



**BRAZIL**

PUBLISHING WORLDWIDE

# BUILD POSITIVE RIGHTS RELATIONSHIPS

*Judith Ramos, of Editora Sepal in São Paulo, Brazil, discusses the relationships of Brazilian publishers with their counterparts in North America.*

The evangelical publishing industry in Brazil is, to a large extent, dependent on translated works, acquired mostly from U.S. publishers. According to a 2001 study commissioned by the Brazilian association of Christian publishers, Associação Brasileira dos Editores Cristãos, (ABEC), 89 percent of surveyed publishers had translated books from English, 28 percent from German, and 22 percent from Spanish. Of the almost 600 titles published in the same year, 40 percent were translations from English. In past years, the percentage has been even greater—75 percent in 1998, and nearly 79 percent in 2000.

The prevalence of translations from English is due to a couple of reasons. First, evangelical publishing in Brazil was initiated by American missionaries. Therefore, most early literature in Brazil was translated from English. Second, most independent evangelical publishers in Brazil are emerging businesses. Constrained by a lack of

resources to develop local products, they find it expedient to acquire rights to proven titles, translate these into Portuguese and move them quickly to market. In this way, they can expand their product lines, offer full catalogs and publish proven authors.

The U.S. is the key target for rights acquisitions by Brazilian publishers because, compared to other English-language markets, it is perceived to have the most mature and professional evangelical

30,000-copy initial print run. This is rare in Brazil, but they could afford the risk because the book was already a proven bestseller in the U.S. In the same way, when Editora Vida published the Portuguese translation of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Zondervan), it sold over 35,000 copies. Other titles, such as the Left Behind series, have also had great success in this market. In contrast, publishing a national author demands extensive editorial work, managing

publishers sometimes receive from their U.S. counterparts.

Brazilian publishers often find that the rights and licensing staff of U.S. publishers only speak English. Little effort is made to find multilingual staff to handle international rights. If a Brazilian publishing house does not have an English-speaking person on staff, communication stalls.

In other cases, only one person handles all international requests, and delays are extensive. At the CBA international convention, for example, it is not unusual for internationals to wait in line while a publisher's sole "international" staff person scrambles to meet their needs. However, this is just at conventions. Even with correspondence, e-mail, reading copy requests and so on, Brazilian publishers are made to wait for months for a simple reply.

Brazilian publishers wonder why they receive such treatment from evangelical publishers seeking to spread the Word. Perhaps the North

## ***Improve the treatment Brazilians receive from U.S. publishers.***

publishing community. The U.S. is seen as a very competitive, demanding market. Therefore, a title that is successful in the U.S. suggests less risk for the Brazilian publisher. For example, when Mundo Cristão acquired rights to Multnomah's *The Prayer of Jabez*, they could afford to risk a

authors' great expectations, developing artwork, and laying out the book, and despite all this sales are often limited.

However, obtaining rights requires positive relationships between U.S. and Brazilian publishers. Much remains to be done to improve the treatment that Brazilian

American market is so large that they do not need revenues from international markets. Perhaps royalty receipts are such a small portion of their total income that they are not all that interested in encouraging international publishers. Clearly, the fact that books translated in Portuguese will touch souls not only in Brazil but in Angola, Mozambique, Portugal and other parts of the world does not seem to matter.

Moreover, when the contract finally arrives, Brazilian publishers find themselves dealing with inflexible standardized agreements that demonstrate little understanding of, or interest in, the problems faced by publishers in poorer countries where Christians have limited resources and poor reading habits. According to the Câmara Brasileira do Livro, the Brazilian book chamber, at 2.4 books per person, Brazil has one of the worst per capita reading indices in Latin America. In this environment, publishing is a challenging ministry, yet some U.S. publishers continue to ask for high advances, not understanding Brazil's economic realities.

Admittedly, some Brazilian publishers have failed to honor commitments, such as payment of royalties. This could be due to dishonesty. However, in most cases it is the environment that causes publishers to fall behind on payments. It is hard for U.S. publishers to understand some of the laws Brazilian businesses

are subject to. For example, when a publisher wants to make a foreign currency payment, the government deducts 15 percent in taxes. To remit U.S.\$1,000 costs an additional \$150 in addition to other bank fees involved in the transaction. This can be difficult at times.



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Because of these mitigating circumstances, U.S. publishers must attempt to understand the situation of their counterparts before making negative conclusions. CBA's international conventions can be an important place for fostering relationships and developing trust and understanding. Brazilian publishers who visit the conventions agree that having personal contact facilitates relationships, acquisitions, and service. However, U.S. publishers must remember that not all Brazilian publishers can attend CBA events. The costs are high. For example, in the last six years Sepal has only been

represented at CBA once, and that was at Anaheim, California in 2002. Not all publishers can attend CBA every year.

Pointing out the downside of U.S.-Brazilian relations is not to say there are only negatives. There are positive models for relationships.

Cook, for instance, has professional representatives who regularly visit publishers and endeavor to offer products that match their publishing lines and areas of competency. In addition, the representatives speak Spanish or Portuguese, which facilitates the relationship for everyone. Aside from Cook, other publishing companies have sought to offer better service and want to help Brazilians to publish products that will be well accepted. Other U.S. publishers have subsidiaries in Brazil.

Also, bringing up the challenges of publishing in Brazil does not mean

that the industry is not making progress. Brazil has a strong Catholic and spiritist background, but evangelicals already comprise 15 percent of over 160 million inhabitants. In the past two decades, the Brazilian church has been one of the fastest-growing in the whole world. More Bibles are distributed in Brazil than in any other country. It surpasses Protestant nations such as England and the United States. Therefore, despite some limitations, Brazilian publishers can successfully transform U.S. titles into national bestsellers and provide cash flow to U.S. publishers. Tim LaHaye, David Wilkerson, and many others have been successfully published in Brazil for over three decades. The more publishers understand the realities of doing business in Brazil, the better will be the ministry of taking the Word to all people God created and placed around the world. ♦