Chapter XLVIII
The Benefits of Using Print–On–Demand or POD

Eric Franzén
CFA Institute, USA

ABSTRACT

The Internet and other new technologies have made possible an ever-growing availability of distribution channels. New paths are being blazed for independent book authors to reach readers and business models have been notably altered for traditional book publishers. Content creators of the past faced many obstacles in publishing hard copy books including lack of manufacturing knowledge, high production costs, and warehouse overheads. Only large publishers with demonstrated business plans could survive the marketplace to produce works at the quantities required to maintain viability. This is rapidly changing. Many companies are surfacing that offer Print-On-Demand (POD), a technology that allows a book to be produced in quantities as low as one book, and distributed only after the demand for that book has been proven (the book has already been sold). Because most content is already in digital form, it can be uploaded to vendors' Web sites, stored, and produced at will on digital printing devices (upgraded copiers). The companies then can bind and professionally finish the work before shipment to the buyer. Books can be listed on numerous Web sites and found by related topic area Web searches. Links to Amazon or a POD vendor's Web site can complete the transaction. The author simply takes his cut once demand has been shown. Not much knowledge is required of the mechanical process of producing the book, production costs are covered by the unit's sale, and there is no warehouse to stock. Independent authors, university presses, and commercial publishing houses all have new options and these options are proving valuable.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate why content providers, either individual or corporate, will be required to use Print-On-Demand (POD) technology to survive in the publishing industry. POD will save time printing a book, offer certain financial benefits, and at the same time require little in the way of resources or industry knowledge. The POD process will be described which includes both a *virtual front-end* and a d*igital back-end.* In the *virtual front-end,* content is uploaded, stored, and used to market the book on the Internet. In the d*igital back-end* step, files stored in the front-end stage are used to directly create printed materials using digital printing devices, essentially high-end copiers. Independent authors, university presses, and commercial publishing houses all will be users of this technology. Advantages and disadvantages for each will be examined and the necessity for using POD demonstrated.

BACKGROUND

Nicholas Negroponte, best known as the founder and Chairman Emeritus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, predicted in 1996 that in the future, content would flow more easily from creator to end consumer. He also argued that middlemen would be "disintermediated" in the process. Negroponte's prediction has proven accurate as evidenced by the digital music revolution (Negroponte, 1996). The consumer is able to acquire the desired content on demand and, in a lot of cases, directly from the artist. Technology revolutions in many other content industries are following the digital music's prototype. Movies are now available on-demand at movie rental stores and online "movies-on-demand" are now available from Amazon.com and other vendors. Television shows are also available for purchase on the Web without commercial interruption.

If this trend continues, written content will also be made more directly available to consumers as technology progresses. Traditional book publishers may soon lose the ability to select and bundle content in the traditional format of the printed book, which, over the centuries, has proven to make them the most money. Many in the publishing industry have worried that books will go the way of music and would be freely pirated on the Internet. More importantly, however, the vehicles for distributing new, original content in hard copy format could completely bypass the publishers (Pfund, 2002). After all, it was not long ago that printing methods were so cumbersome that only larger companies with substantial resources and knowledge of the publishing industry could create a book, print it, and offer it for sale. Printing small quantities of books was possible, but there were many limitations. With recent advances in publishing technologies, the situation has changed. Just about anyone with content can publish it in a variety of formats, including hard copy. Print-on-Demand services (POD) are constantly becoming cheaper and more efficient.

Traditional Publishing Methods

Economic forces used to encourage traditional publishers to manufacture as many copies of a book as possible to achieve better economies of scale and lower per-unit costs (Snow, 2001). A good portion of the cost in printing a book was in the setup stages of the press run. In conventional "offset" printing, negatives needed to be made to image large metal plates that were fastened to large printing devices filled with ink. Skilled laborers would make the press ready, and this process took a long time to unfold before ink actually hit the paper. Once printed, the pages were collated and fastened together. The more copies of a book a printer produced, the cheaper each copy became. Ink and paper were variable costs but other fixed costs needed to be stretched out to be covered by higher quantities. Graph 1 represents the quantity to cost curve in traditional publishing.

Related Content

Concepts, Technology, and Applications in E-Mentoring

Ricardo Colomo-Palacios, Juan Miguel Gómez-Berbís, Angel Garcia-Crespoand Cristina Casado-Lumbreras (2009). *Encyclopedia of Human Resources Information Systems: Challenges in e-HRM (pp. 166-171).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/concepts-technology-applications-mentoring/13225

Work-Life Imbalance of IT Workers in the Internet Age

Helen Richardsonand Darrell Bennetts (2007). *Managing IT Professionals in the Internet Age (pp. 37-87).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/work-life-imbalance-workers-internet/25916

Communities of Practice

Gonçalo Costa (2009). *Encyclopedia of Human Resources Information Systems: Challenges in e-HRM (pp. 142-148).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/communities-practice/13221

Amplifying the Significance of Systems Theory: Charting the Course in High Velocity Environments

Mambo Mupepi (2017). *Effective Talent Management Strategies for Organizational Success (pp. 301-308).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/amplifying-the-significance-of-systems-theory/176336

Diversity Intelligence® and Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity

 (2023). *Valuing People and Technology in the Workplace: Ethical Implications and Imperatives for Success (pp. 147-169).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/diversity-intelligence-and-workforce-inter-personnel-diversity/321322