

Since its arrival on the publishing scene, POD has provoked more controversy than any other segment of the industry. That's not surprising since the digital technology it utilizes is as revolutionary as Guttenberg's invention of the printing press. POD does what the traditional publishing houses could never do to answer the needs of neophyte authors who require short print runs of their books at minimal costs.

## **For Wannabe Authors Choosing POD Is An Ideal Way To Publish Your First Book**

by Charles Jacobs

It sounds sweet and easy...and for many authors it is. Long the bete noire of the publishing world, Publishing on Demand (POD) has rapidly gained acceptance and even a degree of prestige. It can serve as a solid introduction to the publishing process for anyone tackling a first book.

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POD does what the staid, traditional publishing houses can never do. It answers the needs of neophyte authors who require short print runs of their books at minimal costs. I always recommend it strongly as a wise starting point whenever I speak to organizations of retirees because so many of them hope to write a memoir for very limited distribution to friends and family.

The POD house will shepherd you through every step of the publishing process and handle all of the nitty gritty that is so confusing and time consuming to beginners. Once you submit your manuscript. The company will format it properly, design a cover for your approval, obtain all necessary certifications (Library of Congress Cataloguing, ISBN, Copyright, etc), print the book and place it with a major distributor or wholesaler. Of course, they charge a fee for doing all of this.

### **The ISBN Controls**

Most beginners don't realize that the owner of the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) controls all financial aspects of the book. POD houses are profit-driven businesses that too frequently mislead unsuspecting authors by promoting the high level of control the author exercises over production and distribution. This assertion by a leading POD house is typical, "Authors retain all rights and control decisions around the publishing and marketing of their book,"

While it is true that authors do control some decisions, such as selecting the royalty plan they prefer, those decisions are ultimately controlled by the ISBN holder. For example, most houses offer their authors the choice of 5, 10 or 15% royalty on sales. However, the royalty you choose determines the retail price of the book. The larger the royalty, the

higher the retail price, and all POD books normally cost well more than those produced by traditional or self-publishing.

The actual dollar return to the author is controlled by the high profit level the publisher sets for itself. Rest assured that the house will not reduce its profit level simply because you want a higher royalty payment. That usually means that choosing anything higher than a 5% royalty will force a retail price well above the competitive average. It will also make bulk sales impossible because of the high per-copy cost.

The following chart was produced by a major POD house for a 300-page paperback. It should make all of this clearer by showing you the wide discrepancy between the income the publisher derives from sales and the minuscule return left for the author. That's despite the fact that the author initially paid a substantial production fee to the publisher.

#### BOOKS SOLD ON THE POD HOUSE'S WEB SITE

<u>Royalty % to Author</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>30%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>10%</u>
<u>POD House Web site Price</u>	<u>\$17.50</u>	<u>\$12.50</u>	<u>\$11.50</u>	<u>\$10.50</u>
<u>Payment to Author</u>	<u>\$ 8.75</u>	<u>\$ 3.75</u>	<u>\$ 2.30</u>	<u>\$ 1.05</u>

#### BOOKS SOLD THRU RETAILERS

<u>Royalty % to Author</u>	<u>15%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>5%</u>
<u>POD House Web site Price</u>	<u>\$18.95</u>	<u>\$15.95</u>	<u>\$14.95</u>
<u>Payment to Author</u>	<u>\$ 2.84</u>	<u>\$ 1.95</u>	<u>\$ .74</u>

Despite the wide differences in profit, POD houses offer a valuable service, not available just a few years ago when very costly vanity presses dominated the self-publishing world. They perform a much-needed service particularly for authors who seek only very short press runs. Additional copies are always available, as needed, due to the digital technology with which these short runs are printed.

#### **Choosing a POD**

With competition rapidly increasing, POD publishers differ greatly in their offerings so it is important to select carefully. Almost all maintain active web sites. Head to the Internet and enter "POD Publishers." You will find a great deal of objective guidance about the industry in addition to the web sites of POD houses.

The most basic POD program offers production of a paperback or hard cover book. The production fee is based on the size of the book. As a guide to determining size, consider that a 70,000-word document translates into a book of about 300 pages. Promotional programs, printing of PR materials (bookmarks, postcards, etc), editing and other services

are available at an additional cost.

Be wary when choosing the additional programs. The canned press releases the POD houses offer in their promotional programs are basically worthless. You may be able to purchase the printed PR materials referred to above for less money at your local printer.

You can see that POD is not the path to pursue if you are seeking a major financial return on the book you worked slavishly over for the past year or so. But it serves as a marvelous introduction to the book publishing process for a neophyte writer, as well as a much-needed resource for the one-book author with limited distribution plans. That makes it the route of choice not just for first-timers. It makes sense for those writing a memoir for limited distribution, as so many retirees and seniors choose to do.