



INDIA

Adopt *Secular* MARKETING STRATEGIES

John Alexander, a freelance journalist, encourages Christian publishers to look for innovative ways to reach the public in the multicultural society of India.

In India, where Christians comprise only 2.6 percent of the country's 840 million people, Christian books need wider readership and acceptability. However, many in India wrongly equate the selling of Christian literature with proselytization. Secular vendors, many of whom take pride in putting forth an "all-India" image, are

sale," said a seasoned Hindu bookshop owner to me recently. "Give us catalogues of your publications with the price of the books and discounts, if any," he said.

Once such fruitful understanding is reached between Christian publishers and bookshop owners, the results would benefit both parties.

Adopting new sales and marketing tactics can lead to new opportunities.

Christians have a lot to learn from secular publishers. Many use updated printing technology, thus producing better quality products. Some have appointed result-oriented sales personnel and hiked their salaries to increase sales. This has allowed secular publishers to rake in good profits.

Secular publishers have also reorganized their companies to streamline responsibilities. They promote improved time management and goal setting. They are more aggressive in identifying target groups, surveying their needs and brainstorming sessions with staff about how to meet these needs. These new approaches to management and incentives in form of bonuses or some perks have welded teams of workers who are highly professional in their approach.

Christian publishers may do well to get together with some successful secular publishing houses. This would bring new ideas to the forefront. Strengthening such relationships is fraught with

new possibilities and prospects.

Christians must optimize their use of secular marketing strategies and distribution channels. Christian concerns need to be in the mainstream of society, to play a part in giving knowledge of the Christian faith to all Indians. Such partnerships are also mutually beneficial. "Any partnership may mean profits for both of us. Of course, if we provide our facilities for display, we may get a larger percentage of the profits. But, heightened exposure of Christian books would make the names of their publishers more widely known to the reading public," said the owner of an outlet of a famous all-Indian publishing house in Nagpur.

There is a need to improve the way Christians are seen among the people of the country. Christian literature needs wider readership and acceptability. ♦

Relationships with secular publishing houses bring new possibilities and prospects.

adverse to displaying Christian books. Therefore, to reach more people through non-Christian outlets, Christian publishers need new approaches.

For a start, publishers need to talk to booksellers and explain that the mere display of Christian books is not equivalent to converting people of other faiths to Christianity.

Some non-Christian booksellers understand this distinction. "We are willing to give space in our bookshop to any Christian publishers who want to display books for

Secondly, Christian publishers need to adopt aggressive sales and marketing strategies, such as those used by secular publishers. But Christians in publishing are often wary of profit making. The commercial dimension is sidelined, as they claim that their priority is to enlighten and bring spiritual change among the readers. But there is no reason why both goals cannot be synchronized. Christian publishers and bookshop owners face financial constraints because of limited sales.