

Conglomerated Kibitzers Beware

by John Huenefeld

What is the principal difference between effective publishing managers and ineffective ones?

The most effective publishers recognize the difference between the daily, fast-paced, face-to-face interaction by which key departmental managers in small and mid-sized publishing houses make important decisions, and the much slower, off-line, cautious process characteristic of larger organizations (where proposals must be put in writing for consideration by a potentially larger group of kibitzers).

The former style of small-group decision-making dynamics tends to be more decisive and enthusiastic, because everyone gets involved while an idea is still hot. The process is more creative and imaginative because there are fewer inhibitors. But this brisk decision-making process is also much more risky, because all of those conglomerated kibitzers don't get to ponder exhaustively all of the possible faults of a written proposal.



The trick for the small and mid-sized publisher is to take advantage of the creativity and ease-of-innovation of such fast-paced small-group dynamics without getting tripped up by its risky speed and lack of vetting. This is best achieved by making the key departmental managers take individual responsibility for maximizing explicit, quantified performance indices in each of their specialties: content acquisition, marketing, production, and business administration.

Such delegation will normally be effective only if each of those managers is required to regularly (monthly?) explain to the others (the Core Management Group—including the publisher) why the current trend of per-



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formance indices is either improving or deteriorating. It is the *inevitability* of having to explain, repeatedly, to her colleagues how the trend of her function's indices might best be reversed (if bad) or exploited (if good) which exerts the most effective practical pressure for achieving desired results.



John Huenefeld has run a book publishing management consulting firm for 33 years, serving as a confidential advisor to the top managers of more than 350 publishing houses. He is the author of The Huenefeld Guide to Book Publishing, a bedrock text now in its sixth edition (Mills & Sanderson).



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Behind the Scenes at Patron Saint Productions

Advisory Board Member **Alice Acheson**, PR Diva **Gwendolyn Gawlick**, and Executive Director **Steve O'Keefe** will be teaching at PMA's Publishing University April 30 - May 2 before the BEA. For details, visit the PMA web site at <http://www.pma-online.org>.

MacMaster **Jesse Vohs** just overhauled our computer system, upgrading all software and installing a high-speed Internet network. Now we have to learn our computers all over again. In the coming months, we'll make recommendations for software you should try and software to avoid.

Jeremy Hart, our unofficial webmaster, has been installing a charitable publishers bookstore on our web site. Look for the new bookstore in May.

Steve O'Keefe's little brother, Advisory Board Member **Kelly O'Keefe**, just made a big acquisition. Kelly is the CEO of Richmond-based Emergence, a strategic consulting firm, which just purchased Cadmus Creative Marketing of Atlanta. Cadmus employs 65 people and has annual revenues north of \$8 million, much of it from making catalogs for large retailers. This probably means Kelly's book on business strategy will be on the back burner for a while.

Speaking of books, our Director of Production, **Gary Michael Smith**, is shopping a proposal for a book about Print On Demand. Gary teaches short press run publishing at the University of New Orleans and was recently featured on *Eyewitness Morning News* at CBS affiliate WWL-TV.

Former Director of Operations, **Christopher Lenois**, returned to his roots in journalism and is writing for a string of weekly newspapers. Chris' departure has caused delays in the sale of our contact databases. Preparing these databases is our first priority once we recover from our computer upgrade.