

The Author's ADVOCATE



Special Newsletter

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Published for the authors and associates of Infinity Publishing

The Mighty Amazon.com And Infinity's Unique Relationship!!!

The late winds of March blew out some foul news from Amazon.com that caused a major stir in the Print-On-Demand branch of the publishing industry. The basic source of the discord came from Amazon's announced edict compelling the use of their subsidiary POD publisher BookSurge if POD publishers wanted to continue to sell their books through Amazon.com. When I first heard about this fiasco, I thought it must be a sick prelude to an April Fool's joke. It wasn't!!!

The official reason for this abrupt change in Amazon's recently-imposed policy was officially explained as part of their ongoing efforts to expedite the shipment of orders to Amazon customers. Their belief is that with the vertical integration of BookSurge producing POD books directly for sale through Amazon, the time required to fulfill orders will be greatly reduced.

I applaud Amazon's continuing quest to improve customer service; however, I feel Amazon could have introduced their policy change with a bit of finesse rather than having dribs and drabs of details float to the surface. This also smacked with the same sharp sting of Ingram's surprise requirement announced several years ago directing that all POD books distributed by Ingram would have to be produced by their subsidiary printer, Lightning Source. At the same time, Barnes & Noble announced that all future orders for POD books would be placed only with Ingram rather than with the various POD publishers. We pleaded Infinity's case to John Ingram for an exemption because we produce all books in-house; plus, we had been selling at standard trade discounts directly to Ingram and B&N. Ingram informed us that there would be no exceptions – our titles had to go into LSI for Ingram distribution and, in turn, for sale to B&N.

I dare say there wasn't much of an outcry from the publishing community because this had an impact on

only about a dozen or so evolving publishers. This time, there was a lot of outrage voiced pointedly at Amazon from several thousand self-publishing authors locked into using the services of Lightning Source to print all of their books.

This time was also different for Infinity Publishing because we only use LSI as mandated to print books for sale to Ingram. All other Infinity titles sold to bookstores, online booksellers – including Amazon – special sales, other distributors, and author-purchased books are produced at our West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania facility. We have owned and operated high-speed digital printers for producing books in-house since the company's launch in 1997. Indeed, this set us apart from the POD publishing services locked into contracting with outside vendors – such as Lightning Source – providing book printing on demand.

Several years ago, Amazon bought BookSurge, who previously did business as The Great Unpublished, a small digital publisher providing a variation of self-publishing services for authors. This purchase provided Amazon with the means to produce digitally-printed books sold through Amazon. By funneling incoming digitally-printed books through BookSurge, Amazon has integrated the actual production of the books into their far-reaching distribution system. Ben Franklin's successful publishing model was based on controlling the content, owning the presses, and maintaining an ever-expanding distribution system. Two out of three ain't bad for Amazon, and I'll wager it's only a matter of time before Amazon contracts with writers to author work-for-hire books published by BookSurge that will be sold by Amazon.

Infinity Publishing started out with three out of three: our authors provide the content in exchange for royalties; we own the production facilities; and we provide

distribution systems that include Amazon and far beyond in special sales, bookstores, and all varieties of book sellers. Our relationship with Amazon is mutually beneficial because they have developed a vast niche market network and we are providing fresh content to fulfill many of those niches of individual interests. During our first decade as a publisher, we have amassed an ever-increasing array of titles on a wide selection of unique topics. Naturally, we have been selling Infinity books to Amazon since our start of business.

I believe it was in 2006 when *Publisher's Weekly* reported that, in 2005, over 70% of all books sold by Amazon were niche market books. I'm pleased to explain that Infinity Publishing is a First Amendment press engaged in author-originated publishing; that means we have a growing selection of special topic books and all kinds of novels. We generally have books in almost every genre you can think of. Thusly, we provide an ever-increasing reservoir of fresh content to help keep the mighty currents of Amazon flowing.

We appreciate very good customers, so when Amazon launched their Advantage program several years ago, Infinity Publishing was one of the very first publishers to enroll and assign all of our Amazon-distributed titles to the new program. We saw the merits and benefits for our authors when this program was first introduced. We automatically add all new Infinity titles into Advantage and ship consignments books to prime their system. The consigned books – well over 10,000 – are the property of Infinity until sold through Amazon; as a book sells, we pay our authors a 15% royalty on the 55% discounted selling price of their book.

Books in the Advantage program are guaranteed to be shipped instantly to Amazon customers with a quick click of the “Buy” button. Amazon is putting lots of weight on immediate deliveries to customers. We receive weekly book orders to be shipped in order to replenish consignment inventories at Amazon's five national distribution centers. Infinity's production department has maintained an excellent record for prompt and accurate deliveries of all orders.

Amazon moves a massive volume of Infinity titles every month – four to five times the number of books sold through LS/Ingram. Not all of our authors choose to pay the additional fee for Ingram distribution. However, there's no cost for our authors to have their books added to the Advantage program. The 55% off retail to Amazon is justified because of the ever-increasing

monthly volume. LS/Ingram requires the same 55% and they're selling a fraction of what Amazon sells. Competitive pricing is essential – especially in this sluggish economy. Infinity's suggested retail pricing is comparable to similar trade paperbacks. Many of our non-fiction authors authorize Value-Added pricing to increase their earnings from the proprietary material in their books. Reasonable pricing based on the additional value of the content – beyond the suggested retail price determined by page count – increases royalties paid to authors on books sold, enhances Infinity's profit – we earn our profit selling books – and provides Amazon with a workable margin. Remember, authors, good content professionally presented and edited is omnipotent!!!

The loud cries of outrage are from assorted POD publishing services and self-published authors using LSI who must now reformat their books to conform to the production requirements of BookSurge. This means they will incur additional formatting and conversion costs, along with the horrific amount of time needed to essentially cross-publish in order to maintain Ingram distribution and Amazon sales – that comes with excellent web exposure for every book displayed in the world's largest bookstore.

I fear all the ranting and raging out at Amazon won't work. Legal action will be prolonged and costly with a no-win outcome, so they need to give serious consideration to enrolling their books in the Advantage program. It seems to me that seeding the Advantage program with 5 books and agreeing to the 55% discount is more cost-effective than reformatting a book. Besides, it would take one hell of a dam to stop the surges of the mighty and majestic Amazon.

Methinks Amazon might have gathered goodwill if they had presented the benefits of the Advantage program along with workable options for consideration. Their commands of “convert or have the book's buy button pulled” were way too forceful.

Bottom-line – all Infinity published titles continue to be available for immediate sale on Amazon through the Advantage program – so worry not.

PayPal Accepted by Infinity's Online Bookstore

We are pleased to announce that PayPal charges are now accepted at www.buybooksontheweb.com. We appreciate being able to offer our customers purchasing options to buy Infinity published books.

Have a marvelous May, and enjoy often... John