

Research is Key

Richard Kelani, managing editor of Bridge Publishing, applied market findings to begin his firm in Lagos, Nigeria.

Publishing in Nigeria can be fun and financially rewarding if one scouts the terrain.

Five challenges

There are five principal challenges to Christian publishing in Nigeria. These challenges regularly rotate their order of priority.

Poor reading culture. Researchers and consultants, publishers and authors, all agree that the "Nigerian people have no reading culture!" After many years of economic hardship, reading has become a luxury of the affluent.

Competitive publishing industry. Big companies dominate the most lucrative areas of publishing, such as textbook publishing, so new entrants tend to work on jobs with little profit. Some get lucky with reprints of foreign titles or books by pastors of megachurches.

Skeptical financiers. The average Nigerian investor is impatient and interested only in ventures that promise instant profit. When a publisher promises a two-year profit margin of 15 percent, the investor shows the same profit can be obtained in six months with an alternative investment.

Competition from broadcast media. With the liberalization of the broadcast sector, new television channels abound. Information on topics traditionally addressed in print is now available to broadcast audiences at the touch of a button. Many stations even offer opportunities for audience participation.

Market research. New publishers must conduct their own research and create their own databases because usable information is not

available. Failure to conduct good market research is the biggest reason for publication failure.

Research findings

Contrary to popular opinion, Nigerians *do* read. During the rule of military despots, the public consumed many publications on the quest for democratic rule. The number of such newspapers even increased.

Nigerians read anything directed at their interests (not necessarily the interests of publishers). They read entertainment articles, sports, cartoons, human interest materials, etc. Children love educational adventure stories in a cartoon format. Adults, in contrast, only seek educational material in areas of need. A little research uncovered many underserved needs.

Competition among publishers is intense, but few offer self-help materials or "facility publication"—products designed to help people improve in life or in their career. For example, few editorial services exist outside the premises of newspapers and traditional publishing companies, yet potential authors could benefit from editorial help. Even authors who can raise funds for self-publication require marketing advice.

Opportunities

Bridge Publishing, a new enterprise in Lagos, Nigeria, now offers editorial consultancy services in the areas of manuscript evaluation, re-packaging, transcription of taped messages, etc. Bridge helps others design and produce specialized magazines. It also operates as a

research resource company. The capital outlay required is manageable and the work involved enables Bridge to invest in acquiring its own market research information.

Another focus for Bridge is facility publication for worship leaders. Many talented Christian musicians in Nigeria are hungry for success. Most Christians, even the newest converts, want to keep up with the latest worship songs. The growth of Christianity in Nigeria has given prominence to worship. There are very few publishers in the field, but great potential for dividends.

With rapid growth and rising education levels, there also exists a great need for a strong magazine for early teens (12-16 years olds). In the 1970s, this market was served by two cartoon magazines. One was a Nigerian version of Superman, who could not rest due to the activities of Dr. Crime; the other was titled the *Super 8*. The magazines went off the streets because their increasing success and popularity made too much demand on the publishers. The company was not prepared to drop its main business for its side publishing venture. Prospects for a youth magazine are even better now than they were in the '70s, and Bridge is assessing opportunities to produce a strong magazine.

Market research is key

Success is measured, in part, by how publishers overcome market challenges. In that respect, it is amazing what a little research can do! Perceived stumbling blocks become stepping stones and obstacles turn into new opportunities. ♦