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Your book, your way

by Bill Pfliging

It's been said that everyone has at least one book inside. True-life story, romance, adventure, family drama, whatever the genre, there's a book in there somewhere. Just about everyone has had the dream of seeing his or her name on the cover. But in addition to the many difficulties involved - like actually writing the thing - there's the problem of getting published. Practically since Gutenberg, the task of finding a publisher interested in your work has been a tedious, ego-bruising, extremely difficult process. The very existence of the independent literary agent as a career path is proof of just how hard it is to deal successfully with any book publisher.

Oh, sure, there are so-called vanity presses that will print almost anything you pay them to print. But they aren't cheap, and after thousands of dollars you just end up with a box of books to sell on your own. After a year getting local bookstores to carry a copy, everyone in your circle of family and friends would get one for the holidays. The big publishing houses have always had a lock on distribution.

In recent years, a new form of publishing has evolved out of the improved computer-based printing technologies. Print on demand (POD) allows a complete book to be printed and bound in a matter of minutes. This makes it cost-effective to produce books one or two at a time or in small batches, rather than in lots of a thousand or more. Print on demand technology has a number of applications. Commercial publishers use it when they can't justify the expense of producing and warehousing a large print run. Independent publishers use it as a more economical publishing model. Then there are vanities, the fee-based POD publishing services that offer a self-publishing service.

They're not publishers in the traditional sense, but purveyors of publishing services to writers. They don't screen submissions except perhaps to exclude

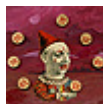
■ Music

Succulent pair



■ Art

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■ Check It Out

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Hoofing it with high society



Going native

Musing on history



Portraits of



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■ Book Review

■ Theater

porn or hate material, and anyone who can pay will be published. They don't routinely provide editing or proofreading services, though some offer these at additional cost. They charge a fee for publication, ranging anywhere from \$99 to more than \$1,000. Xlibris and iUniverse are two of the largest. Xlibris pricing starts at \$500, and iUniverse starts at \$459 for their basic package, for which you'll receive five books. You can buy more, but only at a discount off the retail price.

But that was then, and this is now. Inventor Victor Celorio is out to change all the rules. Victor has developed a machine that can transform any manuscript into a nicely bound, professional quality book in just minutes. The entire system fits in the same space as a large desk. The InstaBook Digital Bookstore and Self-Publishing Center is the first POD in the world to be specifically developed for bookstores, and Victor has received many patents for it. He's sold his InstaBook machines (www.instabook.net) in Mexico, Italy, and Canada, and now the first POD machine to be installed in a bookstore in the US has just been unveiled in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

Bookends Bookstore (www.book-ends.com) is a pleasant small-town bookstore, one of the few to survive the onslaught of Borders and Barnes & Noble chains. Rather than trying to stock everything, owners Walter and Pat Boyer cater to the local residents' needs, stocking many children's books as well as popular best-sellers. Over the years, Bookends has had a regular stream of big-name authors coming to the store for book-signing events. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Chuck Barris, Mary Higgins Clark, Joan Lunden, and actor/wrestler The Rock are only a few. They have a wall of photos filled with pictures of famous authors signing their books in the store. And now they can also boast of being the very first POD-capable bookstore in the country.

Books By Bookends (www.booksbybookends.com) is a shot across the bow of all previous forms of publishing, traditional as well as POD. "We see digital on-site, on-demand publishing as the wave of the future," Walter Boyer said. "Bookends has always been known for its author signings - more than 100 are scheduled this year - and this new service allows us to help more writers become published authors." The Boyers have partnered with journalist, author, publishing consultant (and Ridgewood resident) Tim Harper (www.timharper.com) to bring Victor and the InstaBook technology to Bookends. At a recent unveiling event at Bookends, Tim and Victor demonstrated the ease with which the InstaBook can produce a finished product. "You can walk in, give us your manuscript, and we print and bind it on site, on the spot," said Tim.

At \$150 for the first ten books and less for further printings, their prices are much lower than any of the current POD suppliers. But the InstaBook system is more than just a powerful self-publishing outlet. It also offers over 7,000 public domain books for POD sale as a sort of virtual bookstore, with the

bilateral beings

unique ability to print personalized covers. Imagine for Fathers Day giving Dad's Personal Copy of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley or A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens - with Love from The Smith Family to your assorted friends.

Seems my mother had always wanted to write a cookbook. After she passed away, my siblings and I found a box of clippings, hand scribbled notes, carefully typed recipes, and even little graphic illustrations drawn for her by our father intended as page headings. But it never went any further, most likely because she was too aware of the bubble-bursting reality of the publishing industry. I think I know a nice way to memorialize her efforts.

Bill Pfliging is a computer consultant and technology writer living and working in Woodstock. You can contact him at bill@billsville.com.



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