

BOOKING IT

IS BOOK PUBLISHING IN YOUR ASSOCIATION'S FUTURE?

By Teresa Brinati

The book is dead. Long live the book.

Rumors of the demise of the book have been rampant since the Internet and the World Wide Web turned the publishing industry on its head in the 1990s. Since then electronic publishing has made it technologically easier, faster, and more cost efficient to disseminate content to an ever-expanding universe of readers. And it has indelibly altered the way we experience information through the interactive nature of hypertext links.

Yet the printed book endures.

"Technology has democratized book publishing," said Kent Sturgis, president of the Publishers Marketing Association, which represents thousands of independent publishers. Technology has enhanced the traditional book publishing field by not only transforming production processes, but making it easier for niche publishers—like associations—to market titles to a national audience.

For many fields, the printed book is still an ideal medium for organizing, synthesizing, and presenting new areas of study or practice. According to the American Association of Publishers, net sales for the entire United States publishing industry are estimated to have increased by 1.3 percent from 2003 to 2004 to a grand total of \$23.72 billion. Of that figure, sales of professional and scholarly books accounted for \$4.06 billion, up 2.0 percent in 2004. Although figures were not yet available for 2005, it would appear that traditional book publishing continues to deliver a significant economic contribution.

Last year the Book Industry Study Group (BISG) reported that there are thousands of small publishers, earning between \$1 million and \$50 million on their own, but adding up to an estimated \$11 billion market. Although such sales represent a fraction of what billion-dollar trade companies bring in, it is a segment of book industry activity that was not being covered by traditional research, according to Jeff Abraham, executive director of BISG, a non-profit research and policy

organization funded by publishers, booksellers and others in the industry.

Print Sales = Non-dues Revenue

What this means for associations is that a book publishing program has the capacity to add some wallop to the bottom line. Enhancing non-dues revenue, of course, is the Holy Grail for most associations.

"Approximately 20% of our association's budget revenue is from print sales of books," said Maureen Glass, vice president of publications for the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), which has approximately 30,000 members. ACHE's publishing division is Health Administration Press, which has been in existence for 32 years and has a staff of 13. Last year the press published 18 titles and currently has 90 titles in print.

Only membership dues and education programs contribute more revenue to ACHE than publications, according to Glass.

ACHE has dabbled in electronic publishing, using NetLibrary to distribute its books electronically, and also making available on its website print books in PDF format where they can be downloaded for a fee. "We're monitoring this closely, but we're not seeing strong revenue in this area yet," Glass noted.

The American Bar Association (400,000 members), American Medical Association (248,000 members), and American Library Association (64,000 members) also have extensive book publishing programs. Given their respective membership totals, one might argue that size matters. Large, and even mid-size, membership associations have the internal infrastructure and the external markets to support such an enterprise.

But more diminutive associations, such as ARMA International and the Society of American Archivists (SAA), also are enjoying success in book publishing and

Other Ways to Get It Done

If your association doesn't — or does — have resources for book publishing, there are other options worth exploring to get a publication to market.

- Do you have a sister organization within your association community? If so, consider pooling resources to achieve a shared goal—spreading knowledge. For example, the Society of American Archivists has co-published books with ARMA International, the Association of Canadian Archivists, and the International Council on Archives.

- How about contracting with for-profit publishers? For example, the American Physical Therapy Association did the *APTA Book of Body Maintenance and Repair* with a for-profit publisher that was able to place it in commercial bookstores and feature APTA on amazon.com. Publishers are always on the lookout for content. Associations have the intellectual capital; for-profit publishers have the production and marketing muscle. Could be a marriage made in heaven (or, at the very least, a marriage of convenience). SAA has co-published nine titles with Scarecrow Press, which is part of the Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group.

have recorded percentage contributions to the bottom line comparable with ACHE.

Other Benefits

Books are a form of intellectual capital that contributes to a knowledge base. “The non-dues revenue stream is the chief benefit to the association, but, more importantly, the books benefit the profession at large,” said Vicki Wiler, director of publications at ARMA International, a 10,000-member organization for records managers. “Our members look to us for professional resources they can't find anywhere else.” ARMA publishes on average four books a year (33 are currently in print). “For a profession that is not well-defined in the business world, professional literature is a valuable asset for practitioners because it validates what they do and fosters best practice,” Wiler added.

A record six new books were published by SAA in 2005, according to Nancy Beaumont, executive director of the 4,400-member organization. SAA has 42 titles currently in print. In addition to being a publisher, SAA also serves as a clearinghouse for archives books produced by other publishers.

“We have some 20 manuals, advanced texts, and essay collections in the pipeline and slated for publication by SAA during the next four years,” Beaumont added. “Although we don't yet make books available in electronic formats, we're exploring with our members their interest in 'online books.’” SAA has a total staff of ten; two are dedicated to publishing and fulfillment.

Because most associations have as part of their mission the responsibility to help advance the theory and practice of the profession, industry, or trade that they represent, association book publishing programs offer an added benefit to members: timely production and dissemination of resources that focus on their information needs.

“Publishing also fits well with ACHE's mission because books educate healthcare leaders of tomorrow and keep members current with information,” Glass

added. ACHE's books are in two markets: textbooks for universities and management titles for members. ACHE's new Executive Essentials series includes short, easy-to-read books created in response to members' feedback.

Members provide an ideal author pool. Association membership tends to be diverse in terms of levels of experience. This diversity can feed a book publishing program. Experts within the membership can be tapped to write, edit, and review books. Who better to capture this intellectual capital than the association as a publisher?

Publishing Challenges

Although the rewards of book publishing can be financially and intellectually bountiful, it's not without risk. The upfront costs to publish a traditional book are significant. Pre-publication expenses typically include acquiring the content (author honorarium or sometimes an advance on royalty for the manuscript), editing, design, production, manufacturing, and marketing. Post-publication expenses include warehousing, distribution, royalties, and more marketing. Given these costs, it may take several years to realize a return on your investment. A carefully crafted business plan is a critical tool in helping you understand your risks and potential gain.

Pricing a book can be tricky. “If the market is small, being able to produce a book at a price the market will bear is a gamble you take,” said Wiler of ARMA. “Then going beyond the primary market of members and getting at vertical markets is yet another challenge.”

Then there's the matter of strategic and editorial planning. Sometimes the best-laid plans still produce a dud. “You can plan for a book by having the right topic, the right author, by analyzing market saturation and strategy—and still on occasion miss the mark,” Glass noted.

In addition, many associations face head-to-head competition with commercial publishers in their field. "Associations have an advantage in that we're looked to for our expertise within a profession or industry. But there are things that for-profit publishers can do, given their economies of scale, that we'd like to emulate but can't afford," Beaumont said.

Another challenge for association publishers is managing authors (often members) and their expectations. "Members may be subject-matter experts, but they don't write full-time, so getting a manuscript may take up to 24 months and then the quality can be an issue," Wiler said.

Even so, Wiler, Glass, and Beaumont agree that there are many compelling reasons for an association to take the book publishing plunge.

"Traditional book publishing continues to add to SAA's financial viability because it feeds the development of our members' knowledge and skills. Long live the book!" said Beaumont.

Regardless of what the future holds for the book—whether it's print, electronic format, an emerging technology, or a combination thereof—associations can be well served with a carefully crafted book publishing program that is positioned to meet member needs.

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