

Publishing tasks

This isn't a book about publishing. It's only about formatting and preparing a print-ready file that you can take to a printer who will make a small number of books for you. What you do with those books afterwards is up to you. Still, there are some very basic pricing and distribution issues that you will have to face.

Setting the price for your book

Even though selling “The Writing 69th” wasn't first and foremost in my mind, I did keep close track of my production costs so that I could set a reasonable price. Here is an accounting of my costs:

- I paid an artist \$500 to do the cover artwork.
- I paid a printer \$500 to print 500 color covers.
- I paid another printer about \$600 to print the black & white insides and bind the book
- Total: \$1,700 for 100 books (or \$17 per book)

I'm not including the cost of my personal computer and printer, because I would have bought them anyway. There were some other start-up costs, specifically my scanner (\$150 after a rebate) and CD Writer (\$25 plus \$30 for CDs). I'm not including them here, because I will be able to use them for other projects. Other potential costs include software (like Adobe Acrobat, fonts, or a graphics program) and supplies (ink cartridges and paper). The

cost of each book would have been several dollars more had I included these costs.

\$17 per book is fairly costly, but keep in mind that this includes a lot of overhead, including all of the cost for the artist's work and 400 extra covers. For reprints, the cost of the next 100 books is closer to \$6 a book because I already have color covers and all I need to pay for is the printing of the insides and the binding.

With these costs in mind, I chose \$20 as the price (with an additional \$5 for shipping and handling for any books that I have to mail). This price adequately covers the cost of the first run of books and struck me as a reasonable price for a self-published paperback book on a topic of fairly broad interest. I did not want to set the figure too low because I knew that it would look suspicious if I raised the price later. And I did not want to set it too high because I knew that would depress sales. Although I intended to sell these books myself, the choice of a price also needed to reflect the possibility down the road that I would be providing copies to others to sell. However, I did not print a price on the cover because I wanted the flexibility to change the price as necessary.

I only accept checks or money orders. And although I wasn't expecting any complaints, I was prepared to offer anyone their money back if they weren't satisfied. Your price will also need to be sufficient to cover any applicable sales taxes. Regarding shipping and handling, you must charge enough for the cost of a padded envelope, postage, and your trip to the post office. Charge extra for foreign postage, which can be considerably more expensive. Be sure to use book rate for domestic shipments.

There are also some market and aesthetic issues to think about when setting your price. People generally think of a book as a product (much like a loaf of bread or a bicycle) and they are willing to pay between \$5 and \$30 for one. It may not matter to them that yours is a unique book that is not available in stores.

They may not care that your production costs are higher than a typical paperback book. They may not want to pay more for a 400-page book, compared to a 200-page book, even though the 400-page book costs a lot more for you to print. If you put a hard-cover binding on your book, you may be able to charge more for it, but you will have to weigh that against the higher cost of hard-cover binding.

I think that it's important to understand what you want to achieve by selling your book. If finding an audience and getting your book into readers' hands are at the top of your list, you will want to be sure to set your price at the lowest level feasible. There was little or no room for profit for the first 100 books that I had printed. The \$20 price barely covered my costs.

In addition, I gave away some copies to family and friends, and also to the people who had helped me during the process of researching and writing "The Writing 69th". I felt that I owed it to them. I knew that even if I sold all of the remaining copies, it would only cover a portion of my costs. For the next printing, the profit outlook will be significantly brighter.

Expanding your options

I took a decidedly low-key approach to promoting "The Writing 69th". Several years back I had created a web site with information on my research. It is now at:

www.greenharbor.com

Once the book was ready, I added basic ordering information⁶⁷ to the web site. Occasionally I get an order this way. However the largest number of orders have come through word of mouth, many of them multiple orders from people who I had given a copy, and

⁶⁷ This amounted to my mailing address and a price, plus U.S. and foreign shipping & handling charges. I only accept checks in U.S. funds.

who wanted extra copies to give to their relatives and friends.⁶⁸ All in all, I have sold enough books to cover a significant portion of my production costs.

If I had wanted to expand my options, I would have needed to broaden my distribution. A few things stood in my way, and they all had to do with money in one way or another, either accepting it through credit cards (or having someone else do so for me), spending it on an application for an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), or paying it to a vanity publisher. In this section, we'll look at each of these options and the implications of each.

Credit card sales

One of the very basic decisions that I had to make for my first book was whether I wanted to be the publisher and treat “The Writing 69th” like a “real” book. If I did, then I needed to create a business name and apply for ISBNs. I chose instead to take a different approach. I mostly wanted to get “The Writing 69th” in print to be able to give away a small number of copies. I would also sell some directly through word of mouth, my web site, and perhaps an advertisement in the local paper. These would be direct sales and I would accept only checks, money orders, and cash.

The first step toward broader distribution would be to accept credit card sales. Since I didn't plan to start a business, and since my volumes would be so low, I didn't see any advantage in equipping myself to accept credit cards. However, I did consider the possibility of having someone else accept credit card sales for me. These sales through third parties could include local bookstores, gift shops, or historical societies. All of these sites would be capable of accepting credit card sales. However they

⁶⁸ I think of this as a “Get one free, buy one (or more)” program, and oddly enough it's worked rather well.

would charge a fee for handling a book (generally a percentage of the purchase price, probably 50% or more of the retail price).

The importance of ISBN

To get to a higher level of distribution, a book requires an identity code called ISBN. When a publisher publishes a book, they need to include a way for future purchasers to find the publisher. If the publisher sold books directly to the public, this purpose could be adequately served by an 800 number (as long as the publisher remained in business and never changed the 800 number).

However, the book industry operates through a network of retail bookstores and a distribution channel that supplies these stores with books. The publisher supplies books to a few key distributors who then make the book available to bookstores. These players have an agreed-upon system for tracking down books using ISBNs. You'll find ISBNs on the back cover and following the title page of all books sold through bookstores.

The average consumer doesn't think twice about the ISBN, but that little number helps bookstores track down books through their distributors. An ISBN is 10 digits long and is made up of four parts: a group or country identifier, a publisher identifier, a title identifier, and a check digit. In the United States, R.R. Bowker is the independent agent responsible for assigning ISBNs.

You will need an ISBN if you want your book to be available in bookstores or through Amazon.com.⁶⁹ In general, ISBNs are assigned by publishers, but it is possible for an individual to apply for the right to assign them. It should not surprise you that this privilege will cost you some money. It costs \$205 to register as a publisher, be assigned a publisher's prefix, and receive 10 numbers.

⁶⁹ It is very easy to sell your book through Amazon.com, however you do need an ISBN. Once you have it, you determine a price and contact Amazon.com. They will want a small number of your books to keep in inventory and will charge you a percentage (around 50%) for every book sold.

For additional information, refer to the R.R. Bowker web site at <http://www.bowker.com>.

An ISBN allows bookstores to identify your book, but it also means that your company will be listed in two directories: “Publishers, Distributors & Wholesalers of the United States” and “Publishers’ International ISBN Directory”. In addition, when you assign an ISBN number to a book, you report it to R.R. Bowker, which then includes it in directories like “Books in Print”.

Is it worth applying for an ISBN? Well, it’s part of the cost of doing business if you want to sell your book through established channels. It will also make your book look more professional. And it’s reasonable to assume that you will be able to sell more books because of it. In the case of “The Writing 69th”, I decided not to apply for an ISBN. I may choose to do so later, but I think it is just as likely that I will work with a publisher who will assign one for me. I’m hoping that I’ll find a publisher who will give me an advance and pay me a percentage of sales, but realistically, it’s probably just as likely that I will end up using a vanity, subsidy, or cooperative publisher.

Vanity, subsidy, or cooperative publishers

Vanity, subsidy, and cooperative are three terms used to describe publishers who charge the author money to publish a book.

“Vanity” publishing has a bad name because it’s associated with loser authors who couldn’t find a publisher. Subsidy and cooperative publishers are the same as vanity publishers, but these terms make the relationship between the author and publisher sound more balanced. What does a vanity publisher provide? The services vary from publisher to publisher, but in general a vanity publisher will:

- Edit the manuscript for obvious errors
- Prepare the book for printing

- Assign an ISBN
- Print the book and provide it to distribution channels
- Provide some level of promotion

The growth of the Internet has been a godsend for authors because the Internet has such potential for helping them to reach out to small audiences with specific interests. In that way, topics that may be of little general interest may find a substantial audience on the Internet. At the same time, the Internet has brought a new face to the vanity publishing market. Of course, existing vanity publishers have put up web pages, but many other companies are offering competitive services. These companies are unlikely to call themselves vanity publishers, but in many ways their services are very similar to vanity publishers. Surprisingly, one of the defining features is whether or not they assign ISBNs. In fact, I would say that if a company assigns ISBNs, it is a publisher. And, if it charges you money to assign an ISBN to your book, then it is a vanity publisher.

I have not worked with a vanity publisher, but I considered several, and I might still choose to use one. From my perspective, one of the key values a vanity publisher provides is getting the manuscript into print. I didn't need any help with that. I also felt I could apply for an ISBN without much trouble. And I was a little suspicious whether a vanity publisher would put much effort into promoting my book, so I didn't see much advantage in working with one. If you think you can do what I did, then you really don't need a vanity publisher. However, if you find a vanity publisher who can convince you that they will help you print, promote, and distribute your book, then by all means use them.

Internet resources

A growing number of Internet-based publishing and printing companies are providing services for authors like you. These range from print shops offering short-run book printing to Internet-

oriented vanity publishers. You will also find on-line communities composed of writers, designers, and book production professionals. The Internet changes so rapidly that I am hesitant to include links with information on Internet services. However, here are a few examples of companies that provide book-related services that are available through the Internet:

<http://www.booksjustbooks.com/> - Booksjustbooks is the Internet site of a book printer called RJ Communications. The site features “Instant book pricing” on quantities from 100 to 20,000. Booksjustbooks only accepts laser prints (i.e., a hard-copy print out) as camera copy for runs under 1,000. Above runs of 1,000 it will accept digital files.

<http://www.booktech.com> – booktech.com is an on-demand book facility that provides “course pack” services for college and university professors. booktech.com supervises copyright clearance, file preparation, printing, and distribution. booktech.com will also work with independent authors.

The following three sites are a good example of Internet-based services that allow authors to publish and sell their work:

<http://www.firstpublish.com>

<http://www.iuniverse.com>

<http://www.mightywords.com>

<http://www.xlibris.com>

These services can help your book get greater exposure. Check out these web sites for additional information on their requirements.

<http://www.lightningsource.com> – Lightning Source services include an on-demand book printing facility called Lightning Print that is co-sponsored by Ingram Books (a book distributor) and IBM Printing Systems (a provider of digital printing equipment). Lightning Print was developed to help publishing houses keep books in print without having to warehouse large

quantities. However it is not only for professional publishers. If you or your publisher assigns an ISBN to a book, it is eligible for distribution through Lightning Print. Lightning Print can handle the following trim sizes: 5" x 8", 5½" x 8½", 6" x 9", 7½" x 9.25", and 8½" x 11".

<http://www.netread.com> – NetRead is a virtual community that is known as the Publishing Portal. It provides information on activities in the publishing world.

<http://www.rutledgebooks.com> – Rutledge Books is a cooperative publisher. Authors underwrite the cost of the first printing of the book. After a manuscript is submitted and accepted, Rutledge replies with a proposal outlining the details and the total cost. The minimum number of books published is 500.

<http://www.trafford.com> – Trafford Publishing is an on-demand book publishing service. Authors pay a one-time \$400 set-up fee and an annual \$200 maintenance fee for subsequent years. (Trafford is a Canadian company and both fees are in Canadian dollars.) The author establishes a retail price and receives royalties on all books sold. The royalties are determined by a formula that accounts for the wholesale price and the retail mark-up. Trafford promotes and sells the book through its Internet site.

<http://www.vantage.com> – Vantage Press is a subsidy book publisher. The author pays a fee for the publication of the book. The amount of the fee varies depending on length and other factors. Vantage publishes the book. The author receives 40% of the retail price of the book sold at standard discounts. The bookseller gets 40% and Vantage gets 20%.

Electronic books

Depending on the content of the book you want to publish, you may find that it is to your benefit not to print it at all. Instead, you may want to consider supplying an electronic version of the book

that readers either view on a computer screen or print out themselves. Some technologies will allow you to do both extremely well. Many of the preparations that you make to print small quantities of a book are the same for creating an electronic book.

Advantages and disadvantages of electronic books

Here are some of the advantages of distributing a book in pure electronic form:

- You don't have to print up a lot of copies that you may never be able to sell.
- You can turn over the responsibility for printing to the reader or a service provider.
- You can make revisions and publish new "editions" without having to worry about older versions left in inventory. In a sense, when you publish an electronic book you are a little like a software manufacturer who creates a "golden master" of version 1 of a software product. Future versions (i.e., editions) are numbered to identify them (perhaps version 1.1 for a minor change and version 2.0 when significant changes have been made).
- Electronic books can be created so that it is easy to navigate the book through automated links that take you to chapter headings, other references, or even Internet addresses.
- Readers can easily search the book for key words or phrases.
- If the file is a reasonable size, you can distribute the book electronically via the Internet, thereby avoiding mailing costs.
- Individual users can print it out if they want. (This way, the reader pays the cost of printing.)

Of course there are also disadvantages:

- You assume that your readers have access to a computer (or an electronic book reader) as well as Internet access.
- You must consider how (or whether) the reader pays for the book. Given that you have no printing overhead, you might turn this to your advantage by choosing to give the book away. Here again, if exposure is more important to you than revenue, this could be one means to that end.
- A book with many pictures in it may result in a large file that takes a long time to download from the Internet. If you are creating a book specifically for viewing on computer, you may wish to use lower resolution images, which will result in a smaller file.
- If you give out the file for others to read, it is possible that they may reproduce and sell your book without your knowledge. (And while this is also possible with a paper book, it's also harder and more time consuming.)

File formats for electronic books

There are three file formats to consider if you want to distribute your book electronically:

1. Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF) – PDF is well suited for cases where you want to both distribute the book electronically and also store it in a print-ready format that assures a consistent page layout. Adobe has also introduced PDF-related technologies called PDF Merchant and Web Buy that allow publishers to distribute PDFs that readers can purchase and view.
2. Internet-oriented formats like Extended Markup Language (XML) and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) – These mark-up languages were developed to format information hierarchically, primarily for display on screen via the Internet.

You could use either if you wanted to create a web page with the content of your book.

3. The open e-book format (OEB) – This is a new format that has been developed specifically for use on electronic book (e-book) readers.⁷⁰
4. Microsoft Reader – In 2000, Microsoft introduced Microsoft Reader. Microsoft Reader uses a display technology called ClearType that improves the resolution of letters displayed on the liquid crystal display (LCD) screens used in certain types of computers. The format used by Microsoft Reader is called “.lit”.

The good news about any of these formats is that it is possible to convert a Microsoft Word file into any of them.⁷¹ Therefore the work you do to make the printed version is transferable, although there may be special considerations for scanned images. (In general, images intended for viewing on screen do not require as high resolution as images for print.)

⁷⁰ An e-book reader is a small hand-held computer that has been designed for downloading and viewing electronic books.

⁷¹ Microsoft Word 97 allows you to save a file as HTML. You need to own Adobe Acrobat or 5D PDF Creator to create PDF. XML and e-book format conversions are possible, but not directly from Word 97. Some e-book vendors provide free conversion tools. A special plug-in allows Microsoft Word 2000 to create Microsoft Reader files.