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Selling Canadian Children's Books in the UK

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Introduction

This guide is intended to help Canadian publishers of children's and young adult books exploit the potential of the United Kingdom (UK) market. It will assume that you have a basic knowledge of the UK books trade and that some of the basic decisions about exporting to another country have already been made. The focus of this guide will be on those aspects of the market that are specific to children's publishers.

The UK market is attractive to Canadian publishers because of the elements of a shared heritage. As well, it is accessible, and relatively unencumbered with legal and administrative burdens for the exporter. The UK also has 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 its 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; and price to the market wherever you can. If you do all these things and your books are well-written, you will have the best possible chance of success.

Part One Overview of children's publishing

The Harry Potter effect

This guide has been written at an extraordinary time for the children's book world. On the one hand the timing is unfortunate because the massive success of Harry Potter has distorted almost everything that affects the business of children's books –and it has probably made it more difficult to enter the children's books market than ever before. On the other hand, children's books have never had such a high profile or been treated with more respect in the marketplace.

There is no doubt that the children's book business around the world is booming. One book—and the impact it has made on the industry since it first appeared on the scene in 1997—has changed what used to be a quiet backwater of the publishing scene into one of its most competitive and vibrant areas of activity. What is more, the impetus for this market shift has come not just from Harry Potter but from other publishing phenomena as well. The extraordinary success of bestselling books by Jacqueline Wilson and the emergence of the “crossover” novel (books appealing to both children and adults) led by Philip Pullman have also influenced this change. Pullman's trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, much read by old and young, has now been successfully dramatized at the National Theatre for audiences of all ages. 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. One good example is Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, originally conceived as a children's book but which has continued to sell spectacularly well in both children's and adults' editions.

The Harry Potter phenomenon came out of the blue. The original book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (*Sorcerer's Stone* in North America), was acquired at a modest cost by Bloomsbury Publishing in the UK from an unknown and unpublished author. Nothing in the way it was produced or marketed set it apart from hundreds of other new titles published every year, except for the fact that it was very long for a children's book and demanded an unusually high retail price. What subsequently happened to it is now indelibly part of publishing history.

It is impossible to explain how such things happen. However, unprecedented as it was in children's publishing, such remarkable successes are not unknown. From *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* to *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, little books occasionally break through to become unstoppable bestsellers. It is one of those pieces of extraordinary good fortune that all publishers pray for.

Although it is impossible to ignore the impact that Harry Potter has had on children's publishing, this guide will try to steer a sober path between this glamorous and lucrative area of the market and the more abiding characteristics of the genre. Impossible to ignore, because although this is a trend to be welcomed by publishers of children's books, it brings its own array of problems and issues, impacting on Canadian publishers wishing to sell their books in the increasingly febrile UK market just as much as it does on those already active in it.

The traditional pattern of children's publishing

It is worth reflecting briefly on children's publishing as it used to be in the English-speaking world. The typical structure of publishing found children's books divisions 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. There were very few publishers who specialized exclusively in children's books. To a major trade house, a children's publishing arm was attractive because of the low entry costs, the negligible advances to authors and illustrators, the relatively longer life cycle

than adult books, the 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 profile (and closer scrutiny by the management.) the basic structure has not changed significantly. However, the raised profile of children's books and the resulting higher cost and increased risk in the sector has certainly affected 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. In some companies, this shift has led to closer integration with adult publishing in the sales and marketing functions.

Where will all this lead? Much of publishing is driven by the fashion of the day and the competitors' successes and what typically follows is a trail of imitations of diminishing quality, sales and profitability. Perhaps in hindsight Harry Potter will be seen as just another such flash in the pan. However, the changes that have occurred will be hard to reverse and it remains an open question how children's publishing will emerge from its day in the sun. Most children's publishers would probably welcome a return to a more stable environment where their books can be judged for their own quality and suitability for the marketplace.

The success of a few titles is sadly not a universal blessing. While the attention of the publishing world is focussed on these titles, some harm can be done to publishers with lower expectations for their products in other genres. The price of publishing, previously low, has gone up, at least for the time being, and the distractions caused by these few high-profile titles may make it more difficult for others to succeed elsewhere in the marketplace.

Characteristics of the children's books market

The children's market is distinctive and challenging for various reasons. Firstly, it encompasses most of, if not all, the genres of adult trade publishing: fiction and non-fiction books designed for entertainment or information, illustrated and unillustrated and about every subject under the sun. Secondly, it has two quite separate target audiences: children themselves and the adults who buy or otherwise influence their choice of books. In order to succeed, certainly as far as the younger age groups are concerned, books have to appeal to both. Thirdly (and this is not unrelated) 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.

Part Two The UK Children's Books Market

The UK 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. It has played a leading role in a succession of significant publishing trends: developing complex paper engineering for novelty books; controlling international co-editions; and developing character merchandising. It has witnessed the creative genius of Sebastian Walker (of Walker Books) and the new kind of information publishing pioneered by Dorling Kindersley.

Facts and figures

The UK is one of the world's major producers of books for children and young adults. Children's books are by a substantial margin the second largest category of books published and sold (after fiction). In the year 2002, according to *The Bookseller*, UK sales of children's books at retail were £141.9 million (\$326.4 million)¹ (as against £249.1 million (\$572.9 million) for fiction and £84.5 million (\$194.4 million) for biography and autobiography, the next largest category). This figure represents sales of 49,929 titles and the new title/backlist ratio was 36.3 % to 63.7%.

In 2002, 10,519 new titles or new editions were published, a small decline from 2001 (10,784, the all-time high), amounting to 8.4% of the amazing 125,390 new titles or new editions published in the UK across all categories in that year. By contrast, the number of adult fiction titles came down substantially in 2002, from 13,076 in 2001 to 11,810, so

¹ Amounts are expressed in Canadian dollars converted from British pounds at the exchange rate of :
1£=2.30 CAD or 1 CAD = 0.43478£

that by this measure children's books are close to being the largest category of output in the industry. The next largest categories to these two are history with 6,385 titles, economics with 5,232 and social sciences with 5,134.

The massive volumes of Harry Potter sales have inevitably distorted market statistics. There is some evidence that these sales have been substitutions for other titles and that sales are not growing much, if at all, across all children's titles as a whole. Only time will tell whether this is a significant trend.

Unfortunately, statistics specific to this market sector are not readily available. The Publishers Association, which is the main provider of industry sales statistics, categorizes only by trade books, academic books and schoolbooks, so that children's books are included in the much larger trade books category.

A more serious gap is the lack of any reliable statistics on how children's books are sold. Anecdotal evidence suggests that bookstore sales account for only around half of sales, but it is not possible to support this estimate.

There are, however, additional sources of information available. The ongoing Books and the Consumer survey, produced by Book Marketing Ltd., is available on subscription and provides consumer market research on 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 information about the market, the sales of publishers' titles and the trends within individual categories.

Demographics

The UK birth rate is currently falling, though not a dramatic rate. There continue to be concerns about whether books will still have a place in children's worlds as they grow up. So far most indications are reasonably favourable. Though all schools and libraries now provide free access to computers, both for games and learning, there is little evidence that these are replacing books as a primary medium of entertainment and instruction.

Naturally the younger generation will obtain an increasing amount of practical information from the Internet and that will of course have an impact on some types of publishing. But just as radio, television and film have been absorbed into daily life without significantly detracting from the market for books, so it may prove that books continue to supplement what the computer can provide.

More worrisome, however, is the amount of government funding that reaches the book market. Both schools and libraries have been 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. The Publishers Association has long been lobbying the government for funds specifically earmarked for the purchase of books by schools, but with only partial success. In the case of funding, the computer is the enemy. Enormous sums have been spent on the Curriculum Online initiative, aimed at providing digital resources to schools, and the government's requirement for universal access to the Internet in public libraries has been paid for out of local authorities' book funds. None of this helps the cause of the book, even though some educational publishers are profiting from the delivery of online products. 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 written 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 educational publishing specifically. However, books for the school library or books used by parents and teachers to provide additional information on the subjects being taught are in most cases produced by children's publishers. To that extent the UK educational system may need to be clarified for Canadian publishers.

Public education in the UK is free, with children usually moving from primary school to secondary school at the age of 11. Declining standards in education have disturbed successive governments. This has resulted in the creation of a National Curriculum which places emphasis on certain defined subjects and requires students to reach certain levels at various ages (these are called Key Stages). You can find more specific information about this and the subjects included in the National Curriculum at www.nc.uk.net/index.html.

Library loans

Libraries are still an important market for children's books. The UK's excellent public library service (books are free to borrow) has a strong base, but it has been badly damaged by a shortage of money; a failure to maintain a plausible presence in the community; and the long-running disputes between local government (which is responsible for library provision), and central government about long-term funding. Despite this, children's libraries often 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 special events and activities.

There has nevertheless been a decline in the number of books borrowed. According to figures from Public Lending Right, children's book loans amounted to 90.9 million (21.8% of all loans) in 2001/02, down from 111.4 million in 1996/97 and 113.2 million in 1991/92.

There are indications though that the borrowing of children's titles may be at the expense of adult books. The latest Public Lending Right figures give children's books 28% of all loans in 2003/04, a slight increase over the previous year. It is interesting that of the top twenty borrowed authors in 2003/04, no fewer than eight were children's writers (Jacqueline Wilson, Mick Inkpen, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Roald Dahl, Lucy Daniels, R. L. Stine, Enid Blyton and Nick Butterworth). For the second year in a row, Jacqueline Wilson was named the most borrowed author in the UK.

For the record, J. K. Rowling came only 11th among children's writers, though *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was the most borrowed title in the adult and children's categories combined. It must be assumed that sales of the earlier Harry Potter books had been so great that there was less interest in borrowing them.

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 a difficult task. The structures of the marketplace—the categories into which titles are published and the way they are displayed in shops—form the framework within which the industry operates. These categories are certainly not unique to the UK, but they do dictate how the UK market will treat them, and it may be dangerous to publish outside these categories if you want your books to gain ready acceptance in the marketplace.

Hardback fiction. Once almost unsaleable except in series aimed at the public and school library markets, hardback fiction has now become the highest profile genre within children's publishing. The other change in this category has been the age range at which fiction is pitched. It used to be that the higher the target age group the lower the sales (because children became more mature in their reading tastes at a younger age and books aimed at the early teens market were notoriously hard to sell). Now the coming of the “crossover” genre has changed this and adults of all ages are seen as a consumer for many of the one-off fiction titles now being published. It is difficult to be specific about who the buyers and readers in this category are because they are so widely spread. For the same reasons, as children's fiction has widened its readership age, so has it imitated bestselling adult fiction in its dependence on the author as the brand. In the current environment it is often the author rather than the subject matter that drives sales. Only the most high profile authors get published in hardback—again mirroring the increase in the sale of hardbacks in the adult market in recent times—and some are undoubtedly seen as collectible. The strategies adopted by Jacqueline Wilson's publishers in using distinctively recognizable covers on her novels by the same illustrator—Nick Sharratt—have contributed to this trend, as have the increasingly expensive jackets commissioned by publishers to draw attention to their titles in a crowded marketplace.

Paperback fiction. This is 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 category also includes 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. These books, sometimes called “picture flats,” are mostly 24 or 32 pages long, and come in a variety of page sizes and shapes. They tend to come from the prestige end of the market and are often showcases for illustrators. As hardbacks, however, they are hard to sell in the UK market because prices are high (typically around £10 (\$23)) and because the library market has moved towards buying paperback editions instead. But they are still important as the basis for lucrative co-edition printings. Except in rare cases, the viability of these titles depends on supporting co-edition and book-club 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 books 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. There are bath books, cloth books, rag books, shaped books, books with wheels, books with embedded musical chips, books that double as rattles to hang from the baby's buggy, sticker books, scratch 'n' sniff books, and so on. Frequently they figure well-known children's characters, either from TV or film or 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. UK publishers and packagers have developed the creative skills and the sourcing expertise to set up the substantial co-edition print runs that are necessary to justify the high set-up costs of die-cutting and other production requirements of the individual title.

Information books. The sale of non-fiction books has grown in recent years, perhaps because parents see information books as supplementing those currently available in state-funded schools. The distinctive style created by Dorling Kindersley that combined an extensive image bank with short accessible texts greatly increased this genre’s profile in the 1970s and 1980s. This style (which was extended through the whole range of

publishing from baby books to cook books to city guides) has become less popular in the last few years and today publishers such as Kingfisher have made it a virtue to create books that look different from DK's.

Generally, this category has moved away from the pictorial approach in favour of a more narrative style. The success of the *Horrible Histories* series has exemplified and encouraged this trend.

The main publishers and their characteristics

Almost all the major trade publishing groups now support children's lists. The UK scene, which has seen so much acquisition in recent years, is dominated by a small number of significant groupings, often encompassing the imprints and lists of acquired publishers. Unfortunately, there are no reliable statistics available on the relative sizes of their children's lists. In addition to these larger companies, however, there are a small, but significant, number of publishers producing only children's books, as well as literally thousands of smaller companies also competing in this overcrowded area.

The most prestigious of the children's divisions is still probably the Penguin Group, with its stable of classics and titles acquired on unlimited licence when Penguin had no challengers as a paperback publisher. Still based around the famous Puffin imprint, the division has been strengthened by the acquisition in 1983 of Frederick Warne and the Beatrix Potter copyrights and in 1986 of the Hamish Hamilton list (still a retained imprint). As well, it has grown through the absorption of the Ladybird imprint from elsewhere in the Pearson group and the takeover of Dorling Kindersley.

Penguin has, however, suffered—in children's books as elsewhere—from the loss of valuable titles which have been reclaimed by their original licensors. Random House Group is now probably the largest of the children's publishers and certainly one of the most successful in acquiring new titles. Their imprints include Jonathan Cape, Bodley Head, Hutchinson and Doubleday, with Corgi and Red Fox as their main paperback

imprints. Their most successful author is the phenomenally popular Jacqueline Wilson. A recent development there has been the establishment of David Fickling Books, a personal imprint for the editor who published Philip Pullman at Scholastic and remains his publisher under the Random House umbrella.

HarperCollins, Macmillan, Hodder Headline and Orion—not to mention Bloomsbury, publisher of Harry Potter—also have successful children's lists with a significant output.

In addition to these children's divisions of general trade publishers, there are a number of companies that publish exclusively for the children's market. The largest of these is Egmont, the UK branch of the highly successful Danish charitable organization. This grouping, though long established in the UK market, has grown to prominence through the acquisition of the former Reed children's companies (Heinemann Young Books, Methuen Children's Books and their paperback Mammoth list), giving them publishing rights to Thomas the Tank Engine, Winnie the Pooh, Tintin and others. Smaller but no less influential is Walker Books, which has been a beacon of excellence in the children's book world since its foundation by Sebastian Walker in the 1970s. Honourable mention should also be given to Andersen Press and Orchard Books, the former particularly noteworthy for the quality of their picture books. Scholastic's UK arm also maintains a high quality children's list alongside their more school-orientated information publishing and book-club activities.

All these companies, except for DK, publish mainstream children's books for all ages, from baby books to picture books to teenage and young adult titles, predominantly in the area of fiction. All of them also compete vigorously for TV and character tie-ins. Probably the most prominent is Penguin/Puffin. In addition to its existing properties (Spot the Dog, Beatrix Potter and others), it has recently become 75% owner of a joint venture with BBC Worldwide's children's publishing.

Several major players compete for the school library and non-fiction market. Dorling Kindersley is probably the best known information publisher in the UK and publishes non-fiction for all ages. Kingfisher, now owned by Houghton Mifflin, is also a prominent publisher of non-fiction. Scholastic, the Watts Group (part of the French Hachette group) and Evans Brothers also compete in this sector.

These are the major players, but there are literally hundreds, perhaps thousands, of smaller publishers competing in the children's books market, though their penetration into the distribution channels is undoubtedly limited by their size. Some of these companies that have a high profile include Piccadilly Press, Frances Lincoln and Barefoot Books.

Part of these companies' ability to compete on reasonably equal terms with the heavyweight publishing groups is attributable to various networks of children's book specialists that service this part of the industry, whether it be freelance publicists, distribution or marketing companies, or simply the ability of their owners to make an impact in the relatively small world of children's publishing. The existence and success of these companies should provide comfort to Canadian publishers who will be able, with determination and good local knowledge, to tap into this network of resources. More about this will be found later in this guide.

Co-editions and packagers

The UK, although a major centre of international children's book publishing, is in general too small a market for the sale of hardback children's colour books. This local limitation has led UK publishers, fortunate in having a ready supply of talented writers and illustrators on hand, to establish an international hub for co-edition publishing. This has enabled them economically to print a comparatively small number of copies for the UK market while supplying other language editions to publishers around the world. In the early days, they were helped in this by their flexibility in finding new and cheaper

sources of colour print, notably in the Far East, and by the now long-abandoned legal restrictions on their US partners from placing print abroad. This dominance in the market continues, though affected from time to time by fluctuations in currency exchange rates.

It is not an activity for the faint-hearted, however. Quoting prices to international publishers on books which may not be delivered for several years and then coordinating the language changes and individual requirements of local publishers is full of pitfalls for the unwary. Superficially it looks like an attractive financial proposition, especially as upfront payments can usually be negotiated to fund development costs and reproduction, and this has led a huge number of often undercapitalized packagers to try and establish a foothold in the market. That so many of them have come to grief over the years is a testament to the rigours of this particular market sector.

Character merchandising

The UK market is full of tie-in materials from the latest film or TV series and the use of these to promote accompanying books is nothing new, nor is it a UK phenomenon. (It is many years since Disney first became involved in the merchandising of Winnie the Pooh, for instance). However, it has been a prominent characteristic of the UK children's book scene and publishers are always on the look out for new children's properties from film, TV and other media. Most major publishers also have departments engaged in trying to exploit characters from their children's books and, when successful, revenues from merchandising can be very satisfactory, though often rather smaller and longer delayed than original projections might have suggested. Ownership of merchandising brands, however, continues to be seen as a feather in the cap of publishers.

Part Three Market Potential: Canadian Children's Books in UK

There is no reason why Canadian children's books should not sell successfully in the UK market. However, to do so, there are a few basic rules that need to be borne in mind. These apply to publishers of any genre as much as they do to children's book publishers, but it is worth stating them here:

- The market is competitive. There are too many books chasing too little display space. To overcome this, you must (a) have an excellent product for the market and (b) attend to all the laborious details that help buyers to support your books.
- Advance selling material is essential. An advance information sheet and a cover proof (inside spreads too if you're in the picture book sector) or finished copies available well ahead of publication date—up to six months for some of the major chains or to secure deals in secondary channels—is a crucial part of establishing credibility for your books. It is worth postponing publication if your selling material is not going to be available in good time.
- Make sure your product information is available on the databases early and is kept up-to-date and complete (more on this below).
- Don't give buyers any excuse not to buy your books. Make your titles look and feel as if they belong in the UK marketplace. This isn't about spellings and language (though see below for more on this, too) but about cover images and typography, the general feel of your books.
- Print a UK price (and probably a UK barcode) on your books. British retailers don't need a price add-on on a barcode, so it's better not to leave a Canadian price visible on your books.

- Set a price that is right for the UK market, not one that makes you a profit if you sell the book. The only consequence of overpricing is underselling and returns.
- Follow UK trade practice for terms, returnability and so on.

Opportunities and drawbacks

The UK market in general makes no distinction between books of local origin and those from other countries. In children's books there are countless examples of books from other parts of the world that have been absorbed into the national psyche, and, with the possible exception of books aimed at school use, the subject matter and locale are generally not an issue. The UK market, unlike the US market for instance, is not normally deterred by unfamiliar usages or images, provided that the context and the reasons for cultural differences are clear.

It is unfortunately not possible to be definitive about which books will travel and which will not. Children's books in particular are liable to be subject to notions of political correctness or social judgements, which cannot always be foreseen. In the increasingly multicultural society of the UK, publishers have a tendency to overcompensate by including characters from different ethnic backgrounds in a recognizably UK environment. This is certainly not a requirement, but at the same time the inclusion of multicultural elements will never hinder sales in this area of the market. However, as with all other books, the acceptability of certain titles generally lies with the structures of the book trade and the prejudices of bookstore buyers rather than with the end consumer. It is therefore prudent to tailor your books to the requirements of the trade as far as you can.

As we have already seen, the children's market is among the most competitive and it must be remembered that, amidst the mass of product available on the market, the bookstore buyer is always looking for reasons not to buy rather than to buy. Publishing within the specific categories that are recognizable to buyers and making your books look as much like the rest of the products on offer—unless they are truly innovative—is therefore

advisable. Remember that buyers operate within the constraints of their own store and have limited and specifically allocated space. On the other hand, it is important to remember that the consumer dictates whether a book is successful or not. If you have a product that bookshops don't like but readers do, be prepared to push it.

What sells and what doesn't

The biggest problem facing children's publishers is knowing whether they are producing books for parents or children. This ambiguity in the business crops up all the time and certainly there are a high proportion of books bought as gifts by people who may have no intention of reading them. Furthermore, as we shall see later on, the children's market is very fragmented. There are plenty of ways to sell books outside the conventional bookstore and understanding and exploiting the various channels is crucial for success.

Almost all bookshops have children's sections, but with few exceptions they carry a very limited number of titles—and by not knowing whether they appeal to parents or children, they end up doing neither. There is a considerable amount of conservatism inherent in both children and parents—hence the enduring appeal of classics and established backlist titles. In general terms, and particularly at the younger age levels where parents' choice and approval is paramount, the market is a fairly discerning one. Consumers do, at least to some extent, take notice of the publisher when they buy and expect that to be an indicator of reliability. Puffin Books from Penguin have retained an enviable reputation over the years. More recently, the consistently high creative standards of Walker Books are appreciated by many parents, teachers and librarians.

The other feature of children's books that sets them apart from other genres is the appeal of series publishing. Whether this is a series created by publishers as a format for readers of a particular age, or a sequence of titles about the same characters (e.g., Harry Potter, Thomas the Tank Engine or Philip Pullman), or just books by the same author or illustrator, all these mechanisms help to ensure high and growing sales, provided that the quality is maintained. Conversely, of course, breaking through with a single title by an

unknown author or illustrator is correspondingly difficult, and publishers in these more expansive days are prepared to spend lavishly on production, marketing and PR for the few exceptional titles of this kind which come along.

Cover designs are important, as always in the book trade, but not in the same way that an adult book can be made or lost by the effectiveness of its design. Artwork by a book's illustrator (if there is one) is commonly used and hand lettering is still common.

Distinctive, if at times unsophisticated, designs are normally acceptable. For a book to look right for its market, however, is very important and you may well find some resistance to cover designs originating in Canada. A quick visit to the children's section of a big bookstore should give you a clear idea of what is and is not appropriate. It may be unduly costly for you to change your cover design for the UK market, but it might in certain circumstances be the difference between significant sales and no sales at all.

Product information

We have stressed above how important early product information is to the UK book trade, especially when selling to the major chains or when negotiating bulk sales to book clubs or other similar channels. Although this applies to all books regardless of genre, it is too important a subject not to cover in this guide.

Much of this is a simple matter of timing: if you don't make the trade aware of your titles appropriately early, your sales will suffer and will never catch up. It is also a relatively simple mechanism in the UK because almost all of the trade's product information is channelled through one data aggregator: Nielsen BookData (the company recently merged out of Whitaker and Book Data). In general, and unless you are specifically asked to supply data direct, information provided to Nielsen BookData will be swiftly channelled out to booksellers (online as well as traditional) and wholesalers.

Nowadays it is not enough just to send information about your titles once and then forget about it. You do need to make sure the information held by Nielsen BookData and fed out to the trade remains accurate and complete. You can now check this online, but the best way to ensure that data is accurate is to send updates, preferably in electronic form, every time any information about your books changes. Once they are published, only detail of price and availability generally changes and you may well find that your distributor is set up to send daily electronic information to Nielsen BookData for all the publishers for whom they distribute.

As this guide was going to press, it was announced that R.R. Bowker, the US data aggregator well known to Canadian publishers, had decided to collect data from UK publishers in competition with Nielsen BookData. It is too early to predict what impact this will have on the UK bibliographic scene but you should certainly think about supplying your product information to them too. There is more on this development at <http://www.bowker.co.uk/datasub/index.htm>.

There is also an additional component to product information that you should know about. Book Industry Communication (BIC), which is the UK trade's supply chain organization, has set up a series of children's books marketing codes in collaboration with the children's book group of the Publishers Association. These help to identify the appropriate market for an individual title, and details can be found at <http://www.bic.org.uk/cbmc.html>.

Conformance requirements

Beyond basic adherence to good standards of book production, there are no particular requirements to abide by in order to sell your books in the UK trade. There are no minimum standards for paper quality or board weight, for instance, and there is no need to consider reinforced bindings for libraries (though in some instances these may be provided to libraries by specialist library suppliers and binders).

Nor is there any duty or other obstruction placed on the import of books, regardless of where they have been manufactured. Furthermore, there is no value added tax (VAT)—the European equivalent of a sales tax— payable on books, which means that consumers pay no more than the recommended retail price on the book. Publishers (provided they are registered with the VAT authorities, as is legally required for companies and individuals with sales revenues above a certain level) can recover VAT charged to them by suppliers. More on this can be found on the Customs and Excise web site at www.hmce.gov.uk.

There are, however, two major complications. One is that VAT is chargeable at its full rate of 17.5% on electronic products (CDs, DVDs, videos and book content delivered electronically over the internet). Therefore, if you are selling a mixed product that includes a book and a CD, for example, you are likely to be liable to charge some VAT. Usually the value of products of this kind are apportioned so that VAT is chargeable on the non-book element in the package, but many such decisions are taken at the local level by individual tax officers. The safest course is to submit details of your product to your local VAT office (or that of your distributor) and obtain a specific ruling. Your distributor is likely to have obtained similar rulings in the past that may also apply to your product.

The other complication arises over the question of books as toys. In the case of some baby books and novelty books, it is not always clear whether it is a toy or a book and because toys are treated very differently from books in a number of important respects, it is very important to make the right distinction. Firstly, although books may generally be imported duty-free, duty is likely to be payable on goods classified as toys, depending on where they have been manufactured and whether special exemptions have been granted to their country of origin. It is impossible to give general advice in this area except that, if you have a product which you think is seriously likely to be identified as a toy rather than a book if inspected on arrival, you should obtain a binding ruling on this from HM Customs and Excise as early as possible. The powers of Customs and Excise are notoriously extensive and your products could be impounded or in the last analysis destroyed if you have not already established the basis for import.

Such a ruling is important for another reason: toys are liable to VAT at the full rate. Some publishers have been known to play safe and charge VAT on all their novelty books. This really is not necessary because if a product has been classified as a book (and that would include almost all pop-up and lift-the-flap books) it remains a book for VAT purposes.

Just as important, but easier to cope with, are the European Union safety requirements on toys and some books for babies. This is a self-regulating mechanism whereby publishers print a “CE” mark on the back cover of their books to indicate that they are abiding by EU regulations on child safety. More information on this is available from the British Standards Institution web site at <http://www.bsi-global.com/index.xalter> and the text of the relevant European directive on the safety of toys can be read (not for the faint-hearted though) at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/consleg/pdf/1988/en_1988L0378_do_001.pdf.

You should not feel overly concerned about these regulations. They only apply to a very slender sector of the market, and, if you operate in or near that sector, the best advice is to take advice, rather than find out the worst when it's too late.

Spelling and usage

Many exporters of books from North America are concerned about whether their books will be rejected by bookstores because of North American spelling or usage.

Unfortunately it is very difficult to give definitive advice on this. As with all other aspects of your books, the fewer obstacles you put in the way of buyers, the easier it will be for you and your sales agents. If you can afford to adapt your text to UK spelling you should probably do so, certainly in books for the lower age groups where there may be conflict with what children are being taught in schools. At a slightly higher age, and certainly where children are reading themselves, there is not so much pressure to adapt. Many books of US origin are circulating in the UK and pressures to conform are very much less than, for instance, they are when British books are sold in the US market. Similarly, of course, UK schools have for many years taught the metric system and certainly at the lower age levels the use of kilometres, metres and grams would be

preferred. In society generally, the imperial system of weights and measures is commonly used alongside metric equivalents and even the youngest children know what an inch or mile is (though not necessarily pounds and ounces). The Celsius (or Centigrade) scale of temperature has now more or less supplanted the Fahrenheit scale.

As a broad rule of thumb, objections to books with North American usage and spelling will begin to diminish for books aimed at children of seven or eight and over. Below that, librarians and parents are likely to show resistance.

It is worth noting in this context that UK publishers generally do not print the target age group on their books. Helpful as this can be, most feel that it limits rather than adds to the acceptability of a title, especially in some of their overseas territories where educational development may be different from that in the UK.

Part Four Accessing the UK marketplace

As emphasized before, this guide is not intended for those seeking a way to enter the UK market. It assumes that you have a certain knowledge of the overall UK scene and that you have already made the basic decisions about how you are going to distribute and sell your books. In all probability you have followed the most common model for entry into the marketplace: exporting your books and hiring the necessary basic local expertise in the form of distributors and sales agents to get them into the market.

If you are a publisher who includes children's books within a broader publishing range, you will probably find it easier to sign up with a distributor and sales agent who will handle all your books. (Though that probably would not apply when choosing a freelance publicist, as explained in the section that follows). Most of the rules for effective distribution of adult books apply equally to children's books.

However, there are two significant differences. One is that there are many more channels for children's books that need to be exploited (non-traditional channels will likely account for more than half of your sales), and, second, there are specialist outlets and marketing mechanisms that need to be investigated. Consequently, if you publish only children's books you should certainly investigate the advantages of going to distributors and sales agents who concentrate on children's books. The best known of these is Ragged Bears, who distribute and market for a number of children's publishers, as well as being publishers themselves. There is, however, no particular benefit in going to a specialist distributor in terms of the fulfilment services provided. The same may not be true of sales agents, where having your books sold alongside other children's lists may well be an advantage when it comes to keeping buyers' interest alive. Bounce! Sales and Marketing is the most prominent children's book specialist in this area. Portfolio Books is another company that distributes and markets children's books, along with being a specialist travel book distributor, though this is a relatively recent development. Contact details for all these can be found in the appendixes.

You may be dismayed to find so few organizations specifically devoted to children's books marketing and sales, and how difficult it is to persuade them to take an interest in your titles. This is another consequence of the Harry Potter effect. In pre-Potter days, Ragged Bears had a virtual monopoly of the market for specialized children's books sales and distribution. The market for services in this sector has not moved fast enough to accommodate burgeoning children's lists from UK publishers, let alone from those overseas.

It is important to put this in perspective, however. As we said above, there is no absolute necessity for your books to be handled by children's books specialists, certainly in distribution and most likely in sales too. All sales forces sell children's books and will expect to sell to children's buyers and to non-traditional outlets and provide the services that your titles require. If your books have a real chance of succeeding in the marketplace, you will find no lack of attention.

Dedication, commitment, attention to the detail of the trade's requirements and specialist and professional advice, particularly on the sales and marketing side, are all essential. So is immersing yourself in the unusually close-knit culture of children's publishing. Although you may meet children's publishers whose commitment to their authors and illustrators—and to the value of their books—seems light years away from the marketplace, do not be deceived. For children's publishing is quite as competitive a market as any other, and probably more so. This makes selling children's books hard work, but it makes the rewards even greater when you succeed.

The retail market

Most of your sales activity will be focussed on traditional book retailers, but, as we have said before, it is likely that a substantial proportion of your sales will be made in non-specialist outlets or through other channels altogether. Since the abolition of the Net Book Agreement in 1997, which had previously enabled publishers to set the minimum price at which their books could be sold, there is probably no sector that has grown faster

outside traditional channels than children's books. Given the range of products covered by the children's books sector, the opportunities are almost limitless: promotional offers through magazines or other products, mail order through book clubs, school book fairs or sales through display marketing organizations, and so on. Additionally, there is a wealth of opportunities to sell children's books through non-traditional retail channels: toy shops, general stores, restaurants, highway service areas, tourist shops, etc.

However, you cannot afford to ignore the traditional book retailers. Most bookshops have children's sections, though many of them have limited space and consequently extremely limited stock, typically holding a selection of classic titles and only a handful of new products. Often tucked away at the back of the store and identified by a colourful carpet and perhaps a few cushions on the floor, the children's section is frequently seen as the poor relation in the store, though one which might attract the attention of parents to the more expensive merchandise at the front of the store.

The retail sector is dominated by five major players:

- WH Smith is probably the biggest book retailer in the UK, claiming around 17% of the market share in books, and is also a major retailer of stationery and cards, toys and games, newspapers and magazines and music. It has around 545 main street stores and a further 220 “travel” stores in airports and railway stations. It has few, if any, dedicated areas set aside for children's books but it does sell many, especially information books, school-related titles, as well as middle-market staples. The important thing to remember about WH Smith is that it has strict central buying and stockholding policies which mean that they buy only a very limited selection of titles, though the numbers will be significant if yours are among those selected. Although their commitment to books varies from time to time—at the moment it is high—WH Smith operates as a general retailer rather than as a bookshop chain.

- Waterstone's, the largest of the “real” bookshop chains with about 200 branches, by contrast, runs its stores on an individual basis, allowing store managers a high degree of freedom to control their own stock and budgets. Distinct children's departments are customary in their stores, though stockholding and range varies according to the size of the store. Buying policy does, however, tend to be conservative, with an emphasis on big name authors rather than deep backlist stockholding.
- Ottakar's, the newest major chain, which has grown rapidly by acquisition and by exploiting the demand for good quality smaller bookshops in towns which would not previously have been thought able to sustain a specialist bookstore, has similar policies to Waterstone's and a similar view of the children's market. They do, however, promote children's books strongly and will certainly be one of your key accounts. By creating a corporate Intranet, they have also imaginatively solved the problems caused by giving individual store managers too much freedom to buy. The Intranet enables managers to make their own buying decisions but at the same time informs them of centralized campaigns and promotions, as well as offering a great deal of supporting information about current titles and the company's publicity plans.
- Borders Group, which arrived in the UK in the late 1990s with the acquisition of the thriving London-based chain of small stores called Books etc, now continues to run these shops alongside a growing estate of US-style superstores. Books etc shops generally have a small children's section, often not geographically defined within the store, but broadly similar in layout and stock to those in Waterstone's and Ottakar's shops. Borders, however, generally have large geographically discrete children's sections, with plenty of space and seating for parents and children to browse and read.

There are no reliable statistics on market share in children's books between the various bookstore chains. Of the big companies, Borders probably have the best children's sections, admirably tailored to their target markets, with a wide range of stock and a comfortable and welcoming environment. This is a major selling point for Borders as most children's sections in chain stores are woefully inadequate, without coherent

stockholding, experienced and knowledgeable staff and space for browsing or buggies. The lack of imagination shown by most chain booksellers and their failure to understand the potential of children's books as a way of growing their future market makes it hardly surprising that parents wanting to buy books for their children turn to other sources for their books such as www.amazon.co.uk. Amazon has been a huge success in the UK, going from 0 to around 5% of the market in only a few years. No area of publishing could be more receptive than children's books to the benefits their site provides: limitless range, cover and illustration material, links to books by the same author, real reviews by parents and children and the opportunity to browse. The only drawback is the high price of postage and packing for books with usually a low cover price.

It is important to remember, however, the UK's still active, if beleaguered, independent booksellers, particularly the select group of specialist children's bookshops that compete on range, service and informed and helpful staff. A list of some of these shops, together with a list of the facilities they offer, is given on the Booksellers Association web site at <http://www.booksellers.org.uk/>. Though these shops are limited in number, and for many consumers not conveniently located, they are capable of selling many hundreds of copies of books, especially those they recommend to their loyal customers. These committed children's booksellers, with their personal knowledge of their markets and their stock, put most chain booksellers to shame.

Wholesalers

Unless you are completely new to the UK market, you will already know the enormous power of the three main general wholesalers in the UK market. You will also know that you will have to deal with them in order to supply the many hundreds of independent bookshops (and some chain shops) that depend on them for the overnight delivery of the majority of their supplies, and you will probably know the disadvantages of doing so. You will have to give them a very high discount, between 50 and 60%, and generally you will not know to whom they are supplying or how successfully your titles are performing until you get hit with their returns. However, they are a significant part of the market and

will need your close attention. Gardners are by a wide margin the largest and currently the most successful. Bertrams have worked hard to support smaller bookshops and are very much a force in the market. THE (Total Home Entertainment) is increasing its book sales fast, although they are still overshadowed by its music, video and DVD business. All publish monthly catalogues of new titles, which are widely used by booksellers for their ordering, and it is possible to advertise in them at relatively low cost to draw attention to your lead titles.

It is very important to remember that the wholesalers are not a substitute for distributors or sales agents. Although part of their businesses involves an effective distribution function and they do have sales forces visiting customers, their purpose is to sell more books, not concentrate on individual lists or provide a focused form of sales representation. It is important that wholesalers stock your books, but you should treat them like any other bookseller who will return overstocks without compunction as soon as sales dip below acceptable levels.

Specialist wholesalers and merchandisers

Though often called wholesalers, the specialist sales forces and merchandisers fulfil a very different role from that carried out by Gardners, Bertrams and THE. These are the people who will ensure that your books get sold in the thousands of non-book outlets that now sell books, and children's books in particular. These may be newsagents, corner stores, filling stations, highway service areas, gift shops, tourist shops and music shops. They may also supply books to supermarkets. Given the high proportion of sales expected from outside traditional retail stores, this is a crucial area to focus on.

The terms on which you trade may not be very attractive. You will have to give high discounts and full returnability (which in all likelihood will be taken advantage of) but you will hugely extend your reach by dealing with them—and of course your books will not get the display they need if they are sitting in your distributor's warehouse.

The key companies in this sector will depend on the area of the marketplace you are trying to access. Aura (part of Advanced Marketing Services) specializes in outlets such as garden centres, gift shops and other specialist merchandise. Bookspeed, S. Webb & Co and Powerfresh distribute to the gift and “fancy goods” market.

Supply arrangements for supermarkets are liable to change from time to time, and this is particularly true since one of the major merchandisers supplying this sector, Cork International, was forced into liquidation in 2004, leaving publishers with massive debts. This is likely to lead to a reappraisal by publishers of the discounts they can afford to give to supermarkets and of the precarious financial position potentially occupied by the middlemen who supply them. Other companies, including the three trade wholesalers—THE already has the Sainsbury’s and Morrison accounts—and Entertainment UK, who supply the UK Woolworth operation, are likely to play a larger part in the future in this area and may provide greater stability. Your distributor or sales agent will be able to provide up-to-date information about the particular supply routes used by the supermarket sector.

Another very important channel for your books is likely to be the library and school supply specialists. The library suppliers operate in a fiercely competitive market providing value-added services to public libraries (adding barcodes and class marks, repackaging books for library shelves, and even providing cataloguing records). They buy in significant numbers but the antiquated approval systems they employ have in the past led to a high level of returns. There is now a gradual move towards library selection from CDs or online and even some vendor-managed selection. The key players are Peters Bookselling Services (who exclusively operate in the children’s book sector), Askews Library Services, Holt-Jackson and Cypher Group (owned by Bertrams). Contact details for these are to be found in the appendix.

Finally, there is a group of regional wholesalers (West Country Books, Lomond Books and Country Bookstore) who specialize in books with local appeal. Your distributor or sales agent will be able to advise you on how to tackle this part of the market.

Book clubs and bulk sales

Book clubs are an important part of your market, but they are unlikely to make you rich. On all these deals the volumes may be substantial but the discounts are very high. Book clubs may well expect a discount of 75% or more, especially for books intended to be included in promotions. The benefits are clear, however, particularly for colour books or novelty titles where you have substantial set up and origination costs or—in other situations—where you have excessive stock costing you money to store. It is also arguable that book club sales are bringing you closer to your target audience than sales through the bookshop trade can do.

There are two kinds of clubs. The traditional mail order model, represented in the UK by Books for Children, operated by Bertelsmann-owned Book Club Associates (BCA), sells from colour magazines, typically advertising premium offers to new members willing to agree to buy a certain number of titles in the future. There is a significant element of online sales in BCA's sales strategy as well nowadays. The other model is the school book fair, at which books are displayed in schools and orders taken for them. Scholastic is the leading player in this market (and has absorbed its main rival, Red House).

Children's books also figure prominently in the stock sold by the display marketing companies, which—following the model of the school clubs—display and sell books in the workplace. These companies organize temporary book displays in factories and offices and sell substantial volumes of mass-market titles at very low prices, often to people who would never visit a bookstore. The most notable player in this market is The Book People, run by Ted Smart, which will buy huge numbers of books at a knock-down price if the product is right for their operation. They also have a mail order catalogue that is widely distributed to homes around the country.

These outlets cannot be ignored, as they are crucial to the mathematics of profitable publishing in a sector where high start-up costs and relatively low retail prices are the key facts of commercial life. They also represent, in almost all cases, firm sales, free from damaging and expensive returns. However, you should be aware of some backlash from booksellers, who believe these operations take business away from their main street stores and point to vast price differentials between identical books advertised in catalogues and sold across the counter. Some booksellers are threatening not to buy books also available through catalogues unless they have been informed in advance.

Remainders

If all else fails and you are left with overstocks in the UK which are completely unsaleable or are costing you more to store than you can hope to recover in sales, there are always remainder merchants and jobbers who will take them off your hands, though for pennies rather than dollars. The remainder business has been in the doldrums since the demise of the Net Book Agreement and the number of bargain bookshops on the UK's main streets has much diminished in recent years. Nevertheless there is still a market if you are desperate. Your sales agent will certainly know who to go to, or there is a list published in the *Publishers Association/Continuum Directory of Publishing* which appears annually in October/November and is available at most libraries (not yet online, though).

Part Five Marketing and promotion

Though the mechanics of setting up your business structure in the UK (finding a distributor and sales organization, establishing shipping procedures, ensuring your product information is in the relevant systems in good time, and so on) are your first priority, these are one-off tasks which should need relatively little supervision once set up. By contrast, the marketing and promotion of your books in the UK's highly competitive environment is an ongoing task and one that is likely to preoccupy you on a daily basis.

It is very important to learn what services any individual organization is capable of providing. Many of the companies that offer distribution or sales representation will claim to provide marketing support as well. You must be sure that the services you are paying for are really covering your complete needs.

The traditional distinction is that marketing is paid for and publicity is free and in broad terms that is still valid. Both are equally necessary to the success of your books.

You can reasonably expect your sales organization to provide the basic marketing services: negotiating promotions with retailers' head offices, establishing core stock status for your titles, and arranging window display and other store-related matters. This must not be confused with the job of the publicist who works with the media to bring your books in front of the buying public.

Working with a publicist will be an expensive undertaking but is an indispensable part of establishing a successful business in the UK. Only you can decide how much to spend: whether to hire a full-time publicist for your books, retain somebody to promote your books as required, or buy publicity services for individual titles or campaigns. If you have a sales agreement with a publisher, they may provide this as an additional service, either as part of the deal or as an additional cost.

Although many of the PR agencies will be happy to discuss the promotion of children's books (especially, in the current environment, in the “crossover” sector) it is advisable that you have a publicist who is a specialist in children's books. The children's books world is entirely separate from the world of adult media and has its own very specific requirements and networks. Somebody who understands this—and does not think children's books can be handled in the same way as adult titles—will do a much better job and will be well worth the money.

Unfortunately there are not many of these people and as a result they do tend to become very committed. You may also be surprised by the relatively unsophisticated techniques and methods some of them employ. However, the world of children's books is a small one where everyone knows everyone else, and this calls for a much more personal and nonaggressive approach than that employed for adult books. The key individuals are listed in the appendix. Another source of information available is the Publishers Publicity Circle to which most publicists belong. All their members are listed on their web site (<http://www.publisherspublicitycircle.co.uk/>).

For more general guidance on the children's market, it is possible to obtain valuable advice on your titles and the marketplace—as many publishers do—from consultants. This need not involve a long-term commitment and therefore need not be an expensive activity; a one-off consultation about particular issues that concern you may be all that's required. The children's books editor of the *Guardian*, Julia Eccleshare, or the former head of children's books at Scottish Book Trust, Lindsey Fraser, would certainly be worth approaching. Contact details are in the appendix.

Print and broadcast media

Most of the “quality” national press (*The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Independent* and their Sunday editions) cover children's books occasionally, often in periodic round-ups of new titles. Only the *Guardian*, in its excellent Saturday Review, reviews children's books every week (though admittedly only a few titles) and is the only paper that has its own

children's books editor. The *Guardian* also reviews children's books monthly on its parents' page and in its Tuesday Education supplement and it has an impressive children's books web page at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments>.

None of this adds up to anything resembling comprehensive coverage of new titles. However, there are plenty of opportunities for promoting children's books—in women's or parenting magazines, in the extensive regional and local press—if there is an adequate hook to hang a review on. Identifying and exploiting opportunities of this kind will be one of the skills a really good publicist can provide. Of course the opportunity for publicity or a review has grown with the media's recent increased interest in children's books, particularly “crossover” fiction.

Broadcast media is less easy to address. Though obviously there is a considerable amount of children's programming, it is not easy to promote books in this way. Indeed, the synergies with TV or film often work in the opposite direction, with children's books following TV programmes and the characters created for them. However, there is an extensive network of local and regional radio stations, both run by the BBC and by commercial operators that are always ready to listen to ideas for broadcast content. Local authors, books of particular topical interest, or books that might appeal to young mothers at home during the day are such ideas. National radio (BBC) occasionally covers children's books, with reviews in the daily arts programmes *Front Row* on Radio 4 or *Night Waves* on Radio 3. The perennial daily programme *Women's Hour* on Radio 4 is a good source of publicity for children's titles. Radio 4 also has a children's programme *Go For It* that sometimes features books and authors.

The attractive feature of children's books, though unfortunately it applies only to a very limited number of titles, is the cross-media opportunities sometimes presented. At its most extreme case, for instance, sales of Harry Potter books are supported by film and character merchandising, so that Harry Potter has become a ubiquitous part of daily life for many children and parents. For most titles the reality is much less attractive, with a lot of hard work needed to find an appropriate focus for promoting individual titles to

appropriate media. Needless to say, children's books do not generally lend themselves to generic promotions, though one exception worth mentioning is the annual children's books supplement organized by the Children's Book Group of the Publishers Association and distributed in the *Guardian*. For this, publishers are invited to submit and pay for titles for promotion so that the whole enterprise is self-supporting.

Reading and literacy agencies

Though it is necessary for the purposes of this guide to make the distinction between children's books (primarily for entertainment and information) and schoolbooks, there is inevitably a certain amount of interrelationship between education, literacy and the home use of books. For many children, books are a primary engine of education and personal development, whether used in the classroom or at home, and the majority of publishers take their responsibilities seriously as far as educational content is concerned. For this reason, you should not ignore the reading and literacy agencies of which the most important is Book Trust, the book trade charity that promotes books and reading. Its children's books section provides advice on reading and the availability of children's books and is a key source of information for teachers and the general public. In a more specialist territory, there are two major literacy organizations performing, at least in part, a similar function: the National Literacy Association and the National Literacy Trust. Contact information on these and some other similar organizations is given in the appendix.

Co-operative campaigns and events

Children's books are the pre-eminent feature of World Book Day which, though the date varies to suit the trade and to avoid clashes with other events, is usually celebrated in March in the UK. Indeed, some of the participants complain that coverage of children's books has swamped the whole event. The day provides one key sales opportunity: children are given a £1 (\$2.30) token to be spent on books in the fortnight following World Book Day itself. Though some low-price books are made especially available, this

promotion gives a significant boost to book sales. There are also numerous opportunities for other promotions and publicity, with many schools being involved in competitions and events associated with children's books. Look at www.worldbookday.com for further information.

Children's books also have their own week in October each year, organized by Book Trust. Children's Book Week is a major focus for children's book activity and promotional opportunities. There is much more information on this at www.booktrusted.co.uk/cbw/index.html.

Other events and promotions are less predictable. There has recently been huge interest in the BBC's Big Read TV series, which attempted to compile a list of viewers' favourite books. Retailers also run the same kind of promotion from time to time. There seems to be an inexhaustible interest in lists of this kind, always reported in the national newspapers and on radio and TV and always featuring a significant percentage of children's books. They also always generate subsequent publicity from people complaining that their own favourite books have not been included.

The UK book trade has not traditionally been good at collaborating in the promotion of books, as most publishers prefer to spend their money promoting their own titles rather than supporting book sales in general. But the above mentioned promotions and other similar activities have done a lot recently to raise the profile of books and reading and children's books in particular.

Book fairs and events

The prime event of the year for children's book publishers is the Bologna Book Fair, held annually in April. As the profile of children's books has grown, so has attendance at this fair. It is now one of the chief meeting places for the trading of rights and an indispensable—and generally enjoyable—event in a particularly attractive location. Children's publishers also go to Frankfurt in October and use this as an opportunity for a

six-month update on their business with their international trading partners. Partly because of its closeness in the calendar to Bologna, the London Book Fair (LBF), gaining in size and stature year by year, has not been a major venue for rights trading in the past, but there are signs of this changing, especially as the number of international visitors increases. The LBF has always been more of a trade fair than a rights fair, a place for substantial business between UK trading partners. Everybody with an interest in the children's books market will be active at all these fairs, and, though you may find few chain retailers there, the book clubs, remainder dealers and other potential outlets for your books will all be represented—even if they may prefer to do business elsewhere.

Many other events and festivals in the year have some children's books dimension. The most significant is probably the Edinburgh International Book Festival which is part of the Edinburgh Festival and is an opportunity to promote authors and sell books in the sunshine of Charlotte Street Gardens. The Hay Literary Festival, the Cheltenham Literary Festival and many other smaller festivals will also be open to children's authors and illustrators and form part of the network of contact and communication that is so much a part of the children's book world. The closeness of this world may perhaps seem daunting to publishers arriving in the market for the first time, but it is certainly something that must be taken seriously if you are going to be part of it.

Trade press

Both of the two weekly trade papers, the *Bookseller* and *Publishing News*, cover children's books in some detail. The *Bookseller* publishes a monthly review of the children's books scene edited by Caroline Horn, together with highlights of forthcoming publishing programmes selected by a panel of booksellers and critics, and periodically produces a more extensive *Children's Bookseller* supplement (aimed primarily at attracting children's book advertising from publishers). *Publishing News*, recently relaunched and now competing strongly with the *Bookseller* in terms of coverage and authority, also has a monthly feature, typically comprising an author profile and trade news by its children's books editor, Graham Marks, but also providing a comprehensive

listing of forthcoming titles. Both publications provide opportunities for promoting titles through “advertorial” features. The *Bookseller* also publishes its twice-yearly Buyers' Guide (previously known as the Export Bookseller) listing titles due to be published in the coming season. Contact information for these can be found in the appendix.

Though it is not technically part of the trade press, you might find the idiosyncratic children's book web site at www.achuka.co.uk of interest. It contains lots of news and comment about the children's book world.

Publications and reviews

There are an astonishing variety of publications that might review children's books, though very few do so on a systematic basis. Women's magazines and parenting magazines will cover a very limited number of titles in most issues. The problem will be how to decide how much energy to devote to this, and here the help of a professional publicist will be invaluable in following up personal contacts and opening doors for your publications. More easily accessible, however, are the specialist publications available to those in the children's books area, whether consumers or publishers. These are generally aimed at librarians and teachers and a list of them can be found on the Book Trust web site, including Book Trust's own online magazine (www.booktrusted.co.uk). The most notable publications are the bi-monthly *Books for Keeps* and *School Libraries in View* and *Youth Libraries Review*, of which the latter two are published by special interest groups of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals). *Child Education* and *Junior Education*, published by Scholastic, are valuable sources for teachers looking for books and other educational resources. The *TES* (formerly *Times Educational Supplement*, the leading weekly for the teaching profession) is widely read—partly for its job advertisements—and contains a wide range of book reviews.

Groups and associations

In a sector where contacts are of paramount importance, it is not surprising that there exists a number of groups and organizations that may be advantageous to join. A full list of these can be found at www.booktrusted.co.uk/organisations/index.php. The most important are probably the Children's Book Circle, the Federation of Children's Book Groups and the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)—and, for those particularly interested in the library market, the Youth Libraries Group (YLG)—for which contact details are given in the appendix.

The Publishers Association also has an active Children's Book Group, whose main mission is to expand the market for children's books and which works closely with the Children's Bookselling Group of the Booksellers Association. The Publishers Association is also home to the Educational Publishers Council, which, among other activities, lobbies for school funding and may therefore be worth investigating. This body also organizes exhibitions, including two highly successful Special Needs exhibitions each year, where you can display books and other resources to teachers.

The Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (CILIP), formerly the Library Association, is also important to the children's book world as an organizer of prizes and events and as a focus for promoting books and reading. See for instance www.schoollibrariesadvocacy.org.uk and www.readingagency.co.uk; and CILIP's own web site at www.cilip.org.uk.

Prizes

Prizes and awards play an important part in the children's book calendar and the Book Trust web site lists no fewer than 44. There is no doubt that winning prizes is a significant measure of success for writers, illustrators and publishers alike and will ensure, through the support of the organizing authorities and their publicity machines, a surge in sales. This will vary according to the profile of the prize in question, of course.

Perhaps the most prestigious are the Carnegie Medal and Kate Greenaway Medal, presented by librarians to outstanding books and illustrators and administered by CILIP (more information at www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk). The Nestle Smarties Prize, in which the winner is partly selected by schoolchildren, is administered by Book Trust and is now in its twentieth year. Other notable prizes for books include the Hans Christian Andersen awards, sponsored by IBBY, and the Blue Peter Children's Book Awards, which are administered by the Scottish Book Trust.

The most valuable and potentially the most important of all, however, is the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award. The Whitbread awards are offered in a range of categories (first novel, novel, biography, poetry and children's book) and the winner in each category goes forward to compete for the Book of the Year prize. It used to be thought impossible for a children's book to win the main prize (and at one time the children's book of the year was excluded for this reason). But that was changed last year when *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon won both the children's book and overall prize. For further information go to www.whitbread-bookawards.co.uk.

Two other prizes worth mentioning are the Children's Laureate, an award sponsored by the Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport and given to a children's author who has made an outstanding contribution to the future of reading (see www.childrenslaureate.org) and the Eleanor Farjeon Award, which is given by the Children's Book Group to an individual who has made the greatest contribution to the world of children's books.

Not all of these prizes will be open to writers and illustrators outside the UK but it is important to know about them. They are part of the close-knit fabric of the UK children's publishing world that you will need to infiltrate to ensure the success of your books in this market.

Part Six Conclusion

You may have come to the conclusion that the odds are stacked against your success in selling children's books in the UK market. It is certainly a challenge, especially while the marketplace is so crowded and the stakes seem so high, and it is clearly prudent in a guide of this kind not to make it all sound too easy. So here are some key pieces of advice, which may give you encouragement:

- First and foremost, be professional and do all the things you need to do to eliminate the basic obstacles that get in the way of sales success. One of the prime reasons to do this is that you may find that many of your competitors are not so attentive to detail. The children's book world is very editorially dominated, with emphasis being put on writers and illustrators and rather less on commercial matters. Your customers are probably as much interested in a smooth business relationship with their suppliers as they are in stocking every last one of the many quality books they see.
- Absorb yourself in the children's book world. It's smaller and more manageable than you might think. Keep up your contacts and join in as much as you can.
- Exploit niches in the market. If you have a niche product, aimed at a particular place in the market which is not so widely exploited, make the most of it. It will give you a publicity hook and all sorts of ways of getting your books noticed, both in the shops and in the media.
- Don't imitate. There's enough of that going on already. If your product is strong, you don't need to ride on anyone else's coat tails.
- When it seems appropriate, don't be afraid of your Canadian-ness. Though your commercial performance should be as seamlessly British as possible, the content of your books and their origins may well work to your advantage.

- Visit the market as often as you reasonably can. Attend sales conferences, meet with publicists, sales agents and distributors and, if possible, your major customers. Nothing beats face-to-face meetings, and out of sight can easily mean out of mind in a busy publishing environment.
- Consider your options for getting your books into the marketplace. Exporting them to your own UK-based network may work for you, but if your list is strong a co-publishing deal with a prominent publishing partner may have a lot of advantages. Selling UK distribution rights in individual titles may also be good in some circumstances.

And the very best of luck to you!

Appendices

All web links/URLs were active as of July 2005

1. Sales, marketing and publicity contacts

Bounce!

3/5 Islington High Street

London N1 9LQ

+44 (0)20 7745 2370

rsnuggs@bouncemarketing.co.uk

Sales and marketing for children's books

Mary Byrne

83 Wellington Row

London E2 7BN

+44 (0)7729 6359

mary.byrne@virgin.net

Publicist

Julia Eccleshare

21 Tanza Road

London NW3 2UA

+44 (0)20 7431 1295

julia.eccleshare@blueyonder.co.uk

Children's book consultant and children's book editor of the Guardian

Lindsey Fraser

Fraser Ross Associates

6 Wellington Avenue

Edinburgh

EH6 7EQ

+44 (0)131 553 2759

lindsey.fraser@tiscali.co.uk

Literary consultants and agents

Philippa Perry

Philippa Perry Associates

906 Frobisher House

Dolphin Square

London SW1V 3LW

+44 (0)20 7233 9911

pnlp@dircon.co.uk

Publicist

Portfolio Books

Unit 5, Perivale Industrial Park

Perivale

Middlesex UB6 7RL

+44 (0)20 8997 9000

www.portfoliobooks.com

info@portfoliobooks.com

Distribution, sales and marketing

Nicky Potter

181 Alexandra Park Road

London N22 7UL

+44 (0)20 8889 9735

nicpot@dircon.co.uk

Publicist

Ragged Bears

Nightingale House

England's Lane

Queen Camel

Somerset BA22 7NN

+44 (0)1935 851590

www.raggedbears.co.uk

books@ragged-bears.co.uk

Distribution and marketing

Justin Somper

Just So

45 Elder Avenue

London N8 8PS

+44 (0)20 8341 6523

justso@globalnet.co.uk

Publicist

2. Wholesalers

Advanced Marketing Group

Charbridge Way

Bicester

Oxon OX6 0UT

+44 (0)1869 363555

Specialist wholesaler to non-book retailers

Bertram Books

1 Broadlands Business Park

Norwich

Norfolk NR7 0WG

+44 (0)1603 216666

www.bertrams.com

General wholesaler

Bookspeed

16 Salamander Yards

Edinburgh EH6 7DD

+44 (0)131 467 8100

www.bookspeed.com

Specialist wholesaler to non-book retailers

Gardners Books

1 Whittle Drive

Eastwood Road

Eastbourne

East Sussex BN23 6QH

+44 (0)1323 521555

www.gardners.com

General wholesaler

Powerfresh

21 Rothersthorpe Crescent

Northampton NN4 8JD

+44 (0)8451 304565

info@powerfresh.co.uk

Wholesalers to the gift shop market

THE

National Distribution Centre

Rosevale Business Park

Newcastle-under-Lyme

ST5 7QT

+44 (0)1782 566566

www.the.co.uk

General wholesaler

S. Webb & Son (Distributors)

Telford Place

Menai Bridge

Anglesey LL59 5RW

+44 (0)1248 712761

webbs@dial.pipex.com

Wholesalers to the gift and stationery trades

3. Library Suppliers

Askews Library Services

218/222 North Road

Preston

Lancashire PR1 1SY

+44 (0)1772 555947

www.askews.co.uk

enquiries@askews.co.uk

Cypher Group

Elmfield Road

Morley

Leeds LS27 0NN

+44 (0)113 201 2900

www.cyphergroup.com

enquiries@cyphergroup.com

Peters Bookselling Services

120 Bromsgrove Street

Birmingham B5 6RJ

+44 (0)121 6646

www.peters-books.co.uk

sales@peters-books.co.uk

The Holt-Jackson Book Company

Preston Road

Lytham

Lancashire FY8 5AX

+44 (0)1253 737464

www.holtjackson.co.uk

info@holtjackson.co.uk

4. Trade associations and organizations

Book Marketing

7 John Street

London WC1N 2ES

+44 (0)20 7440 8930

www.bookmarketing.co.uk

Book industry market research and statistics organization

Book Industry Communication

39/41 North Road

London N7 9DP

+44 (0)20 7607 0021

www.bic.org.uk

Book trade supply chain organization

Booksellers Association

Minster House
272 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London
SW1V 1BA
+44 (0)20 7802 0802
www.booksellers.org.uk

Book Trust

45 East Hill
London SW18 2QZ
+44 (0)20 8516 2977
www.booktrust.org.uk
www.booktrusted.co.uk

Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (CILIP)

7 Ridgmount Street
London
WC1E 7AE
+44 (0)20 7255 0500
www.cilip.org.uk

Independent Publishers Guild

PO Box 93
Royston
Herts SG8 5GH
+44 (0)1763 247014
www.ipg.uk.com

Publishers Association

29B Montague Street

London WC1B 5BW

+44 (0)20 7691 9191

www.publishers.org.uk

Publishers Publicity Circle

65 Airedale Avenue

London W4 2NN

+44 (0)20 8994 1881

www.publisherspublicitycircle.co.uk

Scottish Book Trust

Sandeman House

Trunk's Close

55 High Street

Edinburgh EH1 1SR

+44 (0)131 524 0160

www.scottishbooktrust.com

info@scottishbooktrust.com

5. Trade press**The Bookseller**

Endeavour House

189 Shaftesbury Avenue

London WC2H 8TJ

+44 (0)20 7420 6000

www.theBookseller.com

Publishing News

7 John Street

London WC1N 2ES

+44 (0)870 870 2345

www.publishingnews.co.uk

6. Bibliographic agencies**Nielsen BookData and Nielsen BookScan**

Midas House

62 Goldsworth Road

Woking

Surrey GU21 6LQ

+44 (0)870 777 8710

www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk

www.nielsenbookscan.co.uk

Bowker UK

Farringdon House, 3rd Floor

Wood Street

East Grinstead

West Sussex RH19 1UZ

+44 (0)1342 310450

www.bowker.co.uk

7. Book clubs

Book Club Associates (BCA)

Greater London House

Hampstead Road

London NW1 7TZ

+44 (0)20 7760 6932

www.bca.co.uk

Scholastic Book Clubs

Windrush Park

Witney

Oxon OX29 0YD

+44 (0)845 603 9091

www.scholastic.co.uk

8. Children's books organizations

Children's Book Circle

www.childrensbookcircle.org.uk

contact@childrensbookcircle.org.uk

Federation of Children's Book Groups

2 Bridge Wood View

Horsforth

Leeds

West Yorkshire LS18 5PE

+44 (0)113 258 8910

Contact: Martin and Sinead Kromer

info@fcbg.org.uk

IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People)

British Section of IBBY

PO Box 20875

London SE22 9WQ

+44 (0)20 829 1641

ann@lazim.demon.co.uk

National Literacy Association

235 Fairmile Road

Christchurch

Dorset BH23 2LQ

+44 (0)1202 484 079

www.nla.org.uk

nla@argonet.co.uk

Contact: Charlie Griffiths

National Literacy Trust

Swire House

59 Buckingham Gate

London SW1E 6AJ

+44 (0)20 7828 2435

www.literacytrust.org.uk

contact@literacytrust.org.uk

Contact: Neil McClelland

School Libraries Group

c/o CILIP

7 Ridgmount Street

London WC1E 7AE

+44 (0)20 7255 0500

www.cilip.org.uk

Youth Libraries Group

c/o CILIP

7 Ridgmount Street

London WC1E 7AE

+44 (0)20 7255 0500

www.cilip.org.uk