



Online Book Builders

by Julie H. Ferguson

Author and professional speaker, Julie H. Ferguson leads workshops that provide aspiring authors with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to approach publishers and succeed. Her workshops are available as e-books and paperbacks through Beacon Literary Services at www.beaconlit.com, then click on Writers' Tools

My mother-in-law turned 80 in September 2004 and the family was stressing over a suitable present. What could we possibly give someone who had everything and that also fitted the auspicious occasion? I suggested a legacy book and everyone loved the idea. The only disadvantages concerned me—I was the one to do it and I had to find a way that we could collaborate in different cities in real time. Three years later, I decided to produce a travel journal about an unusual trip to Paris, which had different requirements. What to do? How to do it?

After some sleuthing on the Web and recommendations from a writer/photographer colleague, I found solutions for both projects that turned out to be excellent. I call the companies I used “online book builders” to distinguish them from print-on-demand firms, but this term will not locate their websites using a search engine. These companies specialize in producing books in small numbers, say one to six copies only, with no set-up fees. I had another requirement too—both books had to accommodate many photographs and reproduce them in high quality without breaking the bank.

I chose Sharedink.com for the legacy book, a company that uses web-based software to produce all kinds and sizes of books, as well as photographers’ portfolios. They offer “web books” that never need to be printed, hard and soft cover books, myriad templates, and excellent instructions. Their customer service is phenomenal. The web-based program allowed our family to work together simultaneously, although we lived 2000 miles apart. We designed and wrote a web book first, then Shared Ink printed us one hard cover book with 120 glossy pages and sent a free .pdf file of it to each family. Our cost: USD\$150.00, which is not indicative of the typical books Shared Ink produces. We wanted a one-off humdinger with all the bells and whistles for the 80th birthday. It did the trick too—my mother-in-law was speechless as she leafed through the pages. In 25 years, I have never seen her at a loss for words.

My travel journal did not need collaboration, so I chose a different route and firm—Blurb.com. This company uses downloadable, free software called *Book Smart*. Again the program has myriad choices of book sizes and types, templates, colour schemes, etc., and it’s a little easier to use than Shared Ink’s. My 40 page book was on my doorstep less than three days after I

uploaded it. I marveled at its luminous, glossy jacket and the superb photo reproduction that met my high standards. Cost: USD\$29.95 + \$12.00 s&h. Wow!

Any family or organization wanting up to six copies of a book would do well to consider these two companies that charge no set-up fees. The biggest bonus is that you don't have to know how to prepare camera-ready copy either. Both systems are a snap to use and ideal for genealogies, stories for grandchildren, memory/legacy books, company or church histories, etc. Test drive them this summer!

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