

Improve Your Publishing Strategy with an Audit

By John B. McHugh

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Publishing Management Overview

The term “audit” usually conjures up unpleasant thoughts about taxes and the IRS. As publishing professionals, we may think that audits are strictly the domain of our accounting and finance teams. However, if you haven’t considered a publishing management audit, read on to find out how your organization might benefit from one and what elements are examined during the audit. In this article, publishing expert John B. “Jack” McHugh will provide an overview of what’s involved in a publishing management audit and how your organization might benefit from one.

What does a publishing management audit evaluate?

A publishing management audit usually evaluates 16 components of a publishing program. During the process, any one of these components or a combination of these components can be evaluated.

1. **Profitability:** Evaluation of the profitability of the publishing product lines and the publishing division with recommendations for improvement.
2. **Publishing Processes:** Evaluation of all publishing processes.
3. **Promotion and Marketing:** Evaluation of publicity, promotion, and marketing with recommendations. Includes an assessment of social media used by a publishing division.
4. **Editorial Decision Making:** Assessment of editorial decision-making criteria and selection processes.
5. **Rights and Permissions Management:** Weakness here can expose the organization to potential legal exposure. Rights and permissions management are neglected in many organizations. (McHugh brings considerable depth to this aspect of a publishing management audit.)
6. **Internal Communications:** Evaluation of internal communications, reporting, and workflow.
7. **Key Metrics:** A list of key metrics (or measures) to help you to evaluate operational effectiveness and establish baseline benchmarks.
8. **Staff Position Descriptions:** Evaluation of publishing division’s position descriptions with recommendations for revision.
9. **Staff Skills and Experience:** Assessment of the skills and experience of publishing staff.
10. **Professional Development:** Recommendations for the publishing division’s professional development of their knowledge and skills.
11. **Morale and Climate:** Assessment of morale and climate of the publishing division.

12. **Organizational Design:** Suggested organizational designs for the publishing division.
13. **Co-Publishing:** Analysis of co-publishing arrangements and recommendations.
14. **Research:** Assesses the quality of market and customer research and suggests what additional research is needed.
15. **Customer Satisfaction of Service:** Evaluates organization measurement of customer satisfaction.
16. **Other Publishing Opportunities:** Recommendations for other publishing opportunities.

What are the Benefits of a Publishing Management Audit?

You might be wondering why you would want to go through this process. A publishing management audit provides these benefits:

1. Factual information for management decisions.
2. Unbiased management information.
3. Suggested areas of opportunity.
4. An assessment of past performance.
5. Recommendations on how to improve future performance.
6. Suggestions on organization design, process, and communications.
7. Insights into the political dynamics of your organization and its effect on the performance of your publishing division.
8. Recommendations on staffing, recruiting, and staff education and development.

The Audit Process and Key Deliverables

The audit process involves interviewing staff members, authors, and board members. Key documents are examined such as the publishing mission statement and position descriptions. A comprehensive questionnaire is completed by select staff. The process generally takes three months.

The audit deliverables include a comprehensive report covering each publishing department, suggestions for improvement, and recommendations. McHugh will discuss his findings with you. A McHugh publishing audit can be tailored to your organization's needs, for example, the audit could include only book acquisitions or rights and permissions.

Call Jack McHugh for more information at 414-351-3056.

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Articles of Interest

- *Twenty Best Practices in Nonprofit Publishing*, Co-author David Beacom, 2018, 2 pages <https://tinyurl.com/d2x2dctz>
- *Don't Miss Out: Re-tool Your Publishing Program, To Extend Your Mission and Build Profits*. Co-author David Beacom, 2018, 5 pages <https://tinyurl.com/ymhmbtyb>
- *Association Culture: Breaking Barriers to Organizational Progress*, Co-Author David Beacom 2021, 4 pages <https://tinyurl.com/3f9shz2f>
- *New-Product Development in Nonprofits: Best Practices for Building a Brighter Future*—Revised with David Beacom, 2018, 4 pages <https://tinyurl.com/y6k35pbn>

About John B. McHugh

John B. “Jack” McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary’s Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and, for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. He is a member of the ASAE Advisory Board for Publishing, Communications, and Media Issues and Practices.

Jack’s specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, new ventures, organizational design, and social media strategy and policy. Mc Hugh is also the manager of the LinkedIn™ group, **Association and Nonprofit Publishing**. <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2949807/>

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