Publishing Distribution Practices: New Insights About Eco-Friendly Publishing, Sustainable Printing and Returns, and Cost-Effective Delivery in the U.S.

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Accepted: 8 April 2022 / Published online: 5 May 2022
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and highlighted the problems and opportunities within the book publishing industry’s distribution practices. This is a summary of the Publishing Distribution Practices report, researched and produced in collaboration with Portland State University, Independent Book Publishers Association, and PubWest. This article addresses research and recommendations for becoming carbon neutral, delivering books cost effectively, utilizing print-on-demand, minimizing returns, and examining supply chain issues raised by the pandemic. Findings include starting with paper and emissions assessment for more eco-friendly publishing; emphasizing pre-orders, local and discounted delivery, trade organization membership, and POS systems for cost-effective delivery; limiting outsourcing to restrict supply chain disruptions; reducing print runs and promoting books more effectively to minimize returns; and utilizing print-on-demand for proof copies and gap runs.

Keywords Carbon neutral · Print-on-demand · COVID-19 pandemic · Returns · Supply chain · Bookstores

Introduction

The Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) and PubWest partnered with Portland State University’s Graduate Program in Book Publishing to conduct and analyze qualitative research to help the book industry improve distribution practices.

There are several industry problems that were identified as creating barriers and difficulty for good distribution practices in publishing. These problems include the following:
Offset printing is designed to support over-ordering because of economies of scale, so authors and publishers print more than they need to take advantage of lower per unit costs.

Print-on-demand is expensive and getting more expensive.

The quality of print-on-demand for four-color is not good.

Some offset printers can do digital runs, but the publishers have to have a warehousing solution to take advantage of them.

Publishers intentionally flood the market with excessive quantities of their lead titles (with big marketing campaigns) to make a show for said lead titles. Bookstores have nothing to lose by taking these buys because of the industry returns policy.

The publishing industry remains largely entrenched in a traditional trade distribution model despite significant changes in consumer purchasing habits and increased technology capabilities for electronic order management.

The global pandemic accelerated existing, growing supply chain challenges that include the closing and repurposing of paper mills, labor shortages in the graying field of print manufacturing, distributor consolidation, and the exponentially rising costs of materials and transportation.

Based on these industry problems, the executive directors of IBPA and PubWest, along with the IBPA sustainability working group, created research questions for the PSU students to investigate, under the supervision of Dr. Rachel Noorda.

What needs to be done to make book printing truly carbon neutral by 2050?

As consumer buying habits further migrate from retail to online, what does efficient and cost-effective delivery of print books to readers look like going forward?

Although COVID-19 did not create the book industry’s supply chain problems, it certainly exacerbated them. What chinks in the book industry’s armor were most exposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

What’s stopping the industry from embracing POD as the preferred means for printing non-illustrated, black-and-white trade books?

How can the book industry decrease the returns rate for books sold into trade channels from an average of 30% to an average of 15% (or less)?

Five groups of graduate book publishing students investigated these research questions through a mixture of secondary research, interviews, and survey data. Their findings are particularly relevant to small- to medium-sized publishers but are also important for independent bookstores.

**Becoming Carbon Neutral**

What needs to be done to make book printing truly carbon neutral by 2050? Carbon neutrality (CN) indicates that there is net-zero release of CO₂ in the atmosphere. In practice, this means that no fossil fuels were used, the manufacturing did not
interfere with natural systems for processing carbon, and no greenhouse gasses were released into the atmosphere during production [1]. In the U.S., there is currently no way to produce truly carbon neutral paper products. But that does not mean publishers can’t aim for producing low carbon products now, with the goal of CN in the long term. To analyze this, CN has been broken down into two parts: materials and capital/labor.

The material prices, manufacturing, handling, and distribution are primarily handled by mills, paper brokers, and printing presses [2, 3]. For CN to be achieved, one needs to know the following:

**Print & Plant, and Pulping**

This is a common method by publishers where a new tree is planted for every one that is cut down, as seen in Fig. 1. While this solution does help limit emissions, it is not enough in the long-term due to a variety of factors. One such factor is that only 50% of trees that are cut down actually get turned into paper; most are used as fuel for pulping. Pulping describes two processes: pulping timber to make paper and destroying books that have already been bound. Theoretically, the latter could be used to make more books, but the pulp from already bound books is typically not reusable to make PCW paper due to the glue and ink used, as well as the infrastructure capabilities of the press.

**Virgin Paper, and Post Consumer Waste (PCW) Paper**

Virgin Paper (VP) is paper that has never been used before, while PCW is made out of recycled paper. Producing VP requires four times the amount of CO₂ per ton and uses enough energy to run an average U.S. home for 2 months, when compared to 100% PCW paper [4]. This is the main area where change can be made, and waste can be reduced by using as much PCW as possible [5, 6].

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**Fig. 1** Currently used eco-friendly printing practices reported

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Waste Run Off/Emissions and Energy

Currently, paper production is the third highest industry in the consumption of fossil fuels [7], and second largest emitter of greenhouse gasses. The industry is also one the largest pollutants for the environment, producing large amounts of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury, and other carcinogens. Other than the use of harvesting and using paper, this is the factor that has the biggest ecological impact [8–11].

Capital in this paper is defined as the monetary return on investment for publishers to shift to CN printing options, which are considered expensive currently by most small to midsize publishers. One of our respondents in our survey stated that "the cost and availability of PCW paper is especially problematic for highly illustrated books and small print runs (5000 or less)." And more expressed that the cost and availability of materials was their main barrier in achieving CN, as seen in Figs. 2 and 3. In short, without an increased demand from the publishers for printers to use PCW paper, it will continue to be expensive and hard to find. If imprints of the Big Four used PCW paper, prices would eventually drop. Some,
like Macmillan, are already doing so. It might also be pertinent to increase investments into legislation to build infrastructure to process waste effectively, due to paper being the single largest component of landfills in the U.S. [12, 13].

Labor includes those working in the printing industry, those working for the publishers, and even the machines and tools used to print. Labor has a significant impact on CN due to the consumption of materials. Changing editing and production methods would minimize the carbon impact of labor. Examples include, using PDF files for manuscripts, and advanced reader copies. The “print first, sell later” production model also needs to be retired. This model often creates a surplus that needs to be stored, transported, or even pulped later on. Encouragingly, we saw some publishers already starting to do this in our survey when asked on how they are reducing their pulping numbers, which can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

| Table 1  Tracking pulping | Do you keep track of how many books you pulp due to damages and returns? How? | Responses |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| No                        |                                                                              | 4         |
| Yes                       |                                                                              | 1         |
| Yes, through our warehouse reports |                                                               | 1         |
| Our distributor does this for us |                                                              | 1         |
| Yes, distributor provides this information |                                                        | 1         |
| Pulp very few books. Only damaged ones |                                                        | 1         |
| The publisher does, through I’m not sure how and what the numbers are |                                                      | 1         |
| We do                    |                                                                              | 1         |

| Table 2  Avoiding pulping books | Do you have any practices in place to avoid pulping books? If so, what? | Responses |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| No                            |                                                                        | 2         |
| Yes, we sell hurts to partners |                                                                  | 1         |
| Yes                           |                                                                        | 1         |
| We’re modest with print runs and don’t agree to promotion with mass merch accounts that don’t have a track record of high sell through | 1         |
| Remaindering and re-selling old stock to authors |                                     | 1         |
| Yes, we attempt remaindering and donating before recycling |                                     | 1         |
| We do not have a specific initiative for recovering books, but try to prevent waste by ordering in small print runs and reprinting after the first print run is close to selling out so we know how the book has been received, where we can sell it, etc | 1         |
| Yes. We remainder; we print fewer books; we are very careful with inventory |                                              | 1         |
| We rarely pulp and instead offer them as premiums to customers |                                              | 1         |
| We try to print conservatively so that first print runs are around a 1-year supply, with reprints on autoprint thereafter for most titles. Books printed as clothe only first go through the NIP process but then autoprint thereafter to keep stock in line with demand | 1         |
Due to the lack of investment in eco-friendly infrastructure by publishers, the costs of switching to greener practices are currently high. Companies will need to invest in research, development and legislation of more sustainable practices. In order to reach CN, careful consideration needs to be given to what energy sources are used and environmental stewardship needs to be emphasized. Otherwise the U.S. printing system could collapse into itself. The below are just recommendations for publishers to start working towards greener practices. For examples of businesses already doing these practices look to: Cascades, Chelsea Green, Berrett-Koehler, Hemlock, Macmillan, Patagonia, and Rolland Sustana Group [14, 15].

Findings and Recommendations

Start with Paper: PCW, Paper Weights, Prices, and Print-on-Demand

As mentioned above, paper is one of the largest contributors to waste and power consumption. Paper weight should also be considered [16], as Macmillan reported significant savings by choosing a lighter paper weight. In addition to paper type/weight, Patagonia recommends trim size should be considered. One may also consider raising book prices to accommodate this. Another way to minimize the use of paper is to utilize POD options rather than running large print runs.

Assess Your Own Emissions

For those who are unsure of where to start, a climate change firm can be hired to assess what areas of the company are producing the highest carbon emissions. If this is too expensive, there are also excellent resources available to help publishers calculate their own emissions [17] (in bibliography).

Cost-Effective Book Delivery

To determine cost-effective book delivery practices, this question was addressed: as consumer buying habits further migrate from retail to online, what does efficient and cost-effective delivery of print books to readers look like going forward?

Currently, there are several selling and delivery models in book publishing, some of which were frequently used during pandemic lockdowns. Many publishers are finding ways to pull in more online direct-to-consumer sales or creating their own bookselling outlets. Additionally, as consumer buying habits further migrate from retail to online, organizations like Bookshop.org aim to create efficient ways for consumers to get their books and at the same time support bookstores.

Another cost-effective marketing tactic is to offer local delivery or pick up, when possible. In Washington D.C. Kramerbooks & Afterwords Cafe is claimed to be using an “unexpected source for book delivery”. Kramerbook uses Postmates, an app known for its traditional use of food delivery, to hand deliver books to readers in the D.C. area [18].
Findings and Recommendations

Pre-orders

To address the supply chain issues discussed in the introduction, publishers, especially smaller publishers, will want to increase advance demand on new titles in order to get high levels of engagement with delivery postponement offers [19]. Delivery postponement in publishing translates to pre-orders for frontlist titles. Essentially, publishers will need to push pre-orders especially hard and make clear in the marketing that if one does not pre-order a new title, they may have to wait longer for it to be back in stock. This pre-order process would allow publishers to have a POD run for pre-orders that they could then advertise as having sold out, further stimulating interest in the book. Having quantities pre-ordered by consumers will allow publishers to order appropriately sized print runs that will decrease shipping costs and potential returns. By using this method, publishers will be able to make print book delivery more cost-effective from a manufacturing as well as a shipping standpoint.

Local and Discounted Delivery

Publishers can make more active contributions toward promoting local delivery among independent booksellers, and programs like Hachette’s with a discount for delivery is a start. Offering discounts to booksellers or consumers for local deliveries would incentivize more local retailers to offer delivery services if they do not already. Or publishers can go the route of creating their own online retailer and partner with a distributor and investors. This would be the least cost-effective to start but could result in delivery times that rival large retailers as seen through BookBook or in exclusive content to draw in your readers in the case of Inverso.pl.

Bookseller associations like Canadian Independent Booksellers Association (CIBA) and the Red de Librerías Independientes (RELI) are great examples of implementing services for booksellers and for consumers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and rising demand for online retail and delivery services. Many of these stores previously did not have an online shop nor the resources to set up one of their own for the delivery of print books. CIBA’s implementation of an online widget through Bookmanager [20] rather than a full storefront for independent bookstores allows them an online presence without the upfront costs associated with a website. A widget may be the most cost-effective way for independent bookstores to advertise their local inventory and then to provide customers with local delivery, but the service is only available in Canada at this time. They are working to expand their U.S. bookstore database to hopefully launch the feature stateside.

Join Trade Organizations

Booksellers should continue to join organizations like CIBA, RELI and the American Booksellers Association (ABA) that have proven victorious results and offer a cost-effective delivery of print books to readers. They could also join forces among
them and follow the models of these ecommerce platforms. A few independent bookstores, if together, might become a stronger organization with bigger potential to offer better delivery options of printed books to readers.

**Incorporate POS System**

We recommend bookstores incorporate their POS system with their web stores. This will allow them to provide information about their available inventory to their customers, fulfilling their expectations and building relationships with their customers.

**COVID-19 and Supply Chain**

The book supply chain had issues before the pandemic, COVID simply aggravaed the book industry’s weak points—and ironically—also caused an increase in demand for books (by 10%). Publishers have not been able to keep up because of the following issues with the supply change. This means books are going out of stock, book publication dates are being pushed back, and booksellers are not able to get the books they’ve ordered.

**Printing**

The problems start with where the production line begins. Where a book is printed is largely dependent on what kind of paper it will use, and this then affects how it will be shipped and distributed. Books that require a lot of colorful/high-res pictures and high-grade paper are printed in Asia; the U.S. doesn’t have those printing capabilities. Currently, in both the U.S. and Asia, there is a paper shortage. This is due to pulp being hard to acquire currently, hence the price of pulp has almost doubled since 2021 and has become scarce. Hence, printing companies and mills have been focusing on packaging grade paper.

**Shipping**

Getting products from Asia has proven to be a lengthy process due to quarantine and labor shortages, so there has been no real guarantees on deadlines. Added to that, these books need to be transported via large ships. Many industries faced a similar issue during the pandemic, so in general the cost of these shipping containers drastically increased at the time, (by over 100%) This was compounded due to industries prioritizing “essential” cargo. China then sent large amounts of medical gear to different ports throughout the world. These shipping containers and ships used to transport these items were not sent back due pre-existing trading frequencies and labor shortages. Other ports became overwhelmed by the number of ships arriving—some ports were so congested that ships were not able to dock. This backfired immensely with the coinciding of the pandemic easing and demand for containers being available for non-essential cargo. This left China having the containers on record to ship...
books but were actually unaccounted for. Prices then spiked again, making it difficult for publishers to afford shipping. This situation was compounded by the shutdown of the Suez Canal in 2021.

These delays were also seen when working with U.S. printers. This is because the number of printers is almost non-existent now compared to their numbers decades ago. Trucking companies also prioritized “essential” cargos. Larger publishers with their budgets were prioritized by companies, leaving smaller publishers to turn to things like downsizing to cut costs to afford shipping. This further aggravated the existing power dynamic between large and indie publishers. All of these factors have led to major delays in the shipment of books.

**Labor**

While the demand for books increased during the pandemic, the availability of people to produce them decreased. This was due to the long-standing systematic issue with underpaid employment in the publishing industry. During a time where people were quitting low-paid jobs in droves, the publishing industry’s supply chain continued to suffer as companies struggled to keep up with raising wages. (For instance, companies like Walmart, can afford to pay employees $19.50 an hour with full benefits). If the industry wants to compete, they will need to be able to keep up with the rising cost of living.

**Solutions**

There are some steps that can be taken to help with these growing problems: transparency, reinvesting in U.S. printers, and using POD. During the pandemic, the book industry in general has been more transparent about its issues. Customers have responded positively to this and prefer to support companies that treat their employees well. As we move forward, this continued transparency between customers, publishers, and workers will be needed for it to survive in the future.

**Many of the Issues in the Book Supply Chain Have One Thing in Common: Outsourcing**

The book publishing process has become dependent on printing and shipping overseas, presumably to cut costs. With shipping prices ten times higher in 2022, we hope to see a turn to U.S. based companies to lower overall printing and shipping costs. However, this switch will not be easy since there are few large book printers left in the U.S. There is no quick solution to this, but we ask as publishers try to find ways to cut shipping costs and manage book project delays, to look at reinvesting in the U.S. printers. This would strengthen the book industry’s supply chain for the future while avoiding the problems of outsourcing overseas.
One Final Alternative is Relying More Heavily on POD, Adding a Third Shift to Printing Schedules, and Having the Entire Process Become More Automated

These adjustments could offer solutions to the gap between industry demand and printer capabilities while printing with U.S. printers, as well as address issues with worker and paper shortages. In the past, the cost of POD has been higher than traditional print runs, but with the less predictable consumer habits of a post-COVID industry, POD may be the thriftier option.

As we recover from the issues we have seen in the industry during the pandemic, it is important to remember these are not totally the effects of COVID but are rather existing problems that have been exacerbated. We are now seeing an opportunity to make widespread changes to how our industry operates and how we create and distribute books. With these changes, we will see positive effects across the industry as we find ever evolving solutions and create a better, more efficient process overall.

Minimizing Returns

The book industry return policy (full refunds from publishers to bookstores of all unsold books within a year) puts undue burden on publishers and promotes inefficiencies and waste in the industry. This section investigates this question: How can the book industry decrease the returns rate for books sold into trade channels from an average of 30% to an average of 15% (or less)? Based on case studies and interview data from both an independent publisher and independent bookseller, we recommend that publishers work together to solve this problem, utilize print on demand, and focus their efforts on book marketing as a way to minimize returns.

According to John Thompson, the average publisher’s returns are at 30%, 5% higher than a decade ago. Additionally, publishers with extensive backlists have lower return rates. For every 100 books that are shipped, thirty to sixty are returned. On average, new books have about 6 weeks to sell and prove themselves. This means that the first 6 weeks of a book’s life is extremely important and marketing should be at its highest to get readers to purchase and prevent returns. Pre-orders are also important in book sales because it prevents an extremely high print run that is not likely to sell [21].

The book industry returns system has been in place since the Great Depression [22]. Since many of the leaders of the paperback revolution had experience with newspapers and magazines, the practices of those industries (stocking new items regularly, unsold newspapers/magazine issues returned for full credit) were adopted [23]. The system was originally developed for what was deemed short-life, disposable goods; newspapers and magazines are only intended to be used as long as its issue is current.

For a manufactured object that may last many years with care, the commercial life of books is very short. The returns policy is generally limited to a year, but “if the book does not generate sales quickly, it is dead, pulled from the shelves in perhaps 6 weeks” [24]. This is likely due to the extreme unpredictability of reader buying habits: “a clustering process takes place among readers, and groups of people
will all buy the same book, but no one knows for sure when and why this occurs” [24]. Nobody knows how long the buzz around a book will last, or how many copies to prepare for it. Inherently, the industry as a whole is based on risk. Editors gamble on manuscripts they hope will ring true with readers, publishers gamble on the print runs and investments in getting the book into the market, booksellers gamble on how many copies to order and with their limited shelf space, and readers gamble that they will enjoy reading the book [24]. The returns process is a reaction in finding where to offset or minimize the risk.

Case Studies: Indie Publisher and Bookseller

According to independent publisher Robyn Crummer-Olson, returns always cost the publisher more than the retail price since the publisher is also charged a restocking fee or destruction fee. At Ooligan Press, Crummer-Olson works to focus on marketing that accurately fulfills the promise of what the book is about to reach the readers and retailers who want it.

Print-on-demand printing is more expensive than offset printing for larger runs but moving mostly or entirely to a print-on-demand model would not necessarily eliminate returns, since print-on-demand books can also be returned by booksellers. More price effective strategies included paying attention to page count and signature to optimize.

Crummer-Olson recommended several possible solutions to the returns problem: (1) partnerships with publishers for deeper discounts for nonreturnable books where the readership and customer base are clear, (2) a hybrid system where debut authors are returnable but authors with proven track records are nonreturnable, and (3) penalties for bookstores overordering and returning too many books.

Indie bookseller Miles worked in the book retail industry for 15 years and offered a perspective on returns from the bookseller side. Miles noted that returns from bookstores are generally based on the amount of time a book sat unsold on precious shelf space. Sometimes returned books weren’t sent back to the publisher, but to another store in the chain, based on information about which titles were selling well at which stores; this only ever applied to books in hardback or paperback format. Bookstores often overorder and would then have too many copies, even if the book sold well. Books are many times returned from bookstores when sales are down and capital was needed to fulfill school book orders or special customer orders. Miles noted that, in his general retail experience, even well-regarded books tended to sell worse if there were many copies on a shelf. For example, even if a Stephen King title was a bestseller, too many on the shelf had customers if nobody wanted them and passing by as well.

Recommendations to Reduce Returns

In 1992, Greco gathered solutions that had been proposed in the industry over time: (1) increase the discount rate and refuse returns, (2) keep the current discount rate and refuse returns, (3) penalize wholesalers with high return rates, (4) reduce print
runs, (5) control the release of new titles, especially in slow moving segments, (6) end or minimize the midlist, (7) focus on flashy titles, (8) convince booksellers not to overorder, and (9) avoid overselling the potential of a book. When he revisited the topic in 2005, his proposed solutions were largely the same, with the addition of encouraging more development in book projects and adopting strategies from other markets. We’d like to focus on reducing print runs through print-on-demand and avoid overselling the potential of a book through better marketing.

POD is relatively new in the publishing world and is a speedier way of getting books on shelves. The question still stands whether POD is a good option to reduce the frequency of books being returned to distributors. Having books available with POD allows distributors to invest less in a large print run, which makes the returns process less complicated. Inventory and warehousing issues are taken into consideration when books are not selling, and POD can help ease the pressure of inventory space which would benefit both the publisher and booksellers. According to Ingram-Spark, many authors and publishers see POD as an expensive investment. However, if we consider the amount of money that is lost in a print run of a book that will ultimately be returned to the distributor’s warehouse in 6 months and then pulped, POD seems like a viable option. Booksellers oftentimes purchase large amounts of books in fear of running out of inventory. This can be a double-edged sword in the business because if that order is not sold it becomes a loss for the bookseller and publisher. If the publishing industry relied more on efficient systems like POD, book returns would become less frequent since bookstores would only be selling the amount of books they requested. POD is not a magic solution to reducing book returns; however, if it can lighten the overstock and warehousing issues that happen in the industry, it’s definitely something that should be collectively considered.

One of the most common issues in regard to returns is poor book promotion. If a book is not marketed properly, it’s more difficult for booksellers to sell books. Readers are very specific in their likes and dislikes. Books are discovered in these ways: self-discovery in-store or online, through promotional materials, and/or bookseller/third-party recommendations. A book with a strong marketing plan sells more copies. If titles were promoted better, booksellers would have less trouble selling products to the public. We can achieve this by having more book launches and analyzing consumer trends on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The reality is there is only so much we can do when marketing books. Getting to know what is popular in the market can secure sales, but nothing is guaranteed.

**Utilizing Print-on-Demand**

Recognizing the diversity of POD use for small- to medium-sized publishers, this section uses four presses as case studies to illustrate the reasons for and barriers to POD implementation.

A questionnaire was distributed to 4 case study Pacific Northwest publishers on their printing practices. While the presses will remain anonymous, we will call them Press 1, Press 2, Press 3, and Press 4.
Press 1 publishes 70 titles per year across nonfiction and fiction, with typical print runs between 5000 and 10,000. Over the past year, the median price for their paperback books has been $14.95 and $17.95 for hardbacks.

Press 2 publishes 4 titles a year across nonfiction, literary fiction, YA, and some genre fiction, with typical print runs between 1800 and 2500. Over the past year, the median price for their paperback books has been $16. They do not publish in hardback format.

Press 3 publishes 2–3 titles per year in fiction and memoir, with typical print runs between 2500 and 3000. Over the past year, the median price for their paperback books has been $17. They do not publish in hardback format.

Press 4 publishes over 40 books per year, with typical print runs between 3000 and 5000. Over the past year, the median price for their hardback books has been $19.95. They do not publish in paperback format.

**Barriers to POD for Publishers**

1. POD printing is more expensive per unit,
2. POD printing provides inferior quality,
3. POD printing offers less flexibility for design and printing options,
4. POD makes returns a hassle,
5. POD reduces the risk of unsold inventory, and
6. POD eliminates storage costs.

**Barriers to Offset Printing for Publishers**

1. Offset printing is a bigger financial risk,
2. Offset printing is less expensive per unit, and
3. Offset printing provides more flexibility for design and printing options.

**Findings and Recommendations**

**Convenience and Speed**

“[POD is] convenient and faster. We can pay for it out of our Ingram account rather than having to pay via invoice and check.”

**Advanced Reader Copies**

“I use POD for advance reader copies; it’s efficient, I can do another run if I need to, and because we’re distributed by PGW, using LSI means the bill just gets factored into my account. It’s easy.”
Proof Copies

“We use [POD] to proof books and create marketing assets.”

Scheduling Back-Up and Filling Gaps

“As backup for offset printing of frontlist titles. Offset printing schedules have been challenging for us, so it helps to have POD just in case.”

“While POD may carry less of a cost upfront when factoring in warehousing and distribution costs, it is overall more cost effective for many publishers to use offset printing, because the per-unit cost is lower and there is a greater quality for the work produced.”

“There is no single answer as to why POD isn’t the preferred method, but there are multiple compelling factors that add up to the conclusion that POD is not yet at a point that it is the most financially viable option on the market. POD may become a more mainstream printing option for independent publishers when the logistical problem of returns is solved and when larger, aspirational publishers adopt the practice of POD themselves, blazing the trail for smaller presses to follow.”

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