

Writing a book?

Here's one way to get it published

By Paul Lima

AS ANY ASPIRING author knows, finding a publisher can be as difficult as writing a book. That's what I discovered after writing *The Business of Freelance Writing*. After being turned down by two publishers (they didn't think they could sell enough books to make publishing worthwhile), I looked into self-publishing.

I was aware of vanity presses, companies that often charge an enormous amount of money to print one's book. My investigation revealed that vanity presses had been replaced by print on demand (POD).

How print on demand works

Most POD companies (iUniverse, Trafford Publishing, AuthorHouse, CreateSpace and others) sell directly to the public via the Web and also make books available through online retailers. Others, such as Lightning Source Inc. (LSI), do not sell directly to the public, but instead print and ship books only through online retailers. (LSI also sells directly to authors and publishers who want to print books in small quantities.)

When readers order books through an

online retailer, the retailer places orders with the POD company, which prints and ships the books. Books are printed and sold as they are ordered; the author or book retailer does not have to carry any inventory.

Authors earn less per book when books are sold through online retailers because the POD company and the online retailer each take a cut; however, books are available from more sources, which can lead to greater sales.

For instance, my book *How to Write a Non-fiction Book in 60 Days* has been picked up by Five Rivers Chapmanry, a small publishing company in Orangeville, Ontario, and is available through online retailers. Before I give a writing seminar, my publisher orders copies of my book through LSI so I can sell them at my seminar. While we pay more per book when ordering in smaller quantities, I don't have to keep lots of books on hand.



A look at costs

Most POD companies charge an upfront fee to process books for publishing and printing. Authors can then order small quantities of books—as few as one—or sell books online. However, I calculated that I'd have to sell about 250 books before I covered the upfront fee, which can be as high as \$2,000.

Then I discovered Lulu.com. As with most POD companies, Lulu sells directly to buyers via the Web. However, the company does not charge upfront fees if you opt for them not to place your book on Amazon.com, as most other PODs automatically do.

With Lulu, as with any POD company, the author has to format the manuscript (choose the book size and typeface and design the book pages), produce the book cover and upload the book over the Web.

Lulu gives authors a storefront, processes credit-card orders, and prints and ships books on demand as orders come in. Authors can choose to sell paperback books and/or electronic books (PDF files); ordering PDFs saves buyers printing and shipping costs. Lulu processes credit-card orders and makes the book available for downloading.

Like most POD companies, Lulu pays the author a cut of each book sale. The royalty is based on the cost to print the book (the more pages, the more it costs to print), POD company markup and the retail price of the book,

Choosing a print-on-demand company

POD COMPANIES offer a variety of services and varying degrees of hand-holding. The more hand-holding and services you require, the more you will pay upfront. To help you select a POD company, answer the questions below. Then look for a POD company that offers the services you need to take your book to market.

- Can you do a final edit of the book or is editing and proofreading assistance required?
- Can you design the book's pages and cover or do you need design assistance?
- Can you create the book (PDF) and cover (JPG) files that need to be uploaded to the POD company?
- Do you want to sell print and/or electronic copies?
- Do you want to sell through your Web site, the POD Web site, online retailers or all three?
- Will you be seeking a large audience or selling (or giving) copies to family and friends only?
- Will you order print copies to sell to bookstores or at workshops, seminars and/or book fairs?—PL

which the author can set. In other words, authors can charge an arm and a leg and hope the book sells, they can give it away at cost or they can charge a modest markup and earn a few dollars per book.

Getting your book noticed

Working with a POD company is no guarantee of sales. It takes work—marketing work—to get your book titles noticed, as three Costco members have discovered.

Joy Collins turned to iUniverse to publish a novel, *Second Chance*. “There was some interest from publishers, but they wanted more sex or cowboys or vampires,” she says with a laugh.

The Fountain Hills, Arizona, author is now working with a micro-publisher to market the book and broaden the distribution channels. She also uses her Web site (www.joycollins.com) to sell the book, sells it on consignment in local bookstores, does book signings and has issued media releases about it. “While my goal was to be published by a bigger publishing house, I realized I can do just as well with my own endeavors,” she says.

Michael N. Marcus has self-published two books—a memoir and a how-to book—using LSI. The Milford, Connecticut, author used to write for *Rolling Stone* magazine and felt POD would give him “complete control” over the publishing process, with the potential to earn more money by cutting out the publisher. He promotes his books in his blog, through reviews in other blogs and in e-mail to friends and associates.

Dave Morris used LSI to set up his own publishing imprint, New Year Publishing LLC (www.newyearpublishing.com). With a \$300 to \$400 investment, the Danville, California, publisher can make a book available online. His company now offers nine books, with seven more titles in the works. If he used traditional publishing methods, printing costs and returns—unsold books sent back by retailers—would make it impossible for his publishing company to exist. “POD is ideal for niche titles, for great books that otherwise might not have found a home,” he says.

Morris considers himself semi-retired, even though he is running a small but successful publishing company. “The technology used to run the company lets me stay home with my kids,” he notes. Among the books he’s published are *I’m Having Twins* and *My Twins Are Coming Home*—both written by his 10-year-old daughter, Paris. His daughter has sold more than 200 copies of each book, “and earned a royalty on each sale,” says Morris. ☐

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