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Jersey Bookseller Becomes Publisher, Too

by Steven Zeitchik, PW Daily for Booksellers -- *Publishers Weekly*, 4/29/2004

Beginning next week, Bookends in Ridgewood, N.J., will be a POD guinea pig, as it were, when it becomes the first U.S. bookseller to install an InstaBook machine, which allows for on-demand printing of trade paperbacks. (Several have been placed in Canadian stores.)



InstaBook says it has about 10,000 titles available on the machine; about 6,000 of them are non-custom books. It is concentrating on expanding the "list," mostly in the public-domain and out-of-print sphere. But the company also is courting traditional large publishers who want to make backlist titles available at point-of-sale. It has reached such an agreement with Penguin Canada.

Bookends owner Walter Boyer touted his ability to serve those who want some classics, customized publishing, self-pubbed and out-of-print authors and anyone else in need of a quick, inexpensive title in book form. "We're definitely becoming a publisher," says Boyer, whose store, a small, event-heavy venue in an upper-middle-class New York City suburb, is not big enough to hold the title selection of a superstore.

While Barnes & Noble has started its own conventional classics line and Borders has dabbled with the Sprout system, neither have combined the two--making an established backlist available on demand. And of course, on the self-publishing front, iUniverse and Co. already undercut the traditional vanity business. But Boyer says those services are pricier and take more time. An hour, he said, was reasonable for a small run with InstaBook.

InstaBook founder Victor Celorio charges \$500 per month to have a machine placed in a store, and Boyer said that the cost per copy for consumers ranges between \$7.50 to \$15 depending on the number of copies printed. Bookends is being used as kind of showroom for the machine; he says he and his partners, Celorio and publishing consultant Tim Harper, are hoping that many other indies sign up.

"It's a return to the original bookstore concept, where there was no publisher and a bookseller printed the book for you," Celorio said, adding that he believes both the print-and-distribute idea and its inverse can co-exist. "It's not an either-or proposition. It's a complement to the existing publishing setup."

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