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Where Is the Money? Book Printing

By Harbach, Doug

Publication: [Printing News](#)

Date: [Monday, September 10 2007](#)

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A few years ago, the demise of printed books was considered a forgone conclusion because of the invention of electronic books, and society's growing inclination to spend more time getting information online.

The problem with that prediction is that people, in large part, still read for leisure,

and are not apt to lug electronic gadgets on vacations or to a quiet place in the house, or have one handy when trying to read how a new gadget operates. Books printed on paper continue to flourish. Does this mean there is an opportunity for you to profit from all this [book printing](#)? Possibly with the right approach and equipment. Segmenting the Market

You may first think of a book as something that appears on The New York Times best sellers list,

printed in colossal runs. The recent release of the seventh Harry Potter book is one such example. This obviously is not a market you want to spend time on, since these runs require offset lithography, major binding equipment, warehousing, and top-tier distribution systems.

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The good news is that those orders are the exception, not the rule. The vast majority of book titles are produced in smaller amounts, with far less page counts. These can include items such as help manuals, soft cover text books, or booklets from local publishing houses that sell in small numbers to a limited audience.

IMAGE PHOTOGRAPHI

Victor Celorio, owner of instaBook in Gainesville

In fact, a report by Bowker, the agency that issues International Standard Book Numbers, showed more than 50 percent of commercially sold book titles produced in the past two years were in quantities under 5,000, and about a third were produced in runs of less than 100.

This means that a significant amount of book printing will not be done by large-volume offset printers, leaving room for small and medium-sized firms to grab a bit of this market segment.

The most important technology change in the industry that enables firms to take on book printing is [digital printing](#). With this method, the concepts of the virtual warehouse and print-on-demand production become reality.

Unlike the old days where a certain number of books needed to be preprinted based on a perceived future need, and then stored to await distribution, digital printing and the connected technology mean there is no need for the preprinting of a voluminous number of books, and the subsequent warehousing.

Short book runs involve printing small batches-20-500 copies. While the cost to produce each book is higher, less working capital will be tied up overall, compared to the use of the offset process.

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Opportunity Knocking

Capitalizing on sales in the short-run book market utilizing [print on demand](#) is nothing new to Victor Celorio, owner of InstaBook in Gainesville, Fla. Mr. Celorio was at the genesis of this trend when he created a digital network of print-on-demand centers around Mexico City in the late 1980s, and then founded a company in the next decade to market his technology.

While Mr. Celorio calls the development of digital printing the "second Gutenberg Revolution," he believes printers are just starting to experience the changes.

"In the coming years, more and more printing-commercial or otherwise will be produced through [digital printers](#), and I think the world will move away from offset entirely within the next 15 to 20 years," he states.

At the same time, however, Mr. Celorio says it is important to note that true end-to-end book manufacturing involves three stages: production, storage, and distribution. He notes that a successful short-run book printer must be able to handle all three critical elements.

His firm offers the opportunity to store a book electronically, use the Internet to make changes to the book, have it produced in any quantity, and then sent to even the smallest [point of sale](#). He refers to the process and end product as a book-on-demand.

"By integrating open architecture technology to handle the complete book publishing process to their existing equipment, printers can minimize their risks and maximize their profit margins," Mr. Celorio points out.

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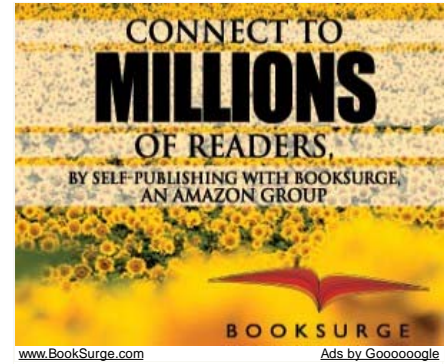
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An Industry in Agreement

Organizers of this year's Graph Expo and Converting Expo in Chicago also thought printers should look at book printing. In fact, an entire day was set aside, Sept. 9, as "Books and Bound Documents Day/7 to enable printers of all sizes to see firsthand what it would take to add the book market to their product offerings.

In a news release about this event, Graphic Arts Show Co. President Ralph Nappi said, "Information technology has become a driving force in the world of printing and publishing. As the adoption of digital and ondemand print technology becomes even more widespread, a significant opportunity exists for specialty printers and commercial printers to expand their range of services."

Duncan Newton, manager of [business development](#) for Oce, agrees that digital print technology is opening up avenues for book printing, but should only be tackled after thorough planning on how this can be profitable. Mr. Newton, who has more than 30 years of experience in the printing business and whose firm's equipment produces hundreds of thousands of books a day, says digital book printing can be lucrative if you can find the "never-ending titles."

"First and foremost, you've got to have enough of a customer base that can reliably give you the flow of work to pay for all your investment," Mr. Newton advises. "In other words, do you have enough of a client base to create enough revenues, and be able to see the books at a sufficient price to make a profit?"

Mr. Newton says there are essentials needed to be an end-to-end book printer, including:

- * High-quality color printing of covers of a size large enough to wrap around a book, normally 12x18";

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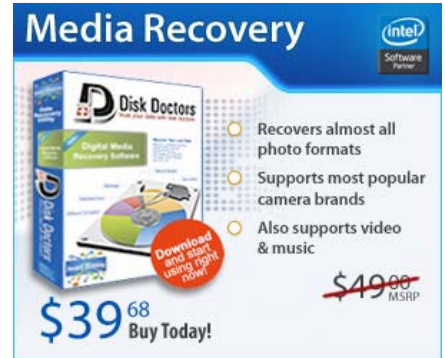
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- * Lamination or coating of the cover;
- * Excellent front and back registration;
- * Ability to produce the pages of the most popular size of books, notably 6x9", 8.5x11", and 5.5x8.5";
- * Equipment that can perfect bind, then three-knife trim.

In addition to commercial printers, Mr. Newton says he has seen a swing back toward publishers getting into the [print](#) business because, with the available technology, it simply is not tricky anymore. He cites Harlequin, famed for publishing romance novels, as an example of such a business now printing its own books.

Here is Mr. Celorio's insight on the future of book printing, in the light of advancement in digital printing technology and what is coming in the future: "I believe that mass production technology is on the last stages of its historical cycle and that the world needs to change that model of production, which is incredibly wasteful."

He adds, "But since mass production is the daily bread and butter for the commercial printer, this is something they don't want to hear."

Mr. Celorio suggests that commercial printers open their minds to newer business models and different scales of revenue, with the printing of books on demand as one of those.

The trend toward printing shortrun books and bound documents is becoming well established, and seems to be within the reach of most printers. Do your homework, and you, too, could find profit in this market segment.

SIDEBAR

More than 50 percent of commercially sold book titles produced in the past two years were in quantities under 5,000, and about a third were produced in runs of less than 100.

AUTHOR_AFFILIATION

Doug Harbach is a veteran consultant and writer in the printing industry. You can e-mail him at dougharbach@yahoo.com.

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