



Exporting Academic and Scholarly Books

**A Guide for Canadian English-Language
Publishers (2nd edition)**



**Livres
Canada
Books**

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Customers in the Export Market

Academic Libraries

Research university libraries, all of which collect in the areas their institution focuses on, form the most reliable export market for scholarly books.⁸ Several US and UK university libraries regularly buy books from Canadian university presses.

The key buyers in the academic library market are not the libraries themselves but the aggregators who serve them. However, with changing business conditions plus acquisitions and mergers, the number of academic book wholesalers keeps diminishing. A recent casualty is one of the UK's largest wholesalers, Bertram Trading, along with its subsidiaries Education Umbrella and Dawson Books. According to the administrators, "Book wholesalers have suffered from falling demand in recent years due to changes in the distribution model for literature and the rising popularity of ebooks. These factors, combined with the COVID-19-related closure of many public libraries and educational facilities, meant these businesses could no longer operate viably."⁹

The largest remaining wholesalers are GOBI Library Solutions from EBSCO (formerly YBP Library Services — originally called Yankee Book Peddler) and ProQuest (which bought Coutts Information Services — originally called John Coutts Library Services — from Ingram). In the UK, Askews bills itself as "the UK's leading library supply specialist" (its parent company, Gardners, a trade wholesaler, purchased Holts in 2008 and combined it with Askews).

8 See the member lists at these websites: Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER), Research Libraries UK, Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), University Libraries of Australia and New Zealand (ULANZ), and Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA).

9 Neill Denny, "Bertrams Goes Bankrupt," *Publishers Weekly*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/international-book-news/article/83647-bertram-goes-bankrupt.html>.

Marketing

Reaching consumers in the export market includes the usual suspects of advertising, digital marketing, and social media.

Paying for advertising in a scholarly journal, however relevant to the subject of the book, is second best to a glowing book review, but no one can guarantee that. For books with a wider audience, the following UK and US publications should be considered:

- [The Times Literary Supplement](#)
- [Times Higher Education](#)
- [The London Review of Books](#)
- [The New York Review of Books](#)
- [Harper's Magazine](#)
- [New Republic](#)
- [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)

The distribution or sales agent contract often contains a clause about cost-sharing for advertising. As always, clear communication and expectations will make for a better marketing plan with shared goals. Sometimes their plan includes multi-title, multi-publisher advertisements. Providing your reps with the same book information (metadata, cover, description, bio, link) you would give your Canadian sales reps is also good practice.

Social media offers opportunities to build relationships with scholars in various fields. The most effective social media campaign works best by building on the author's networks. Ideally, the author can assist with or run their own social media marketing. Those with the ability to engage other scholars in their field in discussion will be the most successful.

China

China is a gigantic market dominated by official Chinese state publishers. Learning English is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, starting at an early age. Some estimates put the number of English learners at 400 million, both adults and children.²⁵ China also has more than 35 million students enrolled in nearly 2,900 universities and colleges.

Official agencies are the gatekeepers of books imported into China. Therefore, a knowledgeable local agent who can handle the bureaucracy and political side of things is necessary. Some sales agents based in Hong Kong sell into the Chinese market. Asia Publishers Services and China Publishers Services are among the most established. Ian Taylor Associates has offices in the United Kingdom and Beijing.

The Beijing International Book Fair is China's most important book fair and a major event for the publishing industry in Asia. The annual attendance of 300,000 with 2,600 exhibitors makes it the second-largest book fair in the world and the most important one in Asia.

Livres Canada Books has two guides for publishers on China: Selling Canadian Books and Translation Rights in China (2016) and Trade Mission to Shanghai, China (2017).

Taiwan

Taiwan has many educational institutions interested in English-language books, meaning possible library sales. Library buying is contracted to independent booksellers, so price and discount demands plus shipping issues can make this market a challenge.

The sales agent/distributor Bookman handles some English-language academic lists. Ian Taylor Associates also covers Taiwan.

Taiwan's interest in books was clearly shown at the 2023 Taipei International Book Exhibition, which saw 505,000 attendees with 470 exhibitors split evenly between domestic and international publishers.²⁶

25 Li Zhenyu, "English Education in China: An Evolutionary Perspective," *People's Daily Online*, April 27, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0427/c90000-9684652.html>.

26 Porter Anderson, "Taipei International Book Exhibition: 505,000 Attendees in Six Days," *Publishing Perspectives*, February 6, 2023, <https://publishingperspectives.com/2023/02/taipei-international-book-exhibition-505000-attendees-in-six-days/>.

- What societies, institutional groups, professional organizations, government bodies, companies, political groups, and informal networks would be interested in your book?
- Would any of these groups buy in bulk, include a piggyback flyer in a mailing, announce the book's publication in a newsletter, etc.?
- To which individuals or institutions (with contact info) should we send promotional material?
- To which specialized journals and magazines should we send your book for review?
- Do you have any other suggestions for the promotion or publicity of your book?

One question that has yielded new and useful ideas for the University of Manitoba Press is this one: "If there's one thing we can do to support this book, what would it be?"³²

Conversely, for scholarly books with trade potential, it is important for publishers to cross into these markets as well. Asking the author questions such as these can reveal useful domestic or overseas markets:

- Is there a trade (general public) market for your book?
- Does the book have news value?
- What form of media might be useful in promoting your book?
- What contacts do you have with the press, radio, television, or social media?
- What radio or television shows would be interested in your book?
- What periodicals, magazines, newspapers, or blogs might be interested in doing a feature on your book, printing excerpts from it, or interviewing you?

Since every scholarly/academic book is highly specialized, the market for it will be as well, hence the value of probing the author for as much information as possible before investing in international marketing.

32 David Larsen, personal communication, Spring 2023.

Best Advice for Exporting Scholarly and Academic Books

Build and Maintain Relationships

Once you have found the trustworthy publishing partners (agents, distributors, wholesalers, etc.) that you need, this is the key piece of advice from those already successful in the export field: “Develop a close relationship with your distributor and seek their advice on pricing, discount, cover design, metadata, etc. Often the distributor focus is primarily on the domestic market, with export markets an afterthought, but a fuller and more constant relationship with your distributor in foreign markets can yield great results. This might mean going to at least one international book fair a year to build that trust and conversation.”⁴⁰

In other words, working with distributors and buyers in other countries depends on good communication. Providing good information on new titles and receiving reports on marketing efforts and sales is critical to success. Direct interpersonal connections are enormously valuable. Meeting with business partners at places like the major book fairs can prove critical to frank discussion and building a deep understanding of what each business partner is doing and to what they aspire.⁴¹

40 Personal communication from Melissa Pitts, Director, in conversation with Laraine Coates, Assistant Director, Marketing and Business Development, both of University of British Columbia Press, Spring 2023.

41 For more detail about building and maintaining relationships, including profiles of Broadview Press and the Higher Education division of the University of Toronto Press (UTP), see Milroy, *Exporting Academic*, 34–35.

Appendix A: Agents and Distributors in Key Territories

United States

Casemate Academic

<https://www.casemateacademic.com/about-casemate-academic/distribute-with-us/>

Chicago Distribution Center

<http://press.uchicago.edu/cdc.html>

Consortium Book Sales & Distribution

<https://www.cbsd.com/publishers/prospective-publishers/>

Ingram Publisher Services

<https://www.ingramcontent.com/publishers/sales>

IPG Independent Publishers Group

<http://www.ipgbook.com>

Email: distribution@ipgbook.com

National Book Network

<https://nbnbooks.com/prospective>