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## 22 Ideas to Insure a Successful Journal Start-Up

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Scholarly and scientific journals are an integral part of most nonprofit publishing programs. Journals are a proven way to disseminate research and other vital knowledge to members while earning profits. Journals enhance the prestige and visibility of the sponsoring organizations.

Starting a new journal is trickier than you might think because much of editorial administration is with an editor **outside** the office of the sponsoring organization. For many of the key actors, particularly the editor and the editorial board members, working on a journal is a part-time, and generally unpaid, activity.

As a staff publishing manager, you will work with **inexperienced** volunteers and members not used to the rigors and discipline demanded by the schedule requirements of journal publishing.

Guaranteed turn-over in key volunteer leaders is institutionalized in the very nature of nonprofit publishing. Deal constructively with this turnover in order to **maintain publishing continuity** of the journal. These factors make nonprofit journal publishing challenging for staffers to manage.

Most journals are published quarterly. Your subscribers deserve to receive them on a regular basis. Volunteer editors many times don't understand their important role in the publishing schedule and relationship to the customer satisfaction of subscribers. The chaotic political environment of most nonprofits mandates careful planning and "rules" to even the playing field.

The following twenty-two ideas are offered to help you start a new journal. There isn't one prescribed process to do the job. The suggested sequence is not intended as the exact ordering of the steps.

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1. Prepare a mission statement. Cover the "who's," "what's," and most importantly, the "why's." Carefully describe the editorial focus and audience.
  2. Identify competition and set a subscription price.
  3. Prepare a preliminary business plan and budget. Check out the unrelated business
  4. Write a marketing and publicity plan. Contemplate and explore with other organizations possible co-publishing and co-distribution arrangements. Investigate opportunities for electronic distribution.
  5. Develop a circulation plan. Investigate options for international distribution.
- income tax (UBIT) issue. Decide on whether or not to accept paid advertising.

6. Explore all in-house co-promotion and publicity opportunities including membership, conferences, books, magazines, newsletters and other communication media used by your organization.
7. Prepare a preliminary publishing schedule.
8. Establish performance expectations and reporting requirements for the editor. Be precise. Ambiguity and uncertainty as far as what is expected of the editor will be deadly. Your editor must know what is expected, if he or she is to do the job.
9. Determine the required minimum editorial backlog of accepted articles in hand to be delivered by the editor. Two issues of backlogged articles is considered a safe number.

For example, if you are planning an average of 10 articles per issue, then require the editorial pipeline to contain 20 accepted articles. By “accepted,” I mean finished and final — ready for production.

10. Determine additional journal features including book reviews, letters to the editor, invited or commissioned articles. Figure out whose responsibility these will be.
11. Specify information to be reported by the editor to the staff publisher. Important information includes: number of articles under consideration; number out to referees for review; number of articles being revised prior to acceptance; review cycle time for accept/reject; accept/reject rate; and number of articles accepted for publication.

This information is necessary to judge the “editorial health” of your journal and will determine whether or not you will meet the publication schedule. The staff publisher is accountable for the schedule and her career will be affected by the success of the journals in her program. As the staff journal manager, this is vital professional information.

12. Determine in-house staffing needs as far as liaison and production. Does your organization need a managing editor to handle production? What can and should be outsourced? Budget accordingly.
13. Write and get publishing committee approval of journal editor’s position description.
14. Prepare an editor’s contract and get it reviewed by your attorney. Get the publishing committee’s approval of contract. A contract for the editor is mandatory. The contract reinforces the **business purpose** of the arrangement with a volunteer editor and should **remove** the evaluation of the editor’s performance from the **realm of politics**.
15. Screen and select editor candidates for official approval by the board of directors.
16. Secure “official” organizational approval from board of directors for mission statement, business plan, publishing policies, budget and appointment of the journal’s editor. Whatever needs board approval, get approved.
17. Develop, along with editor, editorial criteria for refereeing (reviewing) of articles by editorial board members. Quantify the review rating system for ease of administration. Get publishing committee approval.
18. Develop editorial board member (reviewer) position descriptions in conjunction with the editor. Get publishing committee approval.

19. Get editor to select editorial board candidates. Secure publishing committee approval of these candidates.
20. Develop and get publishing committee approval of article submission requirements.
21. Issue a "Call for Papers" in all appropriate media. Use all of your organization's communication media. There are many opportunities to publicize a new journal.
22. Register copyright (Form SA or variation of).

**N**onprofit publishers operate in a unique environment, one that can be sometimes both frustrating and challenging. As a publishing executive experienced in both the nonprofit and commercial sectors, I saw a void in the availability of practical management information for the nonprofit publishing executive. I decided to remedy that situation.

*Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, Foundations and Societies*, 1997, is unique as it presents a broad overview on how to succeed as a nonprofit publishing manager. Read *Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations* to pick up practical advice from a management perspective.

#### 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:

*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

*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

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