



Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers

Twelve Ways Association Publishing Differs from Commercial Publishing

By

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Quick Read In developing an understanding of how associations work, you need to be aware of the differences between association and commercial publishing. This paper will be useful to a professional in the commercial sector currently seeking a job in association publishing, or to an executive from a commercial publishing house who has recently joined an association. This paper will also serve as a refresher for experienced association staff members.

Association publishing differs from commercial publishing in the following ways:

- Association publishers are much more risk-averse than commercial publishers.
- Review and decision processes generally take longer, because volunteer-elected officers are not publication professionals.
- Associations fail to maximize sales potential due to a lack of a clear strategic market awareness, and efficient investment of human and capital resources in their publishing business.
- Associations tend to promote and market only to their members and fail to go to the broader market because they lack clear strategic goals, or do not choose to invest in necessary staff and capital resources.
- Associations tend to either overestimate or underestimate the impact of membership on the outside world.
- Associations can be hindered by micromanagement by elected officials and member volunteers inexperienced in sound publishing business practices.
- Associations lack the financial incentives of commercial publishing; for example, bonuses tied to profitability and pay for performance.
- Associations are highly political; i.e., volunteers may have hidden agendas.
- Elected association leaders might not understand best publication financial practices.

- Associations seldom have realistic long-range publication plans.
- Association leaders can have unrealistic financial goals tied to publication projects, especially pet projects.
- Association volunteer leaders often do not understand that an association is a business.

Working in an association setting after working for a commercial publisher can be frustrating, especially with the slowness of decisions. The structure of an association board of directors and the varied expertise of its members can make it difficult for rapid business decisions, and sometimes good opportunities can be lost. How association leadership and publication staff interacts will vary in individual organizations, and how individual publication projects are managed and promoted will depend on these interactions.

The good news is that successful association publishing programs can be built and sustained by understanding and expecting these challenges. As someone new to the association, you need to establish yourself at the beginning as an experienced publishing expert. Take the time to explain standard publishing business practices to your association's upper management and elected officials. By establishing trust, you will succeed in your association career. Success is a matter of understanding the cultures of associations and then adjusting one's work style to it.

Reviewer Acknowledgment Victor Van Beuren

We wish to thank long-time **McHugh Advisor**, *Victor Van Beuren* of the American Diabetes Association for his critical review of the entire manuscript. A scientist by training (geology), Vic has been actively involved in scholarly publishing for over 30 years. Having worked for both society and commercial publishers (e.g., American Association of Petroleum Geologists, American Diabetes Association, Springer-Verlag, Elsevier), he has direct experience in STM book publishing, journal and magazine management, and marketing to academicians and professional practitioners. Vic's specialties are: managing STM acquisitions, editorial production, and marketing to scholarly researchers.

Also of Interest Association Publishing <http://goo.gl/OHe882>

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- A-24, *Five Commonalities of Association Content Producers: A McHugh Select*, 2014, 2 pages
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About Harvey Kane

Harvey Kane is a semiretired STM publishing executive, having worked for American Pharmacists Association, American Chemical Society, Springer, Academic Press, and CRC Press, now part of Taylor and Francis. Early in his career he worked for Macmillan Publishing Company and acquired college level textbooks in various fields. Harvey has

collaborated with me on a variety of assignments. He is a top contributor to our LinkedIn™ group ***Association and Nonprofit Publishing***.

In his career, Harvey has held these positions: Director, Book Publishing ACS; VP Publishing, American Pharmacists Association; Publisher, CRC Press; Consultant, American Home Builders Press; and Senior Editor at Humana and Springer. Harvey has published books, journals, newsletters, ebooks, and a free circulation newspaper. Lastly, Harvey has extensive experience in the electronic delivery of scientific information. Harvey shares his high-level experience at leading STM publishers in this paper.

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