



LIVRES CANADA BOOKS®

Distribution and Sales in the UK

A Guide for Canadian Publishers

Distribution and Sales in the UK: A Guide for Canadian Publishers

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Canada 

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Executive Summary	2
Overview of the Issues for Canadian Publishers	4
Distributors and Sales Agents	5
How to Begin Choosing a Distributor and Sales Agent	6
Choosing a Distributor	7
Choosing a Sales Agent	9
Product Information	12
Subject Classification	14
Practical Tips on Relationships with Business Partners	15
Inventory Management	16
Print-on-Demand	16
Digital Products	18
Taxation and Digital Products	19
What You Can Do to Improve Your UK Sales	21
Other Ways of Accessing the Market	23
Conclusion	25
Appendix	26
Distribution and Sales Organizations	26
Other Useful Links	34
About the Author	37

Introduction

Though different in form and methodology, this guide draws on work carried out for the Association for the Export of Canadian Books (now Livres Canada Books) in 2005 which attempted by means of a survey of UK distributors to identify ways in which Canadian publishers could most efficiently obtain distribution for their books in the UK marketplace. This guide is intended to look more deeply at the issues raised by that work: why it is often so difficult to obtain satisfactory distribution and sales arrangements in the UK; what Canadian publishers need to do to attract the attention of suitable suppliers; and how the relationships established can be used to best effect to achieve mutually agreeable results.

My guide *Selling Canadian Books in the UK: A guide for Canadian publishers*, published by Livres Canada Books in an updated version in 2012, highlights some of the problems confronted by Canadian publishers in breaking into this market while attempting to explain some of the reasons. The assumption behind this present guide is that you have read the previous work or have sufficient familiarity with the UK not to need it!

Despite the upheavals through which the trade has gone since 2005 much of the advice given here remains the same. The same pressures to comply with the quirks of another unfamiliar marketplace still exist. The growth of digital, though significant, has not affected the basic needs of the sales and distribution functions; it has simply added another layer of complexity. The most significant change has been in the retail channels and the loss of a number of previously important retail chains. This has undermined many of the traditional ways in which books are sold. Though overall physical book sales are in gentle decline, volumes are still substantial and continue to account for 85–90% of publisher turnover. There is still much to play for; and no indication that this will change significantly in the near future.

Note on scope: It is worth pointing out that this guide is exclusively aimed at the sale of English-language titles in the UK market. There are no recognized channels for French-language books. A limited number may be available from academic booksellers, generally for student use, or from the very limited number of foreign language specialist bookshops.

Executive Summary

Overview of the issues for Canadian publishers

The pros and cons of entering the UK market, and the need for understanding that distribution, sales and metadata are inseparable elements if success is to be achieved.

Distributors and sales agents

Recent changes in the distribution scene. The major publishing groups no longer provide a likely option for distribution of Canadian publishers' titles. Closer collaboration between sales agencies and independent distribution companies has consequently made the selection of a sales agency the top priority for most publishers.

How to begin choosing a distributor and sales agent

Suggestions for simplifying the choice of sales agents and distributors with whom to negotiate, and how best to approach negotiations. The decision to enter a distribution or sales agreement is a two-way street, with both parties needing to share the potential benefits.

Choosing a distributor

Specific aspects of the service offering which need close attention. The percentage cost initially quoted does not tell the whole story. You need to have a good knowledge of your own business in order to assess the probable realities of a distributor's charging structure.

Choosing a sales agent

What to consider when identifying suitable sales agents—a good personal relationship is probably the most important consideration.

Product information

Setting up data flows with sales agents and distributors but also with Nielsen and other data aggregators. The crucial position occupied by Nielsen in the supply chain. Establishing how responsibilities for product data are shared between you and your business partners.

Subject classification

The UK book trade does not use BISAC. How to classify your titles using the BIC classification scheme.

Practical tips on relationships with business partners

The need for close communication and trust in your business relationships, especially where non-contractual marketing spend is concerned. Suitability of Canadian titles in the UK market.

Inventory management

The option of printing locally where demand outstrips your ability to supply, and the desirability of shipping direct from printer to the market in appropriate circumstances.

Print-on-demand

Local sources of on demand and short-run digital print for suitable titles.

Digital products

The digital supply chain still evolving, but UK publishers are generally treating physical and digital products as two separate supply channels. How UK publishers are addressing ebook issues.

Taxation and digital products

Specific issues raised by taxation on digital products and ebooks which do not arise with physical books.

What you can do to improve your UK sales

How you can best support your sales agent. Importance of early selling material, good metadata and a transparent relationship with Amazon.co.uk.

Other ways of accessing the market

If you don't want to sell and distribute in the UK in a conventional way, what are the alternatives? The use of websites, or publishing partnerships, and the services offered by Amazon.co.uk.

Distribution and sales organizations

Listing of organizations which may be suitable for Canadian publishers to deal with. Also contact list of other organizations mentioned in the text.