



LIVRES CANADA BOOKS®

Selling Canadian Children's Books in the UK

A guide for Canadian publishers
2nd edition

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Children's Publishing in the UK	2
The Traditional Pattern of Children's Publishing.	2
Characteristics of the Children's Books Market	3
Digital Publishing in the Children's Market	3
2 The UK Children's Books Market	4
Today's Marketplace	4
Facts and Figures	4
Demographics	5
The UK Educational System	5
Library Loans	5
The Profile of Children's Publishing	6
The Main Publishers and Their Characteristics	7
Co-editions and Packagers	7
Character Merchandising	8
3 Market potential for Canadian books	9
Opportunities and Drawbacks	9
What Sells and What Doesn't	10
Product Information	10
Subject Classification	11
Conformance Requirements	11
Spelling and Usage	12
4 Accessing the UK Marketplace	13
The Retail Market	13
Wholesalers	14
Specialist Wholesalers and Merchandisers	15
Book Clubs and Bulk Sales	15
Remainders	16
Digital Content Sales	16

5 Marketing and Promotion	17
Print and Broadcast Media	17
Author Promotion and Social Media	18
Reading and Literacy Agencies	18
Co-operative Campaigns and Events	19
Book Fairs and Events	19
Trade Press	19
Online Resources and Publications	20
Groups and Associations	20
Prizes	20
Conclusion	21
Appendix: Contact Information	22
Sales and Marketing	22
Publicists	22
Consultants	22
Wholesalers and Merchandisers	22
Library Suppliers	23
Trade Associations and Organizations	23
Trade Press	24
Bibliographic Agencies	24
Book Clubs	24
Children’s Book Organizations	25
About the Author	27

Introduction

This guide is intended to help Canadian publishers of children's and young adult books exploit the potential of the UK market. It will assume that you have a certain amount of knowledge of the UK trade and that some of the basic decisions about exporting to another country have already been taken; and its focus will be on those aspects of the market that are specific to children's publishers.

The UK market is superficially attractive to Canadian publishers because of the common language, the predominantly common heritage, and the particular appeal of a market which is accessible, relatively unencumbered with legal and administrative burdens for the exporter, and with a substantial and reasonably well-educated population.

Unfortunately, any publisher will know that there is always a high degree of complexity behind such assumptions. A book in English, primarily designed for its original home market, will not necessarily travel successfully into another territory; and the reason is only sometimes to do with the book's content or style. The most common obstacles come from the way the trade is structured and the channels where books are sold. The UK market is fiercely competitive and – in the case of children's books – very fragmented. You dare

not ignore any of the many channels through which children's books are sold if you are going to achieve success for your books.

The best advice for you is the same as for exporters of any other kinds of book: try to understand the market you are entering, its conventions, its prejudices and its systems; try to make your books seem as much as possible like those on offer from local publishers; make sure the trade knows about your books in plenty of time and through all the proper channels; have the right selling material; price to the market wherever you can; and so on. If you do all these things and your books are good, you will have the best possible chance of success.

1 Children's Publishing in the UK

The original publication of this guide in 2005 coincided with an unprecedented high point in the fortunes of the children's publishing industry. Five of the seven Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling had been published and the trade's euphoria was at its peak. It may seem hard to put the significance of that series of titles properly into context now: what had already happened by that time was that children's publishing had ceased to be a peaceful backwater of the industry and was now recognized as a serious engine of profitability and innovation. What has happened since has only reaffirmed and reinforced that status. Harry Potter turned out to be not just a flash in the pan, but a step change in the way children's publishing was perceived. For Canadian publishers of children's books wishing to publish or have distributed their titles in the UK market it undoubtedly raised the bar; a bar that – to the surprise of some – has remained high.

Harry Potter was not wholly responsible for the change. While the seven books were being published, other publishing phenomena were benefiting from the increased exposure: the extraordinary success of Jacqueline Wilson's often challenging books about dysfunctional family life at the end of the twentieth century; the emergence of the "crossover" novel (books appealing to both children's and adult markets) led by Philip Pullman, notably his *His Dark Materials* trilogy, subsequently filmed as *The Golden Compass*; Peter Jackson's films of J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy; and a growing appetite for fiction in series, which fuelled much copycat publishing but also provided opportunities for the subsequent success of the *Twilight* series and such high concept novels as those of Michelle Paver (the *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* fantasy sequence) and others. All this has given children's publishing an immensely high profile from which many other writers and their publishers have been able to benefit, penetrating and gaining acceptance in markets to which they could never have otherwise aspired. An early example was Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, originally conceived as a children's book, which sold heavily in both children's and adult editions – as indeed the Harry Potter books did.

Indeed, one of the most striking and lasting impacts of Harry Potter has been the opening up of the teen and young adult market, which had long been a notoriously difficult one to access. The seven Harry Potter novels, taking their fans – with Harry himself – from boyhood through adolescence to young adulthood, could be argued to have been responsible for opening up a range of cultural opportunities

and enthusiasms for young people both in books but also in film and video games. This in turn has been a trigger for publishers to explore the cross-media potential of enhanced e-books and apps.

The burgeoning young adult market has had another unexpected impact: in bringing adults to reading through children's books. There is growing evidence that, quite apart from the adult editions of children's books put out by publishers, adults are significant consumers of books intended for children and young adults, particularly in the fantasy genres.

The Traditional Pattern of Children's Publishing

For the purpose of comparison, it is worth reflecting briefly on children's publishing as it used to be in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. There were very few publishers who specialized exclusively in children's books, children's books divisions generally operating within the framework of a larger entity, with their own editors, rights and marketing staff but often sharing sales, finance, production and other corporate functions. In those days the attractions to a major trade house of having a children's publishing arm lay in the low entry costs, negligible advances to authors and illustrators, relatively longer life cycle of children's books, a target audience that was constantly renewing itself, opportunities for publishing in series, and the provision of additional product to feed sales forces and distribution centres. Against this had to be set the relatively low retail

prices, which ensured that in corporate terms the children's division was always the poor relation.

Although there has been a growth in the number of publishers producing only children's titles and although the children's divisions in the larger companies have gained prominence (and closer scrutiny by the management!), the basic structure has not significantly changed. However, the raised profile of children's books and the resulting higher cost and increased risk in the sector has certainly redressed the balance between adult and children's publishing. Where once children's publishing was considered a useful sideline, it is now an integral part of list building strategy and profit generation. At the same time, some of the factors which used to make children's publishing commercially attractive have been eroded, most notably those around marketing costs and author advances.

Characteristics of the Children's Books Market

The children's market is distinctive and challenging for various reasons. Firstly, it encompasses most, if not all, the genres of adult trade publishing: fiction and non-fiction, designed for entertainment or information, illustrated and unillustrated, books about every subject under the sun. Secondly it has two quite separate target audiences – children themselves, but much more significantly the adults who buy or otherwise influence their choice of books – and to succeed, certainly as far as younger age groups are concerned, books have to appeal to both. Thirdly (and this is not unconnected) it is a market where books that were popular with previous generations of children continue to have as prominent a

place as new titles. In this part of publishing at least, where the nostalgia of parents meets the inherent conservatism of children, the old remains a powerful competitor for the new.

Digital Publishing in the Children's Market

Children's publishing has not been immune to the wider trends in digital publishing, and almost all publishers have been actively producing e-books and digitising backlist for the children's market. There is no clear evidence yet of the impact of this on reading habits and purchasing. The traditional children's books market might be expected to be a conservative one at this stage of development, but this is likely to be put under pressure from children's – and their parents' – exposure to screen-based media as time goes on. Against that, however, the cost of reading devices and the unsuitability of digital delivery for certain kinds of book may slow down the process. At the present time, colour picture books are a challenge to many digital reading technologies and also to print on demand techniques. This has led children's publishers to believe that the market can be expanded by devising new products rather than attempting just to replicate printed books in a digital format, notably by developing apps and enhanced e-books which will convey the spirit of the original in a presentation which is more accessible to parents and children familiar with other screen-based formats. These products are expensive to produce, and selling prices generally low, so success is by no means assured. It is too early to say with any confidence whether this is a route which will be followed widely in the future.

2 The UK Children's Books Marketplace

The United Kingdom has a very special place in the evolution of English-language children's publishing both as a business and as a cultural phenomenon. It has an exceptionally large number of internationally known children's writers and illustrators – Lewis Carroll, Arthur Rackham, Robert Louis Stevenson, A.A. Milne (and E.H. Shepard), Kenneth Graham, Enid Blyton, Beatrix Potter, Roald Dahl, C.S. Lewis, not to mention J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman and other more contemporary figures. In business terms, too, it has been a centre of creative excellence and innovation, playing a leading role in a succession of significant publishing trends: the creative genius of Sebastian Walker (of Walker Books); or the new kind of information publishing pioneered by Dorling Kindersley; or complex paper engineering for novelty books; or controlling international co-editions; or exploiting character merchandising.

Today's Marketplace

Despite this legacy much uncertainty currently hangs over the UK publishing scene, and the children's books market is not exempt. The changes documented in Part One of this guide which have occurred in recent years have radically altered the general outlook for publishing and, although they are not specific to the UK, they need to be understood by Canadian publishers interested in gaining or maintaining a foothold in the UK market.

Superficially the news is not all bad. Though it is a matter of regret that the UK is uncharacteristically not playing any kind of leadership role in the growth of digital publishing, it remains a hugely important source of content and creativity internationally. Digital revenues are growing fast, though lack of hard information about both sales and substitution patterns make it difficult to put them into context. However, much the most significant development has been the decimation of the retail sector and, to some extent, its supply channels. This will be described in greater detail later on, but the impact on the way the industry promotes and distributes its books has perhaps been greater in the children's sector than anywhere. Children's books have never been as reliant on the traditional book trade as adult books and have been typically sold through a much wider range of channels, but the loss of high street booksellers as a showcase for children's product has emphasized the need for more direct contact with consumers and information about them.

Facts and Figures

It is next to impossible to provide any meaningful statistics about the size of the UK children's books market, except to say that by any definition it is large, the UK remaining one of the world's major producers of books for children and young adults.

Some published numbers provide a few clues:

- Children's books are by a substantial margin the second largest category of books published (after fiction): of the 150000 new titles registered by the UK ISBN agency, in 2010 20000 of them were children's books.
- Sales of printed books are in gentle decline at around £330 million at ex-warehouse prices, of which some 30% are sold in export markets.
- Digital sales grew by 171% in the first half of 2012 over the same period in 2011. This compares with overall growth of 188% for adult fiction.
- Digital sales are currently running at just over 10% of revenues. This would suggest an annual children's market for digital products of around £30 million.

More seriously unavailable, however, are any reliable statistics on the channels through which children's books are sold. Anecdotal evidence suggests that retail trade – brick-and-mortar and online – accounts for only around half of sales, but it is not possible to support this estimate.

There are, however, additional sources of information available to you. The ongoing Books and Consumers survey, produced by Book Marketing Ltd (BML), now part of Bowker,

is available on subscription and provides consumer market research which is of particular value in terms of trends and demographics. The findings are also made available at an annual conference in March. The other essential source is Nielsen BookScan, which records actual sales out of bookstores and can provide invaluable packages of information about the market, the sales of your and other publishers' titles and trends within individual categories.

Demographics

The UK birth rate, which until recently was falling, is now once again showing growth. In theory this should lead in the next decade to an expanding market for children's books. However, this may well turn out to be an oversimplification. Despite the rapid increase in sales of digital products and the advances made by digital media in the educational system there continues to be a lively debate about whether books will still have a place in children's worlds as they grow up. It is true that social networking and gaming are eating into time otherwise spent with books and an increasing amount of practical information is being obtained from the Internet, and that is of course having a decisive impact on some types of publishing. However, just as radio, television and film have been absorbed into daily life without significantly detracting from the market for books, so it may yet prove that books continue to supplement what the computer can provide.

More worrying, however, is the amount of government funding which finds its way into the book market. Both schools and libraries continue to be starved of funds in recent years and book provision is at a generally low level at present. It is hard to see how this will improve: responsibility for the availability of books in the home (and to some degree in the classroom too) increasingly rests with parents.

The UK Educational System

It is important to make the distinction between books specifically devised for classroom use and those that provide entertainment and supplementary information. In publishing terms, the two sectors are worlds apart; and this guide makes no attempt to address publishing aimed directly at schools and their curricula. However, books for the school library or books which are used by parents and teachers to throw additional light on the subjects being taught are in most cases the products of children's publishers; and to that extent the shape of the educational system may need some clarification for Canadian publishers.

Public education in the UK is free up to the age of 16, with children most commonly moving from primary school to secondary school at the age of 11. Concerns about declining standards have resulted in the establishment of a National Curriculum that places emphasis on certain defined subjects and the required attainment levels at various ages (these are called Key Stages). You can find more specific information about this on the Department for Education website.¹

Although there is broad adherence to the National Curriculum in the State-funded sector, there is currently much change afoot in the provision of public education, with financial support being given from central government funds to so-called "academies" and "free schools" rather than through local education authorities as in the past. This is, however, weakening the rigid structures of education in favour of a more independent approach, though it must be said that emphasis on traditional academic excellence is generally back in vogue in most of the school system.

There is no legal requirement for schools to have libraries of their own, though most do, providing access both to books and to online information.

Library Loans

Libraries are still an important market for children's books. The UK has the basis of an excellent public library service (books, though not DVDs and other electronic media, are free to borrow) which has been badly damaged by shortage of money, failures to maintain a plausible presence in the community and long-running disputes between local government, which is responsible for library provision, and central government about long-term funding. This has become particularly acute in recent months, with libraries bearing the brunt of local government funding cuts. Closures and reduced opening hours, as well as reductions in book fund spending have seriously undermined the service in some areas. Despite this, children's libraries often manage to maintain a better stock than adult libraries and considerable efforts are made in some places to make libraries and the books in them attractive to children through events and activities.

According to figures from Public Lending Right, children's book loans amounted to 96.8 million during 2010/11, up from 89.9 million in 2005/6. However, there are clear indications that the borrowing of children's titles has grown at the expense of adult books. Children's books now represent 35.9% of all books borrowed, up from 33.9% last year, and 28% in 2003/04. Five of the top ten authors borrowed were

children's writers: in second place Daisy Meadows, composite author of the *Rainbow Magic* series; Jacqueline Wilson (4th); Francesca Simon (5th); Children's Laureate Julia Donaldson (7th); and Mick Inkpen (9th). Jacqueline Wilson remains the most borrowed author over the past ten years with 16.5 million loans.

The Profile of Children's Publishing

The world of children's books is itself almost as diverse as the rest of publishing: unlike other genres, it is not one category but comprises numerous sub-genres within it. To define it and treat it as a single entity is itself a difficult task.

However, the structures of the marketplace – the categories into which titles are published and the way they are displayed in shops and online – form the framework within which the industry operates and the market can be broken down into a small number of basic product types. These are certainly not unique to the UK but they provide an indication of how the UK market will treat them, and it may be unwise to publish outside these categories if you want your books to gain ready acceptance in the marketplace.

Fiction

It would once have been unthinkable that fiction, especially in hardback, would become the highest profile genre within children's publishing and the one which attracts the most attention, but that is what has happened. This is largely the result of the success of the Harry Potter books and their imitators, and to some extent mirrors the growth in hardback fiction in the adult market. What could not have been foreseen was the enormous success of the young adult market, which has come to dominate the strategy of the industry, to the detriment of other genres. In this market sector particularly, much of the promotional effort that has gone into expanding the market for adult fiction has also been applied to the children's book market and with it an ever-greater dependence on the author as the brand. In consequence, it is the author rather than the subject matter which is seen as driving sales, and the enthusiasm of both publishers and readers for publishing in series has helped the process along. Another result of this higher profile, again reflecting what is happening in adult publishing, is the amount of money publishers are prepared to spend on jacket designs, hoping to earn back extravagant advances by drawing attention to their titles in a crowded marketplace.

Hardback publication is not for all authors, of course, and is particularly aimed at the young adult market. For fiction

in printed form, the paperback is still the staple product for schools and libraries as well as in the bookstore. Although some hardback fiction is republished into paperback following the traditional pattern, much of it is original publishing. Once again, the author or the series brand is emphasized where there is a perceived market advantage. This heading also includes category series fiction (teenage romance, fantasy and horror) aimed at children's own pockets.

As mentioned above, only the most marketable authors enjoy the privilege of being published first in hardback. Although this adds to the profile of a title, it is not necessary for publishers to produce a hardback edition to obtain reviews or be stocked by libraries. The vast majority of fiction titles are now published straight into paperback and this is taken for granted by the media and the library world. Indeed, public libraries in the UK increasingly stock paperbacks, where lower cost outweighs their more limited life.

Picture books

Mostly 24 or 32 pages but in a limitless range of page sizes and shapes, these tend to come from the prestige end of the market, the showcases for illustrators. As hardbacks, however, they are hard to sell in the UK market: prices are high (typically around £15) and the library market, where in former days most would have been sold, has moved towards buying paperback editions instead, but they are still important as the basis for potentially lucrative co-edition printings, though these too have been in decline in recent years. Except in rare cases, the viability of these titles depends on supporting co-edition and other subsidiary rights sales. Paperback editions in the same format, possibly printed at the same time as the hardback, are a substantial part of the mainstream children's illustrated book market.

Baby books

There is never a shortage of books primarily aimed at the baby market and few of them could be described as straightforward in production terms: bath books, cloth books, rag books, shaped books, books with wheels, books with embedded musical chips, books that double up as rattles to hang from the baby's buggy, sticker books, scratch-and-sniff books, and so on. Frequently they feature well-known children's characters, either from TV or film or else from other more conventional books.

In this array of books as toys, there are three relatively mainstream categories: board books, lift-the-flap books and paper-engineered novelty titles (e.g., pop-up books). UK publishers and packagers have developed the creative skills and

About the Author

Until his retirement in March 2012, **Peter Kilborn** was Executive Director of Book Industry Communication, the UK book trade's supply chain and standards organization.

In his past career he has been a production director and general manager with a number of well-known London publishing houses, a director of the Publishers Association, and a writer and consultant specializing in the supply chain and business improvement.

Among his past assignments he acted as an adviser to the Department of Canadian Heritage on its supply chain initiative; and in the past decade has undertaken a number of writing and research projects for Livres Canada Books.