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# Distribution and Sales in the US

A guide for Canadian publishers  
Part 1: The US Marketplace

## Distribution and Sales in the US: A Guide for Canadian Publishers

### Part 1: The US Marketplace

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Canada 

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# Introduction

This guide, as part of a three-guide report, is intended as an overview of the book distribution and sales marketplace in the United States. The focus is on how publishers get their titles listed and sold. Information is provided on all aspects of distribution in the library, bookstore, online, and educational markets across the country. Each market covered in these guides has a few dominant sales channels, which are covered within *Part 2: Distributions and Sales in the US*. Learning about and working with the appropriate channel partners will be the main driver in your success in the United States.

Rather than deliver a series of out-of-context statistics, we have provided a direct and practical guide to where the opportunities truly lie and how one can go about making the most of those opportunities. As with any stats report, a great deal of the statistical information becomes obsolete before the final document is ever made available. Also, a fair amount of the information one would need is available on the Internet. As an example, there are two excellent statistical reports on the US book market available for purchase. One is a collaboration between Bowker and *Publishers Weekly* titled, *2013 U.S. Book Consumer Demographics & Buying Behaviors*. The other, coined “publishing’s most comprehensive annual survey,” *BookStats*, is a collaboration between the American Association of Publishers and the Book Industry Study Group. Each offers detailed background information and statistics regarding the current state of US bookselling and book buying. The reports are expensive, but the depth of detailed information is very impressive.

This report goes beyond the print book world to cover ebooks. While information on ebooks has been included in other market guides, in this report we deliver specific guidance on selling ebooks in the United States. For ease of reading and usage, the report is broken up into three sections. Part 1 provides an overview of the US marketplace, including trade, the library markets, K–12 education, and higher education. Part 2 delves into distribution and sales, and Part 3 provides recommendations on key conferences as well as expert advice for doing business in the US market.

Every effort has been made to be as complete and up-to-date as possible. As you know, in the rapidly changing world of publishing, nothing remains static. To that end, additional information will be posted on the Livres Canada Books [blog](#), and on the LCB [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) feeds as soon as that information is available. Please do check back often so that you can be as informed as possible.

As this report is intended to serve as a guide to actually making business happen in the United States, only the main markets and the key players within those markets are discussed. Markets such as book clubs, mass merchandisers, and warehouse clubs (Costco and Sam's Club, for example) have not been included in this report, since they represent an unattractive combination of low overall market share (6%, 5%, and 3% respectively) and very low per unit margins. A factor in the success of selling books in the United States, for both the publisher and the bookseller, is significant volume. The markets that sell, and the wholesalers that supply them, are all geared on volume.

The United States is only now starting to recover from the economic downturn that hit in 2008/2009. Unemployment is still high and consumer confidence, even with the occasional uptick, is still low. Most economic indicators are flat or down. Continued partisan bickering and gridlock in Washington, DC, does not bode well for a recovery any time soon. Yes, the economy is in a rough patch. Yes, a full recovery seems to be a fair distance off. Yes, these factors make it difficult to sell books in the United States. Even the tried and true K-12 education book market is down. However, there is still hope and still room for booksellers in this market. For most Americans, books have always been a discretionary or perhaps even a luxury purchase. Truth be told, we are not a nation of readers. The good news is, with well over 300 million people, even a modest percentage of readers still represents a good-sized market.

English is still the predominant language of books being purchased in the United States. It is true that dozens of languages are spoken in the United States, and there are many books available in languages other than English. However, the market size for any non-English-language title is unlikely to generate enough sales to merit the upfront investment of setting up distribution and sales channels. Sales of non-English-language titles in the United States is outside the scope of this report. For French-language publishers, Livres Canada Books has a report on selling French language titles in the United States, titled, *Le marché du livre de langue française aux États-Unis*.