

Enhanced technology and wider acceptance are fueling its momentum

# POD Marches On

BY TERI TAN



Rows of Océ digital presses at Lightning Source's LaVergne plant.

**S**hort runs? Check. Print as needed? Affirmative. Near-offset quality? Absolutely. Personalization? Sure. Seriously, what's not to like about POD (print on demand) and, by extension, digital printing? Ask any publisher that has gone POD, and especially self-published authors, and the answer is, go with it.

"On-demand printing is very much in demand in 2009," notes David Taylor, president of Lightning Source, the biggest POD supplier around. "The busi-

ness model, quality and cost structure have matured considerably in recent years. With POD, publishers can better match supply to demand, thus eliminating the risks and costs associated with the book market." All publishers, regardless of size or specialty, he adds, must take a long, hard look at their business fundamentals and cash flow. "A globally distributed print model, where publishers use the same file to print at multiple locations that are closest to the origins of the orders, has given the book industry a platform to publish smarter. POD is no

longer an optional novelty; it is an integral and essential part of the future of publishing."

Best of all, the POD business model is essentially green. "Offset manufacturing requires a relatively large quantity to be printed in anticipation of sales," adds Taylor. "Oft-times, the books go unsold and have to be destroyed, usually after being shipped and handled numerous times. In contrast, with POD, even one copy can be printed to fulfill a firm order or a short run made to replenish stock. This one-book-at-a-time manufacturing substantially lessens supply chain waste, reduces greenhouse emissions, cuts pulping and therefore landfill and conserves valuable natural resources."

For now, digital printing accounts for only 2.5% of North America's total book production. However, "dramatic growth is expected as more publishers come to realize the true benefits of POD. Wiley, an early adopter, for instance, has transferred more than 10,000 titles to the POD model, and that number continues to grow," says Taylor.

Much of the current POD growth is due to vast improvements in digital technology. The gap between digital and offset printing is closing fast. The newer presses are more reliable, with higher quality and greater speed, becoming more like offset presses. Adds Taylor, "The improvement in digital color book manufacturing is obvious. The HP Indigo presses produce superior color books. And with the business model maturing and manufacturing costs falling, we are set to see a substantial increase in digital color book manufacturing."

Meanwhile, press manufacturers such as Xerox, HP, Océ, Xeikon, Kodak and Canon are developing newer and better models. The latest from Xerox (iGen4), HP (Indigo 7000) and Océ (CS Tandem series), for instance, tout higher productivity, sturdier build for longer runs, a wider color gamut and more eco-friendly processes (consuming less electricity and ink). Paper mills, meanwhile, are producing "greener" stocks with better toner/ink adhesion for high-quality, vibrant colors. Check out Casa Opaque

Digital (a recycled stock from Finch Paper) and Luna Digital (an acid-free and elemental chlorine-free stock from Domtar). Xerox and HP have also jumped onto the bandwagon, coming up with papers that are optimized for their presses.

But talk about POD/digital printing often misses out one crucial party: the people who ready the content file for print, such as codeMantra and those featured in *PW*'s Content Services in India report (Mar. 30). Besides scanning out-of-print titles when electronic files are



**Scott Cook**  
*Director of technology at  
codeMantra*

not available, Philadelphia-based codeMantra also offers a service called Universal PDF. "It gives publishers of any size the ability to maximize revenue streams and reach every major distribution channel with one simple and economical format. It enables publishers to efficiently and cost-effectively go into e-book and digital publishing. We also host digital assets and workflow management systems for publishers and POD providers. In short, we manage, convert and deliver their files as needed," says Scott Cook, director of technology, referring to another service, collectionPoint 2.0, which hosts all versions and formats of a publisher's digital assets in one place.

With satellite offices in Connecticut, Ohio, Massachusetts and Indiana as well as three production facilities in India, codeMantra, with 1,500 employees, has

been around for seven years. "Our in-depth knowledge of digital content and Web services has enabled us to offer next-generation publishing services that allow our clients to capitalize on the value of long-tail publishing by digitizing back-lists for new revenue streams. This, in turn, has increased the demand for POD," says president and founder Andy Ananth, who has partnered with such major publishers as Oxford University Press as well as digital content aggregators like Google.

And how can we not mention On Demand Books' patented Espresso Book Machine, which has been installed in 15 locations including the Library of Alexandria in Egypt and Angus & Robertson Bookstore in Australia. This "Book ATM" makes purchasing out-of-print titles as easy as ordering a cup of espresso. Currently, the machine only produces paperbacks with four-color covers, but more options are being brewed.

Right now, the POD supply chain is filled with a sense of urgency for faster, better and cheaper book manufacturing. For single-copy and short runs, nothing can beat POD/digital printing. But will this segment really grow at 16% per annum, as predicted by industry experts?

**“Our in-depth Knowledge of digital content and Web services has enabled us to offer next-generation publishing services that allow our clients to capitalize on the value of long-tail publishing by digitizing back-lists for new revenue streams. This, in turn, has increased the demand for POD.”**

*—Andy Ananth  
President, codeMantra*