

## Comments from the Book Review Editor

### How my mind has changed about vanity publishing

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Everyone knows how the digital revolution has changed business models for newspaper and magazine publishing, but it has changed the business of book publishing equally if not more.

Writer Karen McQuestion spent nearly a decade trying without success to persuade a New York publisher to print one of her books. In 2010 the 49-year-old mother of three decided to publish it herself, online. A year later, Ms. McQuestion sold 36,000 e-books through Amazon's Kindle e-bookstore and has a film option with a Hollywood producer. In August 2011 Amazon published a paperback version of her first novel, *A Scattered Life*, about a friendship triangle among three women in small-town Wisconsin. Ms. McQuestion is at the leading edge of a technological disruption that's loosening traditional publishers' grip on the book market—and giving new power to technology companies like Amazon to shape which books succeed.

When I published my first book in 1987, vanity publishing—paying a publisher to print your book—was scorned by professional authors. It was called “the vanity press” because writers who weren't good enough to find a reputable publisher paid a company up to \$10,000 to print maybe 1,000 copies of their book. It was up to the author to find buyers or give their books away.

I never considered self-publishing any of my five books, but today my mind has changed. If I write another book, I will publish it with an e-book publisher and not a traditional print publisher. Publishing your own book in a digital format for reading through Kindle or iPads has become acceptable and even desirable. At least a dozen companies today will publish a book for you and make it available to customers in print-on-demand and other electronic formats for digital readers.

The advantage to authors of electronic publishing is simple: wider distribution, more sales, and more money that comes directly to the author. With a traditional print publisher, the author gets 10 percent of the retail cover price or wholesale price of the book. With a

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digital publisher, the book might only sell for \$10. But since there are no printing or distribution charges, the authors can make up to 80 percent of that \$10 or \$8 per copy. So the profit potential for authors is considerably higher.

The three books reviewed in this issue reveal that we are still in the middle of a publishing revolution with an impact as deep and wide as that of the printing press. Juli Metzger, a Ball State faculty colleague, reviews *Can Journalism Be Saved? Rediscovering America's Appetite for News* written by Magazine Division head Rachel Davis Mersey. Carol T. Fletcher reviews *Republic of Words: The Atlantic Monthly and Its Writers, 1857-1925*. Myles Ludwig reviews my book, *The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900*, and says I am too optimistic about the future of magazines.

Stay tuned. The digital ride isn't over.