



by Sandy Wolford

## Iron Out Production Processes

As publishers, we want to get a quality message out on time. Our daily focus often becomes the deadlines we must meet for the production process to continue unhindered. For this to happen, two elements must be in place: effective communication and organization.

### *Communication*

Whether or not your company works in teams, a publishing project usually involves different departments and maybe even other companies, so effective communication is essential for a smooth production process.

How can you be certain the channels of communication in your company are open and being used? Take time to evaluate your production process. What are some areas of frequent frustration and stress? Where in the cycle do you consistently see breakdowns? You are likely to find that a breakdown in communication is to blame. Is art frequently missing or saved incorrectly? Was the art director unclear as to where art elements should be saved? Is the advertising paperwork filled out incorrectly so the dummy has to be revised multiple times? Did the advertising sales representative not know they needed to specify when an advertiser wants to appear in a particular section? These are just a few examples of how miscommunication, or lack of communication, can wrinkle the production cycle and cause unnecessary stress.

When you discover areas of weakness, work to improve the process. Two basic steps you can take are having team meetings and learning to be concise.

Team meetings are essential in production. They keep everyone abreast of what is happening with the publication, and help to ensure nothing has been missed. Individuals often focus only on their own responsibilities; they can forget their work is simply one part of the process. Perhaps there is something a team member can do differently to help another, or to make the process go more smoothly. Meetings allow staff to discuss any problems and encourage one another. However, meetings can also become a waste of time. It is very easy to get off-track, so the person who called the meeting needs to make it his or her responsibility to keep meetings brief and focused. Daily meetings are usually not necessary unless there is some unforeseen emergency; less frequent meetings are more helpful.

Learn to be concise. Whether you are speaking in a meeting, talking on the phone, writing a memo, or sending out a quick e-mail, say what you mean, and mean what you say. Though we want to be diplomatic in our communication with others, it's also important to be specific and get to the point. There is nothing worse than a rambler—the more words or explanation used, the more likely you are to lose your audience's focus and comprehension.

### *Organization*

When the files are disorganized, items get lost. When your notes are disorderly, important points get missed. If production steps are not arranged in a logical and organized manner, things get off track.

Take a look at your production process again. Does the flow of deadlines make sense? Are you choosing photos before articles are even assigned? Are you dummymyng the magazine before all the paperwork is in and ads are paid for?

Streamline the production process. There are always ways to do things more efficiently. Spend some energy on identifying areas in the cycle that are unnecessary or may be done more efficiently. Evaluate your responsibilities within the entire production process. Identify ways to be better organized or more efficient.

For example, what is your publication's procedure for receiving and editing articles? Is there a visible glitch in the flow? Can you cut some time out of the process? At one place I worked, each person on our three-member editorial team read and edited all 14 articles for the monthly issue three to four times during the cycle. We consistently had to rush to get the magazine out on time. By dividing up the articles and reducing the number of times each of us read the articles, we streamlined the process. Expensive corrections were minimized. In the end, the magazine was shipped a day earlier.

### *Improved morale*

As you and members of your team find ways to improve communication and organization, the production process will improve. Additionally, morale should improve because it is exciting to produce a quality product in an efficient manner. ❖

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