

For Budding Authors, a Rapid-Fire Publisher

By **ERIC A. TAUB**
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"HOT off the presses" has taken on a newly literal meaning with the installation of the first instant book-printing machine in an American bookstore.

Take a floppy disk or CD-ROM to Bookends in Ridgewood, N.J., or e-mail the store a file, and pow! -- in as little as 17 minutes a perfect-bound paperback version of your novel, family memoir, or favorite Bulgarian desserts can be printed.

Every book comes complete with a customized cover chosen from among several thousand designs. For an additional fee, it can also be trademarked and registered with a machine-readable ISBN number, essential for any author hoping to get the work stocked by a major chain and on its way to becoming a best seller.

Of course, the chances of best-seller status are as likely as sudden world peace. Which is why Victor Celorio, president of InstaBook in Gainesville, Fla., created his print-on-demand machine in the first place.

"Best-selling books are so outside the norm that they're an anomaly," said Mr. Celorio, who comes from a long line of inventors. (He says his uncle created an automated tortilla-making machine.) "Real bookselling means selling a book here and a book there over a long period."

Walter Boyer, who owns Bookends with his wife, Pat, decided to offer print-on-demand services after he was regularly asked by novice writers how they could publish their books.

With the large capital outlay involved in traditional publishing, which involves printing and storing thousands of copies, mainstream publishers are more reluctant to take on



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titles that they doubt will generate quick, substantial sales.

One alternative that has surfaced in recent years is the use of Internet-based print-on-demand companies like AuthorHouse, iUniverse and Xlibris. These online services cost more than Bookends, although they may offer more assistance in getting a book sold. Copies are printed when ordered, and royalties are split between the company and the author.

Customers pay AuthorHouse (www.authorhouse.com) a minimum of \$698 to prepare a black-and-white paperback book for printing and to obtain an ISBN number to make the work available at retail outlets. IUniverse (www.iuniverse.com) charges \$459 for its basic package, which includes, among other items, five paperback copies, an ISBN number and availability through online and retail merchants. The \$500 Xlibris package (www.xlibris.com) includes an ISBN number and bar code, registration with Amazon and other online merchants, a Web page and one author copy.

But the Bookends store in Ridgewood charges \$150 for printing 10 copies of any work up to 200 pages. Larger books are priced higher, and subsequent 10-book orders are discounted. All royalties are kept by the author. The store also offers editing and marketing services through associates at an additional cost.

Several forms of digital encryption protect an author's work from being stolen and reprinted without permission. Files can only be read through the Instabook machine. And once the book is printed, the file is automatically erased.

Customers can also choose to print any of 10,000 public-domain titles stored on InstaBook's servers. Using a high-speed Internet connection, the store downloads the file and prints the title within minutes.

Mr. Boyer believes that the print-on-demand machine helps distinguish independent booksellers from the large discount chains. "Our goal is to have lots of booksellers across the country hooked into a print-on-demand network," he said. "Anything that makes us different from the chain bookstores is useful."

In addition to working with Bookends, Mr. Celorio has placed four machines in Toronto bookstores and one each in Mexico and Italy. He envisages a day when an author instructs a bookstore in Los Angeles to send a digital book

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file to another shop in Lagos, to be printed in seconds for a single customer thousands of miles away.

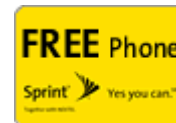
While nothing that striking has happened at Bookends, the store, which operates a separate Web site for its printing service (www.booksbybookends.com), has received inquiries from authors as far away as Florida and California. One of Mr. Boyer's first assignments was to print copies of a Hungarian book for distribution to Hungarian bookstores throughout the United States.

"This is another important part of our mix," Mr. Boyer said. "The more books we print, the more salespeople we have out there."

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