Publishing Alternatives

What are all the options available to you today for publishing and distributing information? Especially those friendly to any small scale tech venture? As I see it, there's at least five intelligent alternatives that you might want to think about…

Ink

Traditional ink-on-paper books are among the oldest of publishing methods. They have a high perceived value and a "touchy feely" pride of ownership. In larger quantities, their cost can be quite low. *If* most of them sell.

And one winner can make you filthy rich.

On the minus side, there are long book preproduction delays and staggering front-end setup charges. 5000 books cost you pretty much the same *total price* as do 1000. A book is difficult to search and hard to update. Most are locked into a costly and outmoded distribution system. One that often returns an author a mere pittance.

I've certainly done well with traditional publishing. At least in the past. My *CMOS Cookbook* and *TTL Cookbook* literally financed my unique lifestyle. And still contribute.

But, my, oh my, how the times have changed.

Ferinstance, the manic industry mergers have left far fewer major publishers. A blockbuster mentality severely limits demand for new titles from newer authors. As any notorious publishers committee will tell you, your subject is either "unproven" or the market is "saturated". And, of course, when you sell some yourself ahead of time, you are guilty of the unpardonable sin of "skimming."

The committees will usually sit on your manuscript for 15 months. Then tell you the title is "not timely".

For decades now, the IRS has *paid publishers to shred books*. Due to arcane inventory tax rules which have totally decimated backlists. In exactly the same manner as paying farmers not to grow crops.

The chain bookstores often replace the Mom-and-Pops. While they still stock an average of 60,000 volumes, they now carry 10 copies each of 6000 titles instead. And there's usually a strict 22 week limit on any book's shelf space. If it doesn't move by then, the book is history.

Just like wilted vegetables on the produce shelf.

Traditional publishing only makes sense when you are *certain* that you can sell *at least* several thousand copies of your text. *And* that the text will have a useful lifetime of *at least* three years or more.

Your first route here is to approach a book publisher and seek out a contract. They should handle all aspects of book creation and distribution at no cost to you. And even may provide you with an advance. For this risk reduction, your return will, at best, be pennies per title. You can find the better publishers by studying ads in relevant mags.

Or by scanning *Books in Print* at the library.

A second route is to *publish* yourself. But hire a *printer* to create the actual volumes for you. Charges of $4000 for 2500 volumes are typical. *Never* use a local printer or a jiffy-printer! *Always* go to a printer that specializes *only* in producing the kinds of books in the kinds of quantities you are after. While I've used both *Gilliland* and *BookCrafters*, I've had serious problems with both of them. I'll probably go with *Thomson-Shore* on the next go-round.

When you publish yourself, you get to keep the author's profit, the publisher's profit, the distributor's profit, the packager's profit, and the retailer's profit.

Uh, that's *if* there are any profits at all. The risks are way higher. But so is the reward.

The big problem when you self publish is distribution. Most bookstores refuse to deal with smaller presses. Your best choice is often to go with the specialized direct-mail outfits that zero in on one in-depth subject.

By the way, any self-published title *must* have an ISBN number. *And* a bar code. Otherwise no store, school, or library will go even remotely near it. You get these ISBN numbers from *R. R. Bowker*.

A third route is to build your own in-house book print shop. But this could easily become an all-consuming and tail-wagging-the-dog passion. One that locks you in to doing old things in old ways.

More info on book marketing in BOOKMARK.PDF and 1001REVS.PDF on *www.tinaja.com* One fine alternate publishing magazine is *FactSheet Five*.

Toner

Toner is the key to newly emerging *Book-on-demand* production. In which titles are printed and sold only *when and as ordered*. The BOD per-volume cost is more or less constant. Compared with an initially ridiculously higher but steeply declining per-volume cost for ink. I'd place the breakeven for BOD today at 1500 sales.

The centermost secret to BOD publishing is to use a PostScript speaking laser printer. More specifically, you want a printer that internally has genuine Adobe PostScript level II or higher; has a companion hard disk; a high speed *bidirectional* interface; provides a resolution of 600 DPI or better; includes a page flipping duplexer; costs less than 0.1

cent per page side for toner; has service manuals readily available; includes easy toner cart recycling; runs at least 12 pages per minute; allows for simple maintenance; and optionally handles 11 x 17 pages; does nice grays; makes pages up fast; and handles photo halftones well.

The first machine to meet most of these needs was the superb *Hewlett Packard* 4M+. Lacking only the essential hard disk and an oversize print capability.

We can shortly expect a 5M+ that will deliver the hard disk. Your hard disk allows unattended overnight printing. Besides storing fonts and book chapters. And in addition to a tremendous font cache rendering speedup.

But the "best" BOD machine today is the 5SiMX. Which has *all* of the above features. I've only had one of these for a week now. But it seems absolutely ideal.

Admittedly, the 5SiMX is a tad pricey, being in the $4K street price range. To put that cost in perspective, four or five of these used in parallel can completely blow away a $235,000 Xerox DocuTech!

After years of foot dragging, toner cartridges today are finally easily and fully refillable. Good sources of supply appear in *Recharger Magazine*. The best source for laser printer repairs and training is *Don Thompson*. One source I use for toner is *Static Control Products*.

Book-on-demand binding options have recently gotten a lot better. But there sure is a long way to go.

The best binding solution I've found so far is Unibind's *Pentabind*. You drop all your sheets inside the Pentabind coverlet and your real cover on the outside. Then whap it in the Unibind toaster for half a minute. This gives you a hot glue spine-lettered perfect binding.

Other alternatives? *Planax* has just the peel-and-stick hot glue strips, but only at obscene prices. They also have a new and very strong cold glue system. It sets up fast, based on a "pressure dewatering" chemical reaction. The neatest new lay-flat binder scheme is called *Otabind*. But this has yet to penetrate the low end market very much.

Your smallest and cheapest "real" perfect binder is that *Standard Bind-Fast 5*. These are sometimes findable used for under $1000.

And for quick-and-dirty jobs, there's still that good old *Personal Velobinder*. Non-perfect and limited to 30 pages or so. At a quarter a binding.

For more info on binding options, try *Quick Printing* magazine, the national *Printer's Hot Line* shopper or such regionals as *HorseTrader* or *California Printer*.

Much more on BOD in my *Book-on-demand* resource kit and in hundreds of files newly up on *tinaja.com*

Electrons

Of all these publishing alternatives, online hypermedia publishing is the *only* one which has solved the distribution problem. Utterly, totally, and completely. Your message can instantly leap around the world. Entirely free of any agent, packager, producer, distributor, or retailer slurps. And free of hidden ajendas. Intimately linked to everything else ever said on the subject. The cost for distributing extra and absolutely "perfect" copies is zero.

Sadly, so is the perceived value. *People buy books but steal software!* And 99+ percent of all Internet content is appallingly vapid grunge.

Just because there's untold millions of people on line,

there's no guarantee any of them will spend any time with you. Exactly what do you have to offer that *cybersluts.com* does not? Technical expertise surely is their forte.

It's tricky to keep ownership of your online material. It's even more tricky to generate a positive cash flow.

Firstoff, you will want to become Internet literate. Know and understand the power and the limits of this outstanding new media. Secondly, *know your goals*. Provide a mix of "demand pull" advertising and other free materials.

The key secret is to make your site so good and so much in demand that they won't mind paying you for obviously valuable additional info. And to *tightly* link that info back to other site content.

Keep most of your screens simple and very informative. Delivering succinct but nontrivial "byte sized" messages. Favor a landscape mode. Make extensive use of hypertext links. Internal, external, and email.

Getting paid for your work can be tricky. It certainly is easy to spend countless thousands of hours on your content generation and programming time. Only to have all of it instantly stolen. With zero cash return.

The payment options include a per-download charge, a monthly subscription fee, or a flat yearly access charge. Or to charge for conventional manuals, support, upgrades, or non-crippled program versions. Java applet passwords can separate the charged areas on your site. Online cybercash payment schemes are not yet fully in place.

It is ludicrously absurd to call HTML a language. At best it is a *crayon*. A dull, sticky, and melted one that goes out of its way to studiously *prevent* your viewer from seeing what you want in exactly the way you want them to. Once past your home page, you should *immediately* switch to Adobe's *Acrobat 3.0*. Supported by *Java* applets.

As nearly everyone else, I've found *Netscape Gold* to be a powerful (and free) online editor. Yeah, you do have to learn at least a little HTML. But mostly to appreciate how mesmerizingly putrid it is.

I do my own online publishing at my *www.tinaja.com* web site. Be sure to check the tech library downloads here to see all the obvious and dramatic differences between Acrobat and HTML. You can pick up a free copy of Gold at *netscape.com* Or get Acrobat at *adobe.com*

Video

Video watchers are passive, easily bored, and demand to be entertained. Their attention span is that of an overripe grapefruit. Thumbs nervously hover over the *fast forward* and *eject* buttons on their remotes. They would much rather rent than buy. Or scam their own dupes.

Still, video can be a good route for highly graphic "how to" explanations. Or where animations, advanced graphics, or special effects are needed. Effects which go way beyond what you can easily offer on a computer screen.

Although high-end consumer cameras are getting pretty good, you will still get the best results using *Betacam* or a similar "professional" or "ENG" grade camera. The main reason is a lower *generation loss* as the editing dups and copies are made. *Always* use a minimum of two cameras. Use rolling tripods when and where possible. *Always* use a wireless microphone for principal speakers. A bad sound track will ruin your vid. Watch your continuity.

There are three routes to editing: *Cuts only*, *A-B Roll*,

and *Nonlinear*. Cuts-only lets you cheaply switch between video sources and nothing more. With A-B roll, you can add fades, wipes, and similar special effects. But nonlinear is infinitely superior. To the video folks "nonlinear" means the same as "random access" to us. You simply place all the digitized footage you think you'll need from all of the sources you want onto one or more humongous hard disks.

Then put what you want where you want

By far the best low-end editing machine today remains the NeweTek *Video Toaster*. But Mac and PC solutions are certainly coming on strong. Especially those associated with *PhotoShop*, *Illustrator*, and *Premier*. The NewTek *Video Flyer* is one good nonlinear solution.

My own older *Introduction to PostScript* video has done surprisingly well. It was pre-Toaster and is pretty much along on its product lifetime curve. I have found Mike or Cathy at *Black Range Films* to be a useful help source for self-published videos. *Polyline* is a great supplier for video cases, mailers, and such. Handy mags here include *TV Technology* and *Video Toaster User*.

CD Rom

Of today's publishing alternatives, CD ROM is your most certain route to financial ruin. The abysmal results of everybody else's klutzy and klunky "shovelware" insipid drivel pretty much guarantees this. The perceived value per byte of content or per hour of effort is quite low.

On the other hand, CD ROM lets you freely mix and match the printed word, graphics, live video, animation, interactive gaming, and audio. CD's can be easily full text searched, are copy resistant, interactive, and offer at least some touchy-feely pride of ownership. That huge memory space of CD ROM excells at archival storage of catalogs, ap notes, and data sheets.

CD ROM is also great for what I'll call *agglomeration*. Where you combine many limited interest or specialized items into a single marketable product. Those "type on call" disks are a good example. The world wide demand for Fluggelhoffer Bold may be rather dismal. But combine it with 10,000 other fonts, and you've got a winner.

My own CD ROM experience is still somewhat limited. I'm helping a museum put their priceless negatives onto *Kodak Photo-CD*. As a pilot project, I may do a Mount Graham tramway historical CD that combines these with live video, and graphics. Plus historical docs.

There are several routes towards CD ROM publishing. First and foremost, be sure to pick up lots of Photoshop and Photo CD experience ahead of time. And most especially Adobe Acrobat. Pay *extreme* attention to making your end user's experience pleasant and seamless.

You can then go to a service bureau to make you, say, 200 CDs for $990. Plus $2 per disk or so for additional copies. Or, you can buy your own CD writer for about the same price. And slowly make your own one-off recordable copies at $6 per disk or so.

One alternate CD title house is *Walnut Creek*. Additional CD ROM and multimedia resources are in RESBN45.PDF.

A Contest

Tell me about your alternate publishing experiences. As usual, there'll be an *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* to the dozen finest entries. Along with an all expense paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two going to the very best of all. Let's hear from you. ❖

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 33 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and various services.

Don has a free new catalog crammed full of his latest insider secrets waiting for you. Your best calling times are 8-5 weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.

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