

Self-Published Authors Must Take Care To Pick the Right Printer For Their Books

Lots of careful thought and a solid dose of research are essential when selecting a printer for your book. It took months, perhaps years, to craft your masterpiece. It would be a shame to clothe it in second class attire.

The first impression a reader gets as he/she takes your book down from the retailer's shelf comes from the cover. You know that from all the reading you've done in school or during those years before you retired and began to write. Indeed, the cover frequently will make or break a decision to buy. Even the best designed cover can be shattered by poor press work. The interior text too is equally susceptible to a second rate printing job.

Digital vs Offset

Before we discuss the actual specifications of your printing requirements, it is important to understand the difference between the two primary processes for printing a book. Offset printing transfers ink from a flat plate to a rotating blanket that makes contact with the paper. It is the ideal system for printing long runs of more than 2,000 copies.

Beginning in 1990, a new technology was marketed that was practical and cost-efficient for much smaller press runs. Digital printing receives its input matter electronically and uses ink dots to replicate what it receives. It is the perfect solution for press runs ranging from 2,000 down to as little as ten copies.

Planning Your RFP

By understanding the difference in these two printing processes, you have narrowed the field and can target the category of printer you anticipate needing. But as you prepare to contact more than one printer for quotations, all aspects of the job must be identical for comparison purposes. Take as much time as you need to determine what to include in your Request for Proposal (RFP), that you present to the printers you select.

Include all of this information to enable you to make a wise choice?

1. What format can the printer's equipment accept when you submit your manuscript?
2. Submit pricing requests for several lengths of press runs to help you determine the most economical run for your book.
3. What proofs does the printer normally offer? You must at least have a *blueline proof* (final proof before printing).
4. Delivery. It is important to know the approximate cost of shipping the finished books to the one or more locations you specify. Books are heavy and transportation is costly. It is also important to know how these shipments will be packed to eliminate damage in transit.

Determining Quantity

The decision on the number of books you order is based on two factors. Obviously you

will have to estimate the quantity you need based on pre-publication sales, any bulk sales commitments, the usage your distributor anticipates from book retailers, as well as other considerations such as special promotions you plan to run.

The second factor that looms large is price. The cost of printing goes down dramatically as press runs increase in size. This is because it takes the same initial pre-press preparation whether the run is 2,000 or 10,000. If you plan to sell your book in retail stores and through the online booksellers, your price must be competitive, and it may be more prudent to order a somewhat larger press run to bring the price down. That is why it was important in the RFP to ask for quotes on several different quantities.

It also means that you must try and develop as many commitments as possible prior to publication so that you can bump up the size of the press run. You can negotiate with book clubs, mass marketers, businesses and organizations that you feel can use your book. That is one of the reasons why the ARC (Advance Review Copy), which we will discuss shortly, is so important. It is the selling tool to accomplish these pre-press deals.

The following chart will demonstrate effectively how the press run sets the price:

<u>Press Run</u>	<u>250</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>700</u>	<u>1000</u>
<u>Total Cost</u>	\$2572	\$2859	\$3099	\$3399
Cost per copy	\$10.29	\$5.72	\$4.42	\$3.33

You can see here that the drop in price from 250 to 500 copies is so great, it would make no sense not to buy the addition quantity. In the case of the other levels, the temptation to order more heavily is far less.

Advance Review Copies

When printing a book, there are two different press runs to consider. Some printers can offer you both. The ARC, which we mentioned earlier, requires a short run, perhaps 50 to seldom more than 100 books. These are in essence galley proofs bound in the book cover to give certain reviewers an opportunity see the book even before it is in completely finished condition. The ARC also becomes the author's tool to sell mass marketers, book clubs and other major users prior to the final printing.

The most prestigious book reviewers, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *New York Times*, *Library Journal* and others require review copies about three months before publication date. ARCs can also be used effectively to obtain endorsements and blurbs for both your back cover and the interior pages of your book.

Primary Press Run

Several months should follow distribution of the ARCs, during which hopefully favorable reviews will be posted. That is an ideal time to speed up your promotional activities while

developing the pre-publication sales that can substantially bump up your press run. If your final run builds to 2,500 or more, you'll be using offset printing.

With a little care and persistence, you can guarantee a quality appearance for your book even if your technical knowledge of printing is minimal. But be certain that the final printer you choose comes well recommended.