

Improving Production Processes for Books and Journals at SAGE Publications

SAGE Publications London wanted help in deciding how to improve both their production processes and technologies to support growth and prepare for the move towards a global publishing model.

The Challenge

SAGE wanted to decide how to improve the efficiency of their production processes for books and journals in order to provide capacity for future growth in volume and develop new services to customers. It was important to understand the causes of extra cost and inefficiencies in the current process, in order to make well-informed decisions about what improvements should be made, and equally, it was important that SAGE production staff were involved in identifying areas for improvement and agreeing what improvements were needed, in order to ensure that the analysis was correct, and that the staff themselves bought-in to the changes that were to follow.

Our Approach

We approached the work in stages. First we ran a series of workshops with different teams of production staff to map the current processes and identify existing bottlenecks. We then used the process maps to build an activity template and asked production editors to record how much time was spent on different activities over a given period, so that we could identify which activities were taking up most in-house effort.

We also analysed historical cost and schedule data to compare different processes and compared this with the time taken in house, to measure the benefit of greater or lesser outsourcing on speed and overall cost. Finally, we evaluated the corrections marked on a broad range of sample proofs to assess the benefits of proof-reading in the different processes.

Results

From Day One we were able to identify several quick wins that could be implemented easily to cut out inefficiencies. Working with SAGE production managers we developed an action plan for short-term improvements, and put many into place within a few weeks of beginning the project.

As the work progressed, we liaised continually with the Production Director at SAGE to identify and sense check longer term ideas for improvements. We considered production tracking systems, outsourcing practices, content management and digital workflows and talked to senior managers to understand the overall business strategy and the strategy for production going forward. As a result we were able to recommend a series of actions that should be taken to improve the existing processes and gear up SAGE production to support future development of new services to their customers.

We drew our recommendations together into an implementation 'Roadmap' to show how the changes could be achieved in manageable steps, and generate improvements along the way. SAGE are using the Roadmap to move forward with their process change and to help form the business requirements for the development of new systems.



Our Client

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SAGE is a leading international publisher of journals, textbooks, reference books, databases and education media across a variety of disciplines and professions. Based in California and London, the UK office publishes over 240 journals and produces over 250 new books per year, priding itself on maintaining rigorous schedules and quality standards and giving authors and editors high-calibre service throughout.

There's no doubt that Sharon and Opsera have helped us enormously in taking a significant step forward in production. Not only have we been able to demonstrate where our processes were inefficient and understand why, but the inclusive way the project was run ensured that everyone could buy in to the need for change going forward. Sharon's publishing background and knowledge of production and production technologies was invaluable in determining the right way forward for us. I can heartily recommend Opsera to others in the same position.
Richard Fidczuk, Production Director