

McHugh Publishing Reprint

12 Factors Considered by Authors when Selecting a Publishing Company

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Acquiring new products is a vital function of a successful book publishing enterprise. New product development revolves around the signing of contracts with authors for new books.

Successful acquisitions requires the selling of the company to the author as the potential publisher of his/her work. In any selling situation, the first step is to look at the transaction through the customer's eyes, in this case the author's.

When evaluating your acquisitions efforts ask yourself: "What are the most important factors influencing the author's selection of a publishing company?" Some

would answer: "Money... advances and royalty rates."

Financial considerations are important to the author. It's easy to quantify the monetary aspect of a publisher's offer. But in most cases it's not the most important factor for an author.

Experience has taught me that an author considers twelve factors when selecting a publisher. However, most authors don't consider all of these factors. You'll build a favorable case for the author to sign with your company if you address those factors that are your company's strengths during the acquisitions process.

The twelve factors are:

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1. The publisher's editorial reputation and visibility in the field.

Answer these questions. Does your company publish a leading list of titles in the author's field? Are your authors particularly distinguished? Let prospective authors know they would be publishing with a leader in their field.

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2. The ability to promote to the target readership/audience.

Tell the author about your marketing strengths. It could be any combination of direct mail promotion, advertising, Web site, a sales force or strong

trade distribution. Sometimes international marketing is important. Some publishers also publish magazines and journals that help sell their books.

3. The production cycle time ... documented.

Tell authors how long it takes your company to produce books. Perhaps you handle your production well and the amount of time it takes to produce books is a plus.

4. In house production department staffing

Answer these questions. Do you employ your own full time production staff? Will there be a one-on-one relationship between the author and production editor? Do your authors have access to production staff?

5. Acquisition editor's (AE) experience, vision and developmental plan

Answer these questions. Does the acquisitions editor understand where this book fits in the market? How will the acquisition editor work with the author to bring the book to its fullest editorial potential? How many reviews? Drafts? Revisions? Who will do content reviews?

6. Editor's tenure and experience.

Answer these questions. How many years of experience does the AE have? What is the AE's track record in launching successful books? Is the AE familiar with the author's field or discipline?

7. Book department staffing...for promotion? Publicity?

Answer these questions. Does the publisher have experienced staff to do book promotion and publicity? Does the company outsource these vital functions? How will key media and reviewers be reached? How strong is the publisher's Web site? Does the publisher send out review copies to journals and magazines?

8. Documented sales record with similar books.

Has the publisher sold similar titles? Can the publisher reach this book's market niche? How well have related titles sold?

9. Sales projection for this book.

What is the sales plan for the book? Will there be sales direct to the customer or through distributors? (Makes a big difference royalty-wise on a net receipt contract.) Will there be telemarketing? How will international sales be handled? What is the number of copies the publisher anticipates selling?

10. Promotion plan for the book.

What is the plan for direct mail advertising? Catalog? Brochures? Space advertising? Convention exhibits?

11. Financial terms...royalty rates/advances/subsidiary rights

12. Contractual terms

Who owns copyright? Pays for photos? Research? Permissions? Can material be customized from publisher's database?

Not everyone of these factors need be addressed during the author-acquisition process. You'll be a step ahead of your competition if you can answer many of these questions with an authoritative answer. If you can, your chances of signing contracts with authors will be enhanced.

For those wanting to explore this subject thoroughly, refer to two of my publications *Managing Book Acquisitions: An Introduction*, 1995, John B. McHugh, 100 pp. and *Book Publishing Contracts: An Introduction*, 1996, John B. McHugh, 88 pp. Both publications explain fully the process of book acquisitions and all of the variables involved in acquiring new authors and new book product.

About John B. McHugh

John B. McHugh is a publishing management consultant and industry commentator. He has held management positions at Houghton Mifflin, Richard D. Irwin, and Wadsworth, Inc. At the American Society for Quality, McHugh served as Publisher and Director of Programs.

McHugh's articles have appeared in *Association Publishing*, *Association Trends*, *The Book Marketing Update*, the *COSMEP Newsletter*, *Independent Publishing*, the *PMA Newsletter* and *Small Press*. McHugh also conducts on-site training workshops for publishers.

Other McHugh Publications of Interest:

McHugh Publishing Reprint

Managing Publishing Rights: Acquiring, Protecting and Selling, 158 pp., 1998. \$90.00. Item M-16

Permissions Management for Requestors and Grantors: Dealing with Copyright and Fair Use, 62 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-14

Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, Foundations and Societies, 162 pp., 1997. \$85.00. Item M-15

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Electronic Rights for Publishers: Protecting Your Interests, 31 pp., 1996. \$22.00. Item MP-7

Book Publishing Contracts: An Introduction, 68 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-13

Managing Book Acquisitions: An Introduction, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-12

College Publishing Market, Third Edition, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-11