



The Product Life Cycle-It's Not Fate!

By Yunita Harahap and Arman Widya

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In the last 10 years, a strange phenomenon has emerged in Indonesia: publishing houses are doing large print runs! New publishing houses are daring to publish books even though a book's life cycle may be only three to six months. However, their selling rate is sometimes spectacular: 50,000 copies. (Previously, perhaps only 10,000 books would be printed at one time.)

Yet publishers still dream of publishing *evergreen* books, which might not sell as quickly but will stay in print for a longer time. As a Christian publishing house, we at Yakasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih (YKKBK, or [Bina Kasih Press](#)) dream of publishing bestseller books dealing with *enduring issues*.

Indonesia is an archipelago with its population spread over five very large and thousands of small islands scattered across an area wider than the United States. We want to serve all our target readers by publishing biblical books of good quality and distributing them throughout the country. That's why we prefer to choose long-term issues for our books, with a planned product life cycle of more than five years.

Four Principles for Longevity

To achieve an average product life cycle of more than five years, we have found that four elements must be in place:

1. *Visionary leadership*. The leader of the publishing house must anticipate changes in the country for at least the next 10 years and communicate this vision to the editorial team.

For example, our *Picture Bible Series* was adapted from the David C. Cook *Picture Bible*. This series was translated 40 years ago and has been reprinted more than 10 times. Print runs have varied: 10,000 copies in the 1990s; 5,000 copies in 2000; and 3,000 copies in 2006. *The Picture Bible Series* pioneered Christian comics in Indonesia, and for more than 40 years Indonesian Christian families and churches have used and enjoyed it. It was initially intended as a tool for the elimination of illiteracy in Indonesia.

Although sales are slowing down, its simplicity and its handy format are perfect for church and mission activities in Indonesia. Many big city churches have bought the series for use in remote areas. They chose *The Picture Bible Series* because they were looking for reliable and affordable biblical books.

Elements that contributed to the *Series*' long life cycle are its eternal theme (the Bible); its actual treatment of biblical teaching; its presentation in comic format—children and even adults enjoy it, from generation to generation; and its classic drawing style. Indonesia has passed through three comic genres: traditional, Western (*a la* Marvel/Disney), and Japanese (Manga).

2. *A skilled editor.* You need an editor who is able to prepare books with themes that last; he or she must also be able to convince the marketing team of the urgency of the book's publication. When we decided to print the *Picture Bible Series* in Indonesian, we divided the original book into 36 volumes, beginning with Genesis and ending in Revelation. Most stories were presented in a single unnumbered volume, while others, such as those of David, Jesus, and Paul, were split into two or more numbered volumes.

Most Indonesians are still living below the poverty line, so they regard books as luxury items. But since books are very important for education, we keep the prices as affordable as possible. In 1999 a single volume sold for Rp 2,400 (about US \$1.00); in 2007, Rp 5,000 (\$ 0.60 – after a sharp drop in the rupiah's value).

In 1990 a competitor appeared: a picture Bible in full color from another publisher (our version is black and white). Anticipating such competition, we changed the size of our book from B4 to A5 in the beginning of the 1970s, and again in 1976 to 13 x 18 cm (we've retained this size). We also changed the cover design several times. These cosmetic changes kept the demand for our *Picture Bible Series* high in spite of competition.

3. *A skilled production team.* Your staff should be able to design a book that appeals to the target audience.

In 1997, we compiled the New Testament stories into one book, which we published in

four colors and priced at Rp 24.000 (\$10.00). After the 1998 Indonesian economic crisis, the same selling price was worth only \$3.00. Even that was too expensive for most Indonesians, so this version was only printed once. This print run of 5,000 copies took seven years to sell out.

4. *A diligent marketing team.* A publisher needs staff who are able to research readers' needs and to provide strategic input to the publishing, editing, and production staff. The team should also be able to apply practical promotion techniques.

Other YKKB Successes

Another book with a timeless theme is a series called *Mari Mengenal Tuhan Yesus (Let's Get to Know the Lord Jesus)*. It was first printed in 1966 in five volumes, which were reprinted several times into the 1970s. Seeing the lack of children's books in this genre in the market, Bina Kasih revived the series in 2002, changing its linguistic style, artwork and size. In the first seven months, sales of the first two volumes totalled Rp 13 million.

Tekad Gadis Kecil, an adaptation of Mary Jones' *The Determination of a Little Girl*, was published some 40 years ago. Generally, books whose content has been adapted (and not just translated) have more staying power, especially if the book deals with issues of daily life. Although the adaptation process demands hard work of editors to ensure the material will fit the readers' context, it extends the life cycle of the book.

Perjalanan Musafir (The Pilgrim's Progress), by John Bunyan, has enjoyed a long life cycle, in part because it deals with a Christian's daily struggles. Most of the artwork in this book was out of date, so we changed it. We also changed the linguistic style, design and page size of the book. Such changes have to reflect developments in

graphic design and in market demand from generation to generation.

When we decide that a book deals with a long-term issue and people still need it, we review the format and the content of the book. Here are the things we look at:

1. *Language*. Perhaps the linguistic style, terminology and content need to be updated according to developments in the national language or with content revisions.

2. *Cover and presentation style* (design) need to be tested and revised in line with technological developments and especially with the target audience's tastes, keeping in mind the developmental gap between big cities and small towns. A popular presentation style will usually extend the life cycle of a book.

3. *Packaging* of the book should account for readers' tastes and demands. Perhaps a series needs to be presented in one volume, or perhaps a book may be divided into two or more volumes. Or perhaps the title can be changed, either from the original title or from the previous edition, to make it more appealing to today's readers.

Challenges lie ahead. One we have been facing since the Asian economic crisis of

1998 is the fast growth of new publishing houses using new printing technology and strong international networks. Another challenge is the attraction—especially among young people—of multimedia technology, which is brighter, easier and faster than print. At the same time, the proclivity of readers in big cities for electronic media runs ahead of that of rural readers. We have to think of both markets as we develop strategies for extending the life cycle of our books.

Since Bina Kasih's early days, the principles in this article have been applied by Mr. H. A. Oppussunggu, Director Emeritus of Bina Kasih. He was able to read the signs of the times, and he revised books as needed to sell them to new markets.

Today that responsibility has been delegated to four division heads. As a consequence, we have to work together for Bina Kasih's vision and mission to be continued in the next generations. We want to serve God's people with enduring, biblical and good books.

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