



Distribution Success in Latin America

By Marco Vega

Marco Vega is administrative director for Desarrollo Cristiano Internacional in Costa Rica. He holds a master of business administration from Magister University and attended the March 2004 Marketing, Sales and Distribution International Christian Publishing Institute held at Cook in Colorado Springs, CO, USA.

For 25 years, [Desarrollo Cristiano Internacional](#) has worked in Latin America to create a distribution network for books and magazines, spearheaded by *Apuntes Pastorales (Notes for Pastors)*, its leading magazine. Creating a distribution network is not easy, since much patience is required to overcome the obstacles all along the way.

To enable the public to obtain our material and be blessed by it (which is ultimately our ministry's purpose), three key elements are necessary. For good distribution it is necessary to combine these three foundational elements in just the right amounts. These elements are:

-  A product people want to buy
-  A product most can obtain
-  A product people know exists

A product people want

The principal challenge in achieving a successful distribution network is offering a product that really meets a need, a product that people will want to obtain. This material must have characteristics that make it special and unique, allowing it to make a positive impact in the lives of people who obtain it.

At Desarrollo Cristiano it is unacceptable to publish a magazine just for the sake of publishing, nor to include an article in the

magazine just to fill space. We firmly believe in zealously keeping the mission to which we were called, and we know that our success will depend, entirely, on following God's plan.

Therefore, both in the books we produce as well as in our magazine, our editorial staff works hard to offer excellent quality in design together with content that is able to shape, equip and encourage pastors and leaders throughout the continent.

It may seem like a small matter, but I repeat what Jesus often said when he wanted to emphasize something important: "I tell you the truth:" an effective distribution network depends, to a great extent, on having a product of excellence that can meet real needs.

A product people can obtain

It is important to remember that distributing books in Latin America is not the same as distributing a magazine. The general culture in almost all Latin countries is that magazines are thought to be of little relevance. This conviction is reinforced because many magazines are distributed free of charge. Therefore, it is necessary that the content be so useful that it breaks the traditional expectations that magazines must be free.

For our magazine, we look for two channels of distribution to reach all markets. One channel is through the different bookstores in a particular country; this is achieved primarily through a local distributor. The other channel is through key individual or ministry distributors who take our magazine to events for pastors and leaders.

An effective strategy we have utilized in distributing our magazines is to identify key ministries in different countries and people who want to achieve similar ministry goals. We introduce these people to our product. When they recognize the benefits of our magazine, they become potential distributors, because they believe in the content of our publication. They are credible representatives, motivated by more than profit. This is one of the great advantages of *Apuntes Pastorales*.

A challenge we face is that magazines have a small profit margin compared to books. Volume sales are much more critical to earning a profit with magazines, so the retail price is something that must always be taken into account, using low cost strategies to allow the magazine to have an affordable price.

With regard to book distribution, the key is our participation in large events where we gather distribution contacts. At events such as the [International Christian Retail Show](#), [Expolit](#) (the principal Spanish-language Christian event for booksellers, held annually in Miami), [Expocristiana](#) (a similar event in Mexico), [COICOM](#) (a conference for Spanish and Portuguese-language Christian broadcasters and mass media), there are valuable opportunities to meet local distributors and to strengthen relationships to our mutual benefit.

It is also necessary to work “like ants,” doing the more expensive but very effective work of seeking key distributors in each country to whom we can present our

materials and with whom we can reach mutual agreements. In the long run, these efforts give valuable results.

An important strategy is to give away literature (books or magazines) to influential people, such as pastors, denominational leaders, ministry directors and other opinion shapers, who can recommend and promote it. Nonetheless, there is a risk that they will think materials will always be sent free. To avoid this, any free material sent is always accompanied by a letter that explains this is a one-time promotional gift, especially when it comes to our magazine.

An excellent product, free samples to influencers, a search for key people to reach the two principal channels, and some ground work, allow our product to be appreciated and found in bookstores and in events for leaders. But the key question remains: How can I make people aware of our product?

A product people know

It is worthless to have distributors with all our material if people are not aware it exists. There are very expensive ways to make the public aware of our literature, for example radio, television or print advertising. Desarrollo Cristiano evaluates the content of a book or magazine to determine the best medium to let the public know about it. Advertising is expensive but yields very good results. It may not be possible to use advertising all the time, but it is good to try to use it regularly and to include such costs in the development budget for a product.

We also design flyers with information about our books and send these to distributors, so that they can hand them out in the largest conferences in their countries. These flyers include a blank spot where local distributors can print their contact information for people interested in acquiring the material.

In addition, we try to distribute our magazine at leadership and pastoral events

in various countries. Desarrollo Cristiano hosts events on the topics we cover in every issue of *Apuntes Pastorales*, that is, matters of concern to leaders and pastors. In this way, our print material is an excellent complement to our ministry of preaching and teaching the Word.

An effective distribution mix

To achieve effective distribution, it is necessary to have just the right mix. The wrong mix or the lack of a key ingredient can wreak havoc. Therefore:

- A good product in few places is deadly.

- A good product in many places without publicity is a pity.
- A bad product in many places with publicity is a waste.
- A good product in many places with good publicity is a success.

Desarrollo Cristiano Internacional, in San José, Costa Rica, publishes books and magazines for Latin American church leaders.

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