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Writing@CSU Writing Guide

Online Vs. Print Publishing

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As printing became more prominent and widely accepted, it also became more commonplace. Following World War II, a great deal of machines were put into action stimulating circulation. Just as the distribution and number of printed texts expanded to reach a variety of audiences and range of topics and knowledge, so the world of texts online is expanding rapidly. And while there are not near the number of constraints of wars and technology upon production, the future of online publishing may change our world. How we read and learn from the face of the screen staring at us as well as how we read from the printed page is changing. While printing has risen to serve as a prominent form of communication with online publishing speeding quickly to meet the needs of the literate world, there are still, and will remain to be, significant differences between print and on-line publishing.

Online and print publishing are significantly different. Choosing what medium to publish in depends on such factors as your publishing goals, the amount of money you have to spend, and the kinds of resources that are available to you. This site is meant to give the novice publisher an idea of the differences that lie between the two publishing media. It also details several considerations for the online publisher to keep in mind.

History of Print Publishing

The introduction of printing created a medium for communication like no other. "Until the advent of radio it was the great means of communication" (Chappell 3). As paper became more widely available in the thirteenth century writing became more prominent. When the need to reproduce texts became greater, Gutenberg's movable type came about followed by a variety of other printing processes. By 1500 somewhere around 12,000,000 books in 35,000 editions had been printed. The world's first newspaper was published in Germany in 1609 (Chappell 127). But with such volumes suddenly being distributed, regulations were made to prohibit unrestrained publishing in 1637 when England limited the number of print shops and foundries by decrees. "In the cradle years of printing opposition came chiefly from organized calligraphers and illuminators whose livelihood was threatened. The content of manuscripts was seldom in question; most were classics or ecclesiastical writings and many were in Greek or Latin, which made them inaccessible to all but a few scholars and churchmen. But with the coming of the seventeenth century, printing was being viewed as a threat to established power, both religious and political" (Chappell 112-113). Though people like John Milton spoke out in favor of freedom of press and against requiring official censoring before publication of any text, governments' fear of political unrest kept even the first American newspaper from continuing after its first issue. Attempted by Benjamin Harris in 1690, the governor and council of the American colony declared the paper was not authorized and ended further production.

History of Online Publishing

Online publishing has been around for about ten years --ever since people started putting their text files on the internet to share information. However, it seems when dealing with print, we all know what the word publishing encompasses --everything from books, to magazines, to newsletters and brochures. But in the online world, because everything sent across the internet is, in a sense, posted to the public domain for others to read, many feel that even email, chat groups, anything that IS online, is published. It can make for a confusing area of conversation and research. For the sake of a more focused and easily understood reference, we'll look at online publishing in the same terms in which we think of print publishing --a work meant for public consumption that entails professional (although not necessarily for

profit) care given to design, editing, audience, and distribution. Basically, we're addressing what we like to call online desktop publishing; however, even under this title you're likely to find a variety of definitions.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Print Publishing

Although technology has crept into our businesses and our homes, it has yet to take over our entire being. In the Atlantic Monthly Unbound, Sven Birkerts suggests, "A word on the page at some level partakes of--participates in--the whole history of words on pages, plays in that arena. Reading it, we accept certain implicit notions...The word on the screen is not opaque, does not dead-end; it is emergent, manifests itself physically from a somewhere inaccessible to the reader."

Reaching your Audience

One of the significant advantages to print publishing exists in distribution. While printing costs are significantly higher than those involved in publishing on-line because of actual paper and printing costs, the advantage of print publishing is placing text in the hands of your audience. In cases of on-line publications, one can only direct someone to a site. The chances of them sitting down in front of the computer, looking up the publication, and reading from it can only be motivated by the individual to find the publication or stumble across it while searching the Web. However, the time it takes to get print into the hands of your audience is also an important consideration. With the accessibility of information on the Web, something like a newspaper's current events can easily be updated and made readily available to the public at a moments notice.

Marketing

In the case of publishing works in print, writers have the advantage of targeting an audience as well as making a profit. In magazines, advertisers supply added income bookstores bring in a great deal of money as well.

Reader Capabilities

Printed publications also have the advantage of creating a design based on whatever capabilities the publisher has regarding fonts, layout, photos and overall

size of the publication. Once a printed publication is in the hands of the reader, the only requirements remain are for readers to be able to see and to read. This is not necessarily so easy with on-line publications. Since they are limited by the technological limitations of the users' screen and memory capacity.

Editing

However, being printed also indicates a problem. With a text that must be finalized by the printing press on paper, the final product is relatively unchangeable. Deadlines are created, met and taken to press. Once the proof is approved, the machines do all the work without comprehending any possible major or minor errors in the text. When the press and bindery are done, there's no turning back. If you have overlooked any details, it is up to your readers to notice. But with on-line publishing, there is a much greater amount of ease in editing. If a date is wrong, a word misspelled or tense out of place, a simple correction can be made to the file and updated on the Web.

Time

Along the same line as editing, another disadvantage to print publishing is the time that it takes. Not only does the writing and editing take time, but time must also be allotted for the printer. And remember, it's a one-shot deal. Though online publications take quite a bit of time to edit and keep-up, they hold that option for change.

Standards

Though Online publishing is growing in importance, publishing in print continues to maintain prestige as an authority and a viable source of because the idea remains that anyone can put anything on the Web, and print editors and publishers are held to a tighter standard and will only print what is worthwhile or valuable.

Submissions

For print publishers, receiving submissions varies depending on writers' knowledge of the publication. For many book publishers, they have too many submissions coming in.

Reflection on the *Freestone*

On a personal note, Dawna is involved in the production of a 24-page alumni magazine produced by the English department at CSU. While we also put the *Freestone* on-line, our primary audience exists in view of the printed page.

Distributing approximately 3750 copies to English department alumni, present and prospective students, and faculty, nearly every copy gets glanced at by at least one reader. We mail 2500 to alumni and the remainder are distributed within the English dept. The only major stress involved is that once it is printed, the final product goes out--typos and all!

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Publishing

While the information available online is staggering, even in our technological age, we cannot forget to mention the fact that not everyone in this day is ready to sit down at a computer screen and read for any great deal of time. Curling up in front of the fire on a cold day with a book in hand can never be replaced by sitting in a cold chair staring at the words on computer screen.

Costs

The costs of online desktop publishing are low in consideration to those of print. Granted, one must have access to a networked computer and a decent amount of usable software, but those are things that anyone in the publishing business, print or online, will have to have anyway. The other costs that may come into play are those associated with online access. These will vary depending on your service provider; however, students enrolled in most universities will be provided access (at least while using school computers) for free. Thus, for example, the *Nieve Roja Review* required no startup costs whatsoever, having been published using campus services. The other positive about low costs for online publishing comes into play when distribution is considered. The distribution itself is free as well. There are no printing costs, which are usually print publishers' biggest expense, nor the waste of large amounts of paper that go along with printing. However, there are costs

attached to some of the methods of marketing an online publication. Just because your publication is online, doesn't mean anyone out there knows where it is or is reading it.

Profits

It remains difficult to make any money from online publishing. Most publications online right now are free to readers and are merely charging for ad space. However, some are attempting to require subscriptions. Much still seems up in the air in terms of what standard might come out of online publishing --what will work and what will fail. It's a new medium and people using it are still in the stages of trial and error. See *Things to Consider* for more information.

Marketing

Although there are no or few distribution costs for online publishing, it does take a bit of marketing to get people to your site. You must register your publication with as many search engines as possible and, often, this entails a cost. However, if this isn't done, no one will be able to find your site. This process needs to be given regular attention as your description or focus changes and as new search engines are introduced. Also, other sites that have agreed to link to yours need to be regularly contacted to make sure that link will remain on their site. So, while marketing and distribution might be cheaper for the online publication, it is not without its costs especially in terms of labor and time.

Editing

Editing is another plus involved in online publishing. For the most part, editing should and does occur before the new issue goes online. However, we've all come across several typos in print documents of any kind that weren't caught before the publication was sent off to the printer. In online publishing, there is no "final" product. Errors can be corrected in a matter of minutes (or seconds even). For example, in one issue of the *Nieve Roja Review*, we had a submission by a fellow grad student that detailed events that very possibly could be considered sensitive material if certain persons happened across the work. It also pointed out the private workings of an industry that many people in the public might not be pleased to read

about. They weren't unethical, but merely contextual and possibly damaging to that particular institution. Therefore, the author, after the issue went online, decided she'd rather make some changes to the names, places, and descriptions used. We were able to take the work out of the publication with a notice that it would appear again in the next issue. That would not have been possible in print. In print, what's done is done once it's on the paper.

Time

An online publication also requires constant upkeep even in-between issues. Links need to be tested regularly in order to avoid 'linkrot'. And because editing can be done at any time, there's a responsibility attached to make sure what needs to be fixed is. Meanwhile, with print, once it's printed, it's out of your hands. In addition, deadlines for online publication are merely self-imposed. For print, the editors need to take into consideration that the printing itself takes a certain amount of time as does distribution. Therefore, their deadlines are rigid. However, for online publishing, deadlines are good to get the ball going, but the actual publishing can occur at any time without the dependence on the timeframe of another.

Audience

Audience is a category that can be considered both a pro and a con for online publishing. While your audience is not limited to only those hit in your distribution efforts, it is also not the dedicated group of readers that most print publications can count on. So, while your publication may be more widely available, that doesn't mean that people are reading it. It's more difficult to determine your readership in online publications. First, you can't know the demographics of your readers as easily as you might with print. Some people have attempted to stick with the subscription method to alleviate some of this problem, but then readership often goes down because readers can often get the same information elsewhere for free on the Internet. Counters help tell you how many have entered your site, but they can't tell you if that person stayed long enough to read anything. While you might say the same of your subscribers in print publishing, the subscribers paid for your publication for a reason and are most likely continuing to read it if they're subscribed. Online, it's difficult to determine not just who your audience is, but how many readers you have.

Standards

Because online desktop publishing is a new field, there are no set standards deemed a quality layout format. This can be seen as both a pro and a con. As an advantage, we can understand this to mean that there's more room for experimentation. However, as a disadvantage, there's been very little usability testing done on what readers like and dislike, what keeps them there and what chases them away. So, while your content might be great, your layout could chase the readers away, and vice versa. It's still a volatile situation without any standards to rely on.

Submissions

Submissions are another tough area to tackle in online publishing. For example, from a literary journal standpoint, many authors are afraid to put their material online for fear of plagiarism as well as copyright problems that may arise later when attempting to publish their work elsewhere. Copyright laws for the Internet have not been firmly established yet, and because the Internet was created with the intention of sharing free information, they appear difficult not just to enact but to get users to abide by. Plagiarism, however, is a threat for publishing in any medium, print or otherwise. Authors seem to be slow to realize this. However, because of this widespread fear, many have deemed the work on the Internet to be poor and the authors published there to be unworthy of higher esteemed print publications. This stereotype also keeps submissions low.

Nieve Roja Reflection

The [*Nieve Roja Review*](#) is an online literary journal run by graduate students in Colorado State University's English department. We put out two issues a year -- winter and summer. While our readership could be large, it's hard to know just who is accessing our site and staying long enough to read anything. We try to only publish what we consider to be 'quality' work in order to avoid the stereotype that published work on the Internet is merely trash. However, it's this stereotype that keeps many of our colleagues from submitting their best work. Currently, it feels like publishing on the Internet poses a 'damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't' scenario, yet it has definite advantages to print as well.

Things to Consider For Online Publishing

Time and Money

1. Your financial costs a publisher will be considerably less online, but your investment in time will be about the same, if not greater. You will also need different skills in an online environment, such as HTML coding, and using FTP to edit your documents once online.
2. If you plan on spending a lot of time and effort putting together your publication online, don't expect to be rewarded for it financially. The way it stands today, advertisers will most likely not pay to have their banner on your site. Print is still the only option if you don't want to be guaranteed of "volunteering" your time. Decide right away if you are comfortable with "giving away" your work. Online, you will most certainly provide your work for free, but this will mean more time for content, and less time worrying about advertising sales. In print, you have the potential to make money, but you will spend a lot of time focusing on how to accomplish this.
3. Meeting deadlines in print means dealing with content as well as advertising, which can be stressful and frustrating. Online, your deadlines are self-imposed, and you will most likely not be worrying about ads.

Marketing, Distribution, and Circulation

You want your publication to reach the greatest number of people who will be interested in reading it. Consider the following when deciding whether to publish online or in print.

1. Distribution online is cheaper than the physical delivery of printed pages, but there are no clear-cut ways to target and market on the Web. The best bet is to link to similar sites and hope for the best. This is another reason why advertising revenue is hard to come by on the Web.
2. If your publication is local, you may be better off in print. Local advertisers can have copies of your publication dropped off at their shops and places of business for sale and distribution. This relationship is impossible on the Web. If you are planning on being national or worldwide, the Web has distinct advantages, but you will need to be very creative with marketing your work.

Content and Quality

A high-quality publication with high quality content will attract more readers and advertisers. Be aware of the following things:

1. Many well-known and talented writers, graphic designers and editors will not be attracted to working on the Web. First, there is no money in it, and second they cannot be guaranteed a substantial readership.
2. People still seem to like the look and feel of print magazines, and often complain that they dislike reading from a computer screen. A high-quality print magazine may contain extensive text and interviews that people will not enjoy reading on the Web. Quality online is a matter of keeping the reader's attention by breaking up and manipulating text. This may require extra effort and time for editorial planning and decision making.

In closing, stick with your instincts. If you have the drive and talent to publish, don't be afraid to publish online because you're afraid your work will be un-rewarded. Currently online publishing pays its own way. You put your work online, and that's it, no print run, no lugging stuff around town, no late bills and assorted other financial headaches.

The truth is that it will take many brave publishers to go online and experiment with the possibilities before anyone will have a chance to succeed, and possibly meet the noble goal of making a living from their work. Online publishing may provide unique opportunities that have yet to reveal themselves. The creative, tenacious online publisher may be among the first to discover these possibilities. And remember, print publishing will be expensive and time consuming, and certainly carries no sure promise of "paying for itself."

Online vs. Print Publishing: Online Resources

- [Publish](#) --a magazine for publishing professionals
- [Web Pages that Suck](#)

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