

# MAKING NEWS

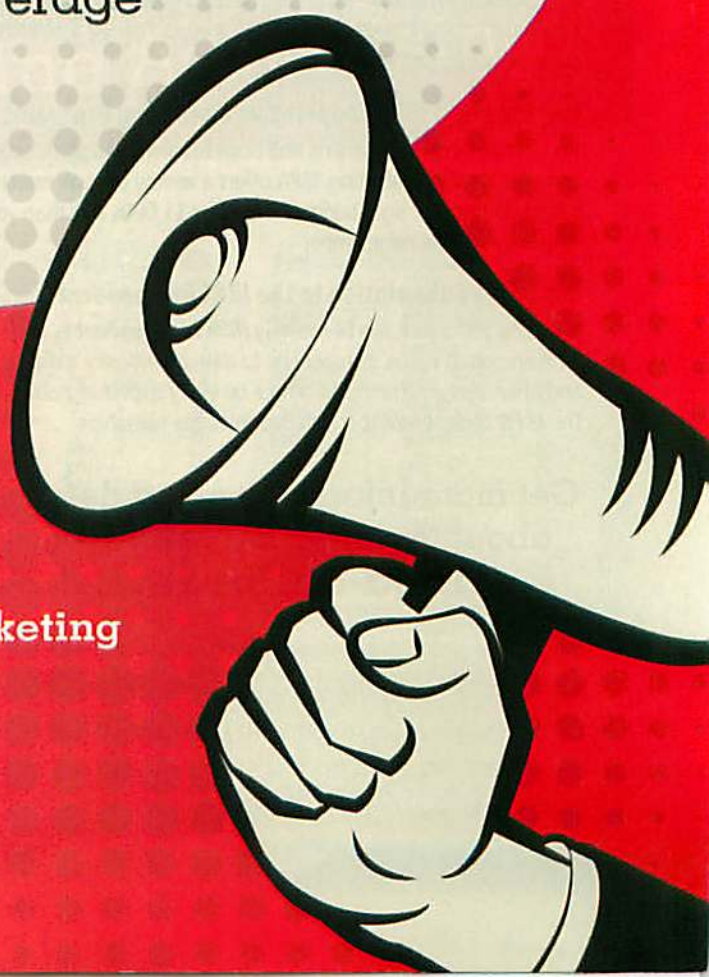
Craft the perfect pitch that'll get  
you media coverage

10

26 11 Case Studies on the 4 Ps of Marketing

30 How to Prevent a PR Nightmare

32 Negotiating Textbook Contracts







### **synopsis:**

- Front Edge Publishing's founding motto is "Good media builds healthier communities."
- The company invites Allies to start envisioning their supporting roles while a book is still in its conceptual stage.
- Angels take it a step further, often contributing to book production or hosting events by underwriting the venue and related expenses.



# SUMMONING OUR ALLIES & ANGELS

Front Edge Publishing integrates highly engaged partners—Allies and Angels—into the promotion of their books.

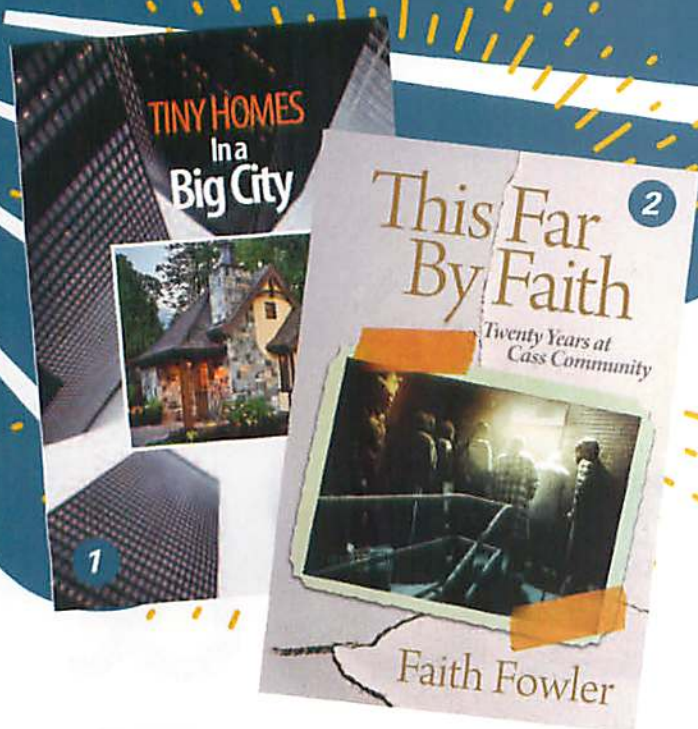
by David Crumm

**A**ny publisher would be pleased to learn that an upcoming book had sold nearly 2,000 advance copies even before the title was publicly released to Amazon and other sellers. Recently, we saw that number racked up by *Tiny Homes in a Big City*, the story of a unique tiny homes community springing up in an abandoned corner of Detroit now known as the Cass Community. We were happy, but we weren't surprised. An early amateur video about this unique Detroit community had gone viral on social media and racked up more than 40 million views.

This book was coming into the world with a vast array of friends waiting to receive it. Since our founding in 2007, we have developed books with careful attention to what we call Allies and Angels.

Front Edge Publishing began as a collaboration of journalists and software developers. Our publisher, John Hile, my co-founder, came from decades of creating innovative software for which he earned a series of US patents. With the advent of the Kindle and digital books in 2007, he was eager to streamline publishing systems. As the founding editor, I came from 30 years as a senior writer and editor for major newspapers with a specialty in covering diversity. John and I formed a hybrid publishing house in which authors and publishing partners share in some of the basic costs of production and expect a higher-than-usual portion of book revenues. John's new publishing software became our own XML-first system of production, allowing for rapid, flexible adaptation of all book formats from a single source file.





*Photos, left to right:*

- 1 Faith Fowler's newest book, *Tiny Homes in a Big City*.
- 2 Faith Fowler's first book, her memoir *This Far by Faith*.

That led to a broader concept of hybrid publishing. In addition to producing books with individual authors, this allowed us to partner in setting up new publishing houses by providing production services to organizations that wanted to become publishers without a production staff. That list soon included the Michigan State University School of Journalism, Michigan public television and, in the heart of Detroit, Cass Community Publishing.

Our founding motto: "Good media builds healthier communities."

Together with our partners, we developed a transparent, collaborative approach to publishing. These underlying values are conveyed in the first two questions we ask potential authors and partner publishers: "So, what do you want to say to the world? And, if we produce books, what Allies and Angels will help?"

Publishers know the dozens of roles Allies can play in promoting a book, from advance interest in reviewing or covering a book to help with social media, launch events, and public discussion of upcoming books. Our main innovation is that we invite Allies to start envisioning their supporting roles while a book is still

in its conceptual stage. We carefully organize, track, and encourage all of these offers of help.

One of our founding principles is: "Radical transparency is good business." We take this so seriously that we begin publicly talking about prospective projects before we've even signed a final contract for a book. Our purpose is to welcome Allies in the earliest brainstorming. Over the years, input from Allies has shaped everything from the scope of a finished book to the details in our keywords and metadata. Often, prominent Allies lend their names for prefaces or forewords, which is common in publishing. But our Allies go beyond that step. For example, several of our Allies who are noted educators have used early proofs of a book to draft, road-test and contribute a discussion guide.

This makes sense because, among the more than 100 nonfiction titles we have published since 2007, we are trying to produce what we describe as "a community between two covers." That's true even of deeply personal books and memoirs. One of our founding principles in 2007 expressed our commitment to pushing hard on this truth: "The most powerful stories are in the lives of ordinary people, who often assume they have nothing to contribute. We must draw them out."



The idea was brought into crystal clarity in 2014 with the publication of *This Far by Faith*, the memoir of Cass Community's visionary Faith Fowler. Faith heads a host of small businesses that are transforming Detroit. She began with an enormous feeding program and has added many other nonprofits, including her nationally known company that turns abandoned tires into sandals with a big D-for-Detroit logo on the soles. Reports on Faith's innovations have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and *PBS NewsHour*. When Faith established a Detroit publishing house in partnership with our company, her first book was a memoir about working with poor people to help transform the city.

Thousands of volunteers pass through Faith's main center in Detroit each year, and some of those men and women share a meal in the feeding program. As volunteers would fill their plates, a woman along the serving line began asking, "Did you get Faith's book, *This Far by Faith*? You should. It's great." Then, the woman would smile and say, "And, you know what? I'm in the book." One woman in a serving line in the

heart of Detroit was carrying out personal promotion of Faith's book to countless visitors. Since that time, when we talk about the power of Allies, we describe this process as: "I'm in the book."

Faith Fowler also taught our publishing house a lot about Angels. Our key distinction is that Angels are Allies who might also put up money or other tangible resources, including:

- Directly contributing to book production
- Buying books in quantity to organize a communitywide "read" or to provide copies of the book for everyone attending a major conference
- Hosting book-related events by underwriting the venue and related expenses
- Bringing the author to a speaking event, workshop, or retreat
- Developing and promoting a discussion guide for the book

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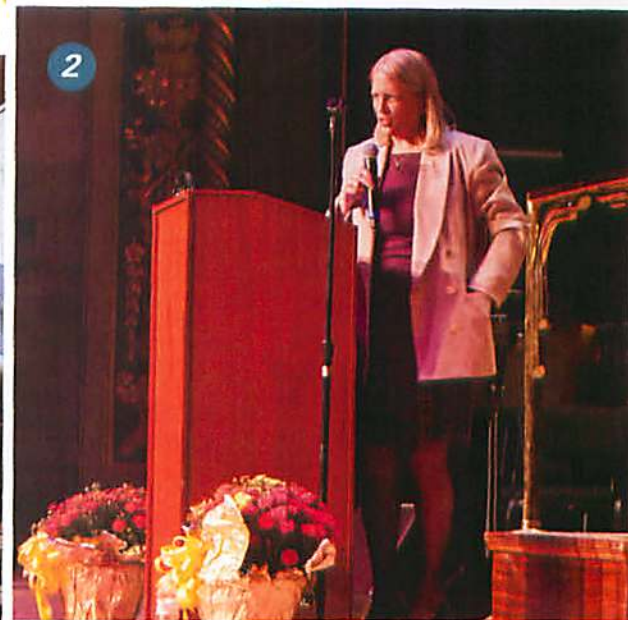
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**Photos, left to right:**

- 1 The crowd arrives at the Detroit Orchestra Hall for the *This Far by Faith* launch.
- 2 Faith Fowler addresses the crowd at the *This Far by Faith* launch in 2014.

- Printing promotional materials such as postcards, flyers, or posters
- Contributing a small "library" of select titles from our list to venues that might welcome such books to share with the community

All publishers look for Angels, although they may not include every item on our shopping list. Faith Fowler's main contribution to our understanding of Angels was her chiding critique: "You're not thinking big enough!"

Every publishing veteran can commiserate about diminishing budgets and shrinking venues for launch events, if such events happen at all. We had fallen into this "think small" assumption. Instead, Faith flatly declared that she would launch her first book at Detroit's Orchestra Hall, a downtown landmark that seats 2,000 people. What's more? She would sell

tickets. To us, that was an outrageous boast! But Faith took the challenge personally.

First, she asked a major Angel, a regional retailer, to guarantee the cost of the venue, just in case her own ticket sales did not pan out. Then, she began selling tickets to the event for \$25 or \$50 per seat. Many people chose to buy the \$50 tickets. All attendees would walk away with a copy of the book, but they were choosing to attend because they wanted to be part of Faith's community.

Since that time, she has fine-tuned her planning for launch events and adapted to venues that hold audiences in the hundreds. A Faith launch event is about an hour or so in duration. She invites local media celebrities to read short excerpts from the new book, which she has edited so that she can fit as many as a half dozen celebrity readers into the



schedule. This represents a huge opportunity for local celebrities, and we have found they nearly always wind up producing their own stories or TV or radio reports. Then, Faith asks popular local musicians to volunteer selections between the readings. The launch becomes a Faith Fowler variety show celebrating the new book. Proceeds from Faith's publishing house support her ministries, so she has the advantage of selling tickets that include a tax deduction. In various regions around the country where she helps with launch events, she often shares the revenue with a local nonprofit.

Faith taught us a lot about summoning Angels at her Orchestra Hall debut. For a small, independent publishing house to launch a new line of books at one of Detroit's largest landmarks was headline news. That day, even Detroit's Mitch Albom was lifted by the tidal wave of good spirit in the crowd flooding into Orchestra Hall. He was not involved in the book's production, but he wound up at the theater himself and, at Faith's invitation, stepped

onto the stage to lend his voice to the launch campaign. Welcoming Mitch to the communitywide effort capped the day.

Our founding principles are not new to publishing. Along with the encouragement of thousands of new friends, we are simply taking these concepts to heart and pushing them further than we originally envisioned. ●



*David Crumm has been a journalist for 40 years, first, as a senior writer and editor at The Detroit Free Press and then as an independent editor and consultant. He heads **ReadTheSpirit.com** online magazine, which covers new books and films on cultural and religious diversity. He also heads Front Edge Publishing, based in Canton, Michigan, near Ann Arbor. He also works with emerging networks of journalists and currently is communications director for a Michigan communicators' network and for the International Association of Religion Journalists (IARJ).*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### IBPA Publishing University 2018

April 6–7, 2018 « » Austin, TX

The premiere educational event for indie publishers and self-published authors. Join 300 of your peers and discover fresh strategies, new connections, and innovative ideas. This event sold out last year!



### ALA Annual Conference 2018

June 21–26, 2018 « » New Orleans, LA

Over 10,000 librarians attend the American Library Association annual conference. IBPA member publishers can include their book (or shelf of books) in our booth display and conference catalog, and have their author(s) sign review copies for interested librarians.



### Frankfurt Book Fair 2018

October 10–14, 2018 « » Frankfurt, Germany

From renting a full booth to displaying a single title, IBPA makes participating in the largest global marketplace for books, media, rights, and licenses easy. 2018 marks IBPA's 33rd year at the Fair and we have a list of more than 400 international contacts with whom we request meetings in order to make contacts for you to license your rights throughout the world.

