



## Unleash the Power

by Kim A. Pettit

*How should we approach publishing if we believe in the power of Christian literature?*

Have you ever written a thank you note in your head, but neglected to write it on paper? Or crafted a masterful e-mail when you're not at the computer? Or how about a story, an article, or even a book outline? If you're like me, you might have dozens of ideas in the course of a day—but only a few result in a product.

Perhaps that is a good thing. After all, most of my ideas are less than brilliant. If all of them were published, that would be a lot of drivel to wade through! I am not a prolific writer, and one reason is that my inner critic recognizes the drivel before it ever takes tangible form. Too often, that critic goes on holiday—and then I need an editor.

We need editors and publishers. They wade through the manuscripts and select what they deem to be the best, the most appropriate, the highest quality material for their readers. They are opinionated, choosy, discarding what will not work, judging the worth of a writer's output in seemingly arbitrary and inscrutable ways.

Despite all the sorting of wheat from chaff that takes place prior to publication, only a few books succeed. In a September 25, 2005 article in *The New York Times Book Review*, Linda Rosenberg, associate publisher and director of paperbacks at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, estimated that at least half of all trade hardcover books are not reprinted. Other estimates are even

higher. I've often heard it said that seven of every ten new books never see a second printing. If Christian literature is powerful; if we've prayed about our decisions; if we have done our best to meet our readers needs; if we've been careful to execute our plans and stay within budget and schedule; if the works we offer have originality and style, communicate truth, and can change lives—why do so many titles die?

We can offer a hundred reasons. Maybe the editor did a shoddy job. The cover was unattractive. The timing was wrong. The distribution strategy was faulty. The editors might say, "The sales reps didn't work hard enough." They in turn might respond, "Editors do not care whether a book sells. If they like a book they assume it will minister to everyone, and that is just not true."

We can always conduct a post-mortem and look for someone to blame. In fact, good managers seek to learn from their mistakes, so analyzing our failures is critical if we want to learn and grow. There may be a single reason that accounts for the failure of a particular book, or multiple reasons—but identifying these is not enough.

Interestingly, the Bible includes two stories of second printings. Do you remember them?

The first occurs in Exodus 34:1, where "The Lord said to Moses, 'Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.'" We could say the first printing was unsuccessful

because Moses, the publisher, became disappointed with the target readers and failed to market and distribute his Author's work!

The second reprint is in Jeremiah 36. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, read the scroll with the Word of the Lord that Jeremiah published. He then proceeded to burn the entire first print run. God responded by telling Jeremiah "Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll," (v. 28) and he obeys. Moreover, the Bible tells us, "Many similar words were added" (v. 32). Here the original title was not a bestseller—far from it—but the example we have is that of the Author and publisher's commitment to making the message known.

If Christian literature is powerful and we believe in the titles we publish, how do we

face the statistics... the death upon death of book after book?

Like Moses, like Jeremiah, we have to go on. Whatever the reasons are that titles die, we are called to minister life through the literature we produce. What does that involve? Continued faithfulness to the charge God has given to us—the call to write, to edit, to publish, to proclaim Jesus Christ in our generation.

"For last year's words belong to last year's language/ And next year's words await another voice," wrote T.S. Eliot in "Little Gidding." We are called to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today," (Heb. 3:13), to obey God's call—and unleash the power of Christian literature to transform and change lives.

© 2004 [David C. Cook Global Mission](#). First printed in *InterLit*, December 2004.

**ChristianTrade Association International**

PO Box 62187 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2187 USA

TEL +1 719 432 8428 • FAX +1 719 325 7001 • [info@ChristianTrade.com](mailto:info@ChristianTrade.com) • [www.ChristianTrade.com](http://www.ChristianTrade.com)