



Norway

It is true to say that Norway has never been as deeply affected as other countries by the worldwide economic crisis. Its unemployment rate is 2.7%.

However the card market is not growing, and its post office said that the volume of cards sent at Christmas was down by 10%. Geir Halgunset, product director of Aune Forlag (Norway's largest distributors of greeting cards) told me that the Everyday card market is still strong and he remains optimistic for 2011 – even when the temperature gets down to its current minus 18 degrees! As so many distributors have said to me, Geir is always looking for something different to offer his retailers - and he still believes that the UK is where he can find it.

Southern Hemisphere



South Africa

With an unemployment rate of 25%, the South African economy has struggled to maintain its stability and 2010 was not a good year as a whole. The greeting card market at retail level is dominated by two or three chains, supplied by the largest publishers in the market. At the lower volume group level, distributors of high-quality UK product are able to make inroads. After that it's the independents who are interested in this end of the market from the UK.

David Niven, owner of Sunbird offers this type of product and feels that for distributors to be successful in 2011 they will have to offer original and high quality product – but at realistic prices.



Above: Image Gallery's Deirdre Robinson (right) catches up with Esther Marshall of Blossoms & Bows and PG's Warren Lomax at last year's UK Spring Fair.



New Zealand

Last year was not an easy one in the New Zealand card scene, according to Deirdre Robinson, director of Image Gallery (one of the leading distributors of UK product in the country). Stores are closing, chains are reducing branches and a negative press is making everyone miserable (sound familiar?). What's worse, upmarket quality cards are being forsaken for the cheaper

end when it comes to Christmas cards.

Despite Bloomberg's report that the New Zealand economy virtually stalled in 2010, everyone is hoping that 2011 will improve as in so many other countries that have been affected by the worldwide situation.



Australia

Interestingly, this country was one of those least affected by the worldwide crisis. Back in 2009, the Australian government decided to pump funds in to the economy directly by giving A\$950 (£525) to each recipient of Family Tax Benefit. While that money has been spent by now, and people are still cautious, it had the psychological effect of steadying nerves.

Some distributors such as Simson Cards (the largest importer of UK cards into Australia) saw its sales grow in 2010 and expects the same growth in 2011. However, as a market, greeting cards were still affected by the sort of pre-Christmas sales launched by the fashion industry. Consumers just wait for the prices to come down. Indeed, as consumers stayed cautious during 2010, three specialist greeting cards chains went out of business, but the economy is in a healthy state.

One final point to make about exporting to Australia: If you set your sights on getting the sort of high volumes that are achievable in the Ozzie market through companies such as Simson, because the market is very price sensitive, UK publishers need to be realistic in their pricing as this will affect the sell-through.



Above: One of the stores from the Cards and Caboodle chain in Australia.

Northern Hemisphere



USA

With the US economy growing faster than expected, distributors like Nelson Line who specialises in distributing art-related cards and stationery found the latter half of 2010 taking off in sales. Managing director Eli Nelson himself was very encouraged to see this following such a flat first half, and it seems it was the general picture – not just with his company.

For 2011 he is expecting "a solid year" and hopes that the current level of unemployment around the 9-10% mark starts to come down as this will affect sales more than anything else.

Above: UK cards distributed by Nelson Line in Barnes and Noble in New York.



Canada

This country's economy is on the road to recovery – albeit slowly – with unemployment still high, at around 7.5%. Again retail groups that specialise in books or CDs are seeking to make up for those markets' decline by taking on cards and stationery.

According to Pierre Brossard, international product co-ordinator of Pierre Belvedere, the leading distributor of quality cards and stationery in Canada, card sales volume are flat but sales turnover is up as consumers look for more interesting card product such as handmade or other added-value product.

He emphasised that it is the UK's creativity in this area that makes visiting trade fairs so attractive.

So to conclude, it's all there to be had – good luck!

If there are any further questions about these markets just write to Robin@yourexporthmanager.com