

Do's and Don't's in Publishing

By Voicu Bojan 10/01/2007

There's something crazy about being in the book business today. The world moves ahead at a very fast pace. But reading entails slowing down, going against the tide. The wise man warns us, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body" (Eccl. 12:12).

In post-Christian Europe, publishing books with Christian content is a great risk and an act of courage. Trying to sell Christian titles to a general market may seem almost suicidal. But as a small, independent publisher, we have been doing this in Romania for 15 years. We don't regret anything, but we have made many mistakes. Here are 10 lessons we've learned.

1. Don't forget to define your framework and limits. Do create a mission statement. Knowing your audience is crucial. Create an identity.
2. Don't betray your readers. This creates long-term confusion. Do stick to your vision; be faithful to your audience. Within certain limits, try to meet their expectations. But sometimes surprise them!
3. Don't neglect to watch the trends of the book market. Do inform yourself and others via contact with media, local bookstores, the Internet, book fairs, and the market in general.
4. Don't stay comfortable. To me, Christian publishing is 30 percent mission and 70 percent business. Do stop selling mild Christian titles to lukewarm Christians! Break this ghetto culture and take the risks of aiming to touch the general market. "Fear not!" is an order, not a request.
5. Don't publish a boring title for the sake of immediate profit. This affects you for the long term. Do select only the right titles for your audience. Small decisions can have great consequences.
6. Don't succumb to market pressure to publish many books. Do aim for impact, not quantity. Better to do a few books, but make sure they are significant titles. Publish the books you really believe in.
7. Don't compromise quality when it comes to translations, photos, covers or design. Do work with professionals – translators, editors and designers. Create a unique, quality product you are proud of.
8. Don't depend on bestsellers. They can be dangerous. Like in tennis, you may score well or barely win a set, but then you allow yourself a moment of relaxation. Don't get caught off guard. Do make sure you keep enough cash in your purse for the gray days. They will surely come.
9. Don't jump to print thousands in the second print run, which is the most dangerous. Do gather from your clients all information about possible returns. Make sure you have a strong request for that title. Be cautious.
10. Don't forget to keep watch around you, mostly on your competition. Do know your position in the market. But try not to be influenced by what others are doing. Follow your vision and instincts, your own way.

Going back to Ecclesiastes, there's a time for everything and *for every book, its season*. Fear not, keep going, we have the perfect backup – God, the Creator of everything.

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