



Publishing by Demand

By Joe Young

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Most publishers in Latin America are small and struggle to survive. Though our potential clients are many, distribution is a big problem. Almost none of us is capable of surviving by just selling what we publish. Without an additional source of income, we perish. Some are helped by their organization or denomination, others have healthy bookstores, but all need extra income.

Ediciones Crecimiento Cristiano [<http://www.edicionesc.com/>] (ECC) specializes in a small niche of the evangelical publishing world: study guides for small groups and related training materials. A lot of this material is published and utilized in English-speaking countries, but very little in Spanish. Convincing churches and others that such materials can be important tools in their ministry is a very slow process.

ECC has been subsidized up to now, but the subsidy will soon be discontinued. The problem is that in our small town we do not have many alternatives. So, a few years ago, we set up our own "Publishing by Demand" system. It has allowed us to continue producing and at very reasonable costs.

Why is that a solution to our economic dilemma? To publish, you must have a printer. Say you have a new title. The printer might charge \$1,000 to do 2,000 copies. Normally, you have to think of a print run of

at least 2,000 to keep the cost per copy within reasonable limits.

So you spend the \$1,000, but then have to wait and sell at least 1000 copies to have enough money to print another title. Some titles could sell quickly, but our type of materials sell slowly. Trying to build up a publishing effort that way is a losing battle.

We still have boxes of materials we had printed years ago, that that now do not meet our standards. Publishing by demand also avoids the problems of having outdated materials on the shelves. We presently have more than 50 titles, but if we had continued producing through a commercial print shop, I doubt that we would have 10.

It was a printer in the USA who suggested that ECC consider publishing by demand. So, when we received some extra financial help a few years back, instead of investing it in printing, we bought some equipment: a fast black and white laser for printing book interiors, a color laser for covers, and a small machine to plastify covers. Adding a small manual paper cutter and a stapler, we can do almost everything in house.

The result is that, with minimal equipment, we can produce a booklet or book equal to, or better, than many print shops.

One big advantage is that it costs ECC about the same per copy—whether we print 5 or 500. When we have a new title we run off 50 or so. When it begins to move, we produce more. At times we get requests for more of a title than we have in stock, but

within a normal day's work, we can produce at least 100 copies of one of our workbooks and get the order out the next day.

Another advantage is that we do not have to limit ourselves to "economic" covers. With the color laser printer a high quality cover costs the same as a two-color "inexpensive" cover.

The new equipment solved part of our problem, but still left us with bills to pay. So, we have also added three other sources of income.

One is a small Christian bookstore, which is growing slowly.

The second is a small office supplies store. It has nothing to do with publishing, but since it is the best-stocked store in our town, we are getting more customers and more income.

The third is a small print shop, using a friend's equipment. This allows us to take in jobs from outside that help the budget and to print our own materials when we need a larger quantity.

Eventually we may be able to eliminate these "extras," but for the foreseeable future,

they are what allow us to continue publishing, and we feel strongly that we should continue.

Like most publishers, we receive limited feedback from our customers. But when we do receive a note from a group that is using our materials, and they say they have been very profitable, we are encouraged to press on.

I would encourage you, if you are also struggling, to not give up. If you must set up a hamburger stand to pay the bills, that is better than quitting!

In another context, the solutions would probably be different. In our small town, and with our limited market, publishing by demand is what has saved us. After all, it is better to have 2,000 copies of 50 titles on the shelves than 2,000 copies of only one! Ediciones Crecimiento Cristiano [<http://www.edicionescc.com/>] specializes in small group Bible study guides. It aims to help believers learn through reflection on God's Word.

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