

COVER

# To Conquer Latin America

Marco Vega, of Desarrollo Cristiano Internacional ([www.desarrollocristiano.com](http://www.desarrollocristiano.com)) in San José, Costa Rica, discusses three key ingredients for effective distribution.

**F**or 25 years, Desarrollo Cristiano Internacional has worked in Latin America to create a distribution network for books and magazines, spearheaded by *Apuntes Pastorales* (Notes for Pastors), its leading magazine. Creating a distribution network is not easy, since much patience is required to overcome the obstacles along the way.

To enable the public to obtain our material and be blessed by it (which is ultimately our ministry's purpose), three foundational elements are necessary. For good distribution, it is imperative to combine these elements in just the right amounts. They are:

- A product people want to buy
- A product most can obtain
- A product people know exists

## *A product people want*

The principal challenge in achieving a successful distribution network is offering a product that really meets a need, a product that people will want to obtain. This material must have characteristics that make it unique and allow it to make a positive impact in the lives of people who obtain it.

At Desarrollo Cristiano it is unacceptable to publish a magazine just for the sake of publishing, nor to include an article in the magazine just to fill space. We firmly believe in zealously keeping the mission to which we were called, and we know that our success will depend, 100 percent, on our following God's plan, the reason for our ministry's existence.

Therefore, both in the books we produce as well as in our magazine, our editorial staff work hard to offer excellent quality in design together with a content that is able to shape, equip, and encourage pastors and leaders throughout the continent.

It may seem like a small matter but, like Jesus often said when he wanted to emphasize something important: "I tell you the truth," that to a great extent, an effective distribution network depends on having a product of excellence that can meet real needs.

## *A product people can obtain*

Remember that distributing books is not the same as distributing a magazine. In almost all Latin countries, people generally think that magazines have very little relevance. This conviction is reinforced because many magazines are distributed free of charge, as gifts. Therefore, it is necessary that the content be so useful that it breaks the traditional expectations that magazines must be given away for free.

A strategy we have utilized in distributing our magazines is to identify key ministries in different countries, or people who want to achieve similar ministry goals. Of course these people must know and respect our product. In benefiting from our magazine they become potential distributors because they believe in the content of our publication. They are credible representatives, motivated by more than profit. This is one of the great advantages of *Apuntes Pastorales*.

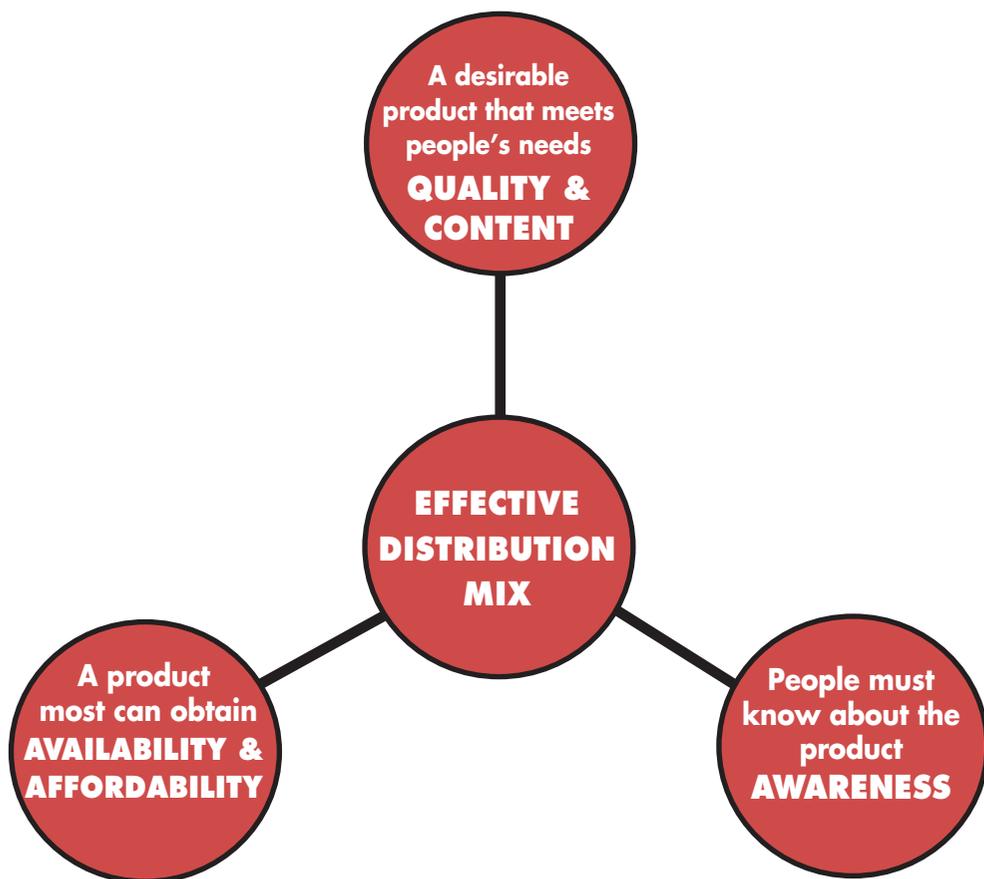
For our magazine, we look for two channels of distribution to reach all markets. One channel is bookstores; this is achieved primarily through a local distributor. The other channel is key contacts; individuals and ministries who distribute *Apuntes Pastorales* to events for pastors and leaders.

A challenge we face is that most magazines, including *Apuntes Pastorales*, have a small profit margin compared to books. Volume sales are much more critical to earning a profit with magazines, so the retail price is something that

## FILLING THE PIPELINE

It's the distributor's job to make certain that bookstores order enough copies of a book. "Enough" is an important concept in countries where retailers can return unsold books to the publisher. A store may be able to sell four of my books. However, if a salesman from Cook is really excited about the book, he might be able to talk the store into ordering eight, more than they can sell. He has overfilled the pipeline. If buyers for my book don't materialize, those extra four books will be returned, often damaged from handling. Cook has over-pushed books on occasion. It's always a mistake. On paper the book sales look like an huge success, but the celebration comes too soon. Effective distribution means enough copies, not too many, of each book go out to each store.

—Marlene LeFever, CCMI



must always be taken into account, using low cost strategies to allow the magazine to have a price that will be affordable to the end user.

With regard to book distribution, participation in certain events is key. At the CBA International Christian Retail Show ([www.cbaonline.org](http://www.cbaonline.org)), *Expolit* (the principal Spanish-language Christian event for booksellers, held annually in Miami, [www.expolit.com](http://www.expolit.com)), *Expocristiana* (a similar event for retailers in Mexico, [www.expocristiana.com](http://www.expocristiana.com)), COICOM (a conference for Spanish and Portuguese Christian broadcasters and mass media, <http://coicom.gospelcom.net/>), there are valuable opportunities to meet local distributors and to strengthen relationships to our mutual benefit.

It is also necessary to work “like ants,” doing the more difficult but very effective work of seeking key distributors in each country to whom we can present our materials and with whom we can negotiate. This is expensive, tedious and tiring work, but in the long run gives valuable results.

An important strategy is to give away literature (books or magazines) to

influential people, such as pastors, denominational leaders, ministry directors, and other opinion shapers who can recommend and promote it. However, there is a risk that they will think materials will always be sent free. To avoid this, any free material sent is always accompanied by a letter that explains this is a one-time promotional gift, especially when it comes to our magazine.

An excellent product, free samples to influencers, a search for key people to reach the two principal channels, and some ground work, allow our product to be appreciated and found in bookstores and in events for leaders. But another question remains: How can I make people aware of our product?

#### *A product people know*

It is worthless to have distributors with all our material if people are not aware it exists. Desarrollo Cristiano evaluates the content of a book or magazine to determine the best means to let the public know about it. Radio (short programs or public service announcements and commercials), television, and print advertisements in magazines, newspa-

pers and bulletins can be expensive but yield very good results. It may not be possible to use such advertising all the time, but it is good to try to use it regularly and to include such costs in the development budget for a product.

We design flyers with information about our books and send these to all our distributors so that they can hand them out in the largest conferences in their countries. These flyers include a blank spot where local distributors can print their contact information for people interested in acquiring the material.

In addition to working with local distributors to promote our magazine at leadership and pastoral events in various countries, Desarrollo Cristiano hosts its own events on the topics we cover in every issue of *Apuntes Pastorales*, that is, matters of concern to leaders and pastors. In this way, our print material is an excellent complement to our ministry of preaching and teaching the Word.

#### *An effective distribution mix*

To achieve effective distribution, it is necessary to have just the right mix. The wrong mix or the lack of a key ingredient can wreak havoc. Therefore:

- A good product in few places is deadly.
- A good product in many places without publicity is a pity.
- A bad product in many places with publicity is a waste.
- A good product in many places with good publicity is a success. ❖