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# Selling Foreign-Language Rights

by Dan Poynter

When you write a manuscript, you are creating a *Work*. The Work may be published in several different formats (editions): hardcover, softcover, audiotape, eBook, magazine condensation, newspaper serialization, movie, translations, etc. These are called “subsidiary rights”.

By having your book translated into other languages, more people will benefit from your message, you will gain a new profit center and the sale counts as an "endorsement". In book publishing, success breeds success. The more you sell, the more you sell. Part of your sales package is a list of the subsidiary rights you have sold. Publishers would sell more foreign rights if they just took the time to let international publishers know of their books.

Publishers in the United States are very lucky. English is the business language of the world, it is the aviation language, it is the Web language, and it has replaced French as the diplomatic language and German as the scientific language. The market for our original English-language books is quite large. Worldwide, more people speak English as a second language than any other. But given a choice, many people would prefer to read your book in their first language.

*Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.*  
—Genesis, XI. 9.

Language rights are sold to publishers in other countries. They translate the book, design it, typeset it, have it printed and then plug it into their existing distribution system. You do not want to take on these functions as you do not have ready access to their markets. It is hard to sell books in a distant land.

I sold the Spanish-language rights to *The Skydiver's Handbook* to a publisher in Madrid. Though only 13% of the skydivers in the U.S. are

women, I made the book gender equitable. I show female instructors and competitors. When I received the translation, I noticed the text was completely masculine—the Spaniards took out all the women!

After some reflection (actually snickering), I decided not to object. I realized this Spanish aviation publisher knows its (macho) customer base better than I. Being closer to their buyer, they know what will sell.

Contact the publishers' associations in major language groups: Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Japan. See *International Literary Marketplace* or visit their exhibits at book fairs. Ask them to recommend member-publishers that specialize in your type of books.

Match your book to the international publisher; they are the ones to contact. They know what you are talking about and they know where to sell your book.

Wring more value out of your Work by having your book read around the world.

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