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UNDERSTANDING THE LIBRARY MARKET FOR MAGAZINES

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT LIBRARY SUBSCRIPTIONS?

For magazines with very small paid circulation levels, the number of libraries presents an opportunity for significant growth. Libraries also represent a way to reach potential new readers, especially given the increasing difficulty of selling single copies via independent bookstores —particularly for small-circulation magazines. Also, libraries tend to renew most of the titles they subscribe to, with a “churn rate” of around 3-5%.

HOW MANY LIBRARIES ARE THERE IN CANADA?

There are several major types of libraries. Here is a fairly recent breakdown (Nov. 2012) from the [Canadian Library Association \(CLA\)](#):

Library Type	Libraries	Service Points (branches)
University	75	525
College	130	207
National	3	7
Public	1,673	3,415
School	14,451	14,451

There are also corporate libraries, law libraries, hospital libraries, and so forth.

NOT ALL LIBRARIES ARE POTENTIAL SUBSCRIBERS FOR YOUR MAGAZINE

Your magazine may not be suitable for all libraries. An urban public library might have 5-25 branches (with a few mass-market magazine titles available in all branches). Toronto Public Library, Canada’s largest public library system, has 98 branches.

Smaller library branches might be open as little as two or three hours a day, averaging five visitors per hour. Others are open 12-15 hours a day, with 50 or over 100 visitors per hour. Larger branches often have a wide selection of print and electronic magazine titles available for visitors to peruse, while others might carry only a very limited number of titles.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

Define your target market. If your title is for grown-ups, the large school library market may be completely irrelevant. Of course, some libraries serve primarily anglophone or francophone communities. In some urban markets, public libraries may have a goal to adequately serve minority language communities.

The number of likely prospective library subscribers for your title may not be unwieldy. For instance, if you believe your title would primarily be of interest to university libraries outside Québec, or larger public library branches in large and midsize urban markets, you may be able to market to a target group of only 200-600 libraries. This could reduce the scope of your marketing initiative from “unaffordable” to being a project that a summer intern or volunteer could coordinate.

EACH LIBRARY MANAGES ITS MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS IN ITS OWN WAY

Some libraries purchase almost all (95% or more) of their magazine subscriptions through Ebsco (the largest “catalog” agency), because using a single vendor makes it comparatively easy to administer.

 [DOWNLOAD MORE HOTSHEETS AT magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets](http://magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets)



Other libraries “shop around” (deciding based on price and service) — maybe subscribing to half of their titles through [Ebsco](#), and ordering the rest directly from the publisher. Some urban library systems have centralized subscription-processing departments for periodicals, while others are somewhat more decentralized, and individual branches or subject-area librarians may be more directly involved in choosing which magazines to add to their collection.

ARE LIBRARIES SHIFTING FROM PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS TO DIGITAL?

Some periodical librarians — particularly at academic libraries — are eagerly moving toward electronic incarnations of magazines wherever available (including magazine articles indexed in electronic databases, or purchasing [digital subscriptions through Zinio](#)), and they may be cutting back on printed magazines as a result. However, some public libraries are responsive to feedback from visitors who consider magazines to be “leisure reading”, and these libraries may choose digital delivery primarily for titles no longer available in print.

DO I WANT LIBRARIES TO ORDER THROUGH EBSCO OR DIRECTLY?

It should make little difference to you. Ebsco will usually remit about 75-85% of the purchase price to the publisher. Some niche magazines insist on 100% remit, and they usually get it, because Ebsco wants to offer its library clients a complete list of titles instead of forcing them to order some titles directly from the publisher. [Note: Ebsco also has some promotional channels that are not directed at libraries, such as their reception room program for medical offices; these have different remit rates.] Many niche magazines set higher rates for library and institutional subscriptions than for individuals, in order to offset commissions on catalog agency subscriptions. Libraries have to watch their budgets and they may choose not to subscribe to expensive magazines.

A LOT OF INFORMATION ON LIBRARIES IS AVAILABLE ONLINE

It may take a bit of determined searching, but you should be able to locate lists of libraries and branches, with mailing addresses and staff names. Use these to develop your own “target list”, and tick off the ones who are already subscribers, so you can work on encouraging the rest of them to subscribe. Here are just a few examples:

- <http://www.bclibraries.ca/contacts/>
- <http://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/branches.html>
- <http://onesearch.library.utoronto.ca/libraries>
- <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/branches/index.jsp>
- <http://library.brucecounty.on.ca/branches/>
- http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=4397,6393630&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL
- <http://www.epl.ca/about-epl/branches-and-hours>

SOME FURTHER READING:

- <http://www.newpages.com/magazines/literary-magazines>

