



RUSSIA

Responding TO MARKET RESEARCH

George J. Law, director of Russian Ministries, tells how its literature ministry was reorganized to speed capitalization and market penetration.

In 1993, Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries began to look for and collect every single Christian book ever printed in the Russian language. Today that collection, located in Moscow, includes over 7,500 different titles. This library became a

Through the support of Overseas Council, in only seven years the committee was able to construct a solid foundation of theological literature for training Russia's new spiritual leaders.

Like many other evangelistic and missionary organi-

tributed grew. Within a year, Russian Ministries was selling its books at cost, and was able to sell 400 percent more books than had previously been possible at a 70 percent subsidy.

Recognizing that the keys to survival were to produce books that people wanted and to deliver them where needed all at an affordable price, Russian Ministries began to develop a long-term business plan, again with the assistance of the Council.

Market research and results

Russian Ministries conducted an investigation into the secular and Christian reading and spending habits in ten geographically diverse cities, with interviews at metro stations and in Protestant churches. The results

were surprising and significant in the development of a long term business plan.

The first shock was that generally, non-Christians were interested in reading Christian literature and were even willing to pay as much as 30 percent more than the average member of an evangelical church was willing to pay for the same book. Years of well-intentioned free and subsidized distribution of books to Christian brothers and sisters had produced an economic dilemma that plagues Christian publishers to this day.

A second discovery had to do with editorial content. While a low percentage of the general population reads religious literature (four percent), there is strong reader interest in non-fiction titles such as biographies (17 per-

cent), dictionaries and reference books (18 percent), and "how to" books (17 percent). There is also interest in historical literature (43 percent), Russian and international classics (30 percent), and poetry (12 percent). [For



Russian Ministries targets people in all walks of life.

basic tool to understand what had been available in Russia for over one hundred years. It provided Russian Ministries with a clearer idea of the needs in Christian publishing.

At the same time, a group of ten Christian leaders from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia formed an editorial selection committee. They were asked to develop a publishing plan for educational literature. The committee consisted of several Christian publishers and the top leaders of theological training institutions.

zations, Russian Ministries was greatly subsidizing the literature it distributed. No thought was given to profit margins. It was not until 1995 that ministry leaders realized that giving away or subsidizing books was counter productive to long-range goals for publishing to be independently and nationally led. The organization decided to reduce book subsidies due to a temporary hiatus of funding and to devote funds elsewhere. At the same time, however, the number of total books dis-



Research and interviews were conducted at metro stations in ten different cities in Russia.

the sake of comparison, the four percent figure compares closely with the number of committed Orthodox believers in Russia. Evangelical believers number less than one percent of the general population.]

Three conclusions were reached. First, most readers in Russia had little or no access to any type of religious literature. Second, in order to be self-supporting, Christian publishing had to expand its channels of distribution. Finally, there were too few Christian bookstores throughout the country to serve as outlets for existing publishers.

Ministry changes

Russian Ministries responded to the challenge by separating its publishing ministry from its distribution work. The publishing department, led by Dr. Irene Kargin, identifies donors who will invest in the first edition of a book by a Russian author to capitalize the project. The publishing department collaborates with the distribution department over every detail of a book project. This includes the selection of which books to print, the cover design, quality, and price. The distribution department buys books from the publishing department. The proceeds are used for new projects and further editions of successful books. Once capitalized, the book can remain in print undeterred by any potential lack of outside funding. In this way, capitalization for the books is achieved for the long term.

The distribution department, led by Dr. Anton Pospilov, consists of two entirely separate divisions. The retail section is small and presently has one outlet

in Moscow. The wholesale section is substantially larger and serves as one of very few wholesale distributors in all of the former Soviet Union. Currently, over 2,500 titles



There are so few Christian bookstores that most Russians have little or no access to religious books.

are carried in inventory. The next largest wholesale distributor of Christian books is located in the city of St. Petersburg and carries inventory of just under one thousand different titles.

To address the present limitations of Christian bookstores, Russian Ministries wishes to launch a chain of retail bookstores called "Semkniga" (Family Books). The research already conducted shows the family has a very high cultural value in Russian society.

Semkniga bookstores will combine secular non-fiction and reference titles with Christian literature, videos, cassettes, CDs, music, and gifts. The secular items will include "how to" books, reference books, history, biographies, poetry, and classics. Instead of appealing to less than one percent of the market, Semkniga will be a source for literature and other needs to more than half the entire population of Russian society.

Concerns and challenges

Current freedom to publish may only be temporary.

The present Russian government is seeking to exercise greater control over media. Christian publishers must capitalize and nationalize their efforts before serious

political limitations are enforced.

Russian Christian publishers must become market driven. Like Russian Ministries, more and more publishers are catching up.

In February 2001, publishers and distributors from Russia gathered in Moscow and launched a branch of the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association. This association wants to help Christian publishers improve marketing skills to serve Christian and non-Christian customers. Such an effort has not come too soon. There are incredible opportunities to meet the spiritual need of millions of Russians. ♦

International PUBLISHING EVENTS

August 3-11, 2001

Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Harare, Zimbabwe
www.zibf.org

September 9-20, 2001

Leading Publishing Organizations, International Christian Publishing Institute, Colorado Springs, CO USA
www.ccmi.org

September 12-14, 2001

CBA Asia Regional Convention, Seoul, Korea
www.cbaonline.org

September 24-27, 2001

Distribution, CCMI Regional Workshop with CSSA, Taipei, Taiwan
www.ccmi.org

October 10-15, 2001

Frankfurt Book Fair, Frankfurt, Germany
www.frankfurt-book-fair.com

October 19-20, 2001

Expolitec Christian Products Fair, Unilec, Mexico City, Mexico
bibabba@prodigy.net.mx

October 17-21, 2001

Balkans Editorial Training and Publisher Consultation, Media Associates International, Bulgaria
www.littworld.org

November 4-10, 2001

Letra Viva Regional Conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina
www.letraviva.com

November 7-9, 2001

Sales Strategy, CCMI Regional Workshop with ABEC, Sao Paulo, Brazil
www.ccmi.org

Fall, 2001

Editorial Training, Media Associates International, Philippines
www.littworld.org

Fall, 2001

Editor and Children's Literature Training, Media Associates International, Indonesia
www.littworld.org