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## How and Why You Should Self-Publish Your Nonprofit Story to Engage Followers

Engaging followers who will become volunteers and donors is hard enough in the good times; now, your nonprofit is competing with disasters near and far that drown out your message. After all, even with Twitter, YouTube and all manner of media operating 24/7, there is still only so much personal “band width” that people can accommodate.

How can you possibly create credible publicity with a pinched budget when everyone’s using the same methods?

Consider writing and self-publishing your story as a book to distinguish your group and raise your profile. Why write? Your story is the inspiration for your group’s existence: Whatever inspired the founding of your group will likewise inspire others to join with your cause.

A professional looking book will add power to your presence in the community and credibility with the public. The quickest way to do this is to self-publish, using e-books (digital), books printed in some quantity by a small printing company, and “Print-on-Demand” (POD) books. (POD is a form of digital publishing using computers and laser printers rather than traditional offset printing methods.) The rest of this article will focus primarily on the latter two approaches to producing an actual book.

### **Publishing Possibilities**

Generally speaking, with a small printing company you provide a completed, properly-formatted manuscript and cover design and they will bind it according to your specifications; you pay them

to print and ship a quantity of books to a specific location. Because the presses are set up for your book, a minimum quantity (often 500 or 1,000) is required. You pay just the cost of printing and shipping. With this approach, you are responsible for much of the pre-production of the book.

On the other hand, a POD company typically offers a menu of services including manuscript formatting, cover design, proofing, and distribution. A POD prints quantities to order, even a single copy, which gives you great flexibility. You purchase your books from the POD at a discount from the retail price, often between 30 and 50 per cent. That allows you some margin should you decide to sell the book.

Regardless of which option you choose, use a graphics designer for your cover and have the interior laid out by a professional. You can skimp on those expenses, but your book will come out looking amateurish and will detract from your cause, your credibility, and your potential profitability.

## **Benefits of Publishing**

A nonprofit can reap a variety of benefits from having its story published:

- **Speaking invitations:** A book sets you apart and leads to speaking invitations; these often lead to additional invitations and opportunities to mingle with people predisposed to your cause. Use these times to invite people to sign up for your mailing list and to tour your location, drawing them into a deeper connection with your mission.
- **Additional exposure:** Beyond your local newspaper, a book can lead to wider media coverage. After Debra published her book, she became a guest on seventy-five radio interview shows across the country and received write-ups in the Chicago Sun Times and the St. Louis Post Dispatch.
- **Radio host:** Start your own radio talk show on the internet through sites like [blogtalkradio.com](http://blogtalkradio.com). Invite others to discuss questions pertinent to your cause.
- **Expanded access:** Identifying yourself as 'the author of \_\_\_' can give you access to other experts or leaders to ask for input, survey participation, and advice. Post that info to your website and blurb it in your newsletter. Your association with other experts or leaders adds to your visibility and credibility.
- **Expert status:** Greater publicity labels you as an expert and experts are called on more frequently for interviews and information, and are more apt to attract donors.

## **A Multi-Purpose Tool**

Your book becomes an avenue to other products you can give away or sell to engage more followers. Consider these ideas:

- Turn chapters to articles for newsletters, mailings, speeches
- Convert part/all of your book into a PDF e-book and sell it on a website
- Create how-to workshops or training classes based on individual chapters
- Solicit online feedback to new chapter ideas to create anticipation and participation

## **Picking a POD**

Finding the right POD company for your project means doing your homework first. As with any new venture, educate yourself on the web. Note what services you'll need so you can minimize the distractions of unnecessary options. Consider:

- Geography: You pay for shipping; does the POD print abroad or down the road?
- Services: Bundled or a la carte? Know what's in a bundle before you proceed.
- References: Contact authors who used the POD. What marketing did the POD promise and how well did it deliver? Would they use this company again? Why or why not?
- Get samples: Buy them if you have to; gauge the quality of the cover, interior layout, paper, ink, etc. What's your first impression of the book? If you like it, ask for the specifications of that sample for your own book.
- Create a budget: Basic packages can start at \$500 and go up depending on what services you need; decide on the retail price for your book and know what your discount will be when buying; get shipping estimates.
- Timing: how long will it take from start to finish? Add a few weeks to allow for adjustments.

Marketing a book is a world (and separate article) unto itself but for our immediate purposes, your book's goal is to elevate your nonprofit's identity to engage followers by generating publicity. You have a book...use word of mouth. Tell others and watch what happens. Here's a great example of why it's worth the effort.

Debra was at a local bank function where she met the bank's president. During their conversation, he emphasized the bank's commitment to giving back to the local community. Before she left, she said, "I have a book you might want to read on that topic."

"Who's the author?" he said.

“I am.”

“Oh!” After hearing more about the book, he invited her to drop a copy at his office the next day. “We’re launching a committee on social responsibility and I’d like for you to be at our first meeting next month.”

A book led to an invitation to meet with senior level decision makers, tell them about her work, and brainstorm about partnering. And that’s why self-publishing your story is a viable approach for engaging more followers, volunteers, and ultimately, donors.

**Learn more about promoting your human service cause...**



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## **About the Authors**

**Debra Berg** is a coach for nonprofit causes and leaders, an author, speaker, and the foremost authority on The New Civic America. Debra has appeared in the *Chicago Sun Times* and on over seventy-five radio and TV talk shows on her groundbreaking research featured in her book, *The Power of One: The Unsung Everyday Heroes Rescuing America’s Cities*. As “The Cause Coach” and the Charity and Volunteering Guide on SelfGrowth.com, she works with start-up cause and existing ones to improve their visibility and viability. Debra launched the National Institute for Civic Enterprise (NICE), a national research and human services nonprofit network in 2007. **Debra is available to inspire your organization as a speaker, to appear for radio/TV interviews, or to provide nonprofit coaching and training. You may contact her in any of the following ways:**

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