

Publish to Strengthen the Church

Abner Lacson and Boris Joaquin, of Church Strengthening Ministries, are determined to reach more and more readers with literature that speaks to Filipino Christians.



"We have the challenge and responsibility before God to make His Word available through our books," says Abner G. Lacson, president of Church Strengthening Ministries.

In today's competitive and fast-changing marketplace, Church Strengthening Ministries (CSM) is reaching Filipino readers in many different ways. CSM is distributing materials through 150 Christian and secular bookstores, and numerous theological and Christian schools.

Though CSM is one of the biggest publishers in the region, bringing in millions of pesos in sales, it does not want to take its

position for granted. Abner Lacson, the first Filipino president of the organization, is determined to see CSM grow stronger and more competitive. "We have the financial and human resources to produce quality Christian resources," he says, "and the challenge and responsibility before God to make His word available through our resources."

Books that strengthen Christians

CSM publishes books to strengthen the Church. The *Experiencing God* workbook, by Henry Blackaby and Claude King, had a following among evangelicals. CSM published the follow-up devotional by Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-By-Day*. After three years, it has sold over 100,000 copies—and CSM is still printing more.

Women on the Journey, the first devotional book for Filipino women written by 17 Filipino relatively unknown women authors, is one of CSM's bestselling products. It has been through four reprints, and another edition is underway. How did this book succeed? It was launched at a women's conference in Manila in September 2000, featuring Bible teacher Beth Moore. Two of Beth Moore's workbooks were also made available: *Breaking Free* and *To Live is Christ*. Two years later, the workbooks are still widely used among evangelical churches,

and women are clamoring to know what CSM plans for them next.

Reaching pastors

A few years ago, CSM launched the *Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible* (POSB) of Leadership Ministries Worldwide (LMW). Because of its long-standing relationships with pastors, seminary administrators and professors, CSM was able to effectively disseminate a great deal of information on the resources, including flyers, mailers, and even CD samplers of the Bible.

Then, building on this success, CSM established a "LMW Pastors Club," that offers members special discounts and informs them of upcoming LMW products.

"We want to extend this type of program to women in ministry, youth leaders, lay leaders, teachers and even Christian businessmen," says Boris Joaquin, CSM's vice president for marketing.

Relationship-building

CSM's motto, "Your Partner in Ministry," communicates a desire to work hand-in-hand with churches, ministries, and schools.

"We build relationships with Christian ministries, their officials and members," says Joaquin. "We listen to their needs, take note of their plans and stand alongside them to establish mutually beneficial partnerships."

CSM helps churches, mission agencies and other Christian institutions in the Philippines produce their own materials. CSM is closely involved with the Association of Christian Schools International, Asia (ACSI), working to develop curriculum suitable for Christian schools.

Training has become one of CSM's distinctives. Its training department actively equips ministry partners to use CSM materials—from Sunday school curriculum to leadership materials and more. The workshops help potential product users see how CSM's materials can work in their ministry setting.

For Vacation Bible School (VBS) materials, training is essential. Partnering with Christian bookstores, CSM sponsors training sessions in strategic locations all over the country. VBS training workshops are typically packed with church workers and volunteers, eager and excited to reach out to children and young people in the coming summer. Every year, 70 percent of the participants are new. CSM sponsors or leads Christian training events nearly every week.

Targeting youth

CSM publishes the *True Love Waits* (TLW) curriculum meant to address the decreasing sexual morality among Filipino youth. In developing the curriculum, CSM tapped into the rich life stories of Christian celebrities who are now living sexually pure lives. During pre-publication, staff conducted dialogues and consultations with youth pastors and leaders. They forged partnerships with existing youth networks and organizations. Prior to the launch, CSM organized an event to introduce the project to key ministry workers, which created awareness for the product, support and eager anticipation for its release.

Planning for the future

"Enthusiasm plus effective distribution are not enough," adds Joaquin. "Our job is to offer the right books to the right people,

with relevant discounts and rewards programs, to help them in their ministries and personal lives."

In terms of product, CSM is working on more books for Christian readers, material to support Southern Baptist programs and initiatives, new Sunday school curriculum, and more. Staff also want to produce more resources that reflect current trends in ministry, including cell-groups, praise and worship, chronological story telling, missions, and evangelism. A key area is more materials for high school and college-age students.

In terms of customer service, a new telemarketing support system is in the works. Aside from dedicating one phone line and an e-mail address to receive orders, CSM will be riding on the mobile phone trend in the Philippines.

For most Filipinos, sending SMS messages (locally known as "texting") via mobile phones has become a major and convenient means of communication. To maximize this, CSM is launching an automatic reply text line service. Customers will be able to "text" in their queries and orders, and receive a text response. Patrons will

enjoy the convenience of e-mailing, calling or texting in their orders and receiving them at their doorstep the following day.

CSM maintains a Web site (<http://www.fsbc.org.ph/csm>). "We

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change our product offerings every quarter," says Joaquin, "as the Web is the quickest, most inexpensive way to update our customers."

CSM's focus is on publishing resources that strengthen the Church, yet they also want to see some of their books speak to those who have not committed their lives to Christ.

"A good book can gain headway for Christ in the hearts of those who may not be openly looking for a religious experience," explains Joaquin. "It can open their eyes to their need for God, warm up their hearts to a new relationship, and in the process help them find life's true meaning," he concludes. Every time this happens, CSM has one more Christian to strengthen. ❖

