

# The Production Department



by Peter Cunliffe

In some ways a production department is like a factory's assembly line. Everything must run perfectly—and all components are interdependent. If one piece breaks down, the whole process can come tumbling down!

The production department is responsible for a book from the time the final manuscript and cover artwork are approved till the time the printer delivers the finished book to the warehouse. This involves many steps: from formatting the text to proofreading, choosing a printer, creating film or digital files, and verifying the proofs.

Some publishers have separate editorial and production departments because they feel the responsibilities of the two departments are quite different. Others prefer to combine them because they feel certain steps in the publishing process could be either editorial or production. Both editorial and production must work closely with the marketing and sales departments.

Since each department's tasks affect the others', a harmonious relationship between them, with each one completing its work by the promised dates, is key. Scheduling is often complicated enough with only 5 or 10 titles per year, but when this escalates to 10, 20, or more, it is critical to track the status of each book in the process.

The editorial department needs to schedule its work so the book can be ready by the date promised. Editorial planning may need to take place two or three years in advance in order to allow authors sufficient time to write the manuscript of a book. Authors or translators should furnish their work in an electronic format compatible with the publishing house's software. In the past, publishers subcontracted formatting and/or typesetting of the text to outside firms, but with the advent of software such as Pagemaker, Ventura, and Quark Express, this job can be done in-house with considerably lower costs. Production scheduling should be done 12 to 18 months in advance, since the staff can only handle a limited number of books at the same time.

Prior to or during the time of the formatting of the text, the editorial department should work with graphic artists to design the cover and illustrations for the book. After the text is formatted, the editorial department has an idea of what the book will look like. At this stage, it will be necessary to insert

the headers for each page and add the title page, the copyright page, any other prefaces or introduction pages, and special artwork on the first page of each chapter. The book should be proofread with this new text added. Finally, the proofs should be sent to the author or translator to insure that he or she is satisfied.

After the formatting of the book has been approved, the production department must obtain competitive bids from at least three printers. The next steps depend on the printer chosen. It is quite common today for the printer to make the films and include the cost as part of the printing, but in some countries the printer may ask the publisher to furnish the films for the text or at least for the cover. In this case, the production department must obtain quotes from firms that make four-color films, order the films, and send them to the printer.

Next, the production department must receive and correct printer proofs for both text and cover. This includes verifying that the color proofs are true to the colors specified by the graphic artist who designed the cover. Stay in close contact with the printer during the time leading up to the printing of the book to confirm there are no problems regarding its timely delivery.

Insert ample "buffer" or "cushion" time into production schedules, because unfortunately the saying is often true that "If something can go wrong, it probably will." A translator may become sick and submit the translation late. A reviser may not be available. The printer may have some other rush job to finish before yours. The goal of the production department is to have the finished book delivered by the date the marketing/sales department needs it for sales and distribution to customers. With good planning and attention to detail, you can keep the "assembly line" moving along smoothly and without incident. ❖

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