So You Want to Print and Sell Your Open Textbooks?

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First, let’s go over some terms
Conventional printing & distribution

- Print runs
- Distributors: sales and order fulfillment
- Sale on consignment to wholesalers and bookstores at varying discounts off retail price; unsold inventory is refunded (and often returned to distributor)
Digital printing (short-run & print-on-demand)

- Allows replenishing inventory in small increments
- Facilitates the “long tail” of publishing books for niche audiences
- Available in the supply chain (for publishing houses) and direct to consumer (set up & purchase online)
A note about versions of open books
Continuous updating

Even though tools like Pressbooks let you continually update a book and its print-ready PDF, there aren’t really workflows for readers to order the current version on demand. It’s confusing for students to update a book mid-semester anyway.
Implications for new editions

- Readers expect that all copies of an edition will be identical.
- If you make changes beyond fixing errata, you really should:
  - Update title page to clearly identify the new edition
  - Assign a new ISBN
  - Stop selling the old edition (?)
Questions to consider
Will you sell books at cost or aim to generate revenue?

**Sell at cost**
- No tax implications
- No ethical implications about profiting from students

**Generate revenue**
- Will it go to author, to institution, or be split? Flow through institution to author? (If institution owns copyright, does author even have right to any revenue?)
- Accounting & tax implications for institution & author
- Institutional policies about instructors assigning their own books? And ethical considerations?
## Print run vs. POD?

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<tr>
<th>Print run</th>
<th>POD only</th>
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<td>• Requires upfront investment, but you get a lower unit cost</td>
<td>• No upfront investment, but unit cost is higher</td>
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<td>• Need to store unsold copies, receive orders &amp; payment, and ship to whatever countries you are taking orders from.</td>
<td>• POD printers handle all fulfillment (receiving orders &amp; payment and shipping to customers)</td>
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<td>You can pay a distributor to do these things. They charge by storage volume!</td>
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| | | | • Requirement to refer students to campus bookstore?
Color printing?

**Interior in grayscale**
- Cheaper to print

**Interior in color**
- More expensive to print
- POD printers usually require that the whole interior be in color even if only a few pages take advantage of it.
- Photo-quality paper is more expensive than paper that is sufficient for simple color diagrams.
Binding type?

- Covers are always in color!
- Hardcover bindings (case binding and cloth binding) are more expensive than paperback.
  - You cannot print less than 500 copies at a time with a color interior and hardcover binding and sell for a reasonable price. Trust me.
Where are your customers? (1)

• Lots of options if you are willing to sell only to domestic customers

• Shipping abroad raises extra complications – are customs and mail/parcel services reliable?
  — Distributors will ship overseas but only with traceable shipping (more expensive)
  — Largest POD vendors have printing locations around the world to speed things up, but even they won’t ship to certain countries.

• Keep in mind online students in other countries taking courses at US institutions
Where are your customers? (2)

If you are printing mostly for the benefit of users in a region of the world with poor connectivity, consider printing there rather than trying to ship from here to there!
Have you considered distribution options with a connection to your institution?
Connections at your institution

- Campus bookstore?
- University press?

*They might even be willing to work directly with your authors!*
If the author owns the copyright and will receive all revenue

Let them set up the book directly with a POD service so you don’t have to be in the middle!
Questions?