

Christian Literature Distribution in Tanzania

by David John Tuppa

In Tanzania there is stiff competition in the production of Christian literature among publishers. Each publisher has his or her own sales force, types of Christian literature, sources of Christian literature, methods of pricing, methods of promotion and product distribution venues.

PRODUCT

Although Christian publishers each have their own products, there is not much differentiation between them. At Central Tanganyika Press, our publications include children's story books; Bibles; books on Christian education, evangelism, theology, home and family, and books for youth. We also publish fiction, church service materials, etc. About 80 percent of our product is translated into Swahili from English titles, and 20 percent are written by local authors. Some of the particular needs in our culture include books on marriage, polygamy, women's roles, health, and finances. The major factor which prompts people to buy product, in Tanzania, is perceived need.

Our books are priced in a manner consistent with other publishers in Tanzania. When pricing books, we take artwork, typesetting, print costs, freight and packing costs, royalties, profit margin, and discounts into account to arrive at a unit cost.

DISTRIBUTION VENUES

Each group in our country has its own methods for physical distribution, but most work with booksellers. Booksellers carry both imported and locally translated and produced materials. Central Tanganyika Press has sold or distributed Christian literature not only through Christian bookshops, but through churches, theological schools, street vendors and others.

We organize Easter and Christmas sales to increase our sales. We also attend church conferences, seminars, and youth campaigns where we offer discounted prices. Apart from selling through these channels, we also advertise and participate in national festivals and international bookfairs. We also travel up country where pastors help us to set up distribution points and book stands inside local churches. Central Tanganyika Press travels throughout the country distributing books four times a year. In addition, we market more fre-

quently to the rural areas in the Dodoma region where we are based.

Our organization has not used a bookmobile yet. Bookmobiles are unlikely to make a profit for us, and expensive to run. But they are effective in getting books to the people, and we expect this approach will expand the market of our books for the future.

Government officials in Tanzania have also recognized the need for children's materials that can be used in school settings, and we have also sought to promote our goods to key individuals in this area.

CHALLENGES

Christian publishers in Tanzania face a number of internal and external obstacles to improved sales and distribution.

External problems include a high illiteracy rate and the lack of a reading culture, as people prefer to read newspapers rather than books or magazines. The purchasing power of the people is quite low. Paper costs are very high. There are few sales outlets and poor road systems. Postage and freight charges are high and the postal system is unreliable. Many publishers also face problems with inflation. Debtors often fail to pay their bills on schedule.

Internal problems for publishers include untrained and/or unmotivated staff, or insufficient staff for sales and distribution. Often titles have no ready market. No market research was conducted prior to publication. Many publishers lack an effective and comprehensive marketing plan, and are unable to allocate more funds for advertising and promotion.

There are 30 million people in Tanzania, and many opportunities. Christian publishers and distributors in Tanzania need to come together and explore ways to more effectively reach Christian and secular markets. ❖

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