



Selling Canadian Children's and Young Adult Books to US Trade and Specialty Markets

A Guide for Canadian Publishers
2nd edition

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Introduction

Given the tumultuous upheaval in the publishing industry since the original edition of this Report, with the mainstreaming of internet retailers and book sales and the growth of the e-book market from virtually nothing to a US\$450 million-dollar business, one might think that Canadian publishers would be at a distinct disadvantage trying to sell into the United States. Yet the fact is, Canadian Publishers with strong children's and young adult (YA) lists now have an even greater opportunity than in the past to merchandise and sell their books into United States markets. The reason is simple: Digital formats and sales outlets have expanded the ability of smaller and independent publishers to sell from their own websites and through the websites of many others – even with the decline in brick-and-mortar independent booksellers.

The market for children's and YA books in the US is large and includes:

- chain and independent retail bookstores
- book wholesalers
- libraries
- schools
- mass merchandisers
- book fairs
- book clubs
- prebinders and rebinders
- direct mail catalogues,
- digital wholesalers and retailers
- publishers' own Web sites

In fact, given the relatively slower rate of digital conversion of children's and YA books, Canadian publishers specializing in these areas actually have a greater opportunity to sell physical books now than do adult book publishers. According to a recent New York Times article, e-books "represent less than 5% of total annual sales of children's books, compared with more than 25% in some categories of adult books."

In this report, we discuss the various markets for children's and YA books, plus the sales and marketing procedures and techniques you should follow to get your books into and out of these assorted venues.

The goal of this report is to provide Canadian publishers with the needed practical, specific information to effectively participate in the children's and YA markets. We have included both pre- and post-publication measures that will help you succeed. A successfully merchandised book or series of books, sold effectively through these marketing channels, can behave like an annuity for the originating publisher as it has for such Canadian publishers as Kids Can Press, House of Anansi, Groundwood and others. So take the long view as you begin to enter the US with your children's and YA titles.

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that at the time of writing, the US economy is still very sluggish. The US book industry continues to shrink and succeeding in it is difficult for all publishers whatever their country of origin. Independent stores continue to disappear, the demand from the chains and large digital retailers, Amazon in particular, for discounts and lower retail prices continues to increase, and because many individual states are facing their own recessions, book budgets for schools and libraries have been reduced across the country. A number of states have announced the closure of branch libraries and the reduction of budgets and hours of operation for those that remain.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope for Canadian publishers of trade books for children and young adults. An increasing number of school districts throughout the country have recognized that using textbooks as their primary – and sometimes only – resource to teach reading has failed miserably. These districts have reintroduced trade books in large numbers into the classroom. Canadian publishers should see this as a prime opportunity for both their storybooks and non-fiction titles.

In this report we will introduce you to retailers and wholesalers with considerable commitment to children's and YA titles. We encourage you to get to know as many of them as you can. The more contact you have with the US and its book industry the better. The more you know about the country and the business, the more you will know what works and what doesn't. Sales will be just one of the rewards of such contact. By being part of the US book industry, you will more readily understand the trends and issues that drive the business south of the border.

1 Market Statistics for US Children's and Young Adult Books

The US represents a huge market for Canadian publishers. In 2010, according to the US Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, the United States imported US\$159,453,000 worth of Canadian books, or 11% of all book imports. If approximately 14% of this figure were allocated to children's books, which would be equivalent to the percentage of the book market that children's books represent in the US, then over US\$22 million worth of children's books would be imported into the country from Canada each year. While that number may be overstated, there is still a lot of opportunity for Canadian publishers of children's and YA books to sell them in the United States.

The statistics show that there were approximately 12,000 new hardcover children's books published in 2009 in the United States and 9,500 new paperbacks in the same year. What the numbers don't tell you is how long these books will continue to sell, and in what ultimate quantities. As we will see later, many children's and YA books start their life cycles selling very slowly, but continue to sell much longer, and more consistently, than their adult counterparts. That being the case, keep in mind that so-called lazy buyers (both booksellers and consumers) will rely on the tried and true titles, which makes it a greater challenge to introduce new titles. Big box stores are notorious for focusing on, and favoring, bestselling children's backlist and bestsellers.

Some interesting statistics regarding children's book can be found in three primary sources:

- the Association of American Publishers / Book Industry Study Group *Book-Stats* program
- Bowker's *Library and Book Trade Annual*
- Bowker's *US Book Consumer Demographics and Buying Behaviors Annual Review*

Each of these information sources contains a wealth of information on the book industry at large, including the children's and YA sector.

Let's look at the current statistics for children's book sales in the US as reflected in the Association of American Publishers statistics for 2010, the last full year reported. The tables that follow, which we have adapted, show figures for 2006-09.

Of the total US\$23.9 billion book market, trade (i.e., consumer) books totaled US\$8.1billion, representing approximately 33% of the total. Juvenile books represented 40% of all trade books sold in 2009. (table 1).

TABLE 1

US book sales, 2006-2009 (US\$ in millions)

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Trade	8,274	8,526	8,079	8,068
Adult hardbound	2,597	2,800	2,436	2,604
Adult paperbound	2,278	2,282	2,364	2,241
Juvenile hardbound	2,058	2,048	1,794	1,704
Juvenile paperbound	1,341	1,396	1,485	1,518
Book clubs and mail order	640	622	600	588
Mass market paperback	1,142	1,119	1,086	1,042
Audiobooks	182	218	220	192
Religious	745	783	724	659
eBooks	54	67	113	313
Professional	3,377	3,475	3,457	3,357
EI-Hi (K-12)	6,189	6,356	6,077	5,238
Higher education	3,453	3,678	3,777	4,265
All other	141	115	169	134
Total	24,197	24,960	24,303	23,856
Trade (% of Total)	34	34	33	34
Juvenile (% of Trade)	41	40	41	40
Juvenile (% of Total)	14	14	13	14

Source: BookStats 2010

3 Working With Librarians and Review Media

Remembering that adults are the gatekeepers of children's and YA books is fundamental to a successful publishing program. Librarians, their review media, and online review consortia and syndicates are the eye of the needle through which you must pass to unlock the gate. Unlike the world of books for adults, where librarians and retailers rarely meet, in the children's/YA universe, they effectively coningle, supporting each other and participating in measures to promote literacy and love of reading.

Therefore, any publisher's first course of action in relation to entering the US children's and YA market should be to learn as much as possible about these review media, the review press and the people involved in them. Canadian publishers should become involved in the national and regional meetings of the major book-related organizations, especially those regional meetings that take place close to the US/Canadian border. Canadian publishers should become familiar with two key organizations: the American Library Association (www.ala.org), which organizes two annual conferences for librarians (the American Library Association annual conference and the Midwinter Meeting) and the Children's Book Council (www.cbcbooks.org), a non-profit trade organization dedicated to encouraging literacy and the use and enjoyment of children's books and the official sponsor of Young People's Poetry Week and Children's Book Week each year.

Let's look at some of the key review media and their activity over the recent past. While the overall number of reviews of children's books is declining, as many important newspaper review sections have closed or downsized, some of the most important review media have actually expanded the number of children's reviews. In particular, *Booklist*, *School Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly* have shown growth (table 7).

TABLE 7

Reviews of children's and YA books and other media by major reviewing publications, 2008-2009

	Children's		YA		Total	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	Children's	YA
Booklist (ALA)	3,138	3,542	—	—	6,680	—
BookPage	77	109	20	34	186	54
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books	849	790	—	—	1,639	—
Chicago Tribune Sunday books section	250	200	50	50	450	100
Horn Book Guide	3,324	3,272	1,154	1,101	6,596	2,255
Horn Book Magazine	320	335	106	116	655	222
Kirkus Reviews	2,096	2,155	—	—	4,251	—
MultiCultural Review	128	127	57	63	255	120
Publishers Weekly	1,030	1,243	—	—	2,273	—
School Library Journal	4,853	5,528	—	—	10,381	—

Source: 2010 Library and Book Trade Annual, 525.

As table 7 makes clear, publishers should certainly get to know the decision makers at *School Library Journal*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Booklist*. Most US children's/YA publishers of any size have an individual, and in many cases a whole department, devoted to library and school sales. This is especially true for those publishers with a significant hardcover publishing program. While it is true that the library segment of publishing is not regarded as being as "sexy" as retail sales and is sometimes perceived as "clubby," Canadian publishers must make it a priority to get involved with the influential professionals within the category. One stimulus that you should always keep in mind: When libraries buy books, they don't return them and they always pay their bills, since they are funded organizations. That's sometimes more than can be said for the retail sector.

About the Authors

ANI CHAMICHIAN is a publishing professional with over 30 years of experience in book publishing. Her experience is wide-ranging and includes work as: a buyer for a national library wholesaler; sales representative in Northern California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska at Harper & Row; VP Marketing and Associate Publisher at Harper San Francisco; Managing Director at Peaceable Kingdom Press in Berkeley, California; and, Director of Content at GoMo Technologies. She is also the co-author of a special-interest guide to videos published by Broadway Books, a division of Random House. She is currently working as a sales development consultant with a variety of publishers in northern California.

THOMAS WOLL has over 30 years of experience in the areas of trade, direct response and professional publishing, most at senior management levels. He has, uniquely, been directly responsible for companies as small as start-ups and divisions as large as US\$80 million. Woll's experience spans all areas of trade book publishing, including: editorial development and planning; new product search and acquisition; sales and marketing (including creation of marketing plans and budgets, setting up distribution and creating sales terms); rights; production and manufacturing; budgeting; and, strategic planning.

Woll has held the following positions: President of Cross River Publishing Consultants, Inc., which works with publishers both large and small; Vice-President and General Manager, Professional and Trade Division, John Wiley & Sons; Vice-President and Publisher, Book Division, Rodale Press, Inc.; Publisher, Storey Communications/Garden Way Publishing; Vice-President and Publisher, Beaufort Books, Inc.; and, Vice-President and General Manager, Vanguard Press, Inc.

Woll has also served on industry panels and lectured frequently at industry events. He holds an MBA from New York University (NYU) and taught at the master's level at NYU's Center for Publishing for 12 years. He is currently a Lecturer and Adjunct Professor in Simon Fraser University's Masters in Publishing program.

Woll is the author of *Publishing for Profit: Successful Bottom-Line Management for Book Publishers* (fourth edition, Chicago Review Press, 2010), now translated into nine languages, and *Selling Subsidiary Rights: An Insider's Guide* (Fisher Books, 1999).

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