



# LAUGHING BEAR 124 NEWSLETTER

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## The Surviving Small Press: Publishing-On-Demand

Publishing-on-demand is a technology publishers have been mooning over for decades; to be able to print and bind books as you need them. No inventory, no storage problems, no remainders. But it turns out for big publishers that the real advantage is, no book ever needs to go out of print.

On the other side of the coin, a number of cyber businesses have popped up who've put a new spin on the old racket of vanity publishing. And at least one has come along who makes it possible for anyone with a manuscript to publish and sell their book for free (but they have to pay for their copies).

IBM and Ingram Industries (parent company of Ingram Book Group) partnered in 1998 to create Lightning Print, which has now become Lightning Source (<http://www.lightningsource.com>), a subsidiary of Ingram. Lightning Source provides electronic services of print-on-demand and eBooks for publishers, and many of the largest have signed up.

Lightning Source, with the distribution power of Ingram and IBM technology, allows publishers to maintain on-demand backlists, eliminating the need to take books out of print when they no longer sell well enough to warrant reprints. It also helps with the problem of remainders, since books with unknown potential can have smaller initial press runs.

Barnes & Noble has partnered with iUniverse.com (<http://publish.yourbook.iuniverse.com>), also affiliated with Ingram, to offer free on-demand publishing of out of print books to any publisher. The service is called PublishYourBook. They will also publish any unpublished manuscript, within reason, for as little as \$99.

There are strings attached in any on-demand arrangement, so check the fine print. The Barnes & Noble deal gives Ingram exclusive rights to sell the book for three years with the agreement automatically renewing every year thereafter. You can cancel the agreement, but then Ingram has the right to sell the book non-exclusively for another year.

You receive 20% royalties for the selling price of the book. If Barnes & Noble discounts it, you get less than if it sells for the full list price. Ingram also has the right to sell subsidiary rights for eBooks, CD-ROMs, and DVDs, then split the proceeds with the publisher 50%-50%. But the publisher has no say in who can purchase the rights. Theater, film, and television rights remain with the publisher.

Where publishing-on-demand strays into the area of vanity publishing is with the many online publishing companies who offer to publish and sell any book for a fee. In some cases it may seem worth it, but the fees and add-on charges for design features and marketing can add up to thousands of dollars.

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## eBooks

Are eBooks the future of publishing, or just a fad? The best thinking now is more likely that they will open up the popular market for books that previously have been difficult to publish, like novels. A novella is a short novel. They are too short (50 to 100 pages) to be worth publishing in print by themselves, but too long for short story collections.

Booklets and chapbooks are good candidates for eBooks as well. These would include the short books on health issues you find in racks in pharmacies and health food stores, as well as little how-to books and religious booklets. Those formats are hard to sell because they require special racks so they can be displayed cover out since they don't usually have the title printed on the spine.

It is unlikely an 800-page novel is going to work in eBook format because of storage issues, download time, online piracy, and just the fact that not many readers are going to sit for hours trying to read from a monitor. Even Stephen King is presenting his new eBook, *The Plant*, in installments of only 5,000 to 7,000 words at a time.

There is a lot of excitement about eBooks in the academic community, however, for college texts. They appeal to both students and professors. Students can carry one laptop computer instead of 20 or 30 pounds of books, eBooks have search and annotation

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## Publishing-On-Demand *(continued)*

You've got to wonder what makes those companies different than vanity or subsidy publishers who've lurked in the little "Publish Your Own Book" ads in the classified sections of writers' magazines since before the Depression.

The print vanity publishers would gull naïve writers into paying exorbitant prices to publish a few thousand copies of a book, then send a few boxes to the writer and retain the right to sell the book themselves.

Bookstores and libraries would not touch books from the vanities because they knew most of them were junk. After a given amount of time the publishers would tell the writer the books weren't selling and would be destroyed unless the author bought them.

In the online version of vanity publishing, the writer doesn't even get a complimentary box of books. They have to pay wholesale for any copies they want, and the publisher maintains the right to sell them exclusively through their web site or online bookstores.

The online publishers do pay writers royalties from any books sold, and unlike the print vanity publishers, the author is encouraged to promote the book. The publishers even have nice web sites to sell the books from.

If you just want to publish a book for your friends and family, on-demand publishing may be the way to go. You don't have to store boxes of extra copies, at least. But do not have illusions that you are going to sell thousands, or even hundreds, or even dozens of copies just because they are available on the web and through online bookstores. You've still got to balance the cost of publishing against the possibility of selling enough books to make the money back, and you've still got to do the bulk of the

marketing, all for a 20% to 25% royalty.

In the last issue of *LBN* I reviewed two books that came from publish-on-demand web sites. *The Mind of Oswald* came from Trafford Publishing (<http://www.trafford.com>). It is a terrific book on Lee Harvey Oswald. You couldn't tell from the quality of the printing that it was any different from any other trade paperback, except that the pages in the front and back of the book were starting to fall out. But it's not unusual for a publisher or author to send out slightly damaged copies for review.

The price for publishing a book with Trafford is \$499 to \$950. At \$950, they handle publicity and distribution. At \$679, you handle publicity and distribution, but there is still online order fulfillment. At \$499, well it is unclear what you get for \$499 other than the opportunity to buy your own book at a wholesale price.

Regardless of the plan, you still have to do all the design, typesetting, illustrations, and anything else you want yourself. Trafford, on the other hand, pays you 60% of gross margin (whatever that means) if you buy one of the expensive plans. On the \$499 plan, you don't get royalties because the only person they sell books to is you. By the way, with all plans you have to buy and mail review copies you want sent to reviewers.

*Bingo Lawsuit* was published by xLibris Corporation, a Random House partner. The printing is good, the cover is pretty plain, but nice, and the binding is sturdy. The best part of working with xLibris is the publishing cost starts at nothing. Fees range from free to \$1200.

If you opt for the free package from xLibris, you send them the manuscript ready to print. They format it to a standard template and give it a generic cover. You don't get to have any illustrations, tables,

or other tricky formatting, but you do end up with a reasonably good looking book. The book is sold in eBook and trade paperback editions.

For \$300 you can choose a format template for the body of the book and add some graphics. At \$600 you can add tables and an index. There is also a hardback edition available at that level. The Premium service package costs \$1200. You get to work with an xLibris designer to get a personalized design.

xLibris pays 25% royalties and gives you a 25% discount on books you buy, regardless of the plan you go with. The books are sold through their web site.

The other web-based publishing-on-demand services I've seen are similar to Trafford. Costs can go as high as \$1395, but there are lots of add-ins to boost the cost even higher. The requirements for submitting a manuscript range from xLibris wanting just a Word or WordPerfect file to other sites that will only accept ready-to-print PDF files done in Adobe Acrobat.

If you want to try publishing-on-demand for one of your manuscripts, check out the publisher's agreement first. You will be licensing the book to the publisher for a period of several years. During that time they can sell your subsidiary rights and have exclusive rights to sell and distribute the book. They may even have the right to sell your rights back to you when the period is up.

The real value of publishing-on-demand is for publishers who want to keep their books in print when it would otherwise not be practical to do so. The services offered to writers are dubious. At best, you can get the book published for free and buy a copy for your mom for \$15. At worst, you can be out a couple thousand bucks and have nothing to show for it. ●

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## eBooks *(continued)*

capabilities, and the cost is a little less than for used text books.

Professors like them for the same reasons, plus revisions, errata and updates can be downloaded immediately.

Librarians are also taking a close look at eBooks. They can easily order multiple copies of popular titles without having to worry about the limitations of shelf space. There is also the possibility of having time-sensitive eBooks that will stop functioning at the library due date.

The librarians don't want eBooks to replace print books. They want eBooks that will be available in electronic format only, and they want them to do things print books can't. They are looking for multimedia capabilities: sound, video, databases. They want them compatible with braille and other software for handicapped patrons.

For eBooks to work in the popular market, beyond the folks who will buy any new gadget, no matter how silly, they will have to do more than display facsimiles of print pages. There are several formats for eBooks now, but the most popular are Adobe's PDF, which can be read on any computer with free Acrobat Reader software, and OEB (Open eBook; see <http://www.openebook.org>), which is being pushed by Microsoft (and is readable on Microsoft Reader). OEB is standardized by OEBF (Open eBook Forum), so other reader manufacturers can use the format and publishers can create compatible eBooks. OEB is based on HTML and XML, the web site scripting languages.

The PDF format lets publishers create eBook pages that look exactly like print pages. OEB eBooks are really the same as web sites, but rendered by software into a single file that can be read using software on your PC or a handheld device.

The OEB books offer all the possibilities for navigation and multimedia that a web site does.

There are numerous advantages to eBooks from a publisher's point of view: No real inventory, you can sell them from your web site, no shipping from the printer or to the buyer, and you can easily make corrections or update the book whenever you want.

On the down side, to be a serious electronic publisher, you've got to make sure your eBook is compliant with the most popular reader software and handheld readers, and you've got to buy and learn the software to make your books compliant.

The hot handheld eBook reader at this point is the Rocket eBook (<http://www.rocketebook.com>), priced from \$269.00 (16 mb) to \$418.00 (32 mb and with all the bells and whistles). Prices will come down if the eBook format takes off, but for now it's going to be a toy for people who've got to have the latest electronic gadget. Still, this is the format the librarians are testing, and competing readers can cost a couple hundred dollars more.

I just received an email, by the way, that says Nuvomedia (Rocket eBook) and Softbook Press (who make the SoftBook Reader) have merged and won't be adding any new publishers until later in Fall 2000 when GemStar eBooks is launched. That means two of the most popular readers have joined to try to corner the market on handheld devices. They suggest going to <http://www.ebooknet.com> to find out more about ePublishing.

If you are going to publish an eBook, you're going to have to look at the cost in time and money versus the likelihood of selling it. The big publishers are putting out electronic versions of bestsellers, and some people will buy them, but the value of appearing to be at the

cutting edge of technology is more important to them than actually selling downloaded books. The small publisher needs to be more careful.

Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and other online booksellers sell eBooks, but you can't expect to sell more of those than you would a printed book through the same outlets. Your bulk of sales are going to come from your web site, and that means you have to put even more effort into drawing traffic to your site.

You still need book reviews, too. You may have an advantage if yours is the first eBook on your subject. There's the novelty factor. But in order to get reviews, you have to ensure reviewers can read the eBook. That means you may have to provide a copy of Adobe Acrobat or Microsoft Reader. Fortunately they are both free. But if your eBook requires Rocket eBook or Softbook or some other reader, you need to find reviewers who have it – just check out the kinds of eBooks they are reviewing.

If you can put the book and reader on a CD-ROM to send reviewers, that will help. After all, it is much more effective to send a copy of a printed book than just a press release inviting the reviewer to order a copy. Reviewers do not like to take the extra step to order a copy or, in this case, download one. I've received CD-ROMs and floppy disks of electronic books and, not only couldn't I open them, but the publisher didn't tell me what software I'd need.

You had also better have posters and a computer to set up if you want to show eBooks at book fairs.

Marketing becomes a matter of sending everyone possible to your web site, where you should have sample chapters, artwork, author bios, etc., along with the eBook for download. ●

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## Microsoft Reader

I've tried several PC-based eBook readers without much luck. Glassbook Reader wouldn't load unless I removed some software with which it was incompatible. Adobe Acrobat works, but the type seems fuzzy on a monitor. And I'm not about to spend a hundreds of dollars for a handheld reader.

Finally I found Microsoft Reader, which you can download free from the Barnes & Noble site under eBooks (<http://www.bn.com>).

I am not a huge fan of Microsoft as a company, but every once in awhile they come up with something worthwhile. Microsoft Reader is one of those things.

It is small, easy to use, and there is a library of 50 or more titles you can download free – from Dante to Sherlock Holmes.

One thing that makes Microsoft Reader stand out is the new ClearType technology. That lets pixels, the little dots that make up your computer screen, each use more than one color. That means smoother, more easy to read type.

The reader appears on your screen about the size of a postcard, and the pages are as clear as those in a paperback book.

Try it out. The price is right, and there are good books to read.

## Announcements

- **AnyBook!: The Small Publisher's Business Kit** (<http://www.isu.edu/~wattron/RonSoft.htm>) has been upgraded to version 5.8. This shareware program is the most powerful tool I've found for small publishers. It keeps track of customers, orders, payments, and everything else a small publisher needs. That's because it was developed by a small publisher for his own business. The software has received a four star rating by *PC Magazine*.

- **Association of Authors & Publishers** (<http://www.authorsandpublishers.org>) has a useful web site with articles from their newsletter, *Publishing Points*, a listing of member books and web sites, and information about their workshops. They meet at the Museum of Printing History in Houston, Texas.

- **John Kremer's Book Marketing Tip of the Week** is an electronic newsletter on all issues concerning self-publishers and small presses. It also contains bookstore and media addresses. You can subscribe from John's web site at <http://www.bookmarket.com>. The web site also features past articles and other publishing resources.

- **Publishers Association of the West** (PO Box 3759, Boulder, CO 80307; 800-444-2326 for room reservations) will be holding its 19<sup>th</sup> annual National Publishing Conference and Trade Show in Colorado Springs November 2-5. The events are produced by [publishingonline.com](http://publishingonline.com), a web-based publisher of e-books.

- **Newsletter & Electronic Publishers Association** (1501 Wilson Blvd., Ste 509, Arlington, VA 22209; <http://www.newsletters.org>) provides information and resources for print and electronic newsletter publishers. Offers resources for marketing and launching your print or electronic newsletter.

- **Benjamin Franklin Awards 2001** (Publishers Marketing Association, 627 Aviation Way, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266; 310-372-2732, <http://www.pma-online.org>) announces the first call for next year's awards. This is for books published between January 1 and June 30, 2000. The deadline for books published from July 1 to December 31, 2000 is January 31, 2001. This is probably the most prestigious series of awards for small press publishers. See their web site.

- **Pan American Indian Association** (8335 Seigny Dr., N. Ft. Myers, FL 33917-1705) publishes *PAIA News*, *Whirling Rainbow*, *Voice of the People*, the organization's newsletter quarterly. The association helps people who believe they are of American Indian decent find their way home to their ancestral tribe. The newsletter features news, information, events, poems, tales, essays, and reviews concerning American Indians.

- **Betty Drevnoik Award 2000** (Haiku Canada, c/o LeRoy Gorman, 51 Graham West, Napanee, ON K7R 2J6 Canada) is a literary award for unpublished haiku. Write for details.

Advertising: Insert ads, in the form of flyers to be inserted in newsletter mailings, are welcome. Send 200 copies of the ad with \$50, and the ad will be mailed with the next issue of the newsletter. Contest and other events or promotions that solicit money in the form of reading or other entry fees will not be accepted.

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