



## Self-Publishing

One of the things that I do not have to be concerned with as the editor of *Optical Engineering* is the actual publication of this journal. Once the manuscripts are accepted for publication, my colleagues on the Board of Editors and I do not have to concern ourselves with the balance of the process. The accepted manuscripts are delivered into the capable hands (computers) of the SPIE journals staff who oversee the actual publication (copyediting, typesetting, printing, and distribution).

Of the three steps of publishing technical work, writing, evaluating, and publishing, I have been involved in the first as an author and in the second as an editor. My involvement in the publication phase of my own textbooks was limited to designing the covers and revising the formatting of the text. This was all done at arm's length and it took weeks to effect any changes.

This past winter and spring all that changed. I published a book. Not my book, but my wife's book on teaching nursing in the clinical setting. Over the years Helen generated and organized notes on guiding faculty members in teaching nursing students in hospitals, clinics, and public-health settings. The clinical assignments are the equivalent of weekly field experience in other areas. However, both students and teachers have the added responsibility of patient safety.

Although several publishers approached Helen about publishing her notes, she was reluctant to submit a manuscript because of the limited audience of faculty and graduate students in nursing schools. It was only after she retired that she finished the book and we became aware of the opportunity to self-publish the text through the Web. She could reach potential readers of her handbook without the formality of commercial publication.

The question was: Which self-publishing operation? It has been some time since I have evaluated these companies, so I'm not sure what has happened since then. I leave it as an exercise for the interested reader to survey the available publishing resources. But at the time, I chose Lulu (<http://www.lulu.com>) because there were no additional costs for figures within the text, as there were with other sites, and the procedures used by Lulu gave me total

control of the book design. In addition, there were no upfront costs for putting a book on the Lulu site. In fact, if an author chooses to permit electronic downloads (e-books) of his or her work, there are no charges to either the author or the reader.

Once a manuscript is prepared in a text processor such as Microsoft Word or Open Office, it is converted to a PDF file for uploading to Lulu's servers. An author can choose from a number of prepared covers and publish the book. However, to maintain control over the formatting, I laid out the text in Adobe InDesign and designed a custom cover in Photoshop. Because of the size of the text and format, we chose a 6- × 9-in. paperback format. There were some glitches in the process that required a series of five proof copies to be printed. With the help of an online chat feature and diligent searches in the discussion forums, these were corrected. We had a readable text with a good-looking color cover.

Each of the publishing resources has its own strategy for making money. In the case of Lulu, it takes 20% of whatever you charge over and above the printing charges. Publication can be in the form of a hardcover or paperback book, a CD, a brochure, or an e-book. In the case of an e-book there is no printing charge. If you want to you can pay \$99 and get an ISBN code that can be placed on the book cover and allows the book to be sold in the commercial market.

One of the most attractive aspects of self-publishing is that you can choose the price at which to sell the book. This not so much a matter of making an enormous profit from a text as it is selecting the price that represents to you and your prospective readers a fair value. One of the problems with Helen's text was that it is in the medical field and such books tend to be very expensive, even an 84-page text. But my wife wanted to keep the price low to allow the widest possible distribution, yet set a nominal cost for something of worth.

Her decision was to permit free download of the e-book version and charge \$10 for the printed version. Granted, someone could download the e-book and print it, but the cost of the printed version was set to discourage that. To give you an idea of the relative costs of the text, printing the text costs \$6.25. This leaves a \$3.75 profit,

providing a split between her and Lulu of \$3.00 and \$0.75, respectively, if the book is purchased through the Lulu.com Web site. If the purchase is through Amazon or other booksellers, the profits are about half of this.

The marketing of the book is straightforward because the book has a definite audience that will be contacted by mail and e-mail. And because the e-book format is free, faculty can download the e-book version and evaluate it for classroom use. We hope other potential readers will become aware of the book through the Web bookstores. If you would like to see the e-book version of the final text, you can find it at <http://www.lulu.com/content/1723476>.

A scan of the offerings on Lulu.com and other self-publishing sites such as iUniverse.com and Xlibris.com

may convince you that while most people are reading less, there are a lot that are writing and publishing more. The threshold for publication has been pretty much abolished. So, who benefits? The egos of some authors, who can claim that they have published, perhaps. But from the perspective of the optical engineer or someone in a specialty field such as graduate nursing education, self-publishing can provide a channel for information that is not intended for journal publication, but which would benefit our colleagues and friends.

**Donald C. O'Shea**  
Editor