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Digital book publisher thrives in Hudson Valley

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Changes in the printing industry are not just happening worldwide - they're also happening right here in the Hudson Valley, thanks to the innovation found at NetPublications, Inc.

The Poughkeepsie-based company was recently named one of the country's top 20 Leading Digital Book Printers by Book Business Magazine.

"It's based on a number of factors," said William Grogg, president of the company, who said NetPublications' longevity, outstanding reputation and the volume of work produced all contributed to the selection. Despite generating \$6,500,000 in revenue in 2008, it hasn't always been an easy ride for the company, which started in 1986 as a traditional print company.

"When digital books first came along, a lot of people really thought they were just Xerox books," Grogg explained of the company's foray into the field in 1996. "They didn't have a lot of respect for the printing of digital books."

That is slowly changing in the centuries-

old printing industry, as the benefits of digital, as well as the quality, are becoming more evident.

"Color digital has improved drastically," says Grogg. Technological advances allow NetPublications to create consistent images, including covers, no matter how much time elapses between printings.

The digital format also allows for easy modifications.

Grogg explains how one client, a college in the Midwest, has a required computer class for all freshman students. The first nine weeks of the class are the same for everyone, but the next nine weeks are broken out into majors, so

students in math, science, business, etc. learn about the computers and programs that pertain to their major. Each semester the text book is updated 10 days before the class starts, to reflect current trends in this dynamic field. One time it included a new computing system that had just been introduced by Apple, another time a change in the production of chip manufacturing.

"Normally it would take 18 months for



those changes to appear in traditional textbooks," said Grogg.

In addition to textbooks, the company also specializes in training manuals and self-publications in a variety of genres.

"Customers submit a print-ready pdf file," he explains. "We do not edit."

Everything from family cookbooks with a picture of mom on the front, to extensive safety training manuals for corporations are treated the same.

With a turn around of one to four days for most jobs, the pace is quick for the 32 employees at NetPublications. The presses cost upwards of a few million dollars and the company's

fastest press can produce 787 pages a minute, collated.

"The niche we got into was a short-run niche," says Grogg.

Last year the company printed 8,000 unique titles, consisting of 300,000,000

pages, with an average press run of 232 pages. The minimum production order is one copy, making the service available for



all customers. NetPublishing's Hudson House Publishing offers a variety of services to individuals who want to self publish. Memoirs and family history books are very popular in this growing field. The company's Vivisphere Publishing division

specializes in various genres, including poetry and science fiction.

In addition to easily modifying content, digital printing also allows for a more accurate production of books. In traditional printing, 45 percent of books are sold back to the publishers and destroyed. Even small publishers require a run of 1,500 to 2,500 copies, regardless of what the market demands may be for a book.

"It just doesn't make sense to print it that way," says Grogg. He recalls an author who insisted that 4,000 copies of his book should be printed, but it sold just 79 copies.

"Sometimes people just fall in the love with the project, they don't think it through."

While the Kindle and other electronic devices are expected to alter people's reading habits, Grogg expects other changes to occur first.

"I think the bigger change in the publishing industry is the distribution arm of it," he says. "Publishers are getting squeezed."

Currently, when a book is sold to a distributor, 55 percent of the value goes with it - 15 percent to the distributor, 40 percent to the book store.

"The distributor/book store model will change," predicts Grogg. "People will either order direct from Amazon, or buy directly from a publisher."

He cites bookhitch.com, which connects readers to the publisher. That process eliminates the industry-wide costly return policy, and also directly links readers with the material they want or need. Grogg says new technology will offer changes in the field, but fundamental business practices will remain.

"We're a small business like everyone else," he says. "We're trying to grow, but we also want to keep the customers we have."