



How to Run a One-Person Company and Survive

By Martha Saint-Berberian

Martha Saint-Berberian

*[email: MarthaBerberian@yahoo.com] was born in New Jersey. At age 11 she moved to Latin America with her missionary parents, Phil and Ruth Saint. "I have been totally bilingual all these years," she says. "Two thirds of Ediciones Sa-Ber's titles are books I wrote directly in Spanish, the others in English." Saint-Berberian's books in English include *The Mystery of Stained Glass*, a biography of her grandfather, Christian artist Lawrence B. Saint, on sale at the Washington National Cathedral bookstore; and *Majorette to Missionary*, the biography of her mother, Ruth Brooker Saint. Some of Saint-Berberian's books were printed and distributed by CLIE*

[<http://www.clie.es/>] in Spain; they sold perhaps 30,000 units over the years. Her books are also available through Christ Mandate for Missions

*[<http://www.cmmissions.net/>] in Charlotte, North Carolina, U.S.A. Ediciones Sa-Ber, in Guatemala City, Guatemala, offers economical Christian publications, written for people with junior-high level education. The company's name, taken from the first syllables of Saint-Berberian, is a pun, as the word *saber* means "to know" in Spanish, a fitting name for a publishing house.*

My first books were originally published by mimeograph in 1980, 1981, and 1982. My oldest son, Steve, would help run the mimeograph, and he and his younger sister Elizabeth would help assemble the pages and staple them.

Who would have expected that from such humble beginnings, 90,000 books would be published in Guatemala?

I saw the need for economical Christian publications, written for people with a junior-high level of education. Ediciones Sa-Ber, founded in 1983, is the fruit of that vision.

People bought my books. Most of these books were distributed nationally, a few were distributed in other countries when we traveled to teach or speak.

More titles followed. As each title became more popular and funds were available, they were printed in offset with a two-color cover. Later on, Ediciones Sa-Ber issued improved and extended editions with full-color covers.

The Catalog

I had not realized the cumulative impact of my efforts, but this is the list of my books in order of popularity:

- *Cómo predicar* (How to Preach), with just 56 pages, sold 16,000 copies
- *En busca del cónyuge* (In Search of a Life Partner), 28 pages, 9,700 copies
- *La mujer y su ministerio* (Woman and Her Ministry), 128 pages, 6,500 copies
- *Técnicas de investigación* (Research Techniques), 48 pages, 6,200 copies
- *Cómo enseñar* (How to Teach), 112 pages, 6,000 copies

- *La familia integral* (The Integral Family), co-authored with my husband, Sam, 53 pages, 2,600 copies sold
- *Cómo escribir* (How to Write), 122 pages, 2,600 sold

If you did the math, that is almost 50,000 books! Ediciones Sa-Ber has published more books as well. Other books of mine have been: *Fundamentos Musicales*, a music course; *Federico Crowe*, the biography of an English missionary to Central America; the story of Nazareth Church of Guatemala, *Pedro y las Joyas*, (Paul and the Jewels); the biography of Alfonso Lopez and the biography of Alfredo Colom.

There were also books my husband “wrote” or better said, “dictated.” I did all the typing and editing; Sam did the checking. These include *Dos décadas de renovación* (Two Decades of Renewal); *De los negocios al ministerio* (From Business to Ministry); and *Hablando de frente con el liderazgo del tercer milenio* (Straight Talk to Leaders of the Third Millennium). I also published two books by Phil Saint, my dad, and the books of various authors.

How I Did It

So, how *do* you run a one-person shop and survive?

1. *The few who are involved need to have multiple talents.* When you don’t have a formal staff to distribute the responsibilities of literature production, you do it yourself. In my case, I write, edit and do layout and design, all from my home office. I take the originals to the print shop and do the promotion and the distribution.
2. Running a one-man “show” is not ideal, because you cannot be a professional in every department. I have learned a lot over the years, but

I am not perfect—not by a long shot!

I continue to handle the finances, prepare the sales slips, collect bills, make bank deposits, and general administration.

The only person who could be considered a permanent, besides me, is the accountant, a vendor who has worked with me since Ediciones Sa-Ber was established in August 1983. I remember he had to literally teach me how to run a business; he said that I should never do any financial operation without a written bill or receipt. I have followed that advice ever since. He also works from his home, and I take him the financial records and bills the first few days of each month.

2. *Have a circle of helpers.* At first, my two oldest children ran the mimeograph and assembled the books. I paid them, since they really deserved it.

My husband, Sam, has always been my personal advisor and occasional assistant, helping me balance my checkbook in those early years, and helping make decisions as to print runs. He helped me organize the books and take inventory, as they are stored in a large closet of our home plus some shelves.

At present my husband continues as advisor, suggesting ways to cut expenses, and my younger daughter Susy is my office assistant, helping me with computer snags and Internet quirks.

I did have occasional typists who worked by the hour, cutting stencils, and later typing originals. I have always had a small circle of editors and proofreaders to check my writing.

3. *Have a clear vision but a flexible time schedule.* When you are the only one to do most of the jobs, you need to survive the stress of producing, publishing and distributing the books.

I accepted the fact that I couldn’t have my books in all the Christian bookstores of

Guatemala, so I chose a few that were representative by location, and whose manager was able to work with me on a flexible schedule. Though my goal is to visit these bookstores every month, every three months is more realistic, or when they call to say they need a certain title.

When an order comes in, I try to take it to the bookstore within one to three days. I leave a bill of sale, which is not the final bill; the numbered bill I write up when they give me a check (or cash). This simplifies the accounting, keeping the bills within the month they are paid. My goal is to maintain a positive personal relationship with the

bookstore managers and salesclerks, so I see them as personal friends.

Results

Looking back, I am amazed at how God used this low-energy gal to do a considerable job in publishing, all the while keeping our family intact.

Looking to the future, I hope to do improved editions when books are out of print. Who knew what Ediciones Sa-Ber would accomplish? By the grace of God, we have been able to provide good literature at an affordable level, and topics that folks need.

© 2009 [David C. Cook Global Mission](#). First printed in *Cook International*, September, 2009.

ChristianTrade Association International

PO Box 62187 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2187 USA

TEL +1 719 432 8428 • FAX +1 719 325 7001 • info@ChristianTrade.com • www.ChristianTrade.com