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Full Steam Ahead for Abu Dhabi Fair

By Teri Tan -- Publishers Weekly, 3/19/2009 8:38:00 AM

With exhibitor numbers and floor space up by 32% and 14% respectively, the six-day Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, which runs from March 17-22, is showing few signs of the global economic doldrums. Organized by Kitab (a joint-venture between the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage and Frankfurt Buchmesse), the fair is trying to elevate its status as the top book event in the region. Among its new programs are the Arab world's first-ever antiquarian fair, the Gourmand-hosted Show Kitchen where celebrity chefs cook up a storm, and another first in this market, a book-signing corner. And where there was a dearth of international authors at the previous fair, this time the list boasts names such as Amitav Ghosh, Henning Mankell, Vikram Seth, Linda Davies, Assia Djebar and Elias Khoury.

On the floor, the exhibits are skewed towards educational, language and reference titles. American publishers Creative Teaching Press, Galaxy Press, Capstone Publishers and Weekly Reader Publishing are here along with their British counterparts Taylor & Francis, Peter Haddock Limited and Nelson Thornes, and Australia's Millennium House (who debuts the world's biggest atlas at 210cm x 469cm). Also in the mix are Italian printer Graphicom, Korean children's book publisher Yeowon Media and Chinese publishers Higher Education Press and People's Medical Publishing House. Most are first-time exhibitors looking to meet potential partners in the Gulf and the fast-growing book market.

But the industry is not without issues. "Piracy is a major problem especially for academic titles due to rampant photocopying," says copyright director Lynette Owen of Pearson Education, who is in town to help Kitab with its translation funding program and rights-related seminars. "However, we are seeing more publishers from this region applying for license, forming partnerships with foreign publishers and going through the proper channels."

At this fair, the first step towards copyright law enforcement started with vetting of interested exhibitors. "Any company that is engaged in piracy activities is banned from exhibiting," says general manager of Kitab, Claudia Kaiser, whose three main goals are to run a professional book event, get people to read and help publishers, local or foreign, to identify business partners. "We are organizing more programs that will help local publishers understand copyrights and rights selling, and attracting more authors to visit and speak at the fair. In whatever we do, our main purpose is to promote reading."

For Emma House, international director at The Publishers Association, the growing British contingent is focused on the educational segment. "Many international schools in the Gulf region follows the British curricula, and naturally, that's where our publishers are going." This year's new program, The Education Chapter, highlights this segment while addressing issues facing the 21st century classrooms.

More new initiatives are scheduled for next year's fair, to be held two days after the IPA International Copyright Symposium (also in Abu Dhabi), from March 2 to 7.

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