

# Publish High-Quality But Low-Cost Products

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Today people live surrounded by “total quality” principles. Each day, buyers expect new and improved products with greater value. Readers expect more from materials they purchase. They demand competitively priced books and magazines with excellent content and an attractive appearance.

Lack of financial resources is one of the difficulties—perhaps the greatest difficulty—that prevents small publishers from competing side by side with large publishing houses. Small publishers do not have the necessary capital to publish high-quality material at low prices. Publishers lacking sufficient finances to produce competitive materials have two choices. They can either lift up their hands in despair and proceed to sign the death certificate for their publishing firms, or look for alternatives that allow them to go forward with the work and remain in business.

Is it possible to produce low-cost but high-quality materials? Definitely. It is difficult, but possible. To achieve these results, publishing house staff must have creativity, perseverance and a sense of calling.

Following are some suggestions to lower costs without sacrificing quality. These suggestions focus primarily on development and pro-

duction, but creative publishers can find even more ways to save.

## *Editorial Development*

Once the publishing house staff is convinced of the relevance and importance of a project, and have set up a work schedule, some things that can help reduce its costs are:

**1. Seek support for the work at hand.** It is possible the project may be of interest to another institution. Present the project to the decision-makers and seek their support. If they are interested, seek to reach a clear and satisfactory agreement. Benefits for both parties may include accomplishment of their joint purpose and lower publication costs. It is important to put such agreements in writing.

**2. Look for a partner.** There are four types of partnerships that can help a publisher lower editorial development costs:

**Rights.** By obtaining reprint rights from another company, publishers can save on product development costs and offer more titles.

**Translation.** Consider translating suitable books in other languages. Often, translation costs are cheaper than the costs involved in developing a completely original product.

**Co-publication.** A project may interest another publisher with similar interests. In such cases, the work and expenses can be shared. Because the other publisher can reach a different market, a larger print run can be achieved and costs per unit can be lowered.

**Co-editions.** Because product development costs can be quite high, a publisher can save by taking part in a co-edition. In this process, several publishers coordinate their work to print the same book in several languages at the same time. The larger print run lowers unit costs for each individual publisher. The publishers sell the finished books in separate markets. Co-editions are especially advantageous for children’s books, materials printed with four-color or with extensive artwork and other books that have high development costs.

**3. Use new authors.** Another way to lower costs is to work with new or lesser-known authors who are more likely to accept lower compensation. One can also negotiate different compensation packages, for example, paying an honorarium rather than royalties. One may pay authors with copies of their books, if this is an established practice for the publishing house.

Another offer may be to do extra promotion for the new author's work, in exchange for his or her agreement to reduce or exempt the publisher from paying royalties on the first printing. If utilizing this strategy, since working with new writers is always risky, their work may be promoted in packages together with the work of better known writers.

**4. Seek volunteers.** In addition to the publishing house staff, use volunteers. People willing to volunteer must agree with the vision and mission of the publishing house. If qualified, they could assist with the revision of manuscripts. Others could gather information on new releases, the interests of the target market, new cover designs, etc. In this case it is necessary to accurately assess volunteer skills prior to assigning tasks. Their support work should not hinder or interfere with the work of the publishing house personnel.

### **Production**

Once the project has reached the publication phase, there are other steps one can take to lower costs.

**1. Constantly obtain quotes.** An important task in production is accurate estimates of the costs. Constantly research the cost of services and materials. Continue this process even when working with established printers. A publisher might think that a big printing firm is not interested in small jobs and will not quote good prices, but this is not always true. In some cases, printers have performed pre-press work at no charge.

Never give up. Continue to seek good quotes. Even when one has obtained the best price for the job at hand, there is always another project on the horizon.

Keep a file on the quotes and estimates given by each firm. This will make it easier to find information in the future. Visit all vendors to verify the quality of their work. Volunteers can provide assistance with this task.

**2. Be flexible and innovative.** In publishing, it is easy to repeatedly use those materials whose qualities and advantages are most familiar, but the pressure to reduce costs means one must be willing to change materials and established work habits. In order to do so, one must have up-to-date information on new suppliers, new printers. Continually monitor the publishing house's needs, available funds and human resources.

**3. Use in-house resources.** Do as much of the pre-press work as possible to lower book production costs. For example, Lámpara often provides 600dpi laser originals to a printer, who then performs the phototypesetting and printing. To do this successfully, the originals must have excellent print quality.

**4. Consider the paper used.** To produce quality books publishers must make careful choices of paper. In Lámpara's case, 75 gram bond paper is economical and maintains good quality. To use paper of less weight could reduce costs slightly but sacrifice quality.

With regard to covers, Lámpara seeks varieties of cardboard. At present, Lámpara most often uses laminated covers. This improves the presentation of the books. An option is to use matte cardboard treated with ultraviolet varnish. In Bolivia, this option is more expensive than lamination.

**5. Save on publicity material.** Save costs by preparing promotional material in-house, rather than using a printer. Many of Lámpara's fliers are designed on computer, printed on a laser printer, and then copied onto colored paper.

**6. Save on supplies.** On beginning a project, Lámpara purchases several large rolls of colored paper. Throughout the year they are cut and used as needed. This enables Lámpara to use different sizes for its publicity materials and to have a variety of promotional pieces. The disadvantage is that this type of

work is only convenient with 100-300 copies. Often, this is sufficient to print posters, invitations, fliers, etc. They are useful for book presentations, panel discussions and workshops. For a wider promotion, the best option for Lámpara is to work with a printer.

### **Facing the Challenge**

Creativity is an important tool in lowering production costs. It helps publishers navigate around dangerous reefs, renews ideas and opens opportunities. Creativity is vital in fulfilling the publishing house's mission, but it is not enough by itself. Perseverance is also necessary. It enables a team to continue even in difficult circumstances. But while creativity and perseverance are important, a sense of calling is indispensable.

Christian publishers labor for the glory of God. They must remember the reason for their work, frequently review their vision and mission, and measure their progress toward making these a reality. This should be as automatic as breathing. It is vitally important to renew and refresh a sense of calling in the staff, volunteers, and everyone involved in the fulfillment of the mission.

Calling, creativity and perseverance allow Christian publishers to meet the needs of their markets. Producing high-quality materials at a low cost is a challenge, but it is not impossible. Nothing is impossible with God. ❖