

Four Benefits of Joining a Publishers Association

By Sarah Bolme

“Why should I spend my money to just be part of a group?” This was the response I received when I asked my friend if she was planning on joining a professional organization that I belonged to. Sadly, many individuals hold this sentiment, seeing membership fees for a professional association as a waste of money.

Professional associations exist for just about any industry. Associations are formed for the purpose of collaborating and learning from one another with the sentiment that helping each other provides better results than each person just doing it alone. When you join a professional association you receive great benefits. However, it is up to each individual to take advantage of the benefits offered by a professional association.

Here are four beneficial reasons for you, a self- or small publisher to join a publishers association.

1. You gain respect in the book industry.

Professional organizations hold their members to a high standard of conduct. Membership in a professional association says “I am serious about my vocation.” Don’t you prefer to go to a doctor who is a member of the American Medical Association? Knowing that your doctor belongs to a professional organization makes you feel more secure that she is serious about learning and knowing the latest medical techniques. As a publisher, your membership in a publishers association brings you the same professional respect in the book industry. For example consider book reviews, an essential ingredient in promoting a new title. One review source, The Midwest Book Review, specializes in reviewing titles from small publishers, self-publishers, academic publishers, and specialty presses. However, they give priority consideration to those publishers that belong to a publishers association such as PMA, SPAN, or CSPA.

2. You receive cutting-edge information.

Publishers associations provide their members with some form of regular communication (usually a newsletter) containing the latest developments and resources in the publishing industry. Many hold seminars and conferences to further their members’ education and expertise in publishing related issues. The information you glean from belonging to a publisher’s association can improve your business and bring you more success in your publishing and promotion endeavors. Knowing what is currently working for other publishers helps you learn what to do to sell more copies of your books.

3. You save money.

Joining a professional publisher’s association costs money. However, if you take advantage of the many membership benefits these associations offer, (which can include co-op marketing opportunities, savings on shipping costs, health insurance programs for self-employed individuals, and liability insurance), you will save money in the long run. Some small publishers claim that the money they save on SPAN’s freight discount benefit alone more than pays for their annual membership fees in the organization.

4. Doors of opportunity open for you.

Professional publisher’s associations provide many opportunities for you to network with other professionals in the book industry. Aside from the aforementioned seminars or conferences to attend, some also provide an on-line discussion group for member publishers. These opportunities allow you to

not only find out what is working for other publishers but they lend you a venue to share your expertise. Networking in this manner can also lead to other prospects such as a co-publishing agreement. Displaying your titles at a trade convention can lead to great deals. While generally a costly endeavor, some publishers associations provide opportunities for you to affordably display your titles. One author received 26 inquiries from displaying his title at the Frankfurt Book Fair through PMA and ended up selling international rights to six foreign countries.

There are currently five main professional publisher's associations for the small and self-publisher.

Publishers Marketing Association (PMA) publishes a newsletter, sponsors seminars, provides co-op promotional mailings, exhibits members' books at trade conventions, and sponsors the annual Benjamin Franklin Awards for the best books of the year published by independent publishers. www.pma-online.org

Small Publishers Association of North America (SPAN) publishes a newsletter, offers co-op advertising and display opportunities, sponsors an annual conference, and hosts an on-line discussion group for small and self-publishers. www.spannet.org

Christian Small Publishers Association (CSPA) is a newer organization for small and self-publishers publishing materials for the Christian marketplace. CSPA publishes an e-newsletter, offers co-op advertising, exhibits members' books at Christian trade conventions, offers webpage hosting, and hosts an on-line discussion group for small publishers publishing material for the Christian marketplace. www.christianpublishers.net

Catholic Book Publishers Association (CBPA) is for those publishers publishing materials for the Catholic marketplace. While not exclusively for the small publisher, they do have a sliding membership fee based on size of publishing house. CBPA publishes a newsletter, provides co-op marketing opportunities, sponsors seminars, and gives publisher service awards. www.cbpa.org

Small Publishers, Artists, and Writers Network (SPAWN) provides opportunities for everyone involved in publishing. SPAWN encourages the exchange of ideas, information, and other mutual benefits. www.spawn.org

You don't have to limit yourself to one. Check each one of these publishers associations out and join as many of them as you feel will gain you optimal information and the opportunities you need to be as successful as you desire in your publishing endeavors.

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