

START AND RUN A DESKTOP PUBLISHING BUSINESS

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A DESKTOP PUBLISHER?

No matter how great the author's wisdom or how vital the message or how remarkable the printer's skill, unread type is merely a lot of paper and little ink. The true economics of printing must be measured by how much is read and understood and not by how much is produced.

— **HERBERT SPENCER**

In 1984, Paul Brainerd, of Aldus Corporation, coined the phrase “desktop publishing” to describe the artwork that could be created using Aldus’s page layout software program. Using a 300 dots per inch (dpi) laser printer hooked up to the computer, you could print out black-and-white, camera-ready artwork. A lot has changed since then. Today, you can take your file to a service bureau or commercial print shop to be output on paper, film, or color printout with up to 3,300 dpi. The quality has improved immensely.

A desktop publisher is a person who uses a computer to produce artwork that can be printed. Desktop publishing is the process of publishing artwork from the top of a desk. Personal computers can be used to produce publications, brochures, advertisements, business forms, sales literature, coupons, flyers, and much more. Desktop publishers should be prepared to design, typeset, and produce a variety of publications and sales literature, including:

Publications

- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Newspapers
- Bulletins
- Journals

Sales literature and promotional materials

- Brochures
- Booklets
- Flyers
- Coupons
- Direct mail materials

Business forms

- Invoices
- Contracts/agreements
- Purchase orders
- Project docketts
- Time sheets

Business stationery

- Letterhead
- Envelopes
- Business cards
- Mailing labels

Instructional materials

- Course manuals
- Course handouts
- Overhead transparencies

- Certificates
- Display cards

As well, desktop publishers may be asked to produce other materials which are not really desktop publishing but may be produced by a computer. These include:

- Signage (interior and exterior)
- Point-of-purchase materials
- Packaging
- Electronic presentations
- Web page design
- Multimedia presentations
- Video editing
- Animation

Desktop publishing. Anyone can do it. But how many people can meet promised deadlines, satisfy the client, and make money?

Who Needs Desktop Publishing?

Ten years ago, organizations hired outside vendors for three reasons:

- (a) To implement ideas that were conceived internally, such as mechanical art. But today, inexpensive computers and easy-to-use software allow companies to do much of the production internally. For example, corporate newsletter editors used to write the stories and hire companies to typeset and paste-up the newsletter. Today, editors are writing and producing the entire newsletter on a computer.
- (b) To handle overflow work and temporary projects. However, projects can now be completed much faster because of computers, so there isn't as much overflow work available. There are more freelancers, so overflow work is harder to get, lower paying, and more demanding.
- (c) To create projects that require special expertise, such as corporate identity, color publications, package design, illustrations, presentations, multimedia, or speech writing. Today, talent, skills, and expertise may not exist in organizations. The amount of high-level work that is farmed out has increased. Organizations may not have



Specialize in an area that cannot be performed by internal staff.

enough internal staff to handle important assignments such as signage, trade show exhibits, corporate marketing plans, or press releases, so they'll hire freelancers to fill this void.

Low-end creativity has virtually vanished, the middle segment (overflow work) is increasingly unproductive, but the high-end (special assignments) is flourishing. To have your own successful desktop publishing business, you need to specialize in an area that cannot be performed by internal staff. Develop a market niche for yourself. For example, a corporate newsletter editor could produce a black-and-white newsletter, but could he or she create color newsletters and publications? This is just one area you could specialize in. How you can develop a market niche is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The Self-Employed Desktop Publisher

The terms “freelancer” and “self-employed” refer to anyone who works for himself or herself, including independent contractors, small business owners, entrepreneurs, consultants, photographers, writers, designers, and desktop publishers. Successful self-employment is about discovering your uniqueness and spreading the word.

As a desktop publisher, you can perform your service in a variety of ways. As a *freelancer*, you may work in other people's offices and be paid hourly, daily, or per job. You might also choose to be a *temp*, working for a temporary personnel agency. When the agency calls to see if you're available for work, you can say yes or no.

You could have a *special deal* or arrangement with a printer, public relations firm, advertising agency, or market researcher. It could provide office space in exchange for services, or printing in exchange for desktop publishing.

With a *sharing agreement*, you could share an office or equipment with another desktop publisher or organization: one does sales while the other uses the equipment. This setup is similar to a time-sharing setup.

If you know a lot about a certain subject, you could promote yourself as a *trainer or consultant*, and turn your knowledge into money. Training and seminars have been very popular during the 1990s.

If you can do something unique, you're a *specialist* and can throw out all the rules and establish your own fee.

There are also lots of opportunities for desktop publishers who have a well-rounded knowledge of software and print production. Why not:

- (a) Start your own business.
- (b) Freelance for printers, advertising agencies, and in-house art departments.
- (c) Work on a contract basis for printers, advertising agencies, and in-house art departments.
- (d) Work for a temporary placement agency.
- (e) Become a print broker obtaining assignments from various clients and sub-contracting the work to other desktop publishers.