



A BOOK DESIGN BLOG

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🌸 April 20, 2004

STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

Today I suffered through the latest in a long string of painful episodes with Lightning Source, their horrible web site, and their nonexistent customer service. And, as usual, a request — demand, really — to speak with higher-ups was ignored.

Here's the deal: their web site doesn't allow you to upload covers and interiors in one zipped (or stuffed) file. It does not explain that, only continually requests files that in this case had already been uploaded. It does not allow for notes or choices. And, most seriously, it does not work properly in Mozilla *or* Safari — M\$ Exploder only.

Couple of suggestions, Lightning. First, no matter where you are, hire people who can speak English. ("I be wantin' to help," the tech person drawled. Before not helping. Thanks!) Second, consider using plain English to put instructions on the web site — and *not blaming* customers before they have a chance to say the web site is not working the way customers expect (read: intuitively).

Soooo, do any of you have experience with *other* print-on-demand book printers? Leave a comment with suggestions, please! We have clients that need to do short runs from time to time and I think someone else deserves the business more than Lightning Source ever will.

Bonus There's a note on Lightning's web site about their recent court loss in a patent infringement case that piqued my interest. Some **details:**

St. Louis-based On Demand Machine Corp. was recently awarded \$15 million in a patent infringement suit against Amazon.com, Ingram Industries and Lightning Source Inc.

Nashville, Tenn.-based Ingram and its Lightning Source subsidiary were previously clients of On Demand, and later went into a similar business using On Demand's technology, the company alleged in the suit. The technology provides on-demand book printing.

On Demand may get a larger award at the judge's discretion because the jury ruled the defendants had "willful intent" to infringe on the patent, said St. Louis-based Helfrey, Simon & Jones, the law firm that represented On Demand.

Huh. Perhaps the "screw you" thinking prevalent at Lightning stems from the top. No *wonder* I haven't heard back.

🌀 GCH at 04:25 PM in [Publishing](#)



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Discussions

Lightning is a big company with a big “we’re right” attitude. Don’t use and don’t recommend. And: \$15mil doesn’t seem like enough.

C., April 20, 2004 04:52 PM

\$15 million *does* seem like a slap on the wrist for a company Ingram’s size. Of course, they’re appealing, so time will tell. Let’s hope it’s \$15 million and *tons of lawyer’s fees*.

Giles, April 20, 2004 05:22 PM

try this one:

<http://www.bookmobile.com/>

these guys are local and we’ve had GREAT results and service from them.

Chris Long, April 21, 2004 09:17 AM

Thanks Chris!

Amanda, April 21, 2004 09:35 AM

Interesting to read your comments. We are a small company in London, UK, who have provided short run printing and design services to companies large and small and also to individual self-publishers. We are completely different to these enormous impersonal operations in that we engage personally with our customers. However, there is a price to pay - it takes a lot of time to get things right, and this costs a lot of money. We’re not making money, we’re losing it! Perhaps they are right and we are wrong.

Nigel Ferguson, May 31, 2004 11:44 AM

With what — quality or price?

Nigel, did you see the **follow up?** BookMobile charges almost double what Lightning does but the quality is more than Lightning could ever dream of.

For the right project/client, that higher-price-but-better-quality would be, well, *right*.

Giles, May 31, 2004 06:08 PM

why not simply find a venue that caters to your workflow...I thought that non-MS ruled graphics/printing/publishing business...so, Mac resources in these areas should vastly outnumber those using needless MS services

ynot, June 1, 2004 07:43 AM



Giles, thanks for your comment. Yes I like quality. We offer genuine bookwove paper to create a better look and feel. We do matt (or matte I think is considered the correct US spelling!) laminate at the same price as gloss. We talk to our customers and help them cope with the technical aspects of preparing files. We adjust their covers to get the spine right. If we spot a mistake we fix it. We offer free replacement books in the case of failure (current rate of failure is around 0.2%). Believe me, we try to get it right! If you would like a sample copy of one of our productions let me know and I'll send you one at no cost to yourself.

Nigel Ferguson, June 1, 2004 06:17 PM

Try this. The service was written up in the New York Times recently. They use the Instabook machine.

Avery

Avery, July 23, 2004 11:53 AM

Sorry:

Boluxed the links.

<http://www.booksbybookends.com/>

Avery, July 23, 2004 11:55 AM

I dealt with a company called Booksurge

<http://www.booksurge.com/>

Not sure about thier pricing. The client handled all that. They were very friendly and helpful.

Charles, July 23, 2004 12:05 PM

I've been using Lightning Source since October 2002, and while it's had it's ups and downs, I've certainly earned better money with them than is possible elsewhere. Who else offers short-discount access to Amazon, Ingram and Barnes&Noble? I've gone through multiple submissions to get my titles right, but it only costs \$40 per redo, that compares pretty well to throwing out 1000 dustjackets for an error on the spine - something from my old offset days:-)

I have a case study of working with Lightning Source on my website at:

<http://www.fonerbooks.com/pod.htm>

One thing the original post in the thread makes clear is that they aren't great on interaction. You have to decipher their guidelines for submission, keeping in mind that centering copy on 8.5x11 is hardly standard practice in the publishing industry, and be ready to go through a couple rounds with your first title.


Morris



Morris Rosenthal, September 26, 2004 03:43 PM

Here in the UK i have been using the absolutely wonderful service from Lightning Source for almost 2 years, great service, a real and lovely person to talk to, no problems at all in fact! I'm sorry to hear you have problems but it doesn't have to be like that. As for the court case, well the USA has become such a litigious society it isn't surprising but there's a big difference in having a good idea and putting it into practical and useful service.

Will, December 8, 2004 05:17 AM

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Comments:

or

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