

Pros and Cons of Print on Demand

This is a contributed article from a small publisher. As with most small publishers, her views are unique to her experience. As you will see in upcoming issues, opinions about POD vary widely. I'll share my own as well. This author's views are, however, useful...

When I was five years old, my parents bought me a manual typewriter for a Christmas present. I practiced every day until I was able to type letters to my grandparents and other relatives. Although it is safe to say that I have been a writer since 1963, I didn't start making money from my writing until I started Graphico Publishing in 1988.

Back in those days, Adobe Acrobat Reader (PDF) had never been thought of. In fact, the word "internet" was unknown to the majority of the general public. Therefore, I had only three options available to me if I was going to sell my articles and books:

1. Submit them to publishers, hoping they would be published "someday";
2. Typeset my own books, print them on a copier and mail copies to customers ordering directly from me (this also meant that I had to market the books myself); or
3. Pay a printer to typeset and print my books, which meant I had to buy a minimum amount and pay for them upfront (which could cost \$10,000 or more).

I chose to employ option Number 2. I figured that I would not have to spend any money using that option because as books were ordered, I could print them on my copy machine. Besides, my books were not full-length paperbacks. They were 20-page booklets that I could print on letter-size paper, fold in half and saddle stitch. Only until I started selling 100s of books would I invest into purchasing a minimum amount from a printer. Besides, the idea of not having to stock a product was of great importance to me since I was living in a small one-bedroom apartment at the time.

However, while choosing the Number 2 method above would save me a lot of money, I was going to have to learn how to market and typeset my books. Learning to typeset was pretty easy. I went to a printer's supply store and picked up books showing me different styles of fonts and I looked at every display advertisement I could find. I purchased Roger Parker's Book, "The Aldus Guide to Basic Design" (<http://www.newentrepreneur.com/>) and was soon able to start designing my own ads, using combinations of examples I learned from the professional designers. The entire learning experience was great fun and I acquired a skill that I now use on a daily basis.

Learning to market though, took longer compared to learning how to typeset. That is because there are so many variations to marketing. What works for one person may not work for another. However, with the vast amount of technology available at your fingertips today, learning to market your products and services is as simple as filling out forms and posting messages to bulletin boards utilized by your target market.

Little did I realize at the time that the procedure I utilized to sell my books by printing copies only when an order was received is the same thing as print-on-demand publishing. The only difference is that today, most of the marketing and typesetting is included in the publishers price. Since I already know how to typeset my books, the publisher normally gives me a discount of \$100 to \$150 for saving them time and expense.

I was first introduced to print-on-demand publishing when I wrote my book, "How to Start, Operate and Market a Freelance Notary Signing Agent Business" available online at <http://www.50statenotary.com/book>). Not knowing that print-on-demand publishing existed I sent my manuscript to several publishers for acceptance. To my surprise, two publishers accepted the book and one offered me an advance of \$2,800.

At first I was elated. I called all my friends and we all yelled and screamed together in excitement. The excitement was short lived when I received an email from the publisher the next day with a list of demands they required before my book could be published. One of the demands was the name of my book needed to be changed and secondly, I was not permitted to publish my testimonial to Jesus Christ in the back of the book. I immediately said "no" and began seeking other alternatives for publishing.

To make a long story short, I found Gom Publishing (<http://www.gompublishing.com>) through my local Christian Blue Pages directory. It just so happened that their office was located within 10 miles of my house. I called them up, asked if I could come for a visit and received a personal tour of their operation. It was a great learning experience and I was sold on the idea of print-on-demand publishing. {josquote} Why are publishers who are located in the high-traffic media biased against print-on-demand publishing? Because they know the author had total control over the book and it did not go through the standard editing process. {/josquote}

Here are just some of the advantages to a writer who uses print-on-demand publishing:

1. You have total control over your book. No one is going to edit your work and take out your personal "style" or omit sections you know to be important. Gom Publishing includes copyediting with virtually all of their publishing plans, which is something I did not find with most other print-on-demand companies.
2. Your book is available for sale within 90 days or less if you assist with the design. Compared to the "old time" methods of publishing, even if a publisher accepts your book, it normally is not available for sale for almost a year or later. The whole world could change in that length of time and you would still have to wait a year or more before you got paid for your hard work.
3. You can make up to 50% for every book you sell. Compare this to a publisher who only pays the writer an 8% to 10% commission. This means that you can set up a web page to sell your book, take orders and purchase the amount of books you need to fill the orders at a 50% discount from the print-on-demand publisher. Gom Publishing offers a 55% discount, which increases your profits even more. This option is not possible with standard publishers who purchase the exclusive rights from a writer, thus not allowing the writer to sell their books on their own.
4. Print-on-demand publishers also build excellent marketing benefits into their basic prices. These marketing benefits include: (a) assignment of an ISBN number; (b) ISBN bar code printed on book cover; (c) Library of Congress cataloging and registration; and (d) automatic listing on the world's largest bookstores: Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Waldenbooks and Borders. I found with Gom Publishing that they even have programs to distribute your book through third party distributors, sales reps, and even offer publicist services. All you have to do is help in the promotion by directing people to your book on these websites. The credit card orders are processed for you, the books are shipped to your customers and you receive a monthly commission check.

Of course there are many more benefits to print-on-demand publishing than the four I listed above, but I am sure you can begin to see the benefits for yourself. However, even though print-on-demand publishing has many "pros," there are some "cons" that you might want to consider. One of those "cons" is how the established publishing community views

print-on-demand books. They view them as "vanity" publications and booksellers may be reluctant to deal with them. Trade journals like Publishers Weekly and Kirkus also do not like to deal with print-on-demand published books and magazines and newspapers shy away from them also.

Why are publishers who are located in the high-traffic media biased against print-on-demand publishing? Because they know the author had total control over the book and it did not go through the standard editing process. So what? In my opinion, the media makes a great deal of money from writers and since print-on-demand technology does not provide them with this extra revenue print-on-demand publishing leaves a "bad taste" in their mouths. They tell their employees that print-on-demand publishing is not professional behavior, when the truth of the matter is that print-on-demand publishing is taking money out of their pockets. The "biggies" cannot reveal their true motive, so they do the "human" thing and create as much bad publicity for the print-on-demand industry that they can then use the leverage of other "biggies" like themselves to keep everyone's pockets padded with the green stuff.

So unless you plan to write a book that you expect to be interviewed on BookTV or Larry King Live about, I suggest you check out print-on-demand publishing. Below are some print-on-demand publishers you may want to consider and compare prices:

1. Gom Publishing, <http://www.gompublishing.com>
2. Graphico Publishing, <http://www.graphicopublishing.com>
3. Author House, <http://www.authorhouse.com/>
4. BlitzPrint, <http://www.blitzprint.com/>
5. Instant Publisher, <http://www.instantpublisher.com/>

Or, go to any search engine and type in the search words "print-on-demand publishing" and start shopping. I chose Gom Publishing to publish my book. The total cost was less than \$600 and I made this money back almost immediately.

If are a first time writer or even published, you need to check out the benefits for your work by utilizing print-on-demand publishing. At least you now have more options available to you and perhaps one day, writers will be less dependent on publishers and can take the control over their own products.

Victoria Ring is a freelance writer, typesetter and designer. She is the founder of 50statenotary.com, graphicopublishing.com and victoriaringconsulting.com. All companies are dedicated to providing one-of-a-kind products and services for the small business person.