



Trends in the Spanish-Language Publishing Market

By Kim Pettit

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The “Spanish-language publishing market,” in some ways, is a misnomer. There are countless ways to segment the public that buys Spanish books, just as there are for English, Chinese or any other language.

To facilitate a quick look at the trends for those engaged in Spanish Christian publishing, I have split the market into two parts. The first is the United States; the second, Latin America, Spain, and the rest of the world.

While there are great differences between book buyers in Barcelona, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires, the U.S. market comprises anywhere from 50 to 70 per cent of annual sales (and income) for most publishers of Christian resources in Spanish. The sales and income received from efforts in other countries varies greatly according to the economic state of each country.

The U.S. Market

According to the country’s official [census](#), the Latino/Hispanic population grew from 22.4 million in 1990 to 42.7 million in 2005. It is estimated that by 2020 it will grow to 60 million, and by 2050, to 103 million people—approximately 24 percent of the total U.S. population. (Note: these figures do not include Puerto Rico’s 4 million inhabitants.)

Moreover, each year 400,000 legal immigrants enter the country while 600,000

are born (births to Latinos/Hispanics are 22 percent of all births in the U.S.). The rapid growth is having an impact. While in 2000 the Hispanic market comprised 40 percent first-generation immigrants, 28 percent second-generation, and 32 percent third-generation, by 2020 researchers at the [Pew Hispanic Center](#) estimate these figures will change, respectively, to 34 percent, 36, and 30.

For publishers, these are drastic changes. While 72 percent of the first generation speak Spanish fluently, 24 percent are bilingual, and only 4 percent are English-dominant, for the second generation these figures flip to 46 percent English-dominant, 47 percent bilingual, and just 7 percent Spanish-dominant. So what happens when your target market—readers who prefer their books in Spanish—shrinks from 72 to 7 percent?

In the meantime, today’s 32+ million people (the Latinos who are Spanish-dominant) are a substantial market (almost as large as Canada!). And schools and libraries seek resources to serve them. Additionally, more non-Hispanic Americans are studying Spanish.

So, competition is growing. In 2005 [HarperCollins](#), [Thomas Nelson](#), [Lerner](#), [Santillana](#) and [Planeta](#) all began new U.S.-based Spanish publishing programs. [Simon & Schuster](#) did so in 2006, while the Spanish association of publishers,

[Federación de Gremios de Editores de España](#), and the Spanish institute for foreign trade, [ICEX](#), launched [America Reads Spanish](#), a three-year program to increase the presence of Spanish books in the States. Moreover, Spanish-language media is growing more quickly than other market segments. [TNS Media Intelligence](#) expects magazines and newspapers targeted to this market to grow by 10.7 percent just this year.

Competition is driving up the cost of royalties demanded by U.S. publishers selling rights, and rather than offering worldwide Spanish-language rights, some are reserving U.S. and Puerto Rico rights. Such was the case with Joel Osteen's forthcoming *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life*, according to Tessie DeVore of [Strang Communications'](#) [Casa Creación](#), quoted in a May 2007 [article](#) on the Spanish-language religious market in [Críticas](#) magazine.

Efforts to track Spanish-language book sales continue. In the Christian market, it is hoped that the implementation of new systems such as [CROSS:SCAN](#) will allow publishers to have better data for all titles—including those in Spanish. Such data is becoming ever more important, as the [Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies](#) projects the U.S. Hispanic market's buying power will increase from today's \$700 billion to \$1 trillion in 2010.

For Christian publishers, trends in Latino religious affiliation are of particular interest. Although the majority of Hispanics remain Catholic, "[Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion](#)," an April 2007 report from the Pew Hispanic Center, notes that every year some 60,000 Hispanics leave Roman Catholicism. Many join other congregations: the number of Hispanic/Latino evangelicals and Protestants grew from 100,000 people 25 years ago to 5 million today. Nevertheless Roman

Catholics are still projected to be a substantial majority (61 percent) of the Hispanic population in 2030 (though this represents a 7 percent decrease from 68 percent in 2006).

The demographic trends in the United States have clear implications for all who publish Christian resources in Spanish.

While there is great opportunity to serve a substantial population of readers now, increasing competition and changes in language preferences require consideration of bilingual and English-language resources. [Editorial Patmos](#) and [Editorial Mundo Hispano](#), for instance, both launched English-language versions of their Spanish-language Sunday school curriculum.

This strategy works for materials that are not already available in English, but it will not work for translations—the majority of products in Spanish-language Christian publishers' catalogs.

Editors and publishers must acquire original voices that will speak to U.S. Latino book buyers, and at the same time, look for ways to expand the sales and distribution of their existing titles and translations into other markets—looking abroad.

Latin America, Spain, and the rest of the world

While demographic trends are a concern for U.S.-based publishers, a different set of concerns takes precedence for those in Spanish-speaking countries.

In its most recent [survey](#) on perceptions regarding the business climate in publishing in 2006 and short-term trends, [CERLALC](#), the Regional Center for Book Promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranked the principal problems facing the industry as follows:

- 1) low demand for books,
- 2) copyright violations (including both piracy and illegal reproductions),
- 3) economic instability,

4) changes in the government policies, and
5) returns.

The relative importance each publisher will assign to these problems, of course, depends on their particular circumstances. Christian publishers usually add inefficient distribution systems as a key concern, giving it greater importance than some of the other items listed by their peers in the industry.

The issue of distribution helps to illustrate the marked differences between Spanish-speaking countries. Valerie Miles, acquiring editor for [Grupo Planeta's](#) book division, notes in "Publishing in Spain and Latin America," an article in [Publishing Research Quarterly](#) (Fall 2006), that Spaniards have 3,500 bookstores serving 40 million people (a 1:11,429 ratio) whereas in Mexico there are only 500 bookstores serving 100 million people (1:200,000). Citing research from [Euromonitor](#), she adds that Mexicans read 1 or 2 books per year, whereas in Spain and Argentina this figure is 10 to 12 books per year.

People read where books are more available and affordable. In the same issue, José Calafell Salgado, [Grupo Santillana's](#) international director for new business development, affirms there are simply not enough bookstores.

He wryly observes, "Someone has said, not without some sense of desperation, that you know a book becomes a bestseller when it starts to be illegally printed and distributed."

The copyright violations, in a way, offer reasons for optimism: "Reading is certainly becoming more popular," he continues, "A recent surge of huge international bestsellers show us that a demand for reading books is there," but the book is "a purchase not possible for the masses... a luxury product."

Consider the realities shown in the table below that compares population and gross domestic product (GDP) for Spanish-speaking countries (the table includes the

Hispanic population of the United States and its proportionate share of the GDP as well).

The economic disparities are evident.

U.S. Hispanics account for only 10 percent of the world's Spanish-speaking population, yet they control 30 percent of its income (and many Christian Spanish-language publishers sell 50 to 70 percent of their books to this market).

Mexico, Argentina, and Spain account for 45 percent of the remaining income and 43 percent of the population, and book sales in those countries are relatively robust compared to the remaining 17 countries listed here, that together make up just under half the world's Spanish-speakers—with only a quarter of their income.

Is it any wonder, then, that copyright violations continue to increase? The CERLALC report notes that piracy is rated highest as a concern in Ecuador and Peru. Illegal photocopying is rated highest in Colombia and Panama. Miles notes that in Mexico and Colombia piracy has increased by 10 percent every year since 1998.

Competition among publishers in Latin America is on the rise as well. "This year, 8,007 titles from 187 publishing houses hope to be featured in the "Salón del Libro" (Book Salon) at the [Guadalajara International Book Fair](#), boasts its site. "This represents a 36 percent increase in publishing houses, and a 26 percent increase with regard to book titles."

The expansion of mass discount stores and chains into Latin American markets will impact book distribution systems. [A *Cook Partners* [article](#) earlier this year described what became of Puerto Rico's Christian bookstores when [Sam's](#) and [Wal-Mart](#) arrived.]

Publishers, bookstores and distributors must develop new competencies to work effectively with megastores and supermarkets.

Christian publishers also must seek new ways to partner more closely with pastors and church leaders and to increase direct marketing to consumers via conferences, virtual bookstores and even social networking sites. [See more on this topic [here](#).]

Publishers must use new technologies to their advantage. Santillana, says Calafell Salgado, uses print-on-demand to supply customer orders in small countries. Christian publishers can do the same—in this issue of *Cook Partners*, Elsa Ramírez de Aguilar describes how Estudios Clase of [SETECA](#), in Guatemala, creatively supplies buyers in Venezuela and other countries.

Publishers can unite for greater effectiveness in reaching foreign markets, engaging in co-publishing and other joint ventures. [Editores Independientes](#), for example, is a partnership of four general trade publishers: [Txalaparta](#) in Spain, [Lom Editorial](#) in Chile, [Ediciones Trilce](#) in Uruguay, and [Ediciones Era](#) in Mexico.

In serving Spanish-speaking churches, Christian publishers have worked together for years. In May, [Expolit](#) celebrated 15 years of bringing Spanish Christian booksellers and suppliers together; this November, [Letra Viva](#), the independent Christian publisher's association, will gather

in Bogotá to celebrate more than 10 years of training and fellowship.

Skimming the Surface

Challenges for publishers serving Spanish-language readers abound. This article offers a first glimpse at general trends impacting publishers in Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, and Spain, but there is so much more that could be said about the specific countries and audiences Christian publishers serve and how they can best accomplish this.

In a recent [interview](#) published in [Christianity Today](#), Ruth Padilla DeBorst, theologian, educator, and director of [Ediciones Certeza Unida](#), states: “Seventy-five years ago, John Mackay wrote a wonderful book, *The Other Spanish Christ*, which asks whether Latin America could discover the Christ who was incarnate, who walked the streets and died and rose from the dead and is powerful today.” Christian authors, editors, and publishers continue to look for ways to communicate the Word made flesh.

And Padilla DeBorst reminds us: “God is Lord over every last corner of the world”—even in the markets we serve.

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