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The New Way to Publish

By Penny C. Sansevieri

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These days, there are several ways to get your book published. You can get an agent and go the traditional route, you can self-publish, or you can take advantage of a new form of publishing called "print-on-demand" or POD.

What exactly is print-on-demand publishing? Think of it as self-publishing with a twist. It used to be, if you wanted to circumvent the traditional publishing houses, you had to tackle everything from printers to cover designers, ISBNs (International Standard Book Number) to distribution. Feeling dizzy yet? Sure, there were also self-publishing houses called vanity presses. They churned out about 6,000 titles per year and the author paid anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000 to publish his or her book. Cost alone was usually enough to discourage anyone who had not spent a great deal of time in the industry. Options were pretty limited, until the Internet explosion occurred.

Enter the on-demand publisher. Now, for a minimal fee (usually from \$159 to \$1,500), you can see your book in print. Essentially, what you're doing is hiring a publisher to publish your book. They take care of the cover, the book interior, the ISBN, and the distribution. They are compensated for this by receiving a portion of the profits every time you sell a book. You are compensated through royalties and while these do vary, they typically fall somewhere in the 18-20 percent range per book. The great part about POD publishing is that the "on-demand" part enables them to print books as they are needed, meaning that someone (probably you) won't get stuck with a garage full of books you can't get rid of. If you only sell 100 books, that's what they'll print. There are no minimum orders, and your book will always stay in print.

To give you an idea of the scope of the on-demand publishing industry, consider this: the typical big New York publisher prints about eight hundred new titles a year. At last count, some of the print-on-demand publishers were doing five hundred a month. Early estimates indicate that POD publishers printed around half a million books in 2001. This year, there are indications that this industry will hit the \$78 billion market. These indicators tell us that the POD industry is growing at a pace no one anticipated. Why? Because the traditional publishing field is narrowing. Only one percent of books published each year are by unpublished authors. Does this low number tell us that there are fewer new authors out there? Absolutely not. What it tells us is that publishing houses are cutting back, merging and no longer willing to take chances on untested material.

The challenge with this industry is that you can't get published unless you're published it's a cycle from

which we all aspire to escape. Now, we can. If you publish your book through a POD press, you are no longer considered a first-time published author. That is, if you sell the book. You still have to market your book. But take heart. With shrinking publishing budgets, you have to market your own book, no matter who publishes you. The hefty marketing budgets that used to accompany new releases are dwindling quickly.

So, let's say you publish your book through a POD publisher and you market it. You market it so well that you begin to garner interest from bigger publishing houses. How many books you need to sell is anyone's guess. Traditionally, the range has been between 5,000 and 8,000. Recently, however, Kensington Books (an imprint of Citadel Press) formed an alliance with POD giant iUniverse (www.iuniverse.com) to consider any book that sold over five hundred copies. By "consider," they mean they will consider publishing it. At five hundred copies, this levels the playing field considerably. If you've written a good book and you market it effectively, you'll sell five hundred copies in the blink of

an eye.

Publishers I've spoken to at some of the biggest houses in the industry (Time Warner, Simon & Schuster) readily admit they watch these books very carefully to see what's selling. By picking a book that is selling moderately well, the publisher knows two things: the book has found an audience, and the author knows how to market it.

Even if you don't get picked up traditionally, there's still hope. If you sell a reasonable amount of books and you still aspire to a bigger publishing house, you can include this first publishing experience in your query letter.

How do you find these on-demand publishers? A list of some I've worked with follows this article, but who you pick will depend entirely on you and the needs of your book. For some, it's the turnaround time; for others, it's whether or not they can print in hardcover. Generally, though, the final product should be your first consideration; distribution or shipping time should be second. Once you've narrowed your publishers down to two or three, a good idea would be to order a book from each of them. This will tell you two things. First, you'll get a sense for their ordering process and how quickly they ship the book to you, and second, you'll get a firsthand look at the quality of their books.

What about the selection process? Do these publishers accept anything that's sent to them? The answer is no. While the approval process is far less restrictive than traditional publishers and you don't need an agent, some POD publishers still have guidelines as to what they will and won't consider. These guidelines vary from publisher to publisher, so you'll need to check their individual sites or contracts for specifics. Also, some publishers will even read the manuscript to determine the quality; if they feel the work is so poor it's unmarketable, they will turn it down.

While you're in the selection process, download the publishing company's publishing contract and look it over carefully. You'll want to make sure a few things are in place before you sign on the dotted line. First off, be certain you're able to retain all the rights to your book (foreign, film, audio, hard cover, paperback, and ebook). This is extremely important. Never give or sell any of the rights away to a book you're publishing through the POD process. Second, determine how quickly you can cancel this agreement. Ideally, cancellation should be immediate. Cancellation clauses will benefit you if your book should get picked up by a traditional house or if you decide to switch publishing companies.

Your time to market, meaning the time it takes them to format your manuscript into a book and get it ready for sale, will vary. Generally, you should see a completed book within ninety days, or in some cases, even less. This turnaround is incredible when you consider it takes a traditional house about twelve to eighteen months to get a new title ready for sale.

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As with anything, there are drawbacks to this form of publishing. One of the biggest issues with print-on-demand is that there is a no-return policy in place for these books. Returns are a crucial part of doing retail business in the U.S. In fact, a whopping 35 percent of merchandise purchased is returned. Still, authors are finding ways around this issue. Some place books in specialty shops because these stores have a lower return factor. Others sell books on-line. Some bookstores will even carry a non-returnable book if the demand exists.

Secondly, this form of printing is more expensive than the traditional trade paperback model. Generally, POD books will be priced higher. Their price is often determined by the page count. As print-on-demand machines become more efficient and the per-page printing costs decline, POD book prices will drop. Many have already decreased considerably from where they were a year ago.

Despite the obstacles, there are many success stories emerging from this industry and many more are finding their way to success everyday. Here are a few titles you might recognize that were (or are) POD books:

- "Legally Blond" (1st Books)
- "The Idiot Girls' Action Adventure Club" (iUniverse) currently on the New York Times bestseller list
- "The Pearls of the Stone Man" (Xlibris.com) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 2002

With on-demand publishing, what was once a dream can now be a reality.

In an industry that is saturated with exceptional talent, the advent of these publishers has afforded authors an opportunity that might otherwise not be available to them. It is an opportunity millions are taking advantage of. For some, it's a way to finally see their book in print. For others it's a road to publishing success.

Print-On-Demand Publishers:

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

<http://www.1stbooks.com>

<http://www.traffordpublishing.com>

<http://www.infinitypublishing.com>

<http://www.xlibris.com>

Penny C. Sansevieri

The Cliffhanger was published in June of 2000. After a strategic marketing campaign it quickly climbed the ranks at Amazon.com to the #1 best selling book in San Diego. Her most recent book: No More Rejections. Get Published Today! was released in July of 2002 to rave reviews. Penny is a book marketing and media relations specialist. She also coaches authors on projects, manuscripts and marketing plans and instructs a variety of coursing on publishing and promotion. To learn more about her books or her promotional services, you can visit her web site at www.booksbypen.com. To subscribe to her free ezine, send a blank email to: <mailto:subscribe@booksbypen.com>

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None

10 Easy Ways To Create Traffic Pulling Content!

By Larry Dotson

1. Publish your visitor's comments or questions that you receive via e-mail. Include your response for each comment. Just get their legal permission first.
2. Interview experts or famous people your visitors would recognize. All you have to do is write out the questions. Just publish the interview on your site.
3. Place a discussion board on your web site. Your visitors would create the content for you, but don't forget to participate on the board too.
4. Accept guest articles related to the theme of your web site. You could publish them when needed or combine them in a huge article directory.
5. Review products and services that your visitors might be interested in buying. Publish your opinions about them right on your web site.
6. Create a recommend links directory that includes your own personal summary of the sites. This'll help your visitors decide if they want to visit the site.
7. Trade content with similar web sites and e-zines. You would both benefit from the new content and could also cross promote each others web site.
8. Publish your own personal diary about things that relate to running and promoting your web site. You could publish it daily or weekly.
9. Create a free ebook directory. You could accept submissions from your visitors and publish your own free ebooks.
10. Add some visual content to your web site. You could add pictures and graphics with descriptions, charts and graphs, visual statistics and results, etc.



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