

Key issues

Print on-demand



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What is print on-demand?

Print on-demand refers to the printing of single copies of books after the order is received. Some printers stretch the definition to cover ultra-short-run printing of say 25-200 copies, but typical digital 'short-runs' are under 500 copies where 'traditional' lithographic (i.e. not digital) print runs start at 1000 units.

For the text pages most publishers and digital printers are using Adobe portable document format (PDF) files which are optimised at a black and white print resolution of 600dpi. For the colour covers PDF files are used to digitally print in four colours. There is a variety of digital printers and finishing equipment designed to cope with ultra-short-run or one-off printing and binding on the market. IBM and Xerox are currently the market leaders in ultra-short-run print technology.

Why should librarians be interested in print on-demand?

Librarians should take an interest in print on-demand (POD) because, like the commercial success of paperback books in the 1950s, the advent of electronic journals in the 1980s or the start of internet bookselling in the 1990s, POD is challenging some of the established publishing conventions.

Convention No.1 challenged: Sorry it's "Reprint under consideration"

POD keeps more titles and issues available in print for longer and avoids the all too common status of unavailable titles. Print on-demand sometimes refers to any form of short-run digital printing, but true print on-demand takes place when a book or back issue order is first received. That item is then printed and distributed – thereby eliminating any

stock holding and improving the publisher's cashflow. Titles that could not remain available now can, even when the initial print runs have sold out and the cost of conventional reprinting is too high.

Convention No.2 challenged: "Pulp those overprints!"

While publishers may not print enough books or journal issues to meet demand and therefore may run out of stock, many books and issues are actually pulped due to over optimistic sales projections. In due course POD and digital short-run printing will contribute to reducing waste in the industry by eliminating overprinting.

Convention No.3 challenged: "I can't get my book or journal published"

Over the past five years *author services companies* (sometimes called internet publishers) and *micropublishers* have taken off in the US and the UK. Author services offer a publishing service to would-be authors who have not been able to get published by the traditional publishing houses. A micropublisher may only publish five titles per year. Neither can afford the conventional overheads associated with stockholding books and back issues, so POD allows these organisations to make titles available digitally, store them digitally and print them as they are ordered.

Convention No.4 challenged: "Country of origin determines the delivery date"

Many publishers have set-up titles in print on-demand databases to enable more cost effective global distribution. For example import/export orders of a common ISBN between the US and UK do not need to be shipped across the Atlantic when the print ready

files sit in the country and can be printed locally and shipped directly.

Each day publishers around the world are continuing to make more low demand backlist book titles and journal back issues available through print on-demand services. There are approximately 150,000 POD titles available today; three years ago there were only 20,000 titles. You may already have some titles in your library today and more will undoubtedly follow.

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Open days

The Milton Keynes site of Lightning Source UK Ltd will be hosting a series of open days. If you would like to visit the site or organise a group site visit please contact enquiries@lightningsource.co.uk.

The combined sites of Lightning Source Inc (in La Vergne Tennessee, USA) and Lightning Source UK Ltd. (in Milton Keynes, England) are now printing over 300,000 books per month on its seven production lines from a title database in excess of 100,000 titles.