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Some Journal Economics

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The Meyers Connection

Lighting Rod or Peacemaker?
by **Barbara Meyers**(President, Meyers Consulting Services)

This connection with *Against the Grain* focuses on another area of journal economics: the costs of production. By production, I mean the composition (typesetting), printing, and binding of a journal. In order to provide you with some valid figures contrasting these costs between a humanities journal and a scientific, technical, or medical (STM) journal, I called upon my friend and colleague, Ms. Philene Wing of Edwards Brothers, Inc. Edwards Brothers is a full-service manufacturer (printer) of books and journals headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan and has both commercial and society publishers as its customers.

Before I give you Philene's figures, allow me to introduce this area with some caveats on the challenges to publishers to contain production costs which can account for anywhere from 35-50% of the expense side in journal publishing.

There are several critical areas to be considered, some of which are:

- 1) The **trim size** of the journal - if a publisher selects a "non-standard" trim size then costs will increase. Most U.S. journals are either 6 X 9 inches or 8 1/2 X 11 inches.
- 2) The percentage of **tabular material** included in a journal impacts the cost of typesetting; the greater the number of tables to be set, the greater the cost.
- 3) The number of **illustrations** also impacts the cost of production, especially for those in the medical publishing world where halftones (photographs) are critical to the dissemination of information. Every halftone increases the cost (by \$9.50 EACH at Edwards Brothers, other printers may be more or less).
- 4) The **typeface** selected also impacts typesetting charges as that will determine the number of characters that can be contained on a page.
- 5) The **point size** and **leading** of the typeface selected also impacts the number of characters one can fit on a single page-- less pages means less costs-- from time on the press to postage paid by weight.

6) The number of **revisions** (aka "author's alterations") dramatically influences the price of composition.

7) It follows then, that the **number of proofs** (checking copies) influences typesetting costs.

8) The use of **color** (other than just black ink) can dramatically increase printing costs.

9) Even the **paper stock** chosen impacts the sheer price of the paper component of printing charges as well as the weight of the journal. This has an impact on the cost of postage in shipping the journal to subscribers. [NOTE: Years ago, when librarians were first requesting that publishers use acid-free sheets they were probably not aware that such stock could add as much as 20% extra to printing charges. Now acid-free paper runs about 5% more than normal sheets.]

There are many more detailed issues to be considered, but I'll stop here for now.

A more general aspect for a publisher to negotiate with a printer is the type of press to be used. Without going into a major dissertation on printing, suffice it to say that the use of a sheetfed versus a web press makes a significant difference in the cost of production. Rule of thumb: Sheetfed presses are used for short-runs and web presses are used for long runs which are usually more economical because the number of impressions is greater and thus, the unit price can be lower.

In addition, the scheduling and level of service also influence a printer's charges. If the editorial content of a journal is late, then overtime on the press will cost more. If a publisher wishes a higher level of service from printer's representatives that will ultimately cost more as well. [NOTE: This is akin to the level of service librarians negotiate with their subscription agents. There's the basic service and then there are all the "extras."]

Now to our hypothetical journals. Philene has set up two scenarios for us. She first made some assumptions to set the two journals on an equal footing. Both journals conform to the following specifications:

Trim Size: 8 1/2 X 11 inches
 Frequency: Quarterly (4 times/year)
 Binding: Perfect bound
 Pages: 200 pages/issue = 800 pages/year
 Print Run: 15,000 copies/issue = 60,000 copies

HUMANITIES/SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL

SCIENTIFIC/TECHNICAL/MEDICAL JOURNAL

RANGE OF TYPESETTING COSTS PER PAGE

straight text, hard-copy manuscript
 \$17.50 - 22.50/page
 uncoded disk \$14-18/page
 coded disk \$12.25-15.75/page

text plus complex mathematics,
 hard-copy manuscript \$25-35/page
 uncoded disk \$20-28/page
 coded disk \$17.50-24.50 page

TOTAL ANNUAL TYPESETTING COSTS BASED ON AVERAGE PER PAGE RATES

Total (hard-copy mss) = \$16,000/year
 Total (uncoded disk) = \$12,800/year
 Total (coded disk) = \$11,200/year

Total (hard-copy mss) = \$24,000/year
 Total (uncoded disk) = \$19,200/year
 Total (coded disk) = \$16,800/year

PRINTING AND BINDING COSTS PER ISSUE

\$13,500 based on:
 No halftones
 50 lb Glatfelter uncoated stock
 10 pt type, 2 color on 2 covers
 uv coating and perfect binding

\$18,625 based on:
 130 halftones
 50 lb Somerset gloss stock
 8 pt type, black plus 1 color on covers
 uv coating and perfect binding

TOTAL ANNUAL PRINTING AND BINDING COSTS

\$54,000 for four issues

\$74,000 for four issues

TOTAL ANNUAL PRODUCTIONS COSTS BASED ON TYPESETTING, PRINTING AND BINDING

\$70,000 for four issues

\$98,500 for four issues

Now I may have raised more questions than I've answered by these two hypothetical cost estimates. I'm sure that everyone reading this realizes that few journals in the humanities and social sciences will have absolutely no illustrations and few of these journals are produced in a trim size of 8 1/2 X 11 inches (most humanities journals are printed in a 6 X 9 inch format). Many STM journals are published on a monthly, versus quarterly, basis and certainly many have more than 800 total pages published per year.

Also, few scholarly journals of either type (humanities or STM) have 5-figure circulations and, of course,

only medical journals will have that many (130) halftones in an issue. But then, again, Philene could not begin to guess at the number of revisions (author's alterations) in the typesetting portion of the process and these can sometimes climb to 15% of the total bill on a manuscript! [Hint: That means that the typesetting costs estimated here are LOW.]

So, all in all, we do have two reasonable pictures to look at if we wish to contrast the dramatic differences in the types of publishing. First of all, STM publishers need a paper stock that will work for the printing of illustrations and therefore will pay as much as 36% more for that difference in stock. Also,

STM publishers have complex mathematics to set, so composition costs run about 50% more on average than prices for the humanities.

In general, paper represents about one-third of any publisher's printing bill. And now that the journal is typeset, printed, and bound, we look to delivering it to the subscribers. Latest word is that we can expect a 25% increase in postal rates within the very near future. That means that within one year publishers will have realized total postage increases of over 50%! But that's really for my next connection, the one concerned with fulfillment and distribution. Look for you then!