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Bookstore Marks First Year as Publisher

by Jim Milliot -- 5/16/2005

Article

It may not be on the same scale as Barnes & Noble's publishing efforts, but Bookends' experience as a print-on-demand publisher has been an unqualified success, said Walter Boyer, co-owner of the Ridgewood, N.J., independent bookstore. Bookends installed an InstaBook machine one year ago, instantly creating a publishing enterprise dubbed Books by Bookends. The operation has grown to such an extent that Boyer has added 500 square feet of space to the store to house the machine, and recently hired a full-time manager to direct the Books by Bookends initiative.

Boyer estimated that the store has printed books for about 200 authors and printed more than 7,000 copies. Family histories have been the most popular subject area, but BbB has printed books in categories ranging from memoirs to Hungarian-language titles. Boyer's steadiest business has come from a local motivational speaker and a historian who, he estimates, have used BbB to print between 300 and 400 copies each. But business has not been limited to the greater Ridgewood area. "We've had people come from as far away as Oklahoma," said Boyer.

Boyer has rejected "only a couple of books" for publication because of what he considered inappropriate material. "The books we publish reflect on our business," he said. Boyer has also learned to make sure authors check the final editions of the books themselves. "What they proof is what they get," Boyer said.

Boyer has had so much business printing original books for authors that he hasn't had time to do what he thought would be an early BbB effort—printing his own copies of classic out-of-print titles. Boyer hopes to be able to get to that project in the coming year as part of an aggressive expansion plan for the publishing operation. Beginning in June, Boyer expects to begin offering marketing and distribution services through an agreement he is negotiating with a former publishing executive. Boyer may also begin advertising the store's publishing services. To date, business has been driven by free publicity, word of mouth and the **booksbybookends.com** Web site.

The publishing operation is now generating about \$12,000 monthly, and Boyer projects that publishing could account for about 15% of the store's total sales for 2005. The InstaBook machine is running full out during regular business hours. Publishing, Boyer said, has proven to be a great way to diversify the store's business.

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