



Print on Demand: what is it?

by
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Print on Demand or POD is revolutionizing the publishing industry. Everyone has heard of it, few have tried it. All of us wonder what it is, who it is for, if it is worth considering, and what are the drawbacks, if any.

POD's laser technology and electronically formatted text allows books to be printed one at a time rather than in the print runs of several thousand copies that fill warehouses and self-published authors' garages. POD is used mostly by subsidy (vanity) publishers, authors who want to self-publish, and electronic publishers who offer POD as a way to produce print versions of their e-books.

The advantages are obvious: no major financial outlay for traditional printing at the outset, no inventory to house, and no fear of heavy returns or remaindering. But authors need to be careful - there are disadvantages. Questionable companies exist out there too and POD is not suitable for all types of books.

POD's production costs per copy are higher than that of traditional printing - quite a bit higher. If you are self-publishing, this means that if you can sell more than 300 copies, the traditional method will be cheaper for you. Likewise, if your book is longer than 200 pages or has many colour illustrations. However if your book needs frequent revision, like manuals or companion volumes for workshops and seminars, POD is ideal because changes can be made easily, though for a fee.

Authors considering POD should also be careful when choosing a company. Most offer an array of printing services, from very basic to quite sophisticated. None offer editing, unless they are also a commercial publishing house. Fees vary widely - from \$99.00 to over \$1700.00 USD and may include cover design, formatting, ISBNs, CIP data, etc., and may not. Most companies sell your book through their websites and may have arrangements with Amazon.com and other online bookstores. Most do minimal promotion and so expect you to take up the slack yourself.

POD companies do not pay advances but do pay royalties, often much higher than print publishers, and you may be able to recover your initial POD fees if you sell lots of copies.

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