



Good Content at a Good Price

A Vietnamese friend told me that he used to have only three basic transportation options: would he buy a bicycle, a motorcycle, or a car? The choice depended on the amount of money he had. Color, make, and other options were not important.

When this friend came to the United States, he had to purchase a car. He needed three days to decide on a vehicle among more than 500 possible models, each with its own set of additional options. He was shocked by the number of alternatives available to him.

An American missionary told about her first days back from Ethiopia. She was overwhelmed by the choices available at the local supermarket. After wandering through the store for over an hour, she left and did not buy anything. She could not make a choice.

In the United States, and increasingly in more countries around the world, consumers face a tremendous number of choices for all types of products, activities, and services. The wide variety of choices for consumers creates a competitive environment for every industry, including publishing. Not only must publishers compete against others in the book industry, but they must compete even against restaurants. A prospective customer in the U.S. might wonder, "Should I go to McDonald's with my kids today or should I buy a Christian book?" Another might debate whether to purchase a discipleship book or attend a sporting event.

What is a publisher's responsibility in such an environment? It is critical to recognize that consumers generally do not perceive publishing as substantially different from, or superior to,

any other industry. Christian publishers offer life-giving good news through their products, but they still have to compete for the attention of potential customers. We have to continually offer customers *good content* at a *good price*. How do we do this?

We publish material with meritorious content, books that can make a difference in the life of the buyer. We look for good writers and solid Scriptural teaching. Unfortunately, success is not just a question of good content. It is also a question of price.

A successful publisher determines what books or features are desired by readers and churches, decides which ones can profitably be offered at the price that the customer is willing to pay, and follows through with the level of service that customers expect. We must focus our editorial efforts, reduce our cost of goods, and watch our cash flow.

In one country, the Christian publishing industry might be thriving, with numerous titles competing for readers' attention each year. In another country, Christian publishers may face competition because of economic necessities. One minister in China wanted to purchase a Bible commentary. He could only do so if instead of purchasing a school uniform for each of his daughters, he purchased one uniform for them to share.

Your books might not compete with McDonald's. They might compete with school uniforms. Whatever your situation, one principle remains: customers have choices. Therefore, publishers must offer customers *quality* content at the *right* price.❖

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To succeed in competitive environments, offer quality content at the right price.

by David Mehlis

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