HOW TO REDUCE THE COST OF
AUTHOR'S ALTERATIONS

"Hello, Ms. Communicator? This is Keepit Reasonable from Purchasing. We just received your request to process an invoice for design services that's 15 per cent higher than your approved budget. Can you explain the discrepancy please?"

Ouch. **Those unexpected author's alterations can sideswipe even the most well-planned budget. Anyone who has ever managed the production of a professionally designed document has come face to face with author's alterations, otherwise known as AAs. These are the fees (usually around $60/hour) charged by your design firm when you make changes to "approved design or laid-out text."**

The mere act of taking text from a raw word processing format to a formal layout means that some AAs are inevitable. Hyphenation preferences, unnoticed errors in the original, an unforeseen need to cut text to fit the available space-all of these changes mean the designer or layout artist will have to do additional work on your layout, resulting in AA charges. A little advance planning can help you keep these charges to a manageable level.

BUILD AAS INTO YOUR ORIGINAL BUDGET FORECAST

Since AAs are inevitable, plan for them in advance when you are putting together your budget. A good benchmark is to add an additional 15 per cent to the layout cost.

GET A FRESH PAIR OF EYES

If you've proofed and re-read the text until you can't bear to look at it again, ask someone who's never seen it to read through it one more time. Be especially vigilant when checking Web site addresses, financial information, and telephone numbers.

WAIT UNTIL THE TEXT IS REALLY, TRULY "FINAL"

Even if your deadline was yesterday, resist the urge to send the text to layout until every person who needs to see or comment on it has done so. You can easily lose as much time on AAs as you thought you'd gain by sending the text out early.

VERIFY AAS FROM OTHER SOURCES

If your text has circulated for input, be sure to review everyone's changes to ensure they are accurate, and consistent. Don't leave comments or questions unanswered. In other words, if someone writes, *Shouldn't this amount match the total on page 8?*, indicate yes or no, or cross out the comment to avoid confusion.

COMPILE YOUR AAS INTO LARGER BATCHES

Without a doubt, this is **the** best way to reduce AA costs. For every set of AAs that you submit, the process is the same. The account rep has to receive the changes. The production manager must schedule them. The layout artist must access your job and go over AAs. After all of the changes are made, the file must be printed out, proofed by the designer, and then given a final proofread by a second person. The new layout must then be sent to you by fax or courier, or a PDF version created and then emailed to you.

The reality is that this process takes virtually the same amount of time for four changes as it does for 14. You'll save time and considerable money by waiting until you have everyone's input and then consolidating all of the AAs before sending them in. Plus, the more sets of AAs, the greater the risk of error.

MARK YOUR AAS CLEARLY ON A HARD COPY OF THE LAYOUT

It may seem obvious, but providing your design firm with a well-marked hard copy that clearly shows the required changes is a simple and effective way to minimize your AA charges. If your designer has problems deciphering your changes, the longer they will take, and remember, time is money. Plus, if they are unclear, there is a greater risk of error or misinterpretation. (When there are a lot of changes, or they are particularly complicated, it's best to send originals rather than a fax.)

It may be better for you to provide a new electronic file (e.g., MS Word) showing where the revisions are, particularly if entire paragraphs of text are being added. That way, the designer can clip and paste, rather than retyping (and possibly introducing typos).

Without a marked-up hard copy of the layout, the designer will have to cross-reference the MS Word file with the layout file (which no longer looks anything like the MS Word file, and flows much differently).

Cross-referencing is especially difficult when there are only a few word changes here and there. When there are a lot of text changes, the best solution is to provide both a marked-up copy of the latest layout, and a new text file.

Yes, email sounds more convenient. But avoid writing long email descriptions of AAs—they're actually time-consuming and much more complicated for the recipient to figure out. An instruction like *Change to lowercase the capital "T" of the fifth word in the third paragraph on page 17* takes longer to execute than if the change is simply marked on a copy and sent in. For the same reason, avoid calling your changes in by phone. It's far preferable—both for you and the design firm—to have a hard-copy record of all changes.