

POD UNSUGAR-COATED

Bartlett, Rebecca Ann, comp. "University Press Forum: Variations on a Digital Theme (and Other Matters)." *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 38.4 (2007): 211-228. Hereafter abbreviated *JSP*

"Kindle: Amazon's Revolutionary New Reading Device." 2008. Amazon.com. 22 June 2008 <<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product...>>.

Rosenthal, Morris. *Print-on-Demand Book Publishing: A New Approach to Printing and Marketing Books for Publishers and Authors*. Springfield, MA: Foner Books, 2004. Pp. vi, 173. \$14.95 Paperback.

Reviewed by Ali Ferguson, Clemson University

Whether they come from experienced authors, subject-matter experts, or just everyday know-it-alls, books of all topics are becoming increasingly easy to publish as a result of digital technology, subsidy publishers, and large Internet marketplaces. As Thomas Bacher, director of Purdue University Press, points out, all "A scholar needs [is] a computer, a Web site, and remarkably inexpensive software to open a publishing enterprise" (*JSP* 225). While subsidy presses and adventurous self-publishers can print pretty much any piece of written work, that does not guarantee that a piece will succeed in the marketplace; on the contrary, a book is most certainly doomed to failure unless proper marketing plans are put in place. The path that leads to the most successful books is often the one paved by trade publishers who have the money, resources, and expertise to publish and market a given title. However, as any new author knows, convincing an acquisitions editor at a trade publishing house of a book's merit can be a daunting and frequently futile endeavor.

So where does the new author turn when trade publishers are no longer an option? According to Morris Rosenthal, print on demand is the answer. Rosenthal's *Print-on-Demand Book Publishing: A New Approach to Marketing Books for Publishers and Authors* is a detailed how-to book explaining the ins and outs of print-on-demand (POD) publishing, including authors' responsibilities, legal matters, book design, Internet marketing, and more. Many individuals immediately associate POD with keeping older titles in print, which is indeed a major use of this technology. Rosenthal's book, however, sets out to expand the use of POD publishing as "This book is written for both authors and publishers who wish to take advantage of the unique possibilities of POD, as opposed to simply using it to keep old books in print" (3). That being said, this book is not for experienced publishers nor for authors who know their way around the publishing industry; rather, it is for those individuals who are interested in self-publishing and getting their work "out there" when traditional publishing means are not feasible.

As Rosenthal points out, POD offers a variety of advantages over traditional printing methods, primarily in terms of lower capital and overhead investments and the almost complete elimination of inventory. In addition, POD offers publishers who are uncertain



of how their books will fair in a particular market the ability to commit to only small print runs until they are reasonably sure of their book's success rate. Unlike traditional publishing, printers using POD are also able to alter their books after initial print runs to correct any errors, add brief examples, or change layout without significant financial costs. Monographs published by Clemson University Digital Press (CUDP), for example, draw on these advantages. In addition to explaining the general POD process, Rosenthal provides a rather detailed case study, "A Year in the Life of a POD Title," to illustrate how one of his previous books fared in the POD publishing process.

Because of these specific qualities, the use of POD publishing is particularly advantageous for non-profit academic presses (like CUDP), many of which are beginning to utilize this technology. Many academic presses print a wide variety of books within a year; however, these books are generally for niche markets and special-interest audiences. In such cases, POD has the potential to significantly reduce production costs and inventory storage of non-mainstream books, while giving the press the ability to publish titles that may have once been passed over because of financial limitations.

Many people believe that newer technology will soon replace the book as we know it, but as Nick Pfund, vice president and publisher of trade and academic books at Oxford University Press, says "The book format as a vehicle of transmission is fragmenting, not dying. We're not seeing the end of the book, we're seeing the galloping diversification of how its messages can be conveyed" (*JSP* 222). Over the last decade or so, the publishing industry (especially in academia) has begun to cater to its increasingly technologically-focused readers; nevertheless, printed, bound books are not going to go away over night, especially when readers are still purchasing them regularly. For publishers who are becoming progressively digital, POD is a smart choice, as it enables presses to provide consumers with the physically bound books they want while giving the press freedom to dedicate more resources to the digital future.

While Rosenthal strongly believes in POD's potential, he does not sugar-coat the POD publishing process, nor does he paint it as a simple endeavor. In addition to listing the overall benefits of POD publishing, he also does not fail to include its potential downfalls, including poorer print resolution, higher printing costs, and distribution difficulties in addition to the need for more market research and advertising strategies at the hands of the POD publisher. Again, Rosenthal brings in his own personal experience and the problems that he faced through his case study and explains how he worked through these problems to create a successful title. His examples and explanations of the POD process can be rather confusing at times, but this seems to be due to the complexity of POD publishing and the many considerations a publisher must make when producing a new title.

Although the quality of the physical printing process is something publishers need to weigh when considering POD printing, Rosenthal's main focus throughout the book and what he seems to want his readers to take stock of most is properly marketing new POD titles. Rosenthal dedicates several chapters of this book to explaining the need for proper marketing strategies and making a new title successful. These chapters not only include traditional marketing strategies and market research plans, but also focus on using new advertising strategies (like Google AdWords), developing keywords for Internet search engines, creating successful websites, using Amazon's many bookselling features, tracking book sales, and several other marketing concerns.



Another interesting point the author brings up is the potential of POD titles to become e-books if that market opens up again. As Rosenthal says, “it’s fairly easy for POD publishers to take a title formatted as a PDF file for print-on-demand, change the ISBN, tweak them for screen resolution, and sell the PDF file as an e-book” (72). Written in 2004, this book is slightly outdated in terms of e-book technology because, at that time, publishers were unable to agree on a standard format or reading device for e-book use. However, Amazon’s new Kindle has revolutionized the e-book market, which may be another potential outlet for POD publishers.

The Kindle is an electronic reading device that can wirelessly download books, magazines, newspapers, and journals from anywhere at anytime. Unlike older, unpopular digital reading devices, the Kindle utilizes a technology called *electronic paper* that “provides a crisp black-and-white screen that resembles the appearance and readability of printed paper” (Kindle). Also, Amazon currently has over 130,000 book titles available for the Kindle that can be downloaded from anywhere in the United States on a free wireless network for which Amazon pays. While it is still rather new, this new e-book technology appears to be revolutionizing the book industry and may soon open a new market for small POD publishers, enabling them to satisfy both their printed-book and technologically-driven audiences.

As opposed to being based on POD technology (as the title seems to suggest), this book’s primary focus is on what POD authors and publishers do with their books *after* the printing has occurred, namely the marketing, distribution, and sales aspects of self-publishing and small-book publishing. Readers who want to learn more about the history, technology, and future of POD book publishing might be slightly dismayed at the end. However, for those readers interested in publishing on their own, this book is a good place to start. More than anything, it shows readers that “as long as you don’t break the law or order up several tons of books on speculation, it’s hard to get into serious trouble writing and publishing books” (172).