

# AUTHORS GUILD

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**BULLETIN**



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## Yes, It Takes Credit Cards

Jason Epstein's dream of a machine that would ease the pressure on publishers to put out bestsellers and recoup large advances, while at the same time expanding readers' access to books, was first tested at the World Bank InfoShop in Washington, D.C., in 2006. The EBM 1.5, now in use around the world, is about nine feet long and five feet high and prints 40 pages per minute. On Demand Books, which Epstein founded with Dane Neeler in 2003, plans to release a new, commercial version, the EBM 2.0, in early 2009. The EBM 2.0 is a sleek, pared-down 36" x 30" that can spit out a 300-page paperback book, with cover, in about three minutes, and will cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000.

In the United States, the EBM 1.5 is in use at the Internet Archive in San Francisco, the University of Michigan Library and Northshire Bookstore in Vermont. The prototype itself is in place at the New Orleans Public Library, which has been using the machine to rebuild the library's collection that was damaged in Hurricane Katrina. It was given to the library by the Sloan Foundation, who partnered with On Demand Books to donate the machine, money for software development, and a temporary salary for the person hired to run it.

As with any new technology, the library faced initial difficulties: getting the large, heavy machine into the library wasn't easy, and the software had some glitches at first. But Megan Albritton, who ran the machine until recently, explained that once those issues were solved, the library began printing books every day, mainly titles that were out of print or did not have copyright issues. The library downloaded software to create book covers, using a white background to save money on toner, and hired a local artist to design a logo—a cup of coffee below a fleur-de-lis of steam. The books were then added to the library's collection.

Visitors to the New Orleans Public Library can see the machine and ask questions about it, but, for

now, cannot use it or buy books printed on the machine. At the Northshire Bookstore in Manchester Center, Vt., the machine is used for self-publishing, not for printing and selling books missing from the store's inventory. However, Chris Morrow, the store's manager, believes there is "tremendous potential for public domain books in the next couple years. Even the biggest store in the country is missing hundreds of thousands of backlist titles. These should be available to print out."

For now, the store has established Shires Press, offering writers an alternative to buying an expensive publishing package from a print-on-demand company. By using the Espresso Book Machine, writers can print as many or as few books as they need—"ten copies for someone's immediate family to hundreds of copies over the course of a few months," Morrow explains—and come back to print and purchase more as needed. In many cases, the only costs are the \$95 set-up fee and a per-page charge of nine cents or less.

Eventually, hundreds of thousands of books will be available for print-and-pay book buyers—more than 500,000 through the distributor Ingram Book Group's Lightning Source subsidiary, which maintains a digital database of books, all with publisher's approval, and more than 400,000 public domain titles through Open Content Alliance—and these numbers are sure to increase. The machine, named one of the Best Inventions of 2007 by Time magazine and often referred to as "an ATM for books," promises to revolutionize the way we think about books, reading and accessibility. So far its impact has been limited—and local—but, as Vince Gunn, CEO of the British bookstore chain Blackwell, points out, "Who knows what the future model will be? But rather than thinking this is scary and holding onto the past, let's think this is exciting and let's work together."

—Isabel Howe