

“Border-Crossing”: No small task for international publishers

Cindy Riggins, the owner of Riggins International Rights Services, provides global rights sales and management/consulting services for US Christian publishers. But she also hopes to see more international authors published in the West. MAI’s Dawn Herzog Jewell gleaned Cindy’s insights on how to make this happen.

Tell us about your interest in seeing more international titles in the West.

Because of my international relationships, I see that there are quality international authors with an important message who need to be heard beyond their own borders. Foreign publishers have licensed from American publishers for so many years, they’d like to see some reciprocal licensing. And it’s now more of a global economy. The Western publishing community needs to embrace that and be willing to import international books.

What are the challenges of getting these books published in the West?

This is a tough subject. I have tried to champion getting foreign language books published in English but it’s almost impossible. The reality is that even unknown American authors have difficulty getting published in today’s market, which is driven by name recognition as far as best sellers. Many US Christian publishers are only considering known authors or those with a lot of publicity connections to help promote their work. When you add the foreign author element, it adds another layer of complexity to the acquisition editor’s challenges.

So, how can international publishers effectively promote titles to the West?

Books winning regional or local awards help to attract attention. Publishers could first submit publications to their country’s publishers associations if they have an awards program. Or, they could look to more international programs. For example, the Christian Trade Association International is starting an awards program associated with Market Square Europe (www.ctaintl.com/2007%20Europe%20Christian%20Book%20of%20the%20Year.pdf) They also hope to offer a new award opportunity in their Asia event this fall.

What other steps can they take?

When I worked at Thomas Nelson, I took several international books to editors and immediately found it challenging. In a few cases, the publisher had put together a synopsis in English or an English translation of the manuscript. It was either a bad translation or poorly written synopsis and therefore appeared to be a bad work even though it wasn’t.

So, I suggest the publisher put together an author biography, including any international connections or ministry the author may have beyond his or her own country. For example, if a Korean author has taught in a US seminary, the bio should emphasize that he or she taught at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Next, the publisher should provide quality sample material. Have the synopsis and sample chapters professionally translated, as well as the author bio. US publishers aren’t set up with a pool of translators, so it’s critical that the international publisher be willing to spend the money

for a quality translation of sample material, and if needed, offer to provide a translator for the full manuscript at the US publisher's cost.

Even with these two important steps, the additional challenges remain. Depending on where international publishers would like to see their books published, they'd have to find out the US publisher's policy regarding unsolicited manuscripts. Many publishers here only accept manuscript submissions through an agent. The international publisher may want to pursue finding a US agent to assist them.

Despite the challenges, are there any success stories?

Strang has published some foreign authors as well as Abingdon Press and Baker Academic. I expect that the first two points I mentioned above were probably part of that.

There may be good news for the future. ECPA has a service called Christianmanuscripts.com. Right now it's only set up to help US authors submit their manuscripts to US publishers for a flat fee. However, ECPA and the Global Publishers Alliance are currently evaluating whether ECPA international members could submit their authors on that system.