

# 5.6 Publication Skills

## Aim

- To familiarize the participants with the process of publishing.
- To enlighten the participants on the current trends and convergence in book publishing.

## Materials Required

- Pen and Paper

### Procedure

• Before the actual class, ask the participants to investigate the process of publishing from the writing of the book to the financial aspects of publishing.

### Input

• The ideas that ultimately become books reach publishers in a number of ways. Sometimes they reach an acquisitions editor (the person charged with determining which books a publisher will publish). This means that ideas are mailed or phoned directly to the acquisitions editor by the author. Many of the larger and better publishers will not accept unsolicited ideas from aspiring writers unless they first secure the services of an agent, an intermediary between publisher and writer. Increasingly, acquisitions editors are determining what books they think will do well and seeking out writers who can meet their needs. At some publishing houses, acquisition editors have the power to say yes or no to a book proposal based on their own judgment of the value and profitability of an idea. At many others, these editors must prepare a case for the projects they want to take on and have them reviewed and approved by a review or proposal committee. These committees typically include not only “book people” but marketing, financial, production, and administrative professionals who judge the merit of the idea from their own perspectives. Once the acquisitions editor says “Yes” or is given permission by the committee to do so, the author and the publisher sign a contract.

• After the contract is signed, an editor is assigned to assist the author in producing a quality manuscript. Some combination of the publisher’s marketing, promotions, and publicity departments plans the advertising campaign for the book. When available, review copies are sent to appropriate reviewers in other media. Book tours and signings are planned and scheduled. Copy for Salesian catalogues is written to aid sales people in their attempts to place the book in bookstores. All this effort is usually aimed at the first few months of a book’s release. The publisher will determine in this time if the book will succeed or fail with readers. If the book appears to be a success, additional printings will be ordered. If the book appears to be a success, additional printings will be ordered. If the book has generated little interest from buyers, no additional copies are printed. Bookstores will eventually return unsold copies to the publisher to be sold at great discount as remainders.

• As a student, you can also publish your own book either independently or with a group of your schoolmates. The challenge here however is that most independent publishers have a hard time raising the money for printing, marketing and distribution. If this is the case, you can take the first alternative which is to get a literary agent. Before you take on any undertaking as big as publishing a book, do a little market research. Find out from your local bookstores and the internet how many other books exist on your chosen topic. If there are several, will yours be able to compete? If there are none, is anyone really interested in this type of book?

### Trends and Convergence in Book Publishing

• The contemporary book industry is characterized by several important economic and structural factors. Among the most important are convergence, conglomeration, hyper-commercialism and demand for profits, the growth of small presses, restructuring of retailing, and changes in readership.

#### a) Convergence

• Convergence is altering almost all aspects of the book industry and its relationship with its readers. Traditionally, books traveled the route from idea to publication, but the Internet now offers an additional way for writers’ ideas to be published. Using this

new technology, even the physical form of books is changing-many of today's books are no longer composed of paper pages snug between two covers. In addition, the Internet is changing the way books are distributed and sold.

### **b) Conglomeration**

More than any other medium, the book industry was dominated by relatively small operations. Publishing houses were traditionally staffed by fewer than 20 people, the large majority by fewer than 10. Today, however, although more than 20,000 businesses call themselves book publishers, only 2,000 produce four or more titles a year. The industry is dominated now by a few giants: Hearst Books, the Penguin Group, Bantam Doubleday Dell, Time Warner Publishing, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Harcourt General, HarperCollins, and Simon & Schuster. Each of these giants was once, sometimes with another name, an independent book publisher. All are now part of large national or international corporate conglomerates. These major publishers control more than 80% of all U.S. book sales (Schiffren, 1999).

### **c) Demand for Profits and Hypercommercialism**

The threat from conglomeration is seen in the parent company's overemphasis on the bottom line-that is, profitability at all costs. Little pride is taken in the content of books and that risk-taking (tackling controversial issues, experimenting with new styles, finding and nurturing unknown authors) is becoming rarer and rarer.

### **d) Growth of Small Presses**

The over-commercialization of the book industry is mitigated somewhat by the rise in the number of smaller publishing houses. Although these smaller operations are large in number, they account for a very small proportion of books sold. They cannot compete in the blockbuster world.

## **Review**

1. The ideas that ultimately become books reach publishers in a number of ways. Sometimes they reach an acquisitions editor and others through an agent, an intermediary between publisher and writer.
2. Most publishers accept an offer to publish written material only after a board of committee members comprising marketing, financial, production, and administrative professionals who judge the merit of the idea from their own perspectives.
3. Once the acquisitions editor says "Yes" or is give permission by the committee to do so, the author and the publisher sign a contract.
4. As a student, you can also publish your own book either independently or with a group of your schoolmates. The challenge here however is that most independent publishers have a hard time raising the money for printing, marketing and distribution.
5. The contemporary book industry is characterized by several important economic and structural factors. Among the most important are convergence, conglomeration, hyper-commercialism and demand for profits, the growth of small presses, restructuring of retailing, and changes in readership.

## **Reflection**

Traditionally, books traveled the route from idea to publication, but the Internet now offers an additional way for writers' ideas to be published. Using this new technology, even the physical form of books is changing-many of today's books are no longer composed of paper pages snug between two covers. In addition, the Internet is changing the way books are distributed and sold.

## **Relevant Skills**

Putting in mind the skills in writing, editing and desktop publishing, reflect on ways you can publish your own book either independently or with a group of your schoolmates.

## **References**

Baran, J. Stanley, 2002. Introduction to Mass Communication. USA: McGraw- Hill Higher Education.  
Levin Mark, 1999. Journalism A Handbook for Journalists. USA: National Textbook Company.

