

The Author's ADVOCATE



Special Newsletter

October 2006

Published exclusively for the authors and associates of
Infinity Publishing and Buy Books on the Web.com

Book Publishing Bounces the World

The world was bounced in 1447 when **Johannes Gutenberg** invented the technology of printing by using movable type. Gutenberg invented and combined the technologies that would make the printing process less labor intensive and more economical. One of his first commercial jobs was printing coupons – the famous Gutenberg bible came years later. Civilization would be forever altered – now that it was cost-effective to print books rather than to slowly scribe them, printed books were more accessible to the public and literacy among the masses became the norm.

Leap ahead 3 centuries to colonial America with **Ben Franklin**, Philadelphia printer, in his *job shop* printing books, essays and whatever else needed printing for a reasonable fee. Ben operated an “open press” – as he later defined it in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Freedom of expression was important to Franklin, and his printing ventures provided the means for early American authors to publish and distribute their books. His commercial publishing success was built upon his ability to create and acquire content, as well as his effective use of letterpress printing combined with his distribution channels. Ben maintained an excellent reputation for fair and honest dealings with one and all – quality presswork was guaranteed. His early franchising of other printers by providing them with presses and referrals established a network of aligned printers operating print shops similar to Franklin’s model. Those presses printed *Common Sense*, the essay written by Thomas Paine that fueled the passion for independence.

In the 20th century, a speed bump occurred with the introduction of offset printing. Diehard letterpress operators bemoaned that it wasn’t true printing unless the inked type kissed the paper. They cried that offset was nothing but smearing ink on paper. However, the ink transferred by offset onto paper proved to be of high quality and more cost-effective than the time consuming, labor intensive letterpress process – the speed bump

actually bumped up the speed of make-ready and reduced the hours of press time. Time is money, and using cost-effective equipment is where the profit is. Now, early in the 21st century, only a very small percentage of printing is still done by letterpress.

In the 1990’s, the world got bounced again with the introduction of high-speed digital printers driven by computers that created a whole new approach to book publishing. A single copy of a 300-page book could be printed and perfect-bound in a matter of minutes, with additional copies to be printed on demand as needed. The weeks needed to print books offset were reduced to mere hours. Preproduction preparations are accomplished in a couple of hours and the digitized book file is always available in seconds to produce one book or several hundred books with the push of a button.

High-speed digital printing eliminated the costly film stripping and plate burning process necessary for offset printing. This removed the expensive requirement of pressruns of thousands of books needed to amortize the pre-press charges to bring the unit cost per book down to a cost-effective price. Hundreds of books can be printed digitally for a fraction of the overall cost of offset. The unit cost is only slightly more than the same books printed offset and the quality is very similar.

The movable type bounce was the smallest baby step when compared to the giant leap for humankind that digital printing created. Movable type provided books for the masses, but digital printers combined with computers created the technology for anyone to become a published author. Suddenly, publishing became an affordable option for the multitude of authors rejected by mainstream publishers. Authors discovered they could be published for an investment equal to the cost of a new flat-screen digital television – the world has gone digital in lots of positive ways.

The publishing game had already started changing with small and mid-size publishers merging with or being gobbed up by what became the “big five” communication giants, who are attempting to dominate the publishing world. In the traditional ways of publishing, there were fewer opportunities for new authors. The giant’s bean-counters reduced schedules to favor their “A” list authors – unknown authors were too great of a risk. Books by a famous name author can be hyped onto the bestseller list. The giants took heed of Franklin’s wisdom about controlling the content and distribution by using sweetheart deals to link up with bookstore chains. With their bookshelves filled with returnable deeply discounted books with imprints of the big five, the chains out sold and put out of business the independent bookstores in their marketing area.

The dawning of the Digital Age illuminated the growing bookselling giant, Amazon.com, with a mighty reach through the internet that covers the world. Their massive on-hand inventory includes almost every known book imprint – regardless of by whom or when or how the book was published. The Amazon advantage is that many of the titles are discounted to entice their huge customer base into buying more books. They made it easy for customers to order books on-line with the assurance they would receive their books in a few days with satisfaction guaranteed.

While the publishing giants were busy rearranging the deck chairs on their own Titanic, micro-publishers with newly published authors were successfully growing and selling more books. Their publishing efforts were made possible by commercial printers using high-speed digital printers to produce only the required quantities to fill orders as needed for the authors’ books.

A host of eager publishing services sprang into being. For a fee, they promised to provide all of the services an author would need to publish and distribute their digitally published book. Some also offered to make the book available as an ebook for an additional fee. However, there were problems caused by some of these services promising authors far more than they could deliver by trying in vain to mimic the ill-fated ways of the top-heavy traditional publishers. Many of these services identified as POD publishers got into trouble by their failure to deliver books in a timely fashion, misrepresenting self-publishing by reselling ISBN’s to authors, publishing books with legal problems, and missing royalty payments. These POD publishing services got a bad reputation for making their profits off the authors by overcharging for questionable services.

Even with these growing pains, author-originated publishing evolved as a new branch of the book publishing. Authors engaging in author-originated publishing grant the publisher permission to produce and distribute their book in exchange for monthly royalties. The author has

complete creative control over their book and retains all rights – this differs from mainstream publishing where publishers acquire all rights by paying the author an advance against royalties. With author-originated publishing, the author pays a one-time fee to add their book into the book publishing system.

Digital printing bounced publishing big time. Progressive bounces continue to occur in positive ways in the author-originated branch of book publishing that’s enjoying increasing sales while the giants’ sales dwindle in a quagmire of flatness. Many books produced by author-originated publishing are niche books in genres or on topics of limited interest. With small defined markets, niche books don’t have the potential profit to justify being published by the giants. Amazon reported that in 2005, over 70% of their profit from all book sales came from niche market books.

Content is the key, and increasingly, authors are controlling their content. Authors are wising up and hiring professional editors to sparkle their books. One of the major role reversals is the editor works for the author and not the publisher because the author owns all rights to their book. The more professional the content is presented, the better the book will sell – that’s a fact.

Another fact is that by 2009, it won’t matter by whom or how a book is published; what *will* matter is the quality of the content in the author’s book and the entertainment value of a novel. Reviews by readers will generate more sales than the hyped sameness cranked out by the named reviewers. Pre-publication reviews will be seen as needlessly delaying releases and a waste of efforts, especially with the timeliness that books can be digitally produced in various formats.

In the near future, ebooks will become more popular and accepted as affordable ebook readers become more portable with longer battery life and smooth refreshes with each page turn that gives the look and feel of reading a book printed on paper. Pass-along provisions will be implemented to enable a purchased ebook be shared freely with a friend, just like a paper book. Purchases of paper books will include an option to also download a discounted copy as an ebook.

Publishing has changed drastically since the bounce caused by movable type. The Franklin influence in publishing through an open press provided a firm foundation for author-originated publishing that’s evolving in ways that would surely please Ben. The vital constant that continues on, regardless of the publishing process, is the needful involvement for the author’s efforts to market their book. As book marketing guru **John Kremer** likes to ask, “What one thing have you done today to promote your book???”

Take care and enjoy often...John