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Book Printing Just Got Cheaper

by Dan Poynter

Book publishing is changing—for the better. There is a New Model for book writing, producing, selling and promoting. Now you can break into print faster, easier and cheaper. One part of this revolutionary change is in printing.

Digital printing machines produce books from an Adobe Acrobat PDF file. This short run printing uses a higher speed direct-to-image (disk to drum) electrostatic process with a toner blend that reproduces photographs well. There is no film or plate. The process is cost effective for quantities from 100 to 1,500 copies. It is no longer necessary to print 3,000+ books; 100 or 500 can be produced at a reasonable per-unit cost. Color covers are usually done with the same digital process.

Putting a lot of ink on paper is now just an option; a good one if there is large prepublication demand such as advanced sales to bookstores and/or a sale to a book club. There is no longer any reason to print 3,000 or more copies of your book on spec. In the future, most books will not be manufactured until after they are sold.

Costs. Let's evaluate prices for traditional ink-press printing, PQN and POD. We will compare a softcover (perfect bound) 144 page 5.375 x 8.375 book with black text and a four-color cover. Prices will vary with the cost of paper and labor so use these numbers for comparison only.

1. Press (ink on paper): \$1.55 each but you have to print at least 3,000 to get a price this low. So, your print bill will be \$4,650. See below.

2. PQN printer (short run):
500 copies for \$2.80 each or a print bill of \$1,400, or
100 copies for \$5.30 each and a print bill of \$530.

3. POD (single copies): May run \$6 to \$10 and are often bundled with other services. It is expensive to make one book at a time.

Print-On-Demand is a good option when a book has run its course, your inventory is exhausted and you still receive orders for a couple of copies a month. Rather than invest in inventory, you can have books made one-at-a-time as needed.

By the way, Print-on-demand is not a printing method, it is a way of doing business. It means that you do not print the (individual) book until after you have received an order for it.

Hardcover. Most books are manufactured with soft covers, called “perfect binding.” In traditional printing, hard or “case” binding runs about \$1.00 extra per book. For PQN production, hard covers cost about \$3.00 more. Those prices include the hard covers and the dust jackets. Case-binding machinery requires a lot of set-up time. So, you have to run the numbers on quantity and price.

The quality of the toner-based digital printing is actually better. The softcover or hardcover books look just like traditional books. There are no light and dark pages as in ink-on-paper printing. The density is maintained electronically unlike offset printing where a density variation of 5% to 10% is a regular occurrence.

Time. Delivery for digitally-printed books is normally five days from proofs and reprints take two to three days. One reason is that the printer does not have to wait for the ink to dry before folding the pages. With your disk on file, reprints can be initiated with a telephone call and the books may be shipped directly to your buyer.

The signatures of PQN short-run printing are just two pages because the print engines print the cut-sheets of paper two pages (both sides) at a time instead of 32 or 48. Now you do not have to design your book’s page count in large signature increments.

Mass customization. Because the printing process is computer-controlled, you may customize your book for your customer. If you make a premium sale to a company, it will cost just pennies to bind in a letter from the CEO or to add the company logo to the cover. For fiction, you could even make the buyer the hero in the book. Think “mail merge”.

Multipurposing. Once your manuscript is written and converted to a PDF file, it may be re-purposed: put on your Web site for download, uploaded to eBooksellers such as Amazon.com, B&N.com,

CyclopsMedia.com and BookLocker.com, read on eBook readers, put on a CD and you can send the disk to any of the three types of book manufacturers. Now you can provide your book in any version (edition) your customer wants and wring maximum value out of your work. Yes, today, we are no longer sure what a “book” is.

Color digital printing is here. Four-color children’s and coffee table books can be manufactured in quantities as low as 100 copies with the Xerox iGen press. The iGen technology eliminates the color separations and long print runs. See

<http://www.gkls.xerox.com/docucolor/>

-----Sidebar-----

Digital printers.

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-----Sidebar-----

Now you can have just 100 to 500 books produced and used for promotional purposes. Authors may send copies to agents and publishers. Publishers may send copies to major reviewers, distributors, catalogs, specialty stores, associations, book clubs, premium prospects, foreign publishers suggesting translations and various opinion molders.

Historically, a book had to be published in hard cover to be taken seriously by the media. In a few years, a book will have to be in paper form, as well as digital, to be considered a commercial success. A printed-paper edition will signify that the book is selling well enough to justify the ink printing.

PQN digital production offers lower investment costs, reduction in inventory, custom publishing, quicker reprints and elimination of obsolescent inventory. Now you can get into print cheaper and produce books only after they are sold.

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