



Good design helps publishers accomplish their mission.

by David Mehlis

**FINAL
FOLIO**

Art and the Ark

The library at Cook has perhaps 350 different books for children on Noah and the Ark, issued by Cook and many other evangelical publishers in this country. Is what they are trying to communicate any different? Is the story any different? No. So why are there so many versions of this story in print?

First, in communicating Christian truths, we all rely on a single source. The Holy Bible is our *raison d'être*, central to our message and calling as publishers. We strive to bring the life-giving stories of Scripture to our readers. That is our joy. We affirm, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" (Is. 52:7, ESV).

Second, product developers are creative. They are innovators. They are quickly bored by old ways of telling the story, and want new text, new artwork, a fresh approach to a tale we all know by heart. And this creativity is a blessing from God, who made us in His image. We want to maximize the opportunities we can provide to our staff to use their gifts in God's service, to be good and faithful stewards of the human resources our company enjoys.

At the same time, we must ask: Will a new version of Noah and the Ark do well in our market? Or would it be better to invest in a different product? We had better be sure before signing the contract. The average life cycle of all products in the United States, including Christian books, is decreasing. It is easy for product developers to focus on the appeal of a great project—but unless it sells, the investment is in vain.

In today's world, titles on the shelf have less than three seconds to catch your eye. Maybe this means your company

has to make a paradigm shift, revamping its covers and re-adjusting the money budgeted for art versus editorial. At Cook, for example, some time ago we had to rethink our packaging for curriculum products. Historically, Sunday school curriculum covers were not seen by purchasers until their orders arrived just in time for the next quarter. As our society and the Church have become far more visually-oriented than in the past, Cook had to change. We continue to provide excellent content and inspiring art, but in more commercially viable products, and with greater attention to cover design and packaging.

Determine what constitutes culturally-appropriate packaging for your market. Your readers may not want big, fancy, expensive hardcover titles. It may be attractive to have the type of Sunday school product that we have here in the West, but ask yourself whether that is what works best for churches in your country. Think about the standard by which your readers will judge your product; and also, consider how God will judge your use of the resources He has given you to further His kingdom. Our products can be dressed up in the finery of kings, but is this what we are always called to do?

Product development requires wise use of resources, especially as we work in contexts where our financial models are driven by our distribution channels, and our distributors require ever-increasing discounts. We must strike the right balance between design and distribution, product and profit, art and affordability, to effectively keep on publishing the Good News. ▽

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