

Global Christian Publishing Symposium NOTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14

Introductory session

Overview of conference notebook and information

Introduction of participants – see descriptions in notebook.

Session 2: Regional/country reports on Christian publishing

Start with Focus on Africa

Matthew Elliott – Oasis – Africa Study Bible.

Bibles – context is that Africa has gone from 10 million to 700 million Christian in a century. The major need is discipleship. Exponential church growth.

The largest Bible poverty, conversations w Todd at Gordon Conwell Seminary, 150 million Bibles in Africa. 500-600 million are readers. In francophone Africa – DRC, an example - pastors – rip Bible in half, share OT/NT, then trade after a while.

What is Bible poverty – not having the Bible in your language is a changing reality in Africa, less than 5% of languages don't have Bible now. 22 million kids in Nigeria in bible classes in public schools. It is now about having the Bible in your hands in the language that you read.

My favorite questions – do your children speak to their grandparents in their mother tongue. In urban Africa, younger generation not using mother tongue. Changing language dynamics.

Are we solving Bible poverty. NO - 3 major reasons , market distortion and toxic charity. We spend majority of resources on a fraction of the problem. Spending heavily on small problems, not spending on the bigger problems.

Not a functional business model for long term effective distributions.

Take away – publishing has to be based locally

Gathuku – (reporting for **Yacouba Sanon**)

3 things –

Production – 3 major pub houses in French speaking Africa. They struggle to find self-sufficiency. Still dependent on outside aid – a big issue. What is a sustainable model.

Self-publishing – private church owned, small publication at an impressive rate. How do we think about having amateurs and freelancers as the ones leading the industry.

Quality and content – pace of production among professionals very slow, cannot sustain the industry. Few professional to serve in that.

Quality of printing – do not follow publishing processes. Then people assume that African content is poorly done, poorly written, poorly edited. Fewer well trained writers.

Training is needed – invest in writing, production and marketing because few people have learned the art of publishing within French speaking Africa.

Access to technology.

Distribution (someone else might talk about that). Lack of reliable distribution networks leads to low sales volume. Competition from western books. Production costs high, sales prices low, not a good business model, production quality wanes over time.

Summary – fundamental – to see as a continent that we are willing to learn and improve. All the ones doing the wrong thing, bring down the whole reputation. Low quality.

Tim Welch - Discipleship of the African church –

Pastors book set project. The goal is not to distribute Christian books to pastors. The goal is transformation in the local church. Great to give a bunch of books to pastors but do they read them. Have to answer this question. Take the project one step further. You will see the results, when the conferences are over, local speakers, training, I say to coordinators – your job starts when the conference is over. Share with me what you read, what did you do about it. That is the success of the project. A bunch of books sitting on a shelf is not a good thing.

Want to provide quality Christian books at an affordable price, but need to follow-up with how they are used – WhatsApp groups, feedback, tell me what happened. We introduced audio books – they are more proficient in audio books, not written, in French. Not just giving books, but transformation.

Discipleship – help you open the book and use it. Blessed is not the receiver but the one who opens the book and reads.

Q: what books get into the set? They ask pastors what books they need – topics that they need.

Muthoni - Ebooks – in Africa we call amazon racist. They do not pay to Africa. They only pay to US.

Lena Pira– ebooks – Africa platform. Africabooks.com

Challenges is the discrimination within Africa with global publishing platforms. Distribution beyond borders, the high cost of print publishing. Print book stock. Storage issues. Supply issues with importing paper. Challenges with transparency with distribution channels – as far as giving out royalties and tracking them.

To solve this – level the playing field for African writers, increase access. African books. The ebook saturation is small within Africa. Only 1%. 600-700 million people online. Covid helped Africa with getting online. In Uganda usage went up – more internet and mobile and access. Christianity is rising in Africa. 39% of Christian population is in Africa. From my perspective – lots of new first time Christian African authors, literacy rates going up. opportunity for us.

Have to do education about what is an eBook and how to format for eBook. When we are telling people the benefits, global distribution and further reach. Lower cost to pub houses and authors who are self-publishing. The content is more accessible – any time 24/7. Authors a new revenue source.

Appreciating the fact – africanbooks.com – can pay to someone in different countries – such a blessing.

Muthania Omukhango – CLC Kenya

For us the best gift that happened Publish for All – when we received the POD was when when $\frac{3}{4}$ of the bookshops in Kenya closed because of taxes and customs. Couldn't afford to import books. POD – make sure that local voices are raised, discover new publishers. When POD came in, CLC changed. Every year – 10 years – everything is based on this one gift. We didn't know what it was. Now our publishing house is well respected. Since we are using good quality. In anglophone Africa – 19 countries, get authors together in one platform. One of the most successful things we have done in Kenya. African books clubs – children and teenagers – catch them before they graduate from school.

2015 the POD. Publish for All. God helped us keep going. Otherwise we would have closed due to costs – reinvent the ministry.

###

Tim Kelly – Publish4All

POD – overview for other African countries.

One of the issues that we have is the logistics area. Working with a lot of missionaries who need access to books. For example in Niger, Southern Baptist missionary. Needed books for discipleship training, working w SB – they have a certain # of titles. When he got his

POD, it changed his ministry. He retired from SB and started a publishing house in Niger. He needed contextualization. The challenge was that it wasn't being done in country.

Niger is 92% Muslim so they didn't think they needed Christian books. But the small quantities help with POD.

In Kenya, average order is 20-30 books, over a year 50k books. It fulfills the in-between. A pub house, if they have a print center. Control content, development of small authors. Start with 30-50 books, not the logistics of storage.

The challenge of storage – climate control – paperback books wilt in local storage.

POD – access to thousands of books, not just the few titles that are shipped.

Game changers that can be provided – francophone – no printers available. Can print in country and control it.

Not for everyone, but it has changed a lot of ministries.

Muthoni - Example – for a large POD order– quality is better – can pay a little more.

Used to have 5 containers. They start to mold when it rains. Now we have access to so many books, they sit on our computer – POD system – 5 days, provide 200 copies.

###

Greg Burgess

Several roles but speaking about graphic novel publishing in Africa –

Children's books, graphic novels and comics. Africa is young, youth population 2/3 are 25 years and younger (or 30 and younger). That demographic will continue into 2050. As a publisher. In Christian world, lots of efforts for theological education and discipleship. Not as much for young people and children.

Another challenge is the continued development of reading culture. It starts with children. Learning to read in school is a painful experience. Learning to read with parents/grands is pleasurable.

UNESCO report – pub in Africa – this past month – Senegal – children's lit is the driving force behind publishing, not only most widely consumed worldwide but represent major sector of industry. Ignoring this would be to ignore an essential part. Paying attention to children's lit will impact the whole book ecosystem. Most people come to Christ in their youth.

Need culturally familiar stories and images. Need to be developing African authors and artists to have culturally familiar stories. Artists and authors for the churches sake – because of the global shift to the south in the church.

Graphic novels one of the most read forms of literature. In sheer numbers. In French speaking Africa. The history of comics and graphic novels comes from colonization first but now has grown in local context, keeps growing.

Graphic novels incredibly relevant for publishing in francophone Africa.

Start with children. 10-15 years from now, we won't have some of the problems we are discussing right now. It's the strategy Nestle used in China and Japan introduced taste of chocolate for children to build future market.

###

Gathuka Kibunga– Africa Speaks

Ties us all together.

1 – we have been having fragmented data, professional, book sales, book stores. Langham has a list, MIT data, Christian author list.

We are investing in how to consolidate data and make that database usable. That will help us make good decisions about the content.

2 - How do we transition the content from nonprofit to trade publishing. Until we cross that bridge we will keep struggling. That will take a very challenging mindset.

90% of the publishing on the continent run on a nonprofit model. Many dynamics. How to recruit. Strategies, content decisions.

UNESNCO report (Greg quoted) cited that the most profitable publishing for the continent is educational publishing \$18 billion. In years past (40-50 yrs ago) – Christian publishers were the educational publishers from missionary past. We have given that over to secular educational publishers.

We are talking about sub-Saharan Africa.

North Africa a different story

Islamic north – intimidating. Cairo has the largest book fair.

Islamic north publishing is being funded by the govt. How do we help mobilize the church to mobilize funding?

Last year – Africa Speaks did a consultation – industry challenges.

It is traditional publishing that ignites an industry.

Self publishing doesn't ignite an industry. Now we have fewer traditional publishers.

We need targeted funding for traditional publishers who are on the continent. How do we support those traditional publishers to ignite publishing .

3 - Accessibility to tech. Africa has made the leap. We have jumped. In that phase – how can we make the most of what is in other regions in African context.

The publisher does not have the infrastructure. How do we get a number of service providers to find it exciting to be in Africa. And make use of the big numbers of African Christians.

In Africa we work in silos.

Africa Shas brought us together. Sometimes we have to push for new policies, push government. It brings us together to speak together and advocate. There are some different visions God has given each of us, but we are united through Africa Speaks.

###

Mark Carpenter – Brazil

Focusing on Brazil. What happens in Brazil is similar to other countries – book publishing. Recent study syndicate of publishers in Rio saying that overall reading rate has declined over 10 years. Beginning to see that in different scenarios around the world. Social media, internet, influencers, TV, etc. more and more difficult to compete for reading time in the 24 hours. Time and attention of readers. Dozens of Christian publishers. A number at the top of Nielsen global book data. Success of local authors. Top selling books used to be US author such as Philip Yancey, or Gary Chapman. No longer the case. Now most publishers are having more success with local authors.

We sense a new openness on the part of secular booksellers toward Christian books. They realize there is a huge and growing audience. We have partnerships with bookstore chain – largest in Brazil, and other smaller chains and independent booksellers.

Young adult fiction written by Brazilian women. Women from 22-35, who are doing well . 200k copies in 2 years for top selling book in Brazil.

Another phenomenon in the year 2023 and 2024, the top selling book in Brazil was a Christian devotional book written by a pastor in a small town but he was very active on social media. Over 5 million copies sold.

The book selling community sees that, secular book chains.

Challenges – We underestimate AI. We will talk more later. Specifically artificial generative intelligence, may substitute what we do – such as in Bible translation. That might affect the demand for our books, as readers go directly to ChatGPT for information on a topic rather than buying a book.

One of the challenges for us as a trade book publishing house. Polarization in the church – theological and political lines. It is a big issue in Brazil, as well as in the US. It is difficult for a trade pub house, to find titles that break through lines of divisions. They are growing.

Book publishing is a cash poor business.

###

Angela Brandle - Synergie –

A lot of what has been said about Africa, I don't want to repeat.

Our source, when not printing in Africa, is European publishers. They focus on what will sell in Europe. In the 6 French speaking regions in Europe, French Christian population is less than 2%,

Some publishers are rewriting content, so it is contextually appropriate.

European publishers, need to contextualize, and know that there will be a market.

Publishers are developing a missionary arm – to expand their vision.

Christian publications in Quebec, now interested in printing in other countries. Now more interest in forming partnerships. Some African leadership coming into French publishing houses.

Christianbook.com has developed a missionary arm. They want to supply books to places that are less resourced.

Challenges – have been mentioned. Shipping. France used to want to promote French language and culture around the world so they had a preferential book post at cheap rates. The govt has done away with that. Cost is 5x more now. Sending by sea, customs challenges.

POD is a wonderful gift. As cheap shipping went away.

Constantly facing challenges on a worldwide scale.

They will want printed, even though eBooks are useful but not all places have internet.

Funding for distributors.

Remote areas – getting Bibles into less well off churches – places where people don't have bank accounts.

Trying to develop a model – assist them without creating dependency. Synergie has a board member from Benin- make sure we don't create a problem.

Have to make difficult decisions – about how to sustain, less reliance on shipping from outside.

How can publishing be sustainable. Since Jesus has not come back yet.

###

Josh John -

State of Christian pub in UAE –

Current –unique Christian environment. Large and diverse expat population and UAE promotes tolerance, but there are strict regulations around publishing religious materials.

Mainly in English, Tagalog and Indian languages.

Still quite limited, either printed or online.

State relations – publishing has to be careful to stay within local law and restrictions.

The only place to buy – 3 small stores.

Affects laborers who live there. Christian books are not available in stores.

A few through distributed through church and online.

Arabic, English, Hindu, other languages.

Opportunities – online platforms, ebooks,

More interested in digital devotional, Bible studies and Christian apps.

Contextual content – how Christian work, live in multicultural context- unique setting.

Opportunities –

Train and support local Christian writers – those who understand this region.

Can bring a whole new generation of content.

Real limitations – space for creativity and opportunity. So much we can still do.

Contextualize – language and manner that they receive information.

###

Keila Ochoa Harris

Latin America –

- US based pub houses – divisions from major pub houses.
- Denominational
- Independent or specialized pub houses.

What is being published – Bibles, academic – seminaries, Christian living, children, teen and fiction (those 3 are at the bottom)

Women are the main customers – when they go to a store, they buy – not just for themselves, for their family.

Who reads the books – mostly the answer is no – people don't read. They read 3-5 books per year. Chile Argentina, Mexico (even lower in countries like Bolivia).

Everyone is online – but young people are reading in last few years – reading graphic novels.

Quality of books are better, covers, writers, editors, the books are more competitive. Giving voice to Latin American authors.

Challenge – sustainability – need \$ from outside, printing costs. Distribution –

Explore audio books, POD, ebooks, but don't know how to do it. Amazon is only in Mexico – how do others get royalties.

Problems – piracy – pdf – nobody mentions who sends the pdf.

Generation gap – older say it cannot be done, newcomers – we can do it. But some have questionable ethics. We can do it but we don't want to pay.

Mission vision for orgs to stay the same, but we can't get stuck on this is how we always do it.

###

Colin Macpherson– Langham –

Global view –

Bible poverty –

We have publishing poverty around the world. Many countries don't have a publisher.

We will see the world's languages get Bibles. To get a Bible. Then they need a publisher.

We talk about church planting. We need to publisher plant around the world.

Very patchy coverage

3 problems – Christian publishing – money – difficult to make money, especially in minority languages areas.

Need working capital, subsidy, even though I hate the word

Major concern – not just majority financially dependent. Majority world publishes what they get paid to do. That can skew their editorial decision making. Vulnerable to western ministries, western viewpoints, and western money.

Challenge – confidence - to be the authentic local voice.

Opportunities – majority world pub can assume the mantle for being the voice.

You can serve us but you can't tell us what to do. An independent prophetic ministry. A partnership, not a service.

###

Luke Lewis – Langham Academic

Just came from SE Asia – Philippines, not represented here.

SE Asia – cluster of theological education.

Not a huge amount of local authorship for seminaries, in terms of context and contextualizing. We are emphasizing that. Projects and books that start in the original language, published in local language, and then give those scholars a platform in other languages.

Indonesian – Build confidence, a group of PhD scholars, on the topic, and they feel vulnerable – first evangelical textbook from a local perspective.

English is default language for theological education. So why write in Tagalog. It goes deeper for the people. How can they articulate themselves better in local language.

Investment in smaller languages, there is a need – how the church self-theologizes – can be much deeper. SE Asia – a lot of good writing and scholarship.

###

Jeremy Weber –

Periodical and journalism side of the spectrum.

Middle East – not a periodical ecosystem, but robust book and social media.

More vertical integration. Not silos.

The opportunity we have to solve our common problems – describe ability – info saturated and time starved. How do we help them find knowledge and take it in social and google.

Takes a lot of being willing to work together.

Opportunity multi-lingual publishing.

Chinese production – great success because the person knew the Chinese language publishers. Find a publisher with a relevant title back list and match it to the news cycle.

Our best performing Chinese content had started with a book title. Struck by potential books, periodicals, influencers, YouTube theologians. They need something to riff off.

Portuguese version of an article – on a YouTube presentation.

Remix for their multimedia audience.

Choosing topics – opportunity –

Our Venn diagrams are so large -

###

Kevin Martin– WORLD magazine –

Challenges and the info – helpful

American audience, not all in America, expats as well.

Challenges are different.

We are specifically news.

We have been talking a lot lately about how to bring biblically oriented news to international audiences.

We have talked about Spanish language news, going into Latin America and Europe.

In the US –

Mark brought up polarization. It is easy if you are willing to find a polarized audience you can make money by giving them what they want. Individuals can make money that way.

It may not be the truth or the whole truth. There is sustainability in that.

The challenge for a new org that is trying to be biblically oriented and objective about what is going on in the world and America.

Resist the temptation to pursue a polarized audience. It is easier to grow and make money.

That is the challenge in America.

As we pursue trying to give object to other part so the world

Training class for journalists – particular news – Africa and Uganda. In the past.

2 courses in China, underground journalist.

Europe – have brought some African and Asian to European training.

Attempt to deliver news to other regions of the world .

All of that is funded by American donors.

I don't know what the future of that is.

We are finding American who are willing to fund that – it is small and slow.

Think about how news journalism can come together and collaborate and be amplified.

###

Samuel Ebersole –

Global news alliance –

We want to the AP or Reuters of what is happening in the global church.

We only current offer content in English and Spanish. Spanish is limited.

We have media affiliates in other areas that distribute our content.

Develop instructional resources and training to develop an army of citizen journalists, smart phone journalists.

Tell stories of what god is doing in their church, area,

1-1/2 – 3 min video pieces.

Local reporters, they can distribute them through media affiliates.

Youtube channel and online platform where the training is available. 25-30 videos.

Interviews with CHRISTIAN journalists. – ethics, tutorials,

Other challenges, resources, language and contextual barriers, since we are primarily working in English.

Al increasing skepticism and cynicism – tellers of God's stories, not just journalists.

The word journalist is not always welcome anymore.

###

Peter Cerra - Tyndale –

3 areas – **Spanish** – we are in a good situation, immense growth in Spanish, investing that. NTV. We work on partnerships. We are distributing with other publishers – helps them and us.

Bibles are leading the charge.

Books are a hit or a miss.

Kids has been a growth area in the last few years.

Export business – sales of English product. Has increased. Biggest struggle is financial – to make the export work. Now looking at local print editions, they can print locally and sell it at local prices. Have done with this a publisher in Africa, 60 books so far.

Licensing – 70+ languages. Bibles, NLT in other languages. Getting the bible into more hands into other languages.

Continually working with more partnerships

Strategic growth – work better in partnership with Africa and India.

###

Jeremy Taylor – Tyndale –

Balance in a number of areas – between business principles and ministry commitment.

We are always looking to do better in this.

How do you prioritize international growth, as a western company

While protecting the sustainability of local partners around the world.

We wrestle with that.

How do you protect the value of books internationally.

When a lot of ministries have a history of giving away books and Bibles, which diminishes the value of books.

And yet there are areas where people don't have the \$ to buy books.

Recognize the challenges in those contexts.

In American publishing – hard to get a contract if you aren't already famous. We won't look at an author if they don't have 100k followers in IG.

What that means is that people with excellent content and don't have a big following struggle to get published.

A lot of garbage in self-publishers, with a lot of good content that people will never be exposed to.

These American issues are also relevant to global publishing.

We are looking for creative and ingenious partnerships globally. We want to be careful not to drive locals out of business.

Pin – Find a balance – serving and finances – ministry and sustainability. Donor fatigue. Find creative ways to do these things.

###

Kim Pettit

Changes in Christian publishing – in US – editorial jobs have changed.

Work with educational publishing now. Competition from churches that publish their own materials, and also homeschool resources.

Oral Roberts University – instructional design – AI (more in a later session)

I want to see people using the resources that are provided around the world.

###

Heather Pubols (MAI) (from Greg Burgess)

Collaboration. Books and publications don't stand along – they are part of a media ecosystem. Need to work across platforms, not just books, magazines, as separate.

Become publishers of content, not just a type of content.

Asked question – how are we viewing collaboration? There are different people reflected here. Is there a spirit of collaboration, in the context of us as Christians in publishing. Is the body of Christ functioning as a collaborative way – or are we stuck in ruts.

Collaboration is an essential part of practicing the Christian faith – trinity – three in one – the body of Christ.

Have we considered more about the publishers of ideas rather than a single product.

Power differentials – how to view collaborations with partners who are different size, power. Are we serving the development of publishing among local publishers, or only self-serving.

US publishers are expanding internationally. This risks the local publishing and the sterilization of publishing which loses local voice and context.

Indigenous publishing – do publishers care about ensuring that indigenous cultures have access to relevant materials. Will AI suffocate local voices.

Challenge to the group – what if a practical outcome of the symposium is to start writing about the importance of publishing, the importance of reading Christian content – articles, through news agencies -

Lamar Keener – Evangelical Press Association

We are a membership organization – magazines, newspaper, digital, content-rich digital platforms. Some print only, but rise of digital.

Drop in frequency for print. From monthly to quarterly to a few times a year. If you are just print, you are missing out on a lot. Now have to have digital, audio, video, social media. The most successful are embracing all the platforms.

Trend for remote staff – staff are spread all around.

Challenges – tighter budgets for print. Technology moves so fast, changes are hard to incorporate and keep up.

Using AI ethically is a challenge we are facing. We want to do it right, but others are using AI unethically with our content.

Small shops are challenged on how to incorporate technology. One person “shop” – or just a couple of people.

###

Sharon Mumper – Magazine Training International

Magazines are my heart – everywhere in the world 60-70 countries – onsite conferences. More than 100 countries for online

Goal – strengthen the Christian publishing industry. People who are actually publishing – training in editing, design, and business/ management and writing. 37 years – onsite in 3 dozen countries (some repeatedly), last 11 years – online training – open to anyone who wants to take advantage of it. Observation is that Christian magazines are proliferating throughout the world. People in America think that there are no more magazines. We work with about 1000 magazines around the world. Started by people with a vision and passion and little experience in publishing or business. Even when finances are tough they do what they have to do to keep going. Many are volunteers. They might pause for a while, then start again.

Writers are usually not paid. Most of the writers are locals, in their own language. Some publications are supported by denominations or churches. Most charge something for their publications. Distribution is a problem. Postal service might be unreliable. Fewer bookshops so single copy sales are usually through churches. A lot of churches are publishing a magazine or some kind of periodical. Concerns of the church and their local area.

Opportunities – a lot of passion, desire to communicate. They start with no money, they keep going. Struggling but keep on.

May God give us a starting point – partnerships, collaborations, as the body of Christ. We are not sufficient by ourselves, have to give and receive. Humility of receiving.

Session3: Publishing challenges/overcoming barriers

Kim – summary of problems that were submitted. Then talk about overcoming barriers.

Pp 52-53 of the notebook. AI summarized, most frequently mentioned are first, in order.

14 different topics.

Page 54-55 – Solutions.

NOTE – Kim will give her summary document to Jennifer to upload to the shared site.

Attach problems to solutions, to get to actionable steps.

Finance

Distribution

Training/equipping

(poor infrastructure is part of distribution)

Skipped opposition to Christianity.

###

The first problem – financial constraints –

Evangelical publishing is not sustainable without donations.

Asked ChatGPT.

Start by acknowledging that the problem -

- Market side – digital platforms, church-based, community-based reading events. Tiered pricing and sliding scales – at different price points in different contexts.
- Product side – make books feel essential and worth paying for. Focus on contextualization. Multi-platform. Training journalists/authors – to do stories in short form (book TikTok). Felt need categories. Durable and attractive design.
- Funding side – hybrid revenue models, cross-subsidize from different lines, co-publishing and rights partnerships, POD and short runs. Subscription or membership models. Yearly kingdom reader at a discount. Local sponsorship.

Seeing publishing as not just selling books – but as impact of the content on the lives. We all have that in our thinking.

5 years

Stabilizing

Product development

Channels

Scaling

Sustainable growth and export.

Key – content localizations, relationship capital.

Even with all these things, sometimes the market is too small. Other lines of business to sustain. Speaker or Training model (booking). Value add resource for attendees.

At Littworld – we aren't interested in having books written by AI – relationships with the author – they have a message for the church (Terumi Echols, IVP).

Speaker model can work in some cultures – the founder, speaker/author becomes the main product, other voices are added to the model.

Langham partnership – pairs authors and speakers –

Church resource hub approach

Credentials, curriculum

Various product lines – Lifeway, Scripture Union

ODB – primarily devotionals, books are secondary

Tyndale – uses book profits to fund mission projects.

Jeremy Taylor – Foundation receives revenue from sale of books – grantmaking – 6 primary areas.

###

Pivot model – event model or product model

AI – ask for negatives and risks. ChatGPT –

###

Peter – AI can generate ideas.

Solutions part – highlighted some words on pp 52-53.

Give examples of how you have dealt with a certain situation.

Sustainability – Greg – publishing is often driven by the one book which will make up the shortfall of others. At one point we invested in bible software – when it was still diskettes. Being at the front end of innovation and pick a motor of innovation as a priority. The publishing of Bible software at Cle that gave us financial independence, and could move forward.

Find what the one thing – the front end of innovation, first one in the market. There was also a risk.

Lena – self-publishing, we capitalized on that, that it was big. Leap publishers, working with self-publishing to make them more professional. Then we can take on new authors. We are in transition. God is doing it. It has been working for us. That has carried the online website.

Muthoni – sometimes projects you know won't make money. But need one project that is fully commercial. Our POD is fully commercial – same pricing as secular printer. That helps us have funds to keep the ministry open. POD is an income generating activity. If other things failed, we can still remain in ministry since it makes 45% profit.

Tim Welch – conference, while we are at the event, we put in seed money for the next event. Cash flow can be hard, expenses up front, and income later.

Peter – the old missionary mentality – is that Christian books should be free. Still training people that books have value, to change the paradigm.

Luke – on the research PhD publishing side. For theological seminaries to have research from their own region on their shelves. A lot of doctoral thesis publishers, expensive publishing. When we started publishing doctoral lines, a lot of seminaries wanted to have the doctoral work on the shelves. Then digital – has become more successful. We do about 15-18 a year – cover themselves as far as funding. We were surprised about the amount. 600 copies of a doctoral work. Key libraries. We have done about 170 doctoral, have distributed over 100,000 of them. Being picked up for textbook. If it can keep going, break even is sustainable, but not forever. Print and digital.

Colin- move away from the word sustainability, but durability – surviving. Find a scale that is appropriate. 2 books a year, hobby level, voluntary. One in Serbia, tried all the different types – scale is important, pricing structures. They sell other services. Sell editorial services to other nonprofits.

Peter – might have a full-time job and they do this as an extra job.

Colin – dogged determination is the critical factors.

Kim – sometimes sustainability is by accident. Picked a niche that wasn't served by someone else. Govt picked the book for use in schools.

Jeremy Taylor – sustainability means different things in different contexts – be precise about the goal. Each ministry has to define that for themselves. Sometimes there is a fundraising component.

Peter – the one book that takes you to another level – can be just a God thing.

Gathuku – sustainability might be the elephant for us. Think backwards. What are the bridges? Largest publishers in Malawi and Ghana. Publishers that received some intense long-term training – Tanzania – specialized in hymnbooks and prayerbooks that have a high demand in church. Question – is it possible to be intentional in these things – where there is demand? If I can't think about scaling for what I am doing – how to be a bigger publisher. That limitation – hoping they will have organic growth. Without an injection of some amount of investment, not possible for certain scaling. How do we help to expand the imagination of the local publisher that what they are doing in their own territory could be going beyond their own country/region. Identify those areas – and work toward those intentionally. Are they all accidental or can they

Kim – Legos initially refused to do movies – now they are doing movies. They saw the success that a 10-year-old boy was having on YouTube with their toys. They lacked the vision that they could do that. Maybe people are using your products in ways that you don't know.

Peter – expand outside the circle of what is working with you. With Social media – we see people using products and content in ways that we didn't think. Be aware, and get on board with that. That's the dilemma. Training – a lot of passion, but don't have a 5-year goal. They are thinking of that as a

Greg – Unesco – Africa report – surveyed about training programs – publishing. A lot of places did not have that. For this group here – having that in mind, and having the convictions that we do concerning the global church – not just MTI, MAI, Langham, etc. More thinking on training.

Lena – tracking analytics, 2-1/2 years on the platform. Haven't put money into advertising platform. 68% of our visitors are organic. 30% sharing. There is a higher demand than we think. The follow-through is low. Still concept that ebooks should be free. "Just share the PDF on WhatsApp". Self-publishing – is the quality matching the expectations. It isn't low demand but the offering.

Peter – being surprised by the demand, then changes the question. How do you align with demand.

Lena – movie industry is looking for new stories – that haven't been told. How do we package them and get them in front of the right people.

Peter – with the online platform, they can increase demand.

Lena - Could add Christian periodicals – to the platform. Just can program it in.

Muthuna – in addition to training, exposure to new ideas – CLC US, Tyndale, marketing to Kenyan diaspora – organizations to link with. National program – Kenyans want to support their fellow Kenyans from home – 10 – 20 books – share with the diaspora. Through an exposure trip. Another market. The price seems inexpensive in the US. On one zoom call. Exposure. Getting to know leaders in the industry – expert advice. People from one place – exchange program – learn and carry home. Exposure for this trip has been wonderful.

Greg – Diaspora church – in Europe – a big thing. Going to churches in France with African diaspora.

Joseph Benjamin – Gujarati Christian. The diaspora is a big part of the market.

Luke – eventually becomes an audience of its own. South Asia – in UK – depends on generation. UK, west African community – people wanting to read from the region. South Asian Bible – they thought it would be a good push in the UK, came back flat. West African community in UK, mostly self-publishing.

Mark – demand – have to start with the needs of the readers. Where the demand is. Once in a while, if you think it needs to be out there. Investment in design, art, and production value. A book that might get overlooked can become a thing. Old classics, invest in design, they come back. Engage influencers who will come on board and market it. Even if a book can be low demand, you can boot it.

Kelly – evangelical poetry, small market, author arranged for a musical adaptation of a play, and sold the book. Presented in a way the audience could resonate with the message.

Gathuka- Timazi magazine –

High school magazine (2007), initially to give away. Then after a year, too expensive. When we offered it for a small price, demand went up by 40%, there was interest. MTI training – how to get money – subscription model through the schools. The distribution and subscription is made by the school. That gave us leverage so we would know how many to print. That was a good break. Then advertising. Then added an event – next to the magazine. A book reading program, the students would learn about it through the magazine, then an

event once a year. Then started doing training in the school. Building the different contact points, with students and teachers. Kept building different programs. Now Bible reading program. Charge for some training, but not all (depending on audience).

Jeremy Weber – CT – investment in visuals – for global market – that was really important. Testing out different product. Advent and Christian devotional. Emphasized the visuals. Tested out different languages. Outperformed what we expected. Some were church model of distribution, some influencer model. In Indonesia – one the people on Instagram – had a theology degree – fan of CT – she wanted to market our things. Prayers for the pandemic. Distinct enough and accessible enough. Invest in your visuals. Influencers – they are your best bet now. Can you trust the influencer? Shocking who is out there who you don't know about.

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Challenge – low demand from customers for content – not just books. Lack of awareness.

Examples – to increase demand/awareness

Session: The future of Christian publishing

Mark moderating

One of the questions – about the future – as you look to the future, what are the challenges and opportunities that your organization will face in accomplishing your mission in the next 5 years.

5 challenges and 5 opportunities – that floated to the top, and were common to many of the answers and comments.

Challenges

Number 1 thing that came up was related to AI. (it is also the top of the opportunity list). Kim shared a positive outcome of AI generated question. But it also raises challenges as content creators.

Example – Lamar – Cover of a book, with the title of one of her books, and the subtitle was “a look at Karen Swallow Prior’s views on” – and the book was mostly just her book.

Kiela – a list of 10 books that they said I had written – copy pasted from ChatGPT. The books did not exist. Very young staff don’t know that

Muthoni – and author put bibliography at end of book – 4 books in the bibliography. Articles I’ve written over the years – short articles. Author cited them as books.

Kim – Errors in bibliographies.

Samuel – so-so writers should be worried about your employability.

Jeremy Taylor - Ethical issues – about artificial generative intelligence. IT is so new and developing rapidly. The issues haven’t been litigated yet. Who owns the content?

Peter - At Littworld, a panel discussion – pub houses are saying that they are not going to use generative AI. Litigation problem. Legal ramifications.

Policies?

EPA – a year ago – rewrote ethics policy with AI in mind. A guide for member publications to go by.

If we were having this meeting 30 years ago – it would have been ‘What are the challenges and opportunities of the internet.’”

Greg – visual arts – litigation started almost immediately – their styles. Positive – conceptualize with an artist.

Mark - author submits an academic book. Is an index a good use of AI. It is a creative process - it is subjective.

Luke - subjective. Index - just technical. But it is a deep-thinking process.

Mark - Should AI write a preface? It can be a starting point.

Matthew - AI is version zero of translation - specialized Bible software. But then you edit it.

Jeremy Taylor - early AI was Wycliffe - Bible translators.

Jeremy Weber - with language - it only gets you so far. You can't make foolish mistakes. We had a first pass with AI on language, then a professional translator look at it. The only way it was created is that a bunch of people had their copyright violated.

Matthew - first - what it is - every person made In God's image. Apple did a test, not human, not creative, pattern matching. The harder the questions got, the dumber AI got. What it is saying, it isn't thinking, it is pattern matching. As Christian content - a tool created by humans. We have creativity. A tool not intelligent.

Kim -

Alxploria.com all the categories - of which type of AI tools can help with which categories.

Samuel - some of what we do doesn't require creativity.

Luke - subjective - what is objective and creative. What do we do in 4 years? What does it mean to be built off other people's work, we can't see what made it. On the academic side. The legal side, the moral right doesn't change, is being destroyed. When people are being disassociated with their work. We already struggle with poor citation and poor referencing. It starts with the little things we can do. Established trust in an author. Read a well-established author. That will break down. How much integrity can you have. One example - asked an author - pick a 2000-word section from a chapter. He sent an excerpt. It was too long. AI made it completely different.

Tim Welch - training editors to spot it -

Mark - the better the tools become the more of an issue it will become. It will become more of a moral and ethical issue. Level of trust between publishing house and readers.

Greg - this is already an issue in translation.

Mark - a primary issue that will affect us as an industry. Especially as less-ethically motivated organizations will come along.

Greg - teachers use tools to try to ID whether or not. But the tools are faulty.

Luke – check out the Wiley book page on policies, guidelines on AI. Transparency between the author and the publisher.

Jeremy Weber – SIL had a bible translation and AI conference. This is a good topic for a future conference. Missio-Nexus had a track, but didn't have older presenters. There are many evangelical Christians in these companies. Need to have moderators who are more experienced and know how to ask the questions correctly. Useful – AI images for articles you couldn't use otherwise. But have an explanation.

OPPORTUNITIES – also AI – see the notebook.

Do more training, current issue of CT is useful.

Many productive ways to use it for workflow.

#2 top challenge – fundraising

Seems to be becoming more difficult in some scenarios.

Brazil – Mark – when he started, he was supported as a missionary. It took 18 years to be transformed to fully independent.

Kim – depends on where you are. Rate of growth in the church, Brazil is growing. Europe, US, declining church and aging donors.

Greg – we want to encourage long-term growth. 18 years in a favorable market (Brazil) – how much are we able to persevere.

Matthew – expectations of donors have changed. Expectations of book delivery has changed. Donor market needs to understand the access to books.

#3 Top challenge – audience behavior, readership

Competing for their time – how to reach them and get them engaged.

How do you change/shift/adapt for further shifts in audience behavior.

Lamar – periodicals, - social media and digital – the ones doing the best.

Kiela – wrong to say new generations are reading less. Now there is more access to books, in schools. Latin America – children are reading more – still competition from media. They are picky readers, want quality books. Willing to read good books. That is a shift. Older generations – there were not books in the library, just an encyclopedia. What kind of content for picky readers – that want it to be a good book. That's where graphic novels are making an impact. The art is beautiful – so they want to read it.

Mark – compete by making the books more attractive.

Muthoni – We were sending our books to parents in churches. Now we send books to children, let the parents pay. spent so much time convincing parents. Now we market through children's events. Sold by children. A line of books – bring one other child – they each bring another child. The kids are pushing their parents to get the books. Last year, our top subscription model – revolving library – in 2024 – Eternity by Randy Alcorn, a comic. We got that book in 2009. Back list. Then started the program, and now people wanted to read it. Good graphics, good quality printing. Books with no illustrations – kids are not interested. Too plain. They want quality graphics. The media, images, so we invest in books that they appreciate. Selling to the children, they drag their parent and get it paid.

Lena – encouraging them to write in genres that are selling. Write fiction and put the truth in. A teacher using parables and teaching poetry. No Bible mention at all, but it fits into the UK curriculum. The secular world does this as well. Writers are writing books that people aren't buying. Encourage them to follow what is more popular.

Mrak Carpenter – schools prohibiting cell phones, France, Brazil, that can help get people unaddicted. That helps us as publishers.

Jeremy Weber – social media channels – do what the other posters are doing . Take snippets of our content and post it in attractive ways. Find people who are posting content in different ways and do that.

Indigitis – organization – bilingual foreign students. Project to adapt core to new audiences. Identify students who can do this adaptation.

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