



## Roundtable on Distribution

By *Interlit* Staff

At Cook's Strategic Leadership International Christian Publishing Institute, held September 2005 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a roundtable discussion on distribution gathered publishers from 11 countries. Marlene LeFever, Brad Quicksall and Kim Pettit helped to facilitate the session.

### ***Reduce mail and transport costs***

"Mailing costs are our biggest problem," said Divine Kumah, of SonLife Books in Ghana. Others in Africa agreed.

"Unfortunately, our postal system in Kenya is unreliable," said Barine Kirimi of Evangel Publishing House in Nairobi. "To make matters more difficult, we also distribute to extremely remote areas, where it is difficult to get any materials through to our customers."

"We have gotten around this problem," says fellow Kenyan Moses Mugane, of Today in Africa, "by distributing our magazine along with the regular newspaper routes. The newspaper deliverymen are already out, driving to the same locations; now they can simply distribute our magazine as well." Mugane's system works well for magazine distribution, but not necessarily for books. In most cases, book publishers sought other solutions.

Transporting books over land can be problematic. "We used to send books by bus, but now too many buses in my country are charging by weight," says Eivind Jaatun of Scripture Mission in Tanzania."

"Because fuel costs in Zimbabwe are rising," agrees Edward Mutema of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, "distribution costs have also increased. Our solution is to network from strategic centers in the country." Regional distribution centers are also favored by others present, both for domestic and international shipments.

"In Peru," says Roger Vergara of Ediciones Verbo Vivo, "rather than paying the expensive prices for international shipping, we ship as far as we can within the country. We get things as close to the border as we can. From there, with our contacts in the churches, we try to have our materials hand-carried across the border to reduce costs, particularly to Bolivia and Argentina."

### ***Recruit independent distributors***

"One solution that we came up with," says Jaatun, "was to give books to high school students to sell in their schools. The students get to keep a percentage of all they sell, around 40 percent."

Kumah's company does something similar. "We supply scholarships to seminary students on the condition that they distribute our products."

"We have Christian education conferences," says Ayad Bebawy of Future Generations Ministry in Egypt, "and through these we have been able to recruit the right people." Bebawy relies on a small network of key contacts in each city to sell his Sunday school material, but anticipates that "growth will create problems," so he is eager to find

additional ways to achieve effective distribution.

Bebawy's emphasis on recruiting the right people resonates with Brad Quicksall, CCMI's Director of International Ministry Development. "I'm in charge of special projects for Cook," states Quicksall. "Because of this, I am not necessarily looking for long-term relationships but effective one-time distribution of very large shipments of books. My biggest hurdle is identifying the appropriate contacts in a given country."

### ***Demand prepayment when necessary***

"My problem is very basic," says Joanna Ilboudo, of A.C.T.S. in Burkina Faso. "My customers are not paying for products! The direct channel is not paying! They have good excuses or stories as to why they cannot pay; regardless, I never receive the money."

"I also had some unreliable distributors," says Helmine Bonglack, of C.B.C.W.U. in Cameroon. "I publish an annual study guide for women for my denomination. After three years of problems with one particular region, I refused to provide them with any materials until they paid for them in advance." Denominational demand was such that the regional director complied with Bonglack's request. Since then, she has had no further problems in that area.

Kirimi agrees that prepayment is key, particularly for sales direct to consumers. While e-commerce is growing in Kenya, Evangel Publishing House is not yet able to accept online payments.

"We have also found that it is necessary to collect payment before sending out the resources," says Davidson

Freitas, of Danprewan Editora in Brazil. The country's social security system allows publishers "the ability to check our customers' credit before sending anything," says Freitas. "We do accept orders and collect payments via the Internet." Brazil's postage system is very reliable, even for shipments to the Amazon.

### ***Seek partnerships***

A large number of publishers at the roundtable emphasized the importance of partnerships with other organizations.

"We partner with Bible colleges and offer scholarships in exchange for displays," says Kirimi.

"We barter services," says Kumah. SonLife engages in both publishing and printing. This enables Kumah to trade pre-press and press services in exchange for book distribution for his company's publications.

Michael Williams of ICI Ministries in the Philippines supports publishers' efforts in bartering editorial, design, printing, and other services. "Oftentimes, people tend to get trapped in their vision," he says. "They have a vision, but no way to support it and no outlet. What I have found, is that once you have a vision, find something else that will generate support for it. It might not have anything to do with the vision; as long as the side project can support the vision, it doesn't matter what it is. I have found that it is necessary to expand your vision, to take risks, and always, to pray."