

# Save on Production

*Christina Lim, of Armour Publishing in Singapore, provides another perspective on cost-cutting measures.*

Lack of sufficient funding is a real problem for many small publishing houses, and sometimes, for large publishers as well. Whether one is a fledgling publisher or has been in business a long time, cutting production costs is essential to enable a company to expand a publishing program and put out more titles.

Are there ways to save on production? Yes. Here are ways to save in four key areas: print, design and illustration, films and editorial.

## **Cut printing costs by 50 percent. Purchase services in another country with a favorable exchange rate**

### **Print**

**1. Compare print quotes.** At Armour Publishing, we seek quotes from at least three different printer before deciding on one. This prevents us from getting 'fleeced' by a friendly printer. There are reasons why quotes do vary from one printer to another. Sometimes printers get better prices from the paper manufacturer because they buy in bulk, or they bought the paper at a time when the paper price was low or simply that the source country is different. This has been Armour's practice for years and it has worked to our advantage.

**2. Print in another country.** When the economic crisis hit Singapore,

we found we had to look for even cheaper ways to print. Though we were obtaining quotes from several local printers, the prices were still too high. However, we are fortunate to be close to a country where quality print services are available and the currency is lower. We found that we could have savings of up to 50 percent by using printers in Malaysia because of the currency difference. In using foreign printers, however, do not forget to make a provision for hidden costs

like delivery charges, taxes, and bank charges which do add up.

The decision to buy print from another country should be thought through carefully as it does bring up other potential problems. One must be convinced of the foreign printer's quality and reliability, especially concerning delivery dates. The printer from Malaysia that Armour is using now was recommended by another publisher. Prior to working with them, we reviewed samples of their work. For the first print job, our editorial staff flew to Kuala Lumpur to do the press check. But for the next two jobs, we corresponded by courier. The quality of the print work was not up to scratch and both times we rejected the covers. Obviously, lack of control is a key issue and one must be prepared to deal with it. Armour is now considering print options in other countries such as Thailand and Hong Kong.

**3. Look for small ways to cut costs.** Don't expect to cut costs in big ways. Small savings add up. When we first published *A Legacy to My Son* we used special paper, Munken Print, because we wanted the book to have a nice feel and look. Upon taking distributor discounts into account, however, we knew we had to cut costs. We found different paper. The feel and look was equally good and the author was happy with the outcome.

### **Design and illustrations**

**1. Widen your pool of illustrators and designers.** Book cover design can cost a lot depending on the experience of the designer. We paid a lot for our first cover design, a watercolor rendition of an eagle flying in a valley, because we didn't know other designers who could do such an illustration, and we were constrained by time. We have since cut our cover design costs by half. Do not depend on just one person. Develop rapport with several designers. Know the strength and style of each individual.

**2. Negotiate discounts.** When working on a series, or when able to guarantee a designer a fixed number of covers per period of time, negotiate a better price per cover. Designers will often accommodate publishers who can give them guaranteed work. This is a win-win situation. For us, this has meant a better price per cover.

**3. Use freelancers.** Hire full-time design staff only if the costs of hir-

ing is less than the sum total of work outsourced for design.

### Films

1. *Compare rates.* Different companies have different overheads. Some may be able to quote better prices than others. For example, the price of a specific paper for color printing may vary by 25 percent. When a book has 300 pages, even very small savings all add up.

2. *Practice the art of negotiation.* At Armour we realized we liked the service a typesetter gave us but that it cost more. We met to discuss better terms for films and obtained them. We have since enjoyed a good relationship with this supplier for the past six years. Talk to suppliers. Good business people want to keep their customers.

3. *Seek other savings.* When funds are tight, cut costs. Be careful, however, to maintain the quality of the film. Work with a reliable supplier.

### Editing and writing

1. *Negotiate writing and editing fees.* Writing and editing talent do

not come cheap. Freelancers are plentiful. There are always individuals who hold a full-time job and may have some spare time on their hands to help you with your work. Negotiate a fee for the whole project or work on a royalty for every book sold. This provides an incentive for them to put more effort into their writing.

2. *Seek quality.* Not everyone cares to understand the philosophy behind a publishing program. Find that special writer or editor who can give quality at a decent price.

### Test the waters

It is a nightmare to continually worry about production costs. Instead, implement cost reviews on a regular basis. Look at available options. Use the best suppliers available. Occasionally test new waters. Always think up new ways of doing things better. Or, in this case, cheaper. ♦



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