

# PUBLISHING PERSPECTIVES

## Frankfurt Book Fair 2014 | Preview Edition

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## Frankfurt's "Global City"

*Who to meet, what to see, and trends to discuss*

# Publishing: The Beautiful Game

By Edward Nawotka

With the World Cup having consumed so much attention this summer, it's only apt to look at the book world through this lens. In general, publishers like to think of selling books like a football—or if you're American, a soccer—tournament. Each publisher fields the best team they can for the season (their catalog of books), and they compete in the marketplace to see who will come out on top (through sales). As anyone who follows football knows, the game itself is mostly comprised of lots of passing the ball around the midfield (midlist) which is essential to setting up the hard won goals (bestsellers). Corner kicks and free kicks are a bit like marketing campaigns: free shots on goal with a better chance of going in, though



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goals are less frequent than one would like. Think of the backfield defense as the backlist, and the coach as the CEO or Publisher, and the Frankfurt Book Fair as the host.

It's interesting to note how much this year's World Cup reflected some of the current trends in publishing. For the past several years, the Brazilians were garnering attention as "the growth market" to beat. The economy was booming and several of the big international ebook players opened operations in the country. But in 2014, expectations have been diminished somewhat as the economy has begun to slow. In contrast, attention has shifted to other parts of Latin America (the topic of this year's Rights Directors Meeting at Frankfurt). Much as Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico made a strong statement in the World Cup, they are again asserting their roles as the traditional Spanish-language publishing powerhouses in the Americas. But smaller countries in Central America are also making their presence known (Central America will have a new collective stand at Frankfurt this year).

Elsewhere in the Americas, the United States went into the World Cup coached by a German (Juergen Klinsmann) and with several key players from Germany. How is this different from the US publishing landscape, where German companies dominate (Bertelsmann owns Penguin Random House and Holtzbrinck owns Macmillan)?

When you get to Europe, France—as it did in the World Cup—is proving surprising. While many counted them out—in particular, of the

digital book race—they have some intriguing innovations happening on the fringes. Spain—which bowed out early in the Cup—is still laid low by its economy, which has hampered the translation market in particular and shifted focus to working more with local writers. The UK continues to be a strong presence—in football, it has the top professional league in the world but nearly always disappoints in the Cup—and as we know, a great deal of action for the UK takes place at the London Book Fair (that's not to say that the key UK players won't be in Frankfurt this year as always).

Finally, you come to Germany, whose World Cup club managed to pull an astonishing and unforgettable 7-1 victory over Brazil in the semi-final. The country has amazing publishing assets, many of which are not as well known outside of the nation. Earlier this summer, I accompanied a group of small press American editors on a tour of publishing houses in Berlin and Frankfurt, organized by the German Book Office New York. It's clear from both sides that there's a strong opportunity to get to know one another better and find titles to exchange. Many of the German publishers wondered why more German books were not translated into English. Maybe it's merely a lack of knowledge about the market or perhaps a lack of "romance" with the nation.

Either way, the Frankfurt Book Fair offers the best opportunity for everyone to interact. If you've never been to Hall 3 (where the German exhibitors are located), make some time for a visit this year. You might be surprised! •

## PUBLISHING PERSPECTIVES

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