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Tate Taps Digital Bookbinding in Meteoric Rise as Mainstream Publisher

It's a 21st century American success story, with an oldfangled twist: Somebody finds a better way to publish books, and through a lot of hard work, a little luck and the application of digital technology, the idea becomes wildly successful.

Richard and Rita Tate's better way was born from the frustration of dealing with traditional, mainline royalty publishers when they wanted to publish their book, *"11 Reasons Families Succeed"* in 2002. Their entrepreneurial spirit, strong Christian faith, dedication to their cause and savvy business practices led them to establish Tate Publishing in 2004 with a focus on serving first-time, unknown authors.

With nearly 700 titles in print shepherded by a staff of 160 housed in multiple buildings on their campus-like corporate headquarters in Mustang, Oklahoma, Tate Publishing is fast becoming a major force in the Christian book publishing world, with a push into music publishing coming hot on its heels.

Applying Unconventional Wisdom

Most everything at Tate Publishing is done unconventionally, according to Dave Dolphin, who joined the company in 2004 as its sixth employee. Now Director of Book Production, Dolphin is responsible for the editors, graphic designers and illustrators Tate employs, as well as for the print facility and the 10-person staff who keep it running 24 hours a day.

Unlike traditional mainstream publishers who seek out celebrity authors with the potential to publish the next bestseller on the New York Times Book List and who often control every aspect of an author's work from manuscript editing to cover design, or self-publishers who leave all the costs, quality control and risks to the author, Tate Publishing prides itself on giving promising unknown authors a chance to go public and in working with them to produce and promote a successful title.

Tate rejects more authors than they take on, helps authors promote their book, underwrites the costs of distribution to bookstores and handles the returns when a book doesn't sell. With return rates typically reaching 25 to 40%, that factor alone can present a huge financial risk for a little-known author.

Bringing Production In-House

To support its unconventional approach to publishing Tate follows a different model for book production, with digital technology playing a key role, says Dolphin.

Originally relying on outside service providers for printing and binding, Tate brought much of its book production in house in 2007. That June, the rapidly growing publisher installed a Xerox Nuvera® 288 EA Perfecting Press teamed with an in-line C.P. Bourg BBF2005 Book Factory, BPRFx rotating folder and Challenge CMT330 3-sided trimmer to automate softcover book production.



At the same time, Dolphin pressed a Xerox DocuColor® 8000 into service to produce marketing materials, supply covers to the Book Factory and print pages for children's books, and he added a C.P. Bourg BB3001 Perfect Binder to produce the children's books off-line and provide additional book manufacturing capacity.

In production, A4-size pages printed on the Xerox Nuvera enter the Bourg BPRFx, which makes a micro-perforation across the center of each sheet, turns them 90° and folds each as it is sent to the BBF2005 accumulator to be gathered until the whole job has been completed. The BBF2005 then jogs the sheets together, mills the folded edge, applies adhesive, wraps the cover around the book block and delivers an A5-size bound book to the CMT330 for three-sided trimming – producing high-quality low-waste documents with minimal operator intervention.

At first, the new production facility operated with two shifts, five days a week. It wasn't long before the company's growth forced Dave Dolphin to add weekends to meet the shop's busy production schedule. Last year, Dolphin brought in a high-speed, large-format Xerox iGen3® press and added a third shift, boosting production on the Bourg Book Factory to a 24/7 schedule.

Finding The Perfect Match

The Xerox presses deliver print with incredible speed and clarity, and resolution that's as good as offset, says Dolphin. And both of the C.P. Bourg binders are real workhorses. The BB3001 operator can produce 200 to 300 books per hour off-line "when he's punching it," and the Bourg Book Factory is nimble enough to keep up with the Nuvera 288's output of four million impressions per month, easily binding about 2,100 softcover books per day, he adds.

"The Nuvera and the Bourg Book Factory are perfectly matched," says Dolphin. "It's rare that either component has to wait on the other, which means you get the most return on the investment you make in them. Plus, one individual can run the entire production line while doing other tasks like laminating covers and helping to box finished books for shipping.

"There are so many things you can do with digital technology today – from producing runs of 30 to 50 copies for a book signing at Barnes & Noble, to meeting a bump in sales from a really good endorsement," says Dolphin. "I don't have to stockpile books in a warehouse, waiting for them to sell out, or to wait until the next printing if I run out of inventory sooner than expected. Instead, I can put the book blocks on my covers now and ship them out tomorrow."

The ability of the BBF2005 to bind from as few as 15 sheets to book blocks 1.57" thick means Tate can bind volumes such as children's books with as few as 28 pages plus cover, to books with hundreds of pages.

"People said we couldn't perfect bind books with less than 48 pages, but on the Bourg equipment we can," says Dolphin, adding, "Instead of accepting the conventional wisdom, we always ask why. More often than not, we find a better way to do it."

Keeping Efficiency Up and Returns Down

Tate Publishing still resorts to conventional methods when it's appropriate, such as having more popular titles printed and bound overseas, says Dolphin. But publishing is an unpredictable business. "Some titles take off slowly, some not at all, and some take off very quickly. You just don't know until the book gets out there," he explains.

"This technology allows us to have an infinite inventory to keep inventory levels and returns way down, and efficiency way up," says the production director, alluding to costs that can really add up at the monthly production rates of 60,000 to 80,000 units Tate now routinely reaches.



In addition to holding the line on costs, Tate's approach to production also satisfies booksellers, who won't stock a book if it doesn't have a title on the spine; and it pleases consumers, who want to buy visually appealing, professionally-produced products, he says.

Meeting Opportunities

Their digital technology also allows Tate to ramp up production quickly when opportunity knocks, Dolphin notes, recounting the story about three brothers whose book, "*Pulling Weeds to Picking Stocks*" skyrocketed in sales after one of the young authors gained attention on the Rush Limbaugh radio show.

The book was already selling well on Amazon.com before one of the teens spoke with the initially reluctant radio host during a Friday listener call-in opportunity, Dolphin recalls. "But after Limbaugh listened to their story, gave their book a thumbs-up and mentioned where to buy it on the air, we were flooded with orders.

"It happened so fast and we needed 10,000 copies *now*! Using the Xerox and C.P. Bourg equipment, we printed and bound the books all weekend and fulfilled every one of the rush orders."

Tate Publishing's success in the book business is just the start of a publishing empire. Two years ago, the company launched Tate Music Group – a business that's also making tracks – and the company is now targeting a move into advertising, movie production and more web content.

"We're a young company guided by the vision and commitment to excellence in the publishing industry. There's no handbook, so we're rewriting the rules of book publishing as we go along," Dolphin says.

Judging by the company's meteoric rise, Tate's unconventional approach to publishing seems to be working just fine.

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