



Want More Customers?

By David Mehlis

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I remember sitting on the sidewalk outside my house. There would be a group of seven or eight of us children—myself, my cousins, kids from the neighborhood—and we'd all be looking as far as we could down the street. The challenge was seeing who could identify passing cars first. It wasn't enough to name the make, you had to name the year and model too.

We could identify perhaps 40 vehicles at a glance. It was easy. There was no mistaking a DeSoto with a Nash. We knew immediately whether a car was a luxury sedan or a family vehicle.

Car manufacturers defined their audience well. But what happened when they did not do so? Ford's sporty two-seater Thunderbird was launched as a luxury car; later, it was transformed into a family car. Ford did not define its audience well, and the company gradually lost its share of the market. Competitors surged, and the American car industry declined.

In thinking about customer acquisition for Christian publishers, the same principle applies. To have effective lead generation, to gain customers—define your audience first. Some publishers resist the idea of defining the audience. "That's too narrow," they claim. "The church in my country desperately needs Christian books. I want to reach my nation for Jesus. If I don't publish what is needed, no one will." So they publish everything.

One publisher told me he aimed to publish a book a day. In that case, what is the difference between publishing and printing? Cars can be mass-produced; why not books? This publisher is perhaps looking at the large U.S. houses that publish hundreds of titles a year. What he may not realize is that, in many cases, fully 50 percent of each print run is simply written off as a loss from the start. The waste of 50 percent of your resources is possible in affluent societies, but not elsewhere. U.S. models may not work where you are. Moreover, as Christian publishers, we have a responsibility to be effective stewards of the money that God gives us to accomplish this ministry.

Publishers are not simply manufacturers. They are not just production coordinators; instead, they add value to the content they receive. The words we publish matter. Our responsibility, as publishers, is first of all to define what message we want to proclaim; and second, to know whom we want that message to reach.

If you want to acquire more customers, do not focus on the distributor. Distributors do not necessarily read the books they sell. A distributor is simply a channel for your books. Taras Boyko, of St. Paul Christian Bible Fellowship [www.CBFpublishing.com] in Kiev, Ukraine, is a publisher who has been effective in defining his audience. His experience as a distributor helped him to

more clearly focus on the readers God called him to reach.

Another example of someone who knows her audience is Anna Shirochenskaya, of Triad Publishing [www.triad.ru] in Moscow, Russia. Instead of using a short-term strategy of selling translation and production services, where the risks are assumed by the buyer of those services, and the message is immaterial, Triad survived and prospered in uncertain times by defining its niche. This proved to be the best strategy for the long-term.

Remember how Toyota beat General Motors in the U.S. market? It happened in

just a few short years. Nobody expected a Japanese company to challenge GM and succeed—but Toyota clearly defined its audience, and went after it. The company quickly gained a substantial share of the market—and changed history forever. The U.S. car manufacturing industry has never been the same since.

Do you want more customers? Do you want to change history—and, more importantly, change lives? Then look at the readers that God called you to serve, and what you are serving them.

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