Self-Publishing and the Computer Underground

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Myles Long
Director of Depravity, CULT OF THE DEAD COW
myles@cultdeadcow.com • http://www.cultdeadcow.com/

Christian “RaD Man” Wirth
Founder, ACiD Productions; Member, cDc’s Ninja Strike Force
radman@acid.org • http://www.acid.org/

Rob “Flack” O’Hara
Member, cDc’s Ninja Strike Force
flack@cdc-nsf.com • http://www.ninjastrikeforce.com/
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Introduction

Myles Long

- Director of Depravity, CULT OF THE DEAD COW
- Webmaster, cultdeadcow.com
- Administrator, cDc’s Bovine Dawn Dojo Forum
- Editor and writer, CULT OF THE DEAD COW
- Editor, The Book of Cao: Enlightenment through a Poke in the Eye (cDc communications, August 2006)
Introduction

Christian Wirth, a.k.a. “RaD Man”

- Founder, ACiD Productions
- Member, cDc’s Ninja Strike Force
- Webmaster, acid.org
- Organizer, Blockparty – a U.S. Demoparty
- Interviewee, BBS: The Documentary
- Editor/creator, Dark Domain DVD-ROM (ACiD Productions, 2005)
Introduction

- Rob O’Hara, a.k.a. “Jack Flack”
  - Member, cDc’s Ninja Strike Force
  - Webmaster, ninjastrikeforce.com
  - Reviewer, Videogame Collector magazine and the Digital Press zine
  - Moderator/administrator/feature writer, Digital Press (digitpress.com)
  - Contributing author, Retro Gaming Hacks (O’Reilly, October 2005)
  - Author, Commodork (Rob O’Hara Books, September 2006)
What do all of these publications have in common?

- Seven books, one magazine
- Three bestsellers, five not
- They were all originally published without the backing of a major publishing house.
Background – what is self-publishing?

- Definitions – self vs. vanity publishing

  - "**Self-publishing** is the publishing of books and other media by the authors of those works, rather than by established, third-party publishers…”

  - "A **vanity press** or **vanity publisher** is a book printer which, while claiming to be a publisher, charges writers a fee in return for publishing their books or otherwise makes most of its money from the author rather than from the public.”

- Analogous to shareware/freeware
  - Author maintains control
  - Author receives most/all proceeds
  - Often niche-oriented
Background – relevant self-published works

- **Online**
  - **E-zines**
    - Phrack
    - Soljo
    - CULT OF THE DEAD COW
  - **E-books, websites, and blogs**
    - CCC.de
    - DeviantArt
    - Hackaday.com
    - Hackcanada.com
    - Slashdot
    - Attrition.org
  - **Streaming/shared mp3s**
    - Phluid
    - cDc tunez / NSF Radio
    - Hacker Voice Radio

- **Offline**
  - **(Maga)Zines**
    - 2600
    - Blacklisted 411
    - Die Datenschleuder
  - **Books**
    - Practical Packet Analysis by Sanders
    - Security Data Visualization by Conti
    - End of Dayz
    - Freax
    - Commodork
    - The Book of Cao
  - **Radio and other**
    - Off the Hook
    - Off the Wall
    - Dark Domain DVD-ROM

Clearly, these lists are not exhaustive. Don’t whine if we left your work out.
Content – what to convey?

- Is my work good enough?
  - Yes.
    - Everyone has a book/article/song/painting/etc. in them somewhere
  - If you do not think that you are that original/good, maybe your friend is

- But...
  - Getting sued is bad – intellectual property rights are key
    - Original content
      - Write what you know – clichéd but true
      - Example: *Commodork*
    - Previously published content for which you own or can obtain the rights
      - A plethora of underground-related content is just waiting to be republished for mass consumption – even if you can already download it all for free
      - Licenses that are your friends
        - GNU Free Documentation License
        - Creative Commons
      - Examples: *The Book of Cao*, *Dark Domain*
    - Obtaining distribution rights
      - Be sure to follow copyright law
      - Examples: *Freax*, *Dark Domain*
Investment – aside from content, what is needed?

- **Audience**
  - Less important than content

- **Time (which equals money, as we all know)**

- **Money – depends on the avenue you pursue**
  - Online is cheaper than offline
  - ISBN – ~$25, for books/DVDs/individual issues of serials
    - May not be necessary, depending on where you want to sell
    - In general, must be purchased in blocks of 10
    - May be purchased from self-publishing site at a markup, ie. lulu.com
  - ISSN – free, for serials only
  - UPC – $89, for all types of products
  - Print-on-demand
    - Very little cost
    - No inventory to manage
    - Could be free (unless you buy a copy for yourself)
  - Short press run
    - Minimum lot quantities of 500-1000 (usually)
    - Slightly better print/binding quality
## Publishing – which site(s) to use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Upfront Cost</th>
<th>Other Services</th>
<th>Royalty</th>
<th>Min Order Qty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AuthorHouse</td>
<td>authorhouse.com</td>
<td>Print on demand</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>Professional design and layout, copy-editing, promotional services</td>
<td>5% – 50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booksurge (Amazon.com)</td>
<td>booksurge.com</td>
<td>Print on demand / short press run</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>Editing services, “publishing packages,” “total design freedom”</td>
<td>Depends on distribution channel</td>
<td>1 / ???</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Press</td>
<td>cafepress.com</td>
<td>Print on demand</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Set by author</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iUniverse</td>
<td>iuniverse.com</td>
<td>“Supported self publishing” (print on demand / short press run)</td>
<td>$299 – $1199</td>
<td>Professional design and layout, editorial services, marketing help</td>
<td>20% (print) / 50% (online)</td>
<td>1 / ???</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lulu*</td>
<td>lulu.com</td>
<td>Print on demand</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Editing, graphics, translation, marketing, publicity</td>
<td>Set by author</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapfish</td>
<td>snapfish.com</td>
<td>Photo books</td>
<td>$4.99 – $19.99</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a non-comprehensive list. Do your own research before choosing a site to use.

*DISCLAIMER:* Both Commodork and The Book of Cao were published through Lulu. We’re not endorsing Lulu in any way; they have pros and cons, just as the other sites do.

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Marketing – promotion is a never-ending job

- You are selling yourself as much as your product
  - Making friends = making sales
  - Use every contact you have

- Online
  - Book-specific website
  - Press releases
  - Forums
  - Blogs
  - Websites/E-zines
  - Podcasts

- Offline
  - Press releases
  - Magazines
  - Meetings/Cons

- Common trap: writing for marketing
  - Solution: market the writing, don’t write for the market
  - Thinking about marketing first is like writing pop music
ROI – how many copies can I expect to sell?

- To profit or not to profit?
  - Are you writing/publishing to make money or to get your idea(s) out there?
    - You can sell “at cost”
    - Naturally, you can mark up that price for a profit
      - Printing is so cheap that margins can be very high (e.g., 32% for *The Book of Cao*)
      - Regardless, you are not likely to get rich by self-publishing

- Sales depend on audience and availability of similar products
  - Print on demand works can, theoretically, be available forever with little-to-no inventory
    - Indefinite availability allows the audience to find the work
ROI (cont.)

- The average self-published book sells approximately 200 copies over its lifetime*
  - *Commodork* = ~500 copies in < 1 year
    - BBS memoirs appear to be big sellers
  - *Freax* = ~100 copies in North America in ~ 2 years
    - It is a coffee table book that retails for $36.99
  - *The Book of Cao* = ~150 copies in < 1 year
    - Its content has been available for free for > 10 years
  - *Dark Domain DVD-ROM* = ~800 copies in ~ 3 years
    - Its content was available at artpacks.acid.org for several years


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Accepting Payments

- **Amazon Advantage**
  - $29.95 annual fee + $15 check fee (if not using EFT)
  - Amazon takes a 55% cut of each sale
  - Inventory is shipped directly to and managed by Amazon
  - You can make 4% back per sale in referral fees by joining Amazon Associates if you refer the sale to Amazon from your own website
  - Amazon manages inventory in their own warehouse

- **Amazon Marketplace**
  - $1.35 closing fee + $0.99 transaction fee
  - Amazon takes 15% cut of each sale
  - Payment made by EFT or gift certificate only, payment by check is not available
  - You ship directly to seller
  - Product must be listed on Amazon proper before it can be added to the Marketplace
Accepting Payments (cont.)

- PayPal
  - Site: www.paypal.com
  - $0.30 transaction fee
  - eBay takes 2.9% of each sale (unless you have a high sales volume)
  - Easy to set up
  - Cons: Not available in all countries
    - 190 countries are currently supported

- Kagi
  - Site: www.kagi.com
  - $1.00 transaction fee
  - Kagi takes 2.5% of each sale
  - Credit card fees range between 2.1% - 4.8%
  - No additional fee for cutting a check
  - Supports the largest variety of credit card and other payment options, helpful support

- DBA (assumed business name)
  - Accept checks using the name of your own business
  - No fees. :)
Reviews – there really is no such thing as bad press

- Good reviews come from people who are excited about you and your product
- Never stop promoting
  - We are still being reviewed a year later – this takes time
- Find “target” websites (ie. sites whose users would be interested)
  - Provide copies in exchange for reviews
- Contact websites/zines/newspapers
  - Offer interviews
- Provide electronic/PDF copies for reviews
- Take people's positive feedback/e-mail/comments, use as a review
- Use contacts (friends, writers, etc.) who can review your product
- Make sure you have all of your ducks in a row before soliciting reviews
  - Website set up
  - Ready for orders
Conclusion – GO FORTH AND PUBLISH

- Thanks to the Internet, everyone can be a published author
  - Anyone can do it
  - Everyone should do it
- Share the knowledge, share the wealth
Questions?