

“We Know it is Possible”

Beatriz Buono, of Certeza Argentina, describes the impact a publisher can have through the sale of foreign rights.

Back in 1984 when Certeza ABUA—later renamed Certeza Argentina—was born, its founding director, Beatriz Buono, would never have guessed that its books would one day cross international borders.

“A mimeograph and a desire to serve ‘our’ students (members of the evangelical movement in the university) were the tools that God used to begin our publishing house,” recalls Buono. Initially, Certeza produced mimeographed evangelistic and discipleship materials for students. It took a visit by Kevin Engel, a Christian publishing consultant based in Australia, to make Buono and her team realize that the materials, if better produced and distributed, could serve the broader Christian community in the country. “The leap to thinking about other young people in

our country was such a great challenge that we did not dream of reaching beyond our borders,” says Buono.

Learning at Frankfurt

The thought that Certeza books could cross boundaries first hit Buono when she attended the Frankfurt International Book Fair through a program of the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC). “I was impressed with this enormous venue created specifically for the exchange of royalties,” she says. “Seeing so many publishers highly interested in having their books published in other languages broadened my vision.”

Reaching Hispanics around the world

In 1997, Buono attended Cook’s International Christian Publishing Institute (ICPI). The program, she says, “helped to further stimulate” her thinking about developing good titles that could have international appeal. “We had always dreamed of discovering and developing Christian authors, preferably young, Argentinean and Latin American authors.”

After ICPI, Buono and the Certeza staff were determined to

implement the dream. They selected four of their most creative and productive authors, and began to push their books for other Latin American countries, Spain, and the Hispanic market in the United States. They sent sample copies of these authors’ books to many publishing houses in Latin America and the United States. This effort paid off. “A year later, in 1998,” says Buono, “we signed the first contract, which we modeled after one from a sister publishing house in England, InterVarsity Press.”

With their first international rights contract in hand, Certeza was even more determined to better publicize the work of their leading authors without neglecting the other emerging writers. A gathering of the Comunidad Internacional de Estudiantes Evangélicos en America Latina (International Evangelical Latin American Student Community) served as a springboard for a series of contacts with leaders from Brazil. “We sold the Portuguese language rights for Jorge Atiencia’s *Hombres de Dios* [Men of God] to publishers in Brazil,” reports Buono.

Hombres de Dios is a good example of how a book with very small beginnings can cross frontiers and transform lives and societies. Certeza first published Atiencia’s works as a series of booklets about Bible characters. Each booklet focused on one key character. The

Our Philippine authors writing in the Asian context have proven effective in generating interest among other Asian publishers for rights to our books. A number of our titles have been translated to Hindi, Burmese, Vietnamese, Bahasa, Chinese and Pidgin. Two recent inquiries come from Thailand and Malaysia. What is biblical and socially relevant to us here in the Philippines may cross the seas and be relevant to other Asians as well, perhaps even more so than books written by Westerners.

—Ramon A. Rocha III, CEO
OMF Literature Inc., Philippines

series of booklets included Daniel, a leader with an outstanding spirit, Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit, Elijah, dealing with depression and success, Ezekiel, a prophet full of the Holy Spirit, and Joseph, a partner in God's work. Each one of these booklets later became a chapter in *Hombres de Dios*. Today, this book is one of our best sellers. It is recommended by Promise Keepers (known as "Hombres de Valor" in Latin America). The Portuguese edition has had an impact in Brazil for Christ. Its ministry also extends to other Portuguese speaking countries, such as Angola.

The *Hombres de Dios* experience continues to spur Certeza's new vision and commitment to getting books by local authors into other languages. They have since sold the rights to two other books by Jorge Atienza, *Victoria Sobre la Corrupción* [Victory Over Corruption], and *Cómo Pastorear y Ser Pastoreados* [How to Pastor and Be Pastored], and are negotiating rights for additional titles.

To the ends of the earth

Certeza, a publishing house once content with publishing for a small audience of university students in Argentina, is now actively pursuing foreign rights sales and distribution opportunities. Certeza sends its representatives to Expolit Miami, Expolitec Mexico, and other important publishing events in Latin America. Certeza participates in Letra Viva, a Christian publisher network based in Costa Rica. Earlier this year, Letra Viva members opened a center in Miami to help publishers in Latin America to fulfill U.S. orders quickly.

Certeza staff are committed to developing more authors who write books that cross borders. They seek and create opportunities for their authors to speak at conferences and workshops in and outside Argentina. They buy space in evangelical newspapers and magazines to advertise the books and their authors and provide magazines with free reviews and bibliographic information by e-mail.

Promoting local authors internationally and selling foreign rights means Certeza books touch lives in other countries. It is also good business. "A very important benefit for us is the arrival of royalty checks," says Buono. Royalty checks are most helpful to Certeza and other smaller publishing houses that, in Buono's words "chronically lack sufficient cash." Since royalties also mean more cash for writers, they

provide an incentive for more writers to emerge in the continent.

Back in 1984, when Certeza was founded, reaching beyond borders seemed impossible. "Now, we dream of seeing our best products translated into English and other languages. Now we know it is possible," concludes Buono. ❖

IS OUR VISION BIG ENOUGH TO GROW GLOBALLY?

As I visit international Christian Bookseller's Association (CBA) chapters—encouraging them, speaking at conventions, and advocating our industry's mission—it is rewarding to see Christian resources at work impacting lives for Christ. The bookstores I visit are part of something big God is doing around the globe.

Distributing Christian materials in nearly every country, our industry virtually serves [customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week]. People on every continent are benefiting from Bibles, Christian books, music, videos, and gifts that integrate faith into life. CBA's vision is "to see excellent Christian products impact the lives of people everywhere." I am excited about all that is being accomplished, but there is still much more to do.

For decades, English-language books have been exported to scores of nations where English is a first or second language. While this has expanded product presence, an elongated supply chain and currency-exchange rates have added costs and hampered sales and ministry. International shipping alone adds 15-20 percent to book costs, plus four to eight week delivery delays. Currency exchanges against the U.S. dollar can add twice, 10 times, even 40 times, the original cost, forcing local pricing at much more than U.S. retail.

This puts U.S. titles out of most people's reach—especially in economies where wages are considerably less than in the United States. In New Zealand, consumers struggle to understand why a Big Mac is similar to U.S. pricing, but a U.S. paperback costs two or even three times more than local paperbacks. Complications increase when consumers see Christian magazine ads with U.S. prices.

To overcome pricing challenges, some U.S. publishers license local publishers to produce and sell titles in their own countries—or even in regional international markets. Titles are "reborn" because pricing is appropriate for each economy. Production costs are reduced, currency-exchange effects eliminated, and supply-chain costs cut dramatically. Locally produced titles can retail at half or a third of what imported books cost.

Additionally, licensed publishing can allow sufficient margins for local publishers to provide retail-support tools, national advertising, and royalties to U.S. publishers and authors while still pricing competitively. I have seen examples of dramatic sales growth—some 20 times higher—once titles switched from being imported to being locally published under license.

Licensed publishing is not that easy. Trust must be built among partners. New contract models are required. The return on investment takes longer but can be larger in the long haul. When done correctly, it benefits everyone—U.S. publishers and authors as well as indigenous publishers, retailers, and consumers. Licensing may not work well in every situation for every title, but it is worth a careful look. It could enlarge our global ministry for Christ.

—Bill Anderson, CBA president and CEO.

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