in Manila, Philippines, includes many suggested prayers.

used by the individuals to study their Bibles day-by-day.

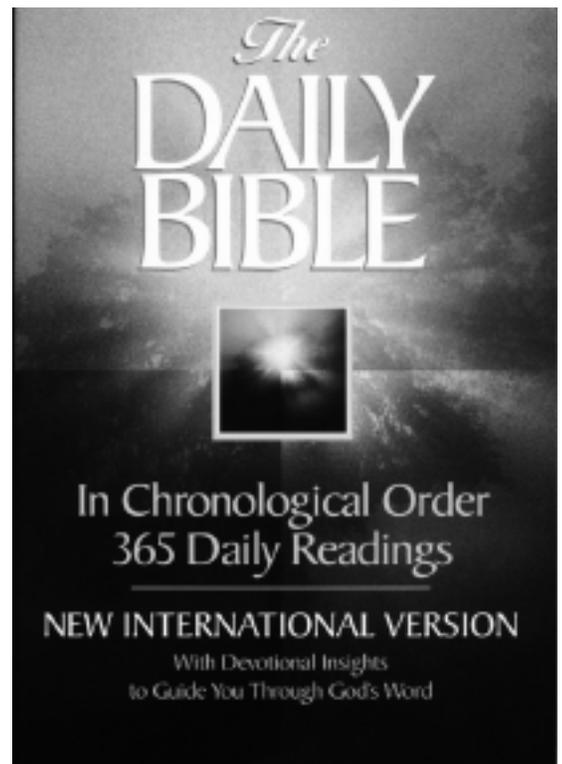
7. Bibles for specialized audiences.

A final category of devotional literature, that has proven to be profitable for many publishers, are Bibles that

include devotional material. Some present the material alongside the Bible text, as a sidebar to passages with key teachings for a particular audience, such as mothers, business leaders, or teachers. Other Bibles for devotional use divide the text into daily readings.

The only limitation on what a publisher can develop in this area is the amount of time and research that one is prepared to invest. He or she might take another look at the wide range of devotional material and review his or her publishing plan. Does the devotional section look the same year after year? Perhaps some brainstorming with the staff can bring a fresh approach to this area. Publishers can research and produce materials in an attractive format to meet local need. Devotional titles do not have to be expensive.

Whatever a publishing house decides to try, it will need to do some research. Each publishing house needs to look at issues such as local needs, the buying power of potential users, the style of production, the daily life patterns of people and how a particular



Bibles with special formats, like the one pictured above from Harvest House, provide another alternative for publishers of devotional literature.

title might contribute to building up Christians.

Is it good business to think about and plan devotional publishing? It not only makes good financial sense, but it meets a great need for Christians in all walks of life and in many situations.❖

Bible Studies for Christian Writers

Being a Christian writer is hard, often discouraging, work. Many potentially excellent manuscripts lie half-written, hidden in drawers and gathering dust because their writers have given up in discouragement or because of outside pressure.

Joyce Chaplin, author of *Make Known His Deeds: Bible Studies for Christian Writers*, knows all about discouragement. Chaplin is keenly aware that to be involved in Christian writing is to be engaged in spiritual warfare. In her work, as the first editorial secretary of the Africa Christian Press, Chaplin saw that many best-selling writers would never have persevered and seen their work published if it had not been for encouragement, prayer, and wise advice.

Make Known His Deeds, Chaplin's book of Bible meditations for Christian writers to consider their calling, was first published in 1957 by Africa Christian Press, in Achimota, Ghana, West Africa. It has since been revised and reprinted.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Association of Christian Writers in the UK, copies are available free to writers and Christian writer's groups as long as stocks last. To take advantage of this offer, write to ACP, 50 Loxwood Avenue, Worthing, West Sussex BN14 7RA, United Kingdom. Those living in the USA, Canada and the UK are asked to send three British pounds to cover cost and postage.

—Donald Banks, Africa Christian Press