

Your Book Printer is Your Best Friend

**The expertise you need is free for the asking...
and printers WANT you to ask!**

by Michele DeFilippo

Book printing is one of the largest expenses in publishing. That's why it's so important to talk to—and learn from—the folks who do it every day. At a recent Arizona Book Publishing Association dinner, representatives from four book printers shared their knowledge of the printing process, offered the vendor's perspective on choosing a book manufacturer, and emphasized the benefits of early communication with your printer. Here's what they had to say:

Planning your project upfront will prevent many production problems later on. To avoid delays and unplanned-for costs, your book should be designed with your printer's requirements in mind. It's much easier (and less expensive) to submit your job with the correct file formats, halftone adjustments, fonts, trim sizes, bleeds, and more than to ask your printer's pre-press department to fix problems at the last moment and delay production.

Printers consider it a major annoyance when they receive a quote request that is also sent to 50 other printers. It tells them right away that this quote is from a person new to the industry, who probably assumes that all printers are alike, and who will make a decision based on price alone. There are many variables from printer to printer on any job and even if you did get 50 responses—which you probably won't—it would be impossible to compare them.

Paper is one of your largest costs and it's a good idea to choose one of the printer's "house" stocks for greatest economy. Everyone should talk to their printing representative early and often to ensure a smooth book-printing experience.

Regarding the "business" side of printing, the signed quote is a *contract* and it's important to review and understand every detail of the agreement before signing up. For example, if your quote is based on

"trouble-free" files, then you can expect extra charges if your files require intervention to print properly. No printer will begin a job without a signed bid.

The brand of cover cloth you choose for a case-bound book can make a big difference in the price, so it's important to pay attention to this detail on your quote. (Rainbow cloth vs. Arrestox B can result in a \$1,000 difference on 2,000 books.)

It's also extremely important to review your printer's proof very carefully. Every printer considers this proof the "Bible," and once you sign off on it, this is what you will get, even if you overlooked something or it's the printer's mistake.

Turnaround time should be discussed with your printing representative well in advance of submitting your job. If you need books by a certain date, it is *your* responsibility to inform the printer so your job can be scheduled accordingly. You'll pay extra for rush service.

The issue of "overs and unders" is often misunderstood. A printing press cannot be "stopped on a dime" like a copier. About 5–10% more books than ordered must be printed to allow for "make-ready" on press and for spoilage in the bindery. If these "overs" are not spoiled, printers offer them to the customer at a discount price. "Unders" are deducted from your final invoice.

It's important to specify "residential" or "loading dock" delivery when you request a quote, as residential delivery costs more. Most book manufacturers negotiate large discounts with freight companies and don't mark up this service, so you won't save money by arranging for your own freight.

Like any business, printers reserve their best prices and terms for repeat customers. Establishing a positive long-term relationship with your printer pays you back in dollars as well as in peace of mind.

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POD books (which are basically a bound photocopy) may give you a good book and may give you a bad book. Most book manufacturers will help you obtain a limited number of POD books, but these are not as durable as an ink-on-paper offset-printed book. As with any photocopy, the image can rub off or stick to plastic materials when exposed to heat or pressure.

Book printers recommend that publishers work with an experienced book designer who understands the peculiarities of book design. Graphic designers who don't have book design experience can create an "over-designed" book that can be costly and sometimes even impossible to print. Even though Word files can be converted to PDF and printed, Word does not compose type as well as a page layout program, so this is not the recommend way to go.

So how do you "qualify" a book printer? The first step is to understand that book printing is a custom operation, not a commodity. Each book is unique and each book manufacturer is unique in terms of equipment, customer service and capabilities. It's important to match the book with the manufacturer.

Just as customers select vendors through the quoting process, printers select their customers through pricing. If you don't know what you're talking about when you request a quote, the printer will immediately know that you're likely to be a "high maintenance" customer and will price the job accordingly. Working through an experienced book designer who speaks the language of printing will benefit you in the long run, because the printer knows he will receive correctly-prepared files.

So how do you become a desirable customer? Do your homework before you ask for quotes. Rather than shotgun a quote to 50 printers you know nothing about, ask your peers who they recommend for book printing. Choose a few printers to research thoroughly. Ask for an equipment list to make sure your book fits their capabilities. Ask for references. Check with Dunn and Bradstreet to make sure the company is healthy. Visit the plant. Is it clean and organized? Meet with your Customer Service Representative, who is your

advocate in the plant. Do you feel this person truly cares about your book?

Once those tasks are completed, you should ask for a quote only from those printers who are qualified and who make you feel most comfortable. Knowing that the printer will "be there" for you throughout the process will give meaning to the numbers you receive. Following this procedure will also let your printer know that you are a serious customer, and every printer wants serious, repeat customers.

After your book is printed, conduct an evaluation and discuss any problems that may have occurred with your representative to learn how they can be avoided in the future.

Most of all, remember that all printers want to do a good job and want you to succeed, because your success is their success. Everyone should think of a printer representative as a "free consultant" who will gladly help you through the intricacies of the book manufacturing process.

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