

Article AB-210

1,102 words

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When Your Book Turns Out Not Quite Perfect

by Dan Poynter

Normally, the arrival of a new book is a day to celebrate just like the arrival of a new baby. Publishing a book is a lot like giving birth and you want each to be perfect. Here is a book quality control plan, a list of things to look for and some solutions in those rare instances when things go wrong.

Check quantity. When the books arrive from the printer, count the cartons. The packing slip will be in an envelope pasted to the side of one carton. Compare the carton count with the amount on the packing slip and Bill of Lading. Sometimes printers short-ship and sometimes books disappear in transit. Separate the carton with the cover over-runs and the short carton, it will be lighter. You do not want these on the bottom of the inventory stack.

Weigh one full carton and multiply the number of cartons. Then weigh a pallet. Compare your totals with the weight on the bill of lading. We recently found a shipment that was off by several thousand (expensive) pounds.

Check condition. Open random cartons and check for damage. If the books were packed loose in the carton, the top ones will be scuffed.

Check quality. If you find defective books, call your printing service representative at once. Do not sell the books. They are either salable or unsalable. Settle with the printer first. If the defect is major, such as an up-side-down signature, the printer will offer to do the job over. If it is minor, such as light inking on some pages, most printers will offer a settlement; to rebate some of the purchase price. You must decide whether a lower price will make the books *salable*.

If you find a significant percentage of poorly manufactured books, do not agree to sort the good from the bad; that could take several hours for

5,000 books. Send samples to the printer and offer to destroy the books or return the entire batch. You have agreed to pay for good work. You have not agreed to open each and every carton, sort the good from the bad and repack them.

Repairing production errors. Every now and then it happens. Even with both the publisher and the printer doing their best work—something goes wrong. There are so many tiny but essential variables of paramount importance in book production that range from the elementary (spelling the author's name correctly) to the technical (bubbles in the cover). Anyway, the mistake is made, the book is wrong—what can we do now?

Always, cover yourself. Make all specifications and any changes in writing. If you make a change in a telephone call, follow it up with a fax or letter. You may need written proof of your instructions later.

First, establish who is at fault (and who, therefore, will pay to correct it). Here are some corrective alternatives.

Rip and tear is the removal of a single page and the "tipping in" of a replacement. A very narrow strip of glue is placed at the edge of the page. Done well, you have to look closely to tell a page was tipped in. But the book must also be retrimmed. Check your margins and cover art to see if the book will look strange if 1/16" or even 3/32" are trimmed off all *three* sides.

Adhesive stickers will correct a wrong ISBN or barcode. This is a fairly common remedy. It may be used to correct a bar code but you wouldn't want to correct the name of the author on the cover this way.

Rubber stamping. If your book was printed in Hong Kong and you left this notation off the copyright page, you will have problems with the US customs officials. Have the printer rubber stamp the required wording for you.

Grind and rebind is used when you have major errors (one up-side-down signature) or have to replace the covers. The glued binding (spine) is cut off, the covers are removed, the spine is reground and a new cover is installed. But the book must also be retrimmed. Check your margins and cover art to see if the book will look strange if 3/32" are trimmed off all *four* sides. Grind and rebind is cheaper than reprinting the entire job but often results in an odd-looking (unbalanced) book.

Most important, ask your printer. They have seen it all and know what they can do to repair problem jobs. When the damage is major, most printers turn to an outside expert.

Dunn and Company specializes in turning printing problems into good salable books. They do everything from changing pages to changing hardcover to soft. Contact

Dunn & Co.
Dave Dunn
75 Green Street
Clinton, MA 01510-3017
Tel: 978-368-7238
Fax: 978-368-7867

Disputes. Occasionally something goes wrong because either the publisher or the printer made a mistake. Here are a few things you may do:

Check with the Publishers Marketing Association before awarding a bid. Find out if any other members are involved in a dispute with your lowest bidder and if so, call those members for details. If you have a dispute with a printer, call the PMA and relay the details so you will be helping the next publisher. Being on PMA's temporary blacklist will encourage the printer to settle with you.

You may have the book tested by a commercial testing laboratory to determine whether it meets *industry standards*. Test findings can be used to settle disputes. One is:

SGS US Testing Company, Inc.
Jim Spry
291 Fairfield Avenue
Fairfield, NJ 07004-3833
Tel: 973-575-5252

Printing Industry Association arbitration boards exist in some areas. See your telephone directory.

The publishing industry is fortunate to be served by 42 ink and 12 digital book printers. These are businesses that specialize in books; they do not print anything else. They consistently deliver on price, service and quality. When a book turns out bad, 95% of the time it is not from a book printer. It is because the publisher went to a local job printer who tried to make a book.

Hopefully your books will always arrive in perfect shape. Keep this article in your shipping area to guide you when you receive your next shipment.

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Dan Poynter does not want you to die with a book still inside you. You have the ingredients and he has your recipe. Dan has written more than 100 books since 1969 including *Writing Nonfiction* and *The Self-Publishing Manual*. For more help on book writing, see <http://ParaPub.com>.

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