

Publish Your Own Best Sellers: Cookbooks!

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Publish Your Own Best Sellers: Cookbooks!

Every year, cookbooks are high on the list of the nation's best sellers. There are tens of thousands of them sold each year with no suggestion of any weakening of the market. Trouble is, there are so many cookbook writers and publishers that the odds of any one particular cookbook becoming a best seller are not much better than a new novel. But, it can be done!

Two things that make cookbooks different from other projects are subject matter and author recognition. Prospective buyers don't have to read part of several chapters to see what the book is about, and the author of a cookbook need not be a world famous chef -- so long as the recipes sound desirable.

Basically, there are three approaches to this business:

1. Accumulate recipe collections and have them published.
2. Publish recipes for organizations.
3. Print private recipe collections.

The first category is the collection and publication of recipes from any sources where you are the publisher, author and/or editor.

The recipes can be in virtually any category (diet, ethnic, geographical area, beef, vegetarian, all desserts, etc.).

Don't overlook recipes for specific groups, such as diabetics or those allergic to milk products. They can be your recipes, from your family cookbook, purchased, or collected by many different legitimate means.

About the only major "no-no" in this area is to copy one from a copyrighted publication. Aside from satisfying yourself that the recipes are accurate and actually produce the desired results, it is usually necessary to convert some of them so that they all produce about the same number of servings (e.g., 1 or 2).

This would be especially important in a cookbook for singles or dieters. There are computer programs that automatically convert recipes to a desired yield (one is Meal Master, a Shareware program available from most any computer user club).

A recipe for 12 loaves of bread would be too big for the average home recipes book. So all the ingredients (cups, teaspoons, tablespoons, etc.) need to be cut by about five

sixths and still be in recognized recipe terms (no easy task for the average person without a Ph.D.

When publishing your own cookbook, the greatest challenge is selling it.

There are an awful lot of cookbooks on the market today, so if you are to compete successfully you must offer something different. It must be something calculated to meet (or create) a demand so people will want to buy it.

The "trick" is to convince potential buyers that your cookbook has recipes they want, don't already have and that other cookbooks don't offer -- at least in the same form yours.

Probably the best way to prepare yourself to come up with a novel approach is to study what is selling currently and in particular, how it is being sold. Check the book stores, advertisements and offers you see in supermarkets and department stores. What do they cover, and more importantly what DON'T they cover.

The third option is to "publish" a private family cookbook. Here, you would gather recipes from one or more members of the family and arrange them into a collection.

Make sure to get comments for each one: who's favorite dish; where it came from, or interesting remarks -- anything that will help make the cookbook truly "family." The recipes should be arranged by category, and there should be good representation in each section to produce a well-balanced product.

Naturally, the easiest way to compile such a cookbook would be on a word processor or desktop system. It would be extra nice to include illustrations (from clip art), and the cover and at least the main title page should be highly personalized. It could bear the family name and "grandma" as the author, for example:

The Jones Family Cookbook, edited by
Sally Jones-Smith

Then, each section title page could have a cute comment, so that the complete product would reflect as many members of the family as possible. The initial copy would be for mom (or grandma), but as you might guess, there would be ample opportunity for extra copies -- for the in-laws, cousins, and of course, one for each daughter when she marries!

Charges for this type of cookbook would be for your time and expertise as well as the amount and type of materials used.

The pages can be plastic covered; it could be printed on a color printer, the covers could be embossed or hand done and inserted under the plastic on a three ring notebook -- and many other possible combinations.

One (of many) idea for an inexpensive but impressive cover is to obtain a good (high contrast) black and white picture, silhouette or drawing of the lady, couple or family involved and use that as a centerpiece, around which you place clip-art and/or rub-on letters to make a "master."

This could then be copied and inserted under plastic on a three-ring notebook. It is also possible to purchase decorated sheets to which you can add the photograph or drawing. And, if you have or can use the services of a good desktop publishing system, there are many other options easily within your reach.

Your profit will not be on the first book. You should just about break even on it (e.g. get paid for your time and materials). Your profit will come from sales of duplicates -- for sisters, uncles, in-laws and for daughters and daughters-in-law when they marry. Once the family owns a single copy of this Heirloom, they will want to pass it along -- especially when they learn that additional copies are half price!

This particular option has an additional potential profit source: when you prepare the Jones's cookbook, you will undoubtedly "save" it onto a disk that cost a quarter or so. There is no need to erase this disk -- just file it, and let the customers know you have it and can update, re-issue or add to it whenever they wish.

For example, you can add a page or two of recipes from the newer family members (along with their comments); correct a mistake in one already printed, or you can run off another complete copy whenever you wish. You would make enough on one correction or page addition to more than pay for the 25 cents you have invested in the disk -- and plenty more when they want more copies!

Within these three major divisions are countless other variations that could never be covered in one volume -- in fact, you may well come up with a new one that does great. Some try to sell recipes one or two at a time, other group them by desired result (diet), food groups (all meat, game, vegetarian), health (salt free), ethnic (soul food), nationality (Hungarian), regional (Midwestern), special groups (senior citizens, Toronto TeeTotalers), or specific courses (all salads). Cookbooks can be all inclusive (large volumes) or short, inexpensive booklets for specialties. They can be loose-leaf or bound, large or small.

Note the advertisements that keep appearing over and over -- as compared to those that appear and then disappear. For example, there are ads in the National Enquirer for one or more "special" recipes, as many others for cookbooks, collections and special purpose diets.

Ads that appear only once or twice indicate that they don't work (the ads cost more than they bring in). The problem can be the product, pricing, wording of the ad, or the fact that there simply isn't sufficient demand for what is being advertised. You will have to make that judgement, but it can be made easier by using a little logic.

if a diet food ad disappears, it is not because the demand for the diet food was "reduced" (sorry 'bout that!), so it must be the price, wording or marketing method. You can eliminate price if the item wasn't overpriced and marketing if there are many other ads in the same publication that do seem to "pull." In this case, the wording of the ad was the culprit -- hopefully, you can spot the problem and avoid it when you write and place yours!

Many printers will be glad to publish and promote your cookbook -- but very few (probably none) will be willing to do so on a percentage basis -- they will want their money "up front!"

You can probably get several quotes on printing a certain number of copies, which will help equip you to get a pretty good printing price --obtain perhaps 5,000 copies at a dollar or less per copy. But the real job is selling them.

Many printers will give you a package price for printing and promotion, but you can't be sure of just what their idea of "promotion" is. Most of them will send out sample copies and price lists and then wait for the orders to come in. If they come in, you do fine. If they don't -- well, the printer kept his part of the bargain!

As a general rule, unless you have the funds to spare, it is best to promote your own cookbook. You do that by sending copies and price lists to possible buyers, by advertising it, personal appearances, fair booths (samples of its cuisine), giving it away as prizes, running specials or any other way you can think of!

The second method is to publish a cookbook with a "guaranteed readership." That is, collect recipes from individuals, list the names of the contributors, and sell copies to them! This is not as far fetched as it might seem at first.

An example is a recipe book for a church group or club, where

the completed cookbook is purchased by the recipe contributors as well as other members of the congregation or club -- to raise money, and also promote the organization.

As the promoter of such a cookbook, you collect, edit and organize the cookbook, arrange for printing, and then help sell it (both within and outside the organization) for a fee or percentage of sales.

Or, you could promote a community cookbook featuring the cuisine of your area, and again giving credit to contributors (credits help ensure sales). In this case you may not need to share your profits with anyone, yet people whose names are in the book will buy it, as well as those who want to "support the city."

Although there are thousands of possibilities as to the content of a cookbook, consider something like all "southern fried chicken" recipes; meals for RV park potlucks, Cook County Cuisines, or Lake Charles Fish Recipes.

Still another possibility would be a booklet for the band-boosters, Soccer Moms or a collection of recipes from senior citizens, with a percentage of the proceeds going to their organization. The latter might include family heirlooms that will be lost if they aren't preserved in your cookbook!

Perhaps the most inexpensive way to produce a small number (less than 500) cookbook is to prepare your pages for reduction onto legal sized paper.

Four typewritten sheets can fit on one sheet of 8 1/2"x 14" paper if they are reduced in size and placed side by side on the 14" width.

The legal size paper is then folded and stapled to form a booklet 8"high by 7" wide.

The page numbering can be tricky in this system, but a copy or booklet service can advise you how to number the pages once they know how many pages the booklet will have.

You should be able to produce this type of booklet, complete with a stiff paper, titled cover for 3 - 5 per page.

When having small jobs printed, always check with both copy services and printers for the best deal.

The bottom line in successful cookbook publishing is to plan carefully and know exactly what you want to do before beginning. Plan what type recipes you want to feature and consider who would be most interested in buying them. Next, figure the best

way to attract those potential buyers to your product.

Work on your recipes until you are certain they are just the way you want them, then design a cover for your book, have them printed, and start advertising.

One problem that can surface in this business is bad recipes -- those that have not been tested and tested by someone who knows food.

Sometimes small publishers run recipe contests and get hundreds of recipes for good (looking) dishes -- but they won't all TASTE good! After all, they were sent in by various people, some of who undoubtedly jotted down something from memory, and others who just copied them. The warning here is to include only recipes in your cookbook that you KNOW are good.

BUSINESS SOURCES

OLSON PUBLICATIONS, INC., Box 1208, Woodstock, GA 31088, 404/928-8994. Publishes monthly FOOD PEOPLE for the retail food industry (not restaurants).

ELM SERVICE MARKETING, 2132 Forden Ave., Madison, WI 53784. Publishes FOOD SERVICE MAGAZINE for the food service industry and INDEPENDENT RESTAURANTS for prepared food retailers.

MARATHON INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING CO., Box 33008, Louisville, KY 40232. Wholesale cookbooks for mail order sales (drop-ships).

METANOIA CORP., Box 267, Fon du Lac, WI 54935, 414/923-3700. Publishes COOKING FOR PROFIT, monthly trade magazine for food service operations.

PENTON, INC., 1111 Chester Ave., Penton Pl., Cleveland, OH 44144, 216/696-7000. Publishes RESTAURANT HOSPITALITY, trade magazine for restaurant owners.

SPEEDIBOOKS, 23680 Miles, Cleveland, OH 44128. Printer of booklets (from 3 cents each).

PUBLIC BRAND SOFTWARE, P.O. Box 51315, Indianapolis, IN 46251. 80/626-DISK (IN-800-727-3456). Free catalog of public domain software -- includes several menu and recipe programs.

EPISOFT SYSTEMS, Suite 143, 1321 SE Everett Mall Way, Everett, WA 98204. Offers MENU MASTER -- program that converts servings. Licensed version - \$35

PC-SQUARED, P.O. Box 1610, Morgan Hill, CA 95037. Offers

PC-RECIPE, program for recipes.

VANTAGE PRESS, 516 W 34th St.,New York, NY 10001.
"Vanity" printer -- prints and/or promotes books for a fee.

R.R. DONNELLY & SONS, 2223 Martin Luther King Dr.,
Chicago, IL 60616. Book publisher.

KINGSPORT PRESS, INC.,Box 711, Kingsport, TN 37662.
Book printer.

INTERSTATE BOOK MFG. CO., 2115 E. Kansas City Rd.,37662.
Book Printer.

THE KELSEY CO.,Box 941, Meriden, CT 06450, 203/235-1695.
Printing supplies (reliable authority on printing).

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.,31 East 2nd St.,Mineola, NY 11051.
Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd.,Lincolnshire, IL
60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St.,Groten, MA 04171, 800/225-6380.
Office supplies.

IVEY PRINTING, Box 761, Meridan, TX 76665. Letterhead:
400 sheets plus 200 envelopes _ \$18.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business
cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) and letterhead stationery.
Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE & SONS, 4119 Drake Bldg.,Colorado Springs,
CO 80940. Short run business cards (250 for \$5), stationery,
etc.,Good quality but little choice of style or color. Can be
difficult to deal with (they are a "short-order" mail order
house).