

The Prints and the Paper

Since starting Ink'd Well Comics in late 2009, we have printed multiple books and series with many different printers. These projects have been of varying sizes, page counts and colour method. Because of this, the most popular questions I receive from aspiring comic creators revolve around choosing the right printer for the job. Hopefully this post points you in the right direction.

Before you start, there are a few things you need to determine:

- 1) Budget.** Absolutely every decision you make needs to revolve around your ability to pay for something without it crippling you or the project.
- 2) Colour or B&W (or greyscale – some printers differentiate between the two, so be sure to ask)**
- 3) Print run.** If this is your first title, or you are putting something out that may not have the widest appeal, it's best to err on the side of caution.
- 4) Page dimensions.** Despite standard comic books having a specific dimension, not all printers follow this – some differ by the smallest amount, yet enough to cause problems down the line. Skew larger, as it is always easier to shrink down.

Many of these points may not matter if you're simply printing off an ashcan run. This is a cheap, easy way to get your work out in the wild. A photocopier (or home printer, if you don't mind swallowing the ink costs), large paper-cutter and a long-reach stapler will be your best friends. Keep costs to a dollar or less (split between materials and costs incurred making the cover pop) because you're likely to give most of these away. The rest can be displayed at local shops or sold through 'zine festivals.

Traditional printing resembles the comics released by major publishers and, as expected, costs a lot more. Ashcans are great for their purpose but if you want to establish yourself as a professional, you need to look the part. Expect to pay – depending on size, colours, print run, dimensions and shipping – \$1 to \$4 per standard 22-page issue, more for graphic novels. Don't expect immediate profits, as you will first need to recoup your up-front costs. On the plus side, comic shops and convention attendees are more likely to be attracted to your high-quality books. You'll also have incredible flexibility with regards to page and cover weights, tones, etc. One last bit of advice: Spring for pre-assembled books (most good printers don't even offer options for self-assembly).

I haven't had as much success as others with print-on-demand (POD) services but having worked with both of the big two, in terms of variety, let me share what I've discovered. The more popular of the two, Ka-Blam, only accepts TIFF files, unless a recent change in policy has been made. This is quite annoying due to the layout programs I use. For you, this may not be an issue so keep that in mind. I've also had bad luck in general with Ka-Blam. This is not necessarily indicative of the company on the whole because many of my good friends have never once had a single problem. Furthermore, I've purchased books from their amazing online store (IndiePlanet) without issue. ComixPress have been very good to me, in terms of service, but their shipping is much slower and their online storefront isn't as impressive. Nonetheless, the quality is equal and the costs are lower. One thing about POD books is that, at their best, they still always have a certain 'feel' about them that isn't quite right compared to traditional printing. You'll note I did not mention Lulu or any other POD service. All I know about Lulu is that when I was

researching options, they offered the least amount of options for the highest cost-per-item. I have not used any other on-demand printer so I cannot provide additional information about them.

When getting a quote from a printer, kill multiple birds with one stone: Get B&W and colour quotes at once for standard issues and graphic novels. This will save them a lot of time and give you all the knowledge at once.

In addition to your printer, you still need to decide on a format. My first series was printed as three separate issues. This was a bad idea. You make so little on each issue that, depending on your run, may need a second just to hit profit mode. Bear in mind that your choice of printer will play a huge role here. I recommend having a few cheap one-shots to help entice people and get them acquainted with what you have to offer. So-called 'brand loyalty' will often bring people back for your bigger releases.

No matter what, you will need to offer digital versions of your comics. Sign up with PayPal or a similar service that allows for a user-defined redirect page and have it point to the file. Remember to price things reasonably! Alternatively, you could investigate the digital storefronts like Comixology to handle a lot of this for you. You'll have less say in the matter, though, so consider yourself warned.

The most important thing to remember is that when people buy your work, they are buying you. Your ability to sell yourself and your product is most important as it brings people to the table – figuratively and literally. The quality of the product is next because it brings people back. Your choice of printer ties everything together; it's the icing on the cake.

I hope this helps you in some way, shape or form. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask!