

InstaBook Launches 'Books-On-Demand'

BY STEVE EDWARDS

InstaBook introduces a book-making system aimed at short-run book printing for unpublished authors, memoirists and family historians. The company plans to install 100 machines in the U.S. over the next year.

InstaBook, the Gainesville, Fla.-based developer of a print-on-demand book-printing system, has installed its first machine in a store in the United States. The system, called InstaBook Maker III, is running at Bookends, an independent bookstore in Ridgewood, N.J. The installation marks the beginning of an ambitious campaign to put machines in stores all over the country and establish a network of book-printing services.

The machine, which has been greatly refined since its public debut five years ago, contains two printers to produce colored covers and black inside pages, up to 8.5 by 11 inches in format and 3 inches thick. Some of the functions are automated, but the process requires a few manual steps by a trained operator. An earlier version of the system, InstaBook Maker II, is already in use in two stores in Canada.

Self-publishers targeted. The machine installed at Bookends in the first week of May printed several hundred books in its first two weeks, according to co-owner

Walter Boyer. Unlike earlier plans for printing books in stores, which typically involved obtaining the rights to large numbers of out-of-print books that could be printed on demand from a huge database, Bookends has its eye initially on a different market: short-run book printing that doesn't justify the large expense of conventional printing. Among the possible customers for this service are unpublished authors, memoirists and family historians.

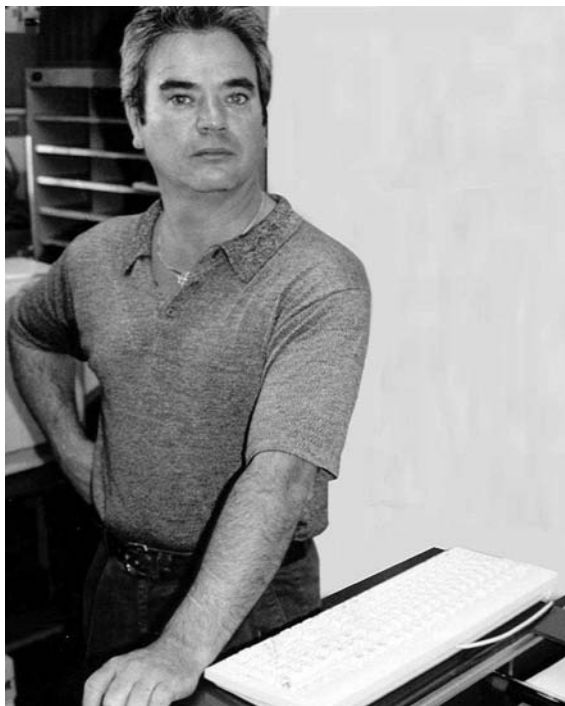
For a typical preformatted book of up to 250 pages (50,000 to 60,000 words), the first printing of 10 copies costs \$150, the second printing of 10 copies is \$100, and all subsequent printings of 10 copies is \$75. For preformatted books of 250-350 pages (60,000 to 80,000 words), the first printing of 10 copies costs \$200, the second printing of 10 copies is \$135, and all subsequent printings of 10 copies is \$100.

Although photocopying these materials might be cheaper, copy shops typically don't offer perfect binding, a capability that gives Bookends an advantage over Kinko's.

Bookends is supplementing the printing business by offering "publishing services" to its customers, since many of them may need help designing a cover, editing copy and even finding a publisher for a new book. Fees for these services will vary with the nature of the job, but Bookends quotes starting fees of \$200 for consulting on how to find a publisher, \$125 for copy editing, \$30 for cover design and \$30 for formatting the job for the InstaBook machine. (The formatting fee can be avoided by supplying the file in PDF, although so far most manuscripts have arrived as Word files. Bookends also has a \$10 CD that can be used at home to format the job for the InstaBook Maker.)

Although Bookends has put a lot of effort into serving the self-publishing crowd, it also prints individual titles from a database of about 10,000 books that are either in the public domain or for which InstaBook has obtained the rights.

The 50-page list of available titles, which can be viewed at the store's Web site (www.book-ends.com), includes assorted works by Shakespeare, O. Henry, Kipling and Dante (10 editions of *The Divine Comedy*). The price can be as little as \$8.50 for *Alice in Won-*



Victor Celorio, the founder of InstaBook and developer of the InstaBook Maker system, first showed a prototype five years ago and recently installed his first system in a U.S. store, Bookends in Ridgewood, N.J. His goal is to have 100 similar systems running in stores in the U.S. within a year.

derland or as much as \$99 for the collected works of Poe (plus postage if it is ordered to be shipped).

As a bonus, Bookends will customize the cover to include the purchaser's name (e.g., Mary's Copy of *The Divine Comedy*).

The machine. The InstaBook Maker III contains an Epson Stylus Photo 2200 inkjet printer for covers and a Kyocera Mita FS-9500 DN monochrome laser printer for inside pages, plus a perfect-binding system and a trimmer to produce books that look good enough to pass for trade paperbacks, Boyer said. The brand-new Model III provides digital controls and is quieter than the previous machine. The entire configuration measures 7 feet by 2.5 feet by 3 feet.

The Epson 2200 is a seven-color, 2,880-by-1,440-dpi inkjet printer accommodating 13-inch-wide paper. The first desktop photo printer to use seven pigment inks, it was designed for portrait or fine-art photographers who need archival images that will last up to 90 years, according to Epson. The FS-9500 DN is a 50-ppm, 11-by-17-inch duplex printer offering a standard resolution of 600-by-600 dpi and a fast mode of 1,800-by-600 dpi. Its maximum duty cycle is 300,000 pages per month.

Although the InstaBook Maker III is mostly automated, it requires the assistance of a trained operator employed by the store. The procedure begins with the printing of two digital files (the cover and the text). After the book is printed, the operator picks up the cover, places it in the binding tray, picks up the book block for inspection, jogs it to ensure that all pages are straight, and puts the book block back into the hopper for binding. (If the final format is 5.5 by 8.5 inches, the system cuts the letter-size sheets of paper in half as they come out of the printer. The system has a patented built-in cutter that at the same time that it cuts exposes the fibers of the paper along the edge to make the binding stronger than traditional binding.)

In the initial implementation, Bookends is limiting the formats supported to 5.5 by 8.5 and 8.5 by 11 inches, although we were told the machine can handle intermediate sizes.

With the book block ready, the operator presses the button for binding. (InstaBook Maker III has a new operator interface that allows for the control of every aspect of the process, from the amount of pressure in the binding to the amount of glue being replenished.) After drying for 10 seconds, the book is ready for trimming on three sides.

The entire process takes up to 10 minutes per book. Boyer said Bookends has experienced a few mistakes in attaching covers, but it hasn't been a problem because a new cover can be applied without wasting the inside pages. If customers need heavier-duty covers than an Epson Stylus can produce, the cover can be laminated and inserted into the process or the job can be outsourced to use a different printing technology.



InstaBook Maker III. This machine is printing books on demand at Bookends in Ridgewood, N.J. It contains two printers, a perfect-binding system and a trimmer. Most of the process is automatic, although the operator is required to intervene in the final stages as the cover and inside pages are assembled and bound.

The strategy. Victor Celorio, founder of InstaBook, has ambitious plans to install 100 machines in stores in the United States within the next year, covering all of the major metropolitan areas. With that broad coverage of the market, a new opportunity opens up: A customer could place an order by phone, have the book printed at the nearest store with an InstaBook Maker, and pick it up (or have it ready for shipping) in minutes.

At that point, restoring out-of-print books to availability becomes a viable market, as might a service of printing e-books (presuming the legal implications are worked out). With 10,000 classics and 50,000 e-books available, in addition to the rights to out-of-print titles that can be negotiated with the publisher, Celorio envisions a sizable business of printing single copies on demand.

Over time, Celorio believes, the two businesses of self-publishing and demand printing of existing titles will tend to even out. He also believes that there might be a market for InstaBook Makers in copy shops, where the machine's perfect-binding capabilities could be used on materials printed on other printers in the same shop. Celorio said he will announce more installations soon.

Our take. There are a lot of interesting aspects to this story. First, it's notable that Bookends has accomplished something that has evaded Barnes & Noble and Borders since 1999, when they both announced aggressive plans to install print-on-demand equipment in their stores. Second, although the idea of targeting the self-publishing market isn't new, combining the consultation and editorial services with the printing of perfect-bound books could provide enough extra revenue to turn a marginal business into a successful one.

Finally, the plan to establish a network of 100 systems around the country is intriguing, although it's hard to predict how much additional business the network would contribute to each store's own operation.

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