



The self-publishing evolution: the Lulu.com case

The Network, the Community and the Self-Creativity

Over the Print on Demand,
more than the User Generated Content

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Lulu.com is a marketplace where “authors” - individuals, companies and groups - can publish and sell a variety of digital content including books, music, video, software, calendars, photos and artwork.

In this paper, on the base of the preliminary studies, we are going to analyse the Lulu.com online self-publishing company considering its position in the online environment utilizing Print-on-Demand technology.

Firstly, we define what the self-publishing phenomenon is. This section comprises figures and critical perspectives that are essential to have a detailed identity card of the self-publishing industry. Furthermore, a benchmark analysis helps our understanding of Lulu.com in the competitive environment. Then, we are going to have a look at the advantages and drawbacks of using PoD technology, since the Lulu revolution is based on this type of evolution of the digital typography system, which it makes possible print low quantity of product at accessible costs.

At the end, we speak about the dynamism of the value based customer relationships that are based on two main assets: the physical networks and the community built on it.

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Introduction

The Lulu.com project

Lulu.com is the brainchild of Bob Young, the entrepreneur who founded the open source company Red Hat, which had launched all over in the world Linux software, the world's leading open source system. With Lulu, Young is gambling that lessening the control exercised by traditional publishers over the distribution of information will in the long run create a richer marketplace for consumers. The Lulu brand is derived from the concept of a "lulu," which is an old-fashioned term for a remarkable person, object or idea.

Lulu.com, an on-demand marketplace for books, e-books, music, and multimedia, is the latest company offering self-publishing tools for authors. Lulu.com claims that in the space of a few minutes an author with a finished manuscript can make his or her book available as a paperback to order through the Internet. The company reported that authors have published 100,000 new titles on Lulu.com in the last six months alone, with over 2,000 new titles added each week. Lulu is based in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, and evolved from a company called Open Mind Publishing. The collaborative music site nowRecording.com is also part of the Lulu family. As we can find in an article of the press centre of Lulu, the company is a proven leader in the digital marketplace with over 110,000 items sold last month.¹

Lulu is a revolutionary idea for the so called Print-on-Demand publishing industry. Bob Young, the Canadian entrepreneur, after a significant failure of the sales of his book "Under the radar", has not been discouraged, but he has started to use books in order to create his new business. As a matter of fact, Mr. Young has been very successful to found a niche for his Print-on-Demand market. He based on his concept on the fact that editors refuse to publish usually not because of the quality of one book, CD or photobook, rather because the title simply does not have market.

Lulu after having been founded in 2002; has become one of the web's premier independent publishing marketplace for digital "do-it-yourselfers". According to the principles of the self-publishing industry, Lulu is a place on the web where you can publish, sell and buy books, music, comics, photographs, movies, and doing so consumers

¹ Anonymous, Lulu provides technology to make personalized gift giving affordable, Dundas Star News, Dec 8 2006.; http://www.dundasstarnews.com/dsn/news/news_677516.html

are going to belong to a virtual marketplace, because all transaction on the Lulu page is digital. It looks like a virtual library to which the customer can connect and up- or download the work - literary, musical or a photographic one – according to his or her preference. The downloaded material can be in the more suitable format costumers like, such as PDF, DVD or in the traditional ones.

Lulu simply provides the tools that leave control of content in the hands of the people who created the content. Therefore Lulu is not only a kind of publisher company, but also a technology one, because of its digital content.

Lulu.com does not currently charge fees for publishing an author's book. Authors themselves assume responsibility for editing, marketing and many of the other services traditionally provided by publishers –including the online business, sometimes also printing, delivery and customer service. In return they maintain complete control over their work, including setting their own royalty and the ability to revise and republish their books anytime. Lulu.com also offers custom cover art, uploading, formatting and editing services for a fee. Lulu.com also earns a 20% commission on book sales, at the end of each quarter, Lulu mail them a check for the royalties users' content generates.

Considering the features of the Lulu company, we can ask, what does make this site so popular among users? Lulu is special, because on the one hand Lulu is also a technology company, since Lulu is based on the use of an open source software, putting users in control of technology. Lulu believes in putting authors and independent publishers in control of their digital content, from content creation to pricing to royalties. The other main reason of the success of the Lulu project, that Lulu simply brings creative content to the world and gives talented and in some cases hedonistic publishers and web visitors the venue to buy and sell independent works, which comprise not only books but other interactive products. At the same time the site has a huge emphasize on entertaining its users, and give an opportunity people to be extrovert being a certain kind of exhibition-place for individuality.

Bob Young, Lulu.com's founder and CEO, argues that putting authors in control of the publishing process is a good thing. Young says, "When the Internet came along, established media companies were horrified that anyone could publish a web site. They thought that the amount of bad content would make the information available on the Internet worthless. But that has turned out not to be true. The Internet is full of useful content. People have developed tools to sort out what they want from what they don't. Lulu.com opens up book publishing in the same way."²

² www.lulu.com

1. The self-publishing phenomenon

Publish on demand, also known as print on demand or PoD, is an increasingly common and accessible alternative or supplement to traditional publishing methods. PoD systems make use of digital technologies to enable an all-digital printing system. This reduces initial set-up costs, in the sense that small print runs can be published at a reasonable unit cost. The technology becomes less price-effective at large volumes, making PoD systems particularly economical for publications with low or limited demand, or where the predictability of market demand is fairly low. The minimal set-up costs also imply that publications can be made available on a speculative basis.

1.1 A 'Long-Tail' Technology

The beginning of PoD also happens together with current discussions characterised by the phrase 'the long tail'³. The expression refers to the large number of moderately popular or less popular publications that are interesting to a quite large segment of the population, but are not bestsellers or chart hits. Such content is often very difficult to get hold of, given that demand is too low for it to be profitable efficiently according to traditional economics of scale publishing. Small-scale publication – the Print-on-Demand methodology- reduces this barrier, meaning that content can be digitally stored, browsed and made available for sale on virtual interfaces, and a physical object such as a book or a CD is printed for the buyer.

Digital browsing and distribution also means that physical limits, such as the size of a shop and the amount of space available in the warehouse for storing a large print run of books, becomes a less significant factor in the decision of whether to publish.

Popular PoD services include Xlibris.com, Lulu.com and Blurb.com and well-known PoD companies are also iUniverse.com, and 1stBooks.com now named

³ The Long Tail, Chris Anderson, < http://today.reuters.com/news/articlenews.aspx?type=internetNews&storyID=2006-12-11T062157Z_01_N04486747_RTRUKOC_0_US-LONGTAIL.xml&WTmodLoc=InternetNewsHome_C1_%5BFeed%5D-1>

AuthorHouse.com. Each has its own process; Blurb, for example, specialises in printing from web applications such as blogs and wikis, whereas Lulu provides a number of modes of use - essentially, most PDF files with embedded fonts can be printed using the Lulu publishing system. Customised covers and so forth can also be created, even though simple and effective defaults are also available. Several book formats are available, ranging from bound A4 to British or American paperback novel formats.

1.2 The advantages of self-publishing

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Over the past few months, there is an emerged attention in articles⁴ about print-on-demand (PoD) publishing and it has to be mentioned despite of the many negative critics about the industry, self-publishing has been receiving more and more positive attention in the international media. Self-publishing companies are companies that charge authors a fee to publish their books. Print-on-demand companies are companies that store electronic copies of books, eventually films and music, and print and produce them, in specific quantities, only when orders are received – all this again for a special fee, or for a price of a tailor-made package. What are the benefits of PoD for these special fees?

PoD and non online self-publishing companies in general allows authors to:

- > avoid the higher costs (it is precise in the case of online companies only at low amount of production level!) because there is little or no waste from unsold products
- > avoid large inventories and storage expenses of the book or poster do not need to be kept in stock inventory
- > quicker and less expensive technical set-up
- > quickly reprint titles when inventory runs low
- > quickly reprint when demand exceeds forecasts
- > test-market new book titles using short-runs (galleys) which print and bind with the same specs as final production runs
- > economically fulfil smaller quantity needs of a shorter run niche markets
- > pre-publish more titles where first editions are less than 1,500 units
- > keep printed literature or manual needs current by updating content more often
- > furnish advanced critique copies of high-end full colour catalogue and annual report jobs to tweak design, copy, image positioning, and general content prior to production runs
- > print out-of-stock titles in small
- > be instrumental in bringing out-of-print titles back to life

⁴ Lulu rivoluziona il sistema editoriale, - http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Scienze_e_Tecnologie/2005/08_Agosto/01/lulu.shtml;
Lulu, c'è un libro per tutti con la filosofia open source Il sito stampa solo gli esemplari che vengono venduti, Riccardo Bagnato,
http://www.repubblica.it/2006/10/sezioni/scienza_e_tecnologia/libri-on-demand/libri-on-demand/libri-on-demand.html?ref=hpsez

In addition, in the case of books, PoD or self-publishing types of companies differ from traditional publishers in the sense that the writer is the publisher of the book, not the company. The writer invests in his own work, absorbing all losses, enjoying all benefits, and maintaining the ownership and distribution rights of the book.

A huge challenge can be that the writer can be responsible for the all marketing and distribution staff which is a huge undertaking, except they buy the package containing various type of advertising and publicity toolkits, that can allows also to enter consumer's book into the so called *Google Book Search Partner Program*, a specialized service on *Google.com* that searches the full text of books to find content of interest, enables users to view a small portion of relevant books, and then directs users to online bookstores where they may purchase them.

1.3 The price of vanity

Print-On-Demand companies are often considered as vanity publishers. That means you pay them to publish your book. A vanity, or subsidy, press is one that charges a fee to publish an author's work, and then, unlike legitimate print-on-demand companies, it can happen it retains the rights to the book.

Sometimes subsidy press companies even make authors buy copies of their own books once published. They may pay the author royalties from book sales, but the majority of sales go to the company. This can be unethical. When authors pay to have their books published, they should retain the rights to the books.

As a consequence there remains a stigma associated to the use of print-on-demand for certain types of content, particularly narratives. It is associated in many peoples' minds with the use of small presses or vanity presses, which to many have the reputation of preying on the trusting novelist, demanding large setup fees for small print runs and providing no help in terms of marketing or distributing the work. ISBNs need to be bought separately, which is important because distribution difficulties exist for works without an ISBN assigned to them. However, there are many compelling uses of print-on-demand, ranging from publishing of local-interest or specialist books, particularly convincing for institutions such as museums, schools, to print publication of conferences, various proceedings, or brochures.

One of the most intriguing problem with vanity press that there is no bookstore distribution. Bookstores rarely carry subsidy titles. But if authors' book is not in stores, the likelihood of reaching the vast majority of book-buying customers is significantly restricted. For this reason, even if users create a book/compilation/photobook which may be listed in online bookstores such as Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble, may have even an ISBN and can be included in an electronic catalogue, customers simply will not know about it, unless they know the title in advance.

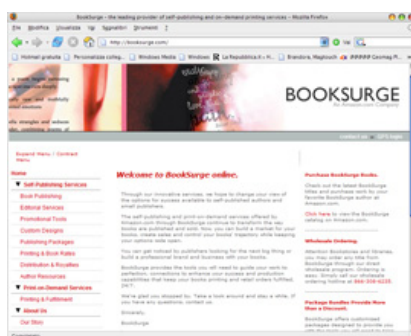
However, there are many articles warning for carefulness in on the topic of PoD solutions. Some self-publishing and print-on-demand companies do not edit or copyedit the material they are given, and if the writer does not take the responsibility of getting the book copyedited, the result can be a shoddy product. It is recommended that writers seek referrals by contacting other writers who have worked with the company in question.

While self-publishing a useful methodology, other publication methodologies should be considered in parallel - in particular, there are many potential difficulties and responsibilities that should be considered in terms of distribution and marketing, which are often not handled by PoD businesses, or it is supported but for a pretty much higher price.

1.4 Competitors and benchmarking

After having have a look at on the dynamism of self-publishers and their methodology, let us provide a snapshot of the most famous online PoD companies:

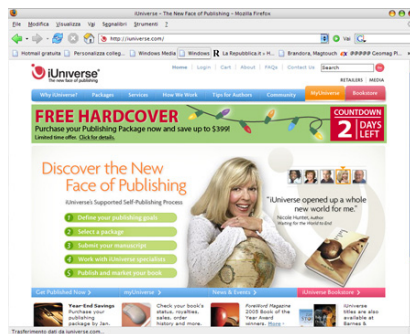
BOOKSURGE An Amazon.com Company



"BookSurge.com owned by Amazon.com, provides professional services that enable authors to publish their own work, and by doing so, allows authors to retain control of their intellectual property, their sales trajectory and their profits.

Offering a wide range of services from professional book interior and exterior design to editing and promotional tools, thousands of authors has taken advantage of our Global Publishing System (GPS) software platform and expert staff to make their dreams a reality."⁵

⁵ <http://www.booksurge.com/ourstory.html>



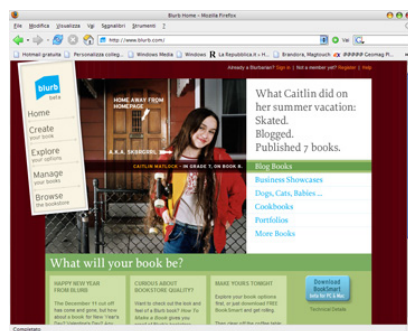
The most important distinctive feature of iUniverse.com, that not it only allows publish customers' book but makes it available on Barnes & Noble.com (www.bn.com), Amazon.com and 25,000 other online retailers worldwide. Thanks to print-on-demand (PoD) technology, users can request as many copies of their book as they need and receive them in a matter of days. There are no minimum order requirements, and iUniverse.com claims that their consumers will never be pressured to purchase books.⁶

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Xlibris



Similarly to the previous one, Xlibris.com gives writers the tools to become publisher. Authors give Xlibris.com their manuscript, after that they work together on formatting it and design the cover, and then the completed file is stored digitally. Books are added to an online bookstore as well as other popular booksellers like Amazon.com and Borders.com. When someone places an order for a copy, Xlibris have one printed up and ship it out, splitting the royalties with the author. They offer hardback and trade paperback. Writers retain all rights of their work and are free to take it elsewhere at any time.⁷



"Blurb is a company and a community that believes passionately in the joy of books – reading them, making them, sharing them, and selling them."⁸

Blurb enables anyone to create, share and distribute affordable, beautiful, bookstore-quality books. Blurb's technology is based on their award-winning BookSmart software application that makes it easy to create a professionally designed book, using simple dragging and dropping of photos and auto-flowing text, in about an hour.

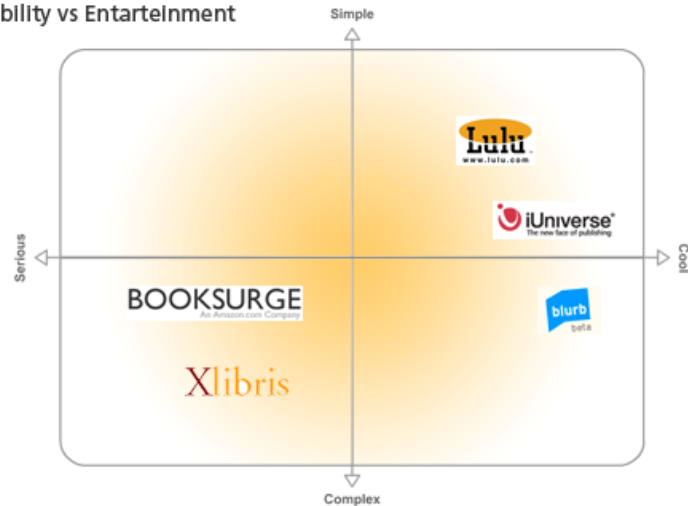
⁶ www.iuniverse.com

⁷ <http://www2.xlibris.com/>

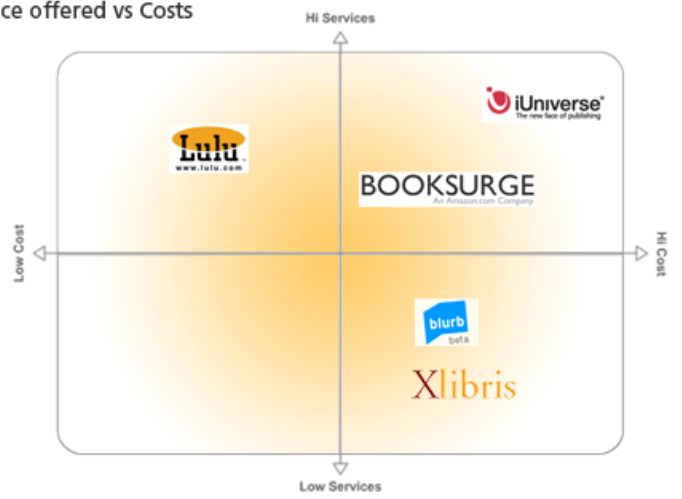
⁸ <http://www.blurb.com/corporate/about>

From the two graphs below we can see Lulu.com in relation to its competitors. The graph a.) shows us Lulu's position regarding its usability and its innovativeness, while graph b.) explains the relationship between services offered and its affordable prices.

a. Usability vs Entertainment



b. Service offered vs Costs



1.5 Lulu.com strategies and its position in the e-market

Taking into account how Lulu allocate and leverage its resources we can say that it is applying the Sense and Respond type of strategy in order to achieve a strong position in the online self-publishing market. They have a well-built asset, which is the community. Moreover, Lulu has almost the intermediary rule on the one hand between networks of consumers or visitors, on the other hand among the companies which provide the work

outsourced by Lulu (E.g.: copyediting, formatting, reviewing and so forth) and costumers undertaking this services.

Reach the public is a tricky issue regarding Lulu.com, because it can be viewed from two different directions. First of all, we have to consider the problem from Lulu's point of view. Secondly, self-publishers have to takes their rightful place among the world of the e-commerce.

In the case of a PoD company, such as Lulu.com, is a real marketing challenge. The dilemma is how create an original, individual set of toolkits and packages for consumers seeking for self-publishing solutions. This, however, forms another challenge: how to market these services to the appropriately appreciative audience.

It is important to get people to Lulu.com, but the real process starts with finding customers. The Internet allows Lulu to attract customers in two ways:

- > getting them to find you through search engines, links, and alliances with other sites;
- > by proactively finding them and sending material electronically.

One of the most effective way people find online businesses is through search engines. There are a number of general-purpose engines where Lulu.com is registered, such as AltaVista, Google, Yahoo!, and MSN. It is also important to find the specialty search engines that focus on your specific industry, such as publishing, self-publishing. Moreover Lulu.com is linked from/to other complimentary e-businesses. One of the most relevant aspects of Lulu's success is based on web sites that potential customers visit, and links to the Lulu.com site.

As we have already said, it has to be considered from the user point of view, which has to deal with the positioning of his or her own book, CD, or DVD. To accomplish this need Lulu offers information both for free, such as the freely downloadable materials to help to manage consumers' creation, and provides also fee charged marketing services, often offered by external service provides – comprising from press release creation to eBay distribution package as well.

1.6 The Self-publishers community

Since we had no possibility to choose a specific market for Lulu.com and make a research to understand which type of users use the site and the services built around it, we can just make some assumption on the bases of the packages and tools they offer to

customers and try to classify relevant segments for Lulu.com, but even for self-publishing companies, generally speaking.

We have decided to analyse the packages offered by self-publishing companies, and doing so we could approximately identify the features of the most typical slice of customer groups without making any kind of demographic segmentation referring to who is connecting to Lulu.com; moreover we could find out the likely reasons why customers behave the way they do.

According to the services offered by e-publishers we can distinguish at least five main segments:



> Authorpreneurs

They would like to reach readers both adults and kids with the aim to entertainment with their stories, or simply makes them smile, and at the same time create sales for their hopefully successful story. The authorpreneur type of writers has carefully developed characters, a fantastic storyline and a goal of selling books. That is why these type of writers can be recognized as “authorpreneurs”.⁹

> Extrovert individualists/entertainers

If they are writers, probably they have their real story to tell. It is about “auto-biographers”, who would like to share the story of their life and to preserve it for future generations to read about and learn from. If they are not writers, they would more likely to share their photo-albums, self-portraits.

> The Experts

They are talented cooks, travellers, or researchers accomplished with a special kind of professional skill with expertise to share, or experience to communicate. The Experts have intention to share their knowledge through a device available to a large public, namely the Internet.

> Community Seekers

People interested in publishing or self-publishing, photo-edition, downloadable books, music, films. They like to comment in digital format such as blog, chat, mail. They tend to discover these kind of sites through search-engine systems, word-of-mouth, or complementary web pages.

> Families

It is an interesting fact that one of the highest ranked service on Lulu is to create a book composition with children’s drawings. Family members discovered the great opportunity to create special memories or gifts to each others using PoD services.

⁹ V. Michael Santoro, Book Marketing Landmines and How to Avoid Them; <http://www.proauthors.com/Aff-article-02.html>

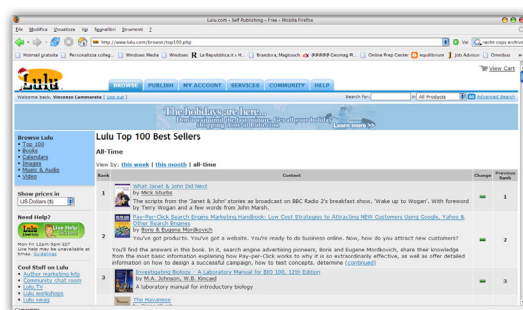
2. The Lulu.com model



Lulu.com web site can be browse following two different navigation streams: the “Marketplace”, the “bookshelf” where the visitors can find all the titles that are on sale, and the self “Publishing”, the real engine of the Lulu.com network, where the “authors” can manage their own creativity.

Near these two relevant areas there are: a set of services useful to support the publishing (pre-publishing, graphic services, publishing services), the promotional activity (marketing and publicity services, write press release, set up storefront, marketing kits) and then the community, the soul of the authors network.

2.1 “Browse” the offer



In this section the user can browse all the proposals available: the “Lulu.com Marketplace”. This space is divided into five categories of products: books, calendars, images, music & audio, video.

Each kind of creativity is organized in sub-categories following the model of other online

bookshops (Amazon – in the first period of activity –, Abebooks or Barnes&Noble.com).

As expected, users can see the “Top 100” of the week and easily, with the click through, enter in the page of the book chosen.

The file of the product contains a cover image and data regarding: the title, the name of the author (with the link to personal space), the intend audience (Children, Everyone, Teen, Mature), the price (of the printed or downloadable version), the rating of the readers and the description written by author.

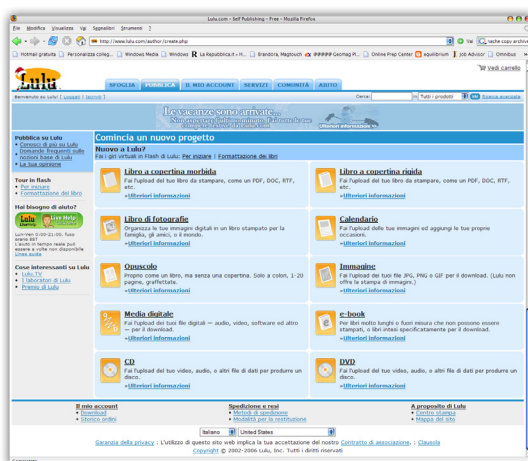
In order to evaluate the effective value of the book or other multimedia products and set up the reliability of the author, whose are interested in purchasing can see or hear, a preview of the source file and read the comments left from the readers community.

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In that meaning, like in Wikipedia case, the contents presents and sell are not editing from the lulu.com governance: the site is in fact a “technological partner” and not a “Publisher” that control the work of the “self publishers”, and the community, with the rating and comments activities, can cut out the market the product, like in Amazon, and his creator, as E-bay.

Another possibility given to the buyers’ community is browsing personal “shop window” (storefront): a space where authors or “publishers” can build an inner webpage where promote theirs creative proposes. In this sense the philosophy applied is the same of MySpaces.com, where clients can manage a potential attractive pole for community.

2.2 “Publish” the creative works



Monitor the homepage, it is given a relevant space to publishing activities, which is the core purpose of the Lulu.com model. Authors can use Lulu.com to publish many types of digital media, including documents, music or video, CDs, DVDs and more. The publishing process is very similar for all types of media.

It is required to create an account: it is a short registering operation that does not have time

constrain, it is free and permit to create, develop and manage personal publishing projects.

For the purpose of this short description, we show behind the steps to publish a book in both print and download formats from a word processing document:

> Information

Input the author and work data (including copyright information and eventually ISBN number).

> Upload & content

Once optimized and formatted the “source” document (.doc, .pdf...), there is the uploading phase and the .pdf conversion. Before beginning the effective publishing process, the author needs to decide the size of printed book: are available different size, taken from the international, USA and EU, digital-typography standards. At this point the author is able to visualize the print-ready document preview.

> Binding & colours

Then is possible setting the preferred package of the printed product, selecting the binding typology and the press colors (colors or b/w) and check printing costs.

> Cover art

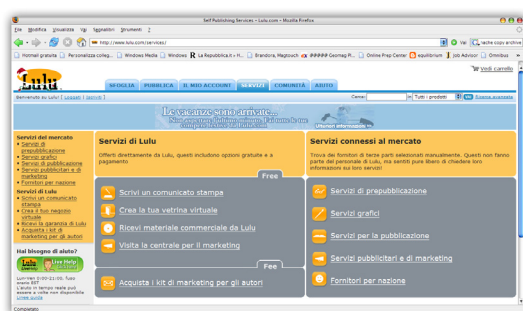
An important aspect is the customization opportunity that Lulu.com offers to design the cover pages with the possibility to use one of many templates available. The particular creative authors can upload their files.

> Pricing and finishing

Finally, is required to pricing the printed and digital version product, check royalties and Lulu.com commissions and complete the operation accepting the Copyright license.

2.3 “Services”: free or fee?

2.3.1 Free tools and services offered



> Write a Press Release

The author can download a template customizable by filling own information in place of the sample name and title. Then the user can follow many suggestions on the contents of the release and is asked to refer Lulu.com as “the world’s fastest-growing provider of print-on-demand books”. Further, in order to distribute the “press kit”, they recommend a Web PR agency network (PRWeb).

> Set up your storefront

In this section the “seller” can manage their own products bookshelf.

> Get Lulu.com collateral

Where downloads promotional materials for the website, book signing, or convention booth, in order to co-advise Lulu.com and products.

> Visit Marketing Central

A collection of many marketing tools and solutions (not all free), useful to communicate the product. For instance, it is possible, copy the html code correspondent to a set of buttons and banners that redirect the user to the single product page.

2.3.2 Fee services

> Buy author marketing kits

A “ready made” growing selection of printed items to assist authors in their marketing efforts. (Business Card, Post Card and Bookmarks).

> Pre-publishing Services

Lulu.com proposes different partners that can help authors in the editing phase (correction, translations, indexing, formatting...).

> Graphic Services

As previous, Lulu.com suggests to consult professionals and specialist graphic designer, that can improve the quality of the product.

> Publishing Services

Useful for optimizing, converting and revisioning drafts.

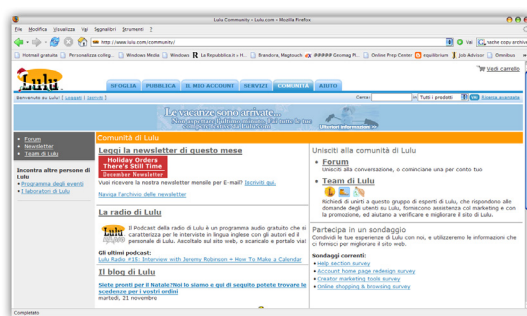
> Marketing and publicity services

In this subdivision are collected Lulu.com-approved third parties service providers that can support authors in many marketing activities and distribution: event, promotional materials, distribution on e-bay, press release, web design, book jacket and so far so on.

> Providers by Country

Names and contacts of international partners.

2.4 “Community”: the Lulu.com soul



The Lulu.com “project” exploits the Users Generated Contents trend and found his philosophy on the authors-readers community power. In this sense, we consider it a sort of business strategy that permits Lulu.com to be “the world’s fastest-growing provider of print-on-demand books” thanks mainly to the word of mouth generated.

In order to increase the size of community, Lulu.com gives many “meeting opportunities”: Lulus can join using not only the traditional relationship tools, like forum and blog, but also, information tools, as the Newsletter and the Lulu.com Radio-TV (using Podcast technology) and creating events and prize that have a relevant external visibility.

The Lulu.com fans can also apply to join into the staff team providing with the marketing, promotion, help test and improve the site. The application foresee three different levels of involvement in order to diffuse the Lulu.com brand: “*community leaders*”, presents in the forum an throughout the site in order to support other users; “*street promoters*”, “on field” people presents at conventions, conferences, events and fairs; “*bug hunters*” that help Lulu.com beta test new releases and verify that bugs have been fixed.

For better understanding the Lulu.com habit, we let's see three kinds of communication tools: the Newsletter, the LuluRadio and the LuluPrize.



- > "LuluCreators": the newsletter

It is a monthly website where Lulu.com staff, speaks about relevant issues. The structure, is builds around a focus on the current time period (Christmas, Valentine's day, Thanks giving) that is used like recall for holiday shipping activities. LuluCreators presents then many arguments of general interest on the LuluWorld, PoD and Self-publishing industry, administrative information and workshop scheduled. There is also a little news coverage survey with the latest articles on Lulu.com and the PoDcast service (LuluRadio) with authors' interviews and previous downloadable audio archive. Naturally also the hedonism of "creators" is reward by theirs product review copy: the cover and a small description of the content, links to the relative page. The worldwide communities' activities are promoted and presented in a separate corner of the page, followed by the authors' voice, a quotation by a fun mail to Lulu.com staff.



> The LuluRadio: the voice of Lulu.com

The LuluRadio Podcast is a free audio program, updated weekly, that features in English language interviews with Lulus and the staff. The themes treated are various: the editions go from the “how to”, where experts and authors advice publishing techniques on various products, to “community spotlight”, on the Lulus lifestyle, to audio books review.



> The Lulu Blooker Prize¹⁰

The Lulu Blooker Prize is the world's first literary prize devoted to “blooks” – books based on websites such as blog and webcomics. It is awarded in three categories: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Comics. The total Prize fund is \$15,000 divided between the first prize (\$10,000) and the category Prizes. Blooks are the world's fastest-growing new kind of book and way to write new category of content.

The new concept of the publishing industry is that PoD technology generates needs of learning for an appropriate public. For this reason, also the “**Help**” area is particularly useful in order to involve the future “authors” to take into account the creative community prospective. Additionally to the FAQs, the staff proposes three essential tool: the Flash tours, in particular the “*Getting started*” (fundamental in order to show the creative and business potential), the “*Product Cost Calculator*” and the “*Live Help*”, useful to build a solid customer relationship.

¹⁰ www.lulublookerprize.com

3. Building the author's network

3.1 The generated value for the "Lulus"

In order to analyze, the effective values delivered by the Lulu.com model, it is useful to consider all the costs sustained from the users, and the real package of benefits delivered. Obviously, we now are considering the kind of proactive user that take part at the community and maximizing the whole potential of the system, without take care more of the creative works buyer.

3.1.2 Costs analysis

The first features that is communicated to the new user, is the *pseudo*-freeness of the service. At a basic level the monetary cost of the publishing is really equally to \$0. The system in fact, also at the moment of the brief phase of sign-in (low limitation of freedom coast), do not ask to introduce any payment transaction data. All the payable costs are charged to the final shopper and nobody spend nothing until he or she pick up something from the Lulu.com's shelves.

The monetary cost reveals if the "author" want really earn something by the selling of his creative product: as we know, do something and not communicate it, is equal to do not it. The marketing and the promotional tools and efforts represent significant expenses for whom want to create a business from the Lulu.com partnership.

About the proprietary knowledge and cognitive resources costs, we consider it irrelevant in all the self-publishing industry: further more, the possibility of pricing and the opportunity offered by the site of publish and deliver to "the public" a self made craft, repay substantially the "author".

Once published, could grow a kind of risk perception, based on the doubt of the real quality of the final product: the nature of this fear is inside the PoD outsourcing network. Can Lulu.com to warrant for third parties?

Actually, as one can read on the forum, if appear any kind of difficulty or problem with a printed product, Lulu.com provide to the reprinting or the refunding.

3.1.2 Benefits analysis

The functional and the emotional benefits are really clear: the Lulu.com services, are useful and well-designed in order to permit everybody, whit an basic knowledge of word processing software (MSWord), to deliver all around the world own documents. So it is simple and amazing share with others (friends and not only) the fruits and the aims of own protagonist.

It is also clear, that if the content of the uploaded documents is interesting for particular niche of readers, like university study papers, notes or presentations, also the relevance of knowledge sharing create a meaningful social and cognitive benefit.

Balancing costs and benefits, we can conclude that *the success of the Lulu.com, is on the value of his network and community.*

3.2 The neo-publisher experience

The user experience point of view is featured by a simple and intuitive navigation based on the elementary usability policies that permit an immediate involvement to discover and enjoy the web services: the perception is helped by a familiar atmosphere and by the identification of the user with the testimonial successful case shown in the cover random images.

In this way Lulu.com talk about the powerful and the vitality of his growing community, anxious, like the user, to show and read their hedonistic products.

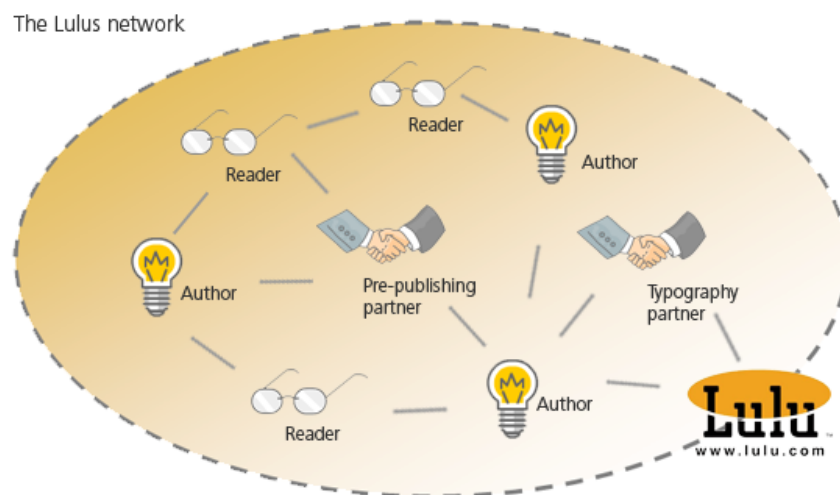
During the user visit, the sensation of friendship and familiarity, is given, not only by homepage photo (as said before), but also by the graphic design style, not so sophisticated (like Iuniverse.com), but really near to the original open source and UGC philosophy: a lab where experiments users creativity.

Like in UGC models, the role of a so presents and actives community, is a warranty for the contents quality (Wikipedia docet) and naturally for all the others members of the networks, suppliers included.

3.3 Identifying the network to create community

“The beginning of a beautiful friendship”¹¹

At the base of Lulu.com phenomenon, there are the relationships that occur between the knots of the network generated. In this sense, we can identify all the points of the net with the stakeholders involved in the PoD process that are the follows: **authors** that create and sell the products, small service company and typographies that are the “**third parts**”, **readers** that buy the books or others products, and, of course, **Lulu.com** that is not only the technological partner but also the governance and overall the glue of Lulus community.



Organizations that understand the opportunity to build community on the Internet will be successful. Lulu has understood this well, and below the “Community” leaflet on Lulu’s homepage consumers can exploit different services and openings, that are basically ways to add value to the relationship among Lulu and its consumers. Which are these communities building aspect?

> Newsletter

Lulu offers newsletters which add value to the relationships, and it can be delivered online or by mail. Consumers can also brows in the newsletter archive.

> Lulu workshop

Lulu.com is offering learning opportunities to further solidify the relationship.

¹¹ Humphrey Bogart alias Rick, from the film: Casablanca (1942)

> Team Lulu

Consumers can enjoy a group of experts regarding the Lulu phenomenon; the aim of the Lulu Team is to help and answer user's questions, and provide assistance of marketing and promotion. Moreover the group test the site in order to improve the Lulu site.

> Surveys

Lulu encourages its users to take a survey and share their experiences with Lulu, in order to improve the services and the website.

> Involve People -The Blooker Prize

a literary prize that rewards bloggers turned bookwriters. It is truly a competition to whom have turned their episodic blogs into a more substantial book. The press often declares positive feedbacks about The Blooker Prize.¹²

> Lulu Radio

The Lulu Radio Podcast is a free audio program that features English-language interviews with Lulu authors and staff. Customers can listen to it on the website, or download it.

From the list above we can see how Lulu uses always more sophisticated ways to build customer loyalty and strong relationships. Lulu has customized its site by providing both added services and giving customers a reason to return regularly to the Lulu e-business.

¹² Anonymous, Blogging book competition hots up; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4780774.stm>

Conclusions

Our analysis about self-publishing and companies built around this activity provided us a better understanding how it works in the real life, and we find out some insights in relation to the difference between PoD services and PoD companies.

First of all, it has to be mentioned that even if in the mind of the broader public, companies that offer print-on-demand or self-publishing services are almost exclusively means: online self-publishing houses, such as Lulu.com and BookSurge of Amazon, there are traditional publisher houses providing services such as digitally save books, and they are also able to service extremely low number of print runs. For instance, it has come out of our researches that Oxford, the largest academic publisher, has been actively using the PoD program for over years.¹³ Therefore we cannot neglect the fact that this technology has had a considerable effect on the whole publishing industry, and will continue to take publishing into new places over the next few years. From production to editorial to finance, print-on-demand is changing the business of publishing.

From these two big area of application of PoD technology (online publisher houses and big traditional academic publishers) we can see how large an impact print-on-demand has had on publishing, and it also reflects the projected impact it will have over the next few years.

It remains to see more detailed what are our suggestions considering Lulu.com in the promising online self-publishing market.

Undoubtedly, Lulu.com is continuously works on adding value the relationship once established due to its services. They are using online techniques, to make more interactive and really entertaining the relationship and the “connecting-in” with customers. Consumers can be signed in, download, upload, chat, blogging, participate in events, and so forth. However, in our opinion Lulu.com should convey their mission and vision by a better organised design on its interface and foster its differentiation among competitors communicating in a more clear way, highlighting what is offered exclusively by them, organising information on the web site still more user friendly.

¹³ Jeremy Lewis, Print-on-Demand or Short Run Digital Printing: A New Technology for Publishers, Publishing Research Quarterly Volume 18, Number 1 / April 1, 2002

Concerning its services, Lulu probably should have emphasise more its subsidy type of publishing offers, since as to the book-writers Lulu has opened many doors by its reasonably priced small-scale publishing but, and there is a but, it is worth only for the smaller organisation or the individual. As a consequence we find excellent Lulu.com efforts to promote other directions of editing, such as music, photographs and art works, however whilst a PoD is a useful methodology, to whom wants to see their books in libraries, other publication methodologies should be considered in parallel.

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