# 7 things you should know about...
# Lulu

## Scenario

For nearly 10 years, Dr. Forsythe taught a seminar on local and regional politics. She typically used a textbook for four or five semesters before selecting a new one, in part to minimize the hassles for the bookstore and in part because the course was required for all political science majors, which meant that students would have a ready supply of used textbooks each semester, saving some money over the cost of new books. In teaching the course, however, Forsythe found that the textbooks were routinely out of date and that she had to provide supplemental materials that covered recent elections, legislative action, and political shifts.

Then she discovered Lulu and decided to publish her own textbook in a format that she could update as frequently as necessary. Forsythe had previously considered writing a textbook but abandoned the idea after speaking to a few academic publishers, who told her that the focus she had in mind was too narrow for them. In putting together the materials for her self-published textbook, she was relieved to be able to write the book exactly as she wanted for the course, without having to consider its wider marketability. She spent a considerable amount of time writing the book, but the Lulu tools to design and lay out the book allowed her to format it and have it ready to print in a short time, without any upfront financial investment.

Forsythe set the price of the book at about half of what a new textbook would cost. The first semester she used her text, she required her students to buy printed copies from Lulu. In addition to saving the students money, this model also pleased Forsythe because it did not waste natural resources on texts that simply sat on store shelves. For subsequent semesters, she was able to quickly revise and rewrite sections with new information, creating an up-to-date version for each section of the course, saving herself and the students the effort of going over the outdated parts of the text. She also stopped requiring that her students purchase printed copies, allowing them to download an electronic file of the book for free if they chose, though many still preferred to buy a paper copy.

## What is it?

**1** Lulu is a web-based self-publishing service. It provides online access to the tools an individual needs to design, publish, and print original material, including books, brochures, reports, calendars, and posters. Users can also create digital content, such as music files, videos, graphics, or e-books. The site includes an online store, where content can be purchased either in hard copy or, in some cases, downloaded as digital files. Writers can obtain an ISBN through the site, allowing them to sell their books through online or traditional retailers, and the site provides a forum, blogs, a newsletter, and other resources designed to cultivate and support a community of authors and other content creators. Lulu also offers affiliated services, including high-volume production services (for print and digital media); applications specifically designed for children that guide them through the process of creating their own books or comic books; and a vintage press service, which digitally scans rare or out-of-print works or personal artifacts, allowing them to be reproduced through Lulu's printing operations.

## Who's doing it?

**2** Although self-publishing tools have been available for some time, the number of people who publish their own works remains relatively small. Rather than charging users for design and production costs, as some other self-publishers do, Lulu provides the tools so users can do this themselves, paying only for printing. As a result, some have suggested that Lulu can do for self-publishing what blogging software has done for web posting—that is, provide a means for millions of users to easily and inexpensively produce and share content. By offering templates for many kinds of publications, both print and digital, the service is designed to appeal to a broad range of potential users. Some faculty use Lulu to create textbooks or coursepacks for the classes they teach, sending students to the site to either download a digital copy (often for free) or buy a printed copy. In some cases, faculty at other institutions use these learning materials in their own courses. Students can use dissertation templates to self-publish doctoral or master's theses.

## How does it work?

**3** Users choose from among various product categories including hardcover or paperback books, dissertations, textbooks, calendars, portfolios, and several kinds of digital media. Lulu provides templates for each product category and applications to format text, images, or other material into a final product. For example, authors select the size of the book and the type of binding, choose

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# Lulu

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color or black and white, and select a copyright license. Users decide whether the project will be kept private, in which case only the creator can see it, or will be available for sale or download, either at the Lulu Marketplace or through other online or brick-and-mortar retailers. Rather than the traditional model of printing a fixed run of books, production is print-on-demand. Creators determine how much their products will cost. Downloads of files can be free or can cost the same or less than a printed copy, and authors receive 80 percent of profits when their content is purchased.

## Why is it significant?

Self-publishing offers an alternative to traditional publishing by allowing authors and creators of content to decide what gets published and in what form. With traditional publishing, editors make these decisions, and each project is typically time-consuming and expensive. Although most publishers have experimented with digital books and print-on-demand, the traditional model remains their mainstay. Self-publishing advances a model in which books can be produced quickly and inexpensively and anyone who has an idea for a book can see it published. Lulu's founder and CEO Bob Young has said that the company's goal is "to have a million authors selling 100 copies each, rather than 100 authors selling a million copies each," endorsing the notion that even if a book only has an audience of a few hundred, it might be invaluable to those people. To that end, Lulu provides the infrastructure to allow content creators to create original work and make it widely available to as many people as want to see it.

## What are the downsides?

The ability for virtually anyone to publish a book or other creative content—the impetus behind self-publishing—represents one of its drawbacks. Allowing authors to make all publishing decisions does little to assure readers that a self-published work will justify the cost to buy it or the time to read it. Concerns over basic issues such as grammar and punctuation also come into play. Self-publishing contributes to the growing problem—enabled by a range of information technologies—of overwhelming amounts of content without effective, efficient tools to search and organize it. Finally, despite the possibility of having millions of people creating and sharing work through Lulu and other self-publishing venues, the number who do this remains relatively small. Lulu includes a feature, for example, that allows users to rate the works on the site, but most have so few (if any) ratings that the tool provides limited value.

## Where is it going?

Self-publishing is part of a broad movement toward user-generated content, and services such as Lulu have the potential to extend that movement to creators and consumers of content who are more comfortable with traditional media. At the same time, by fundamentally altering the established model of publishing, Lulu contributes to a reshaping of our conception of what makes something a book. This, in turn, has implications for our understanding of how knowledge is created and can prompt a reassessment about the value of information. Removing both barriers to publication and rules for how content should be presented, self-publishing services may also lead to the introduction of new genres of creative or nonfiction work. Lulu might also encourage smaller content contributions (new forms of "microcontent"), and if the Lulu model of self-publishing takes off, conventional publishers and bookstores are likely to move in the same direction.

## What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Self-publishing offers several advantages to faculty and students. Having more texts to choose from, or being able to easily prepare their own textbooks, instructors gain considerable flexibility in selecting materials for a course and in updating syllabi more frequently. From an investment of a relatively modest amount of time, faculty can create entire textbooks or shorter materials, including lab manuals, handouts, multimedia demonstrations, and other teaching resources. The Lulu model offers opportunities for students to save significant amounts of money on course texts—a large and growing concern at many institutions. For students, having access to the infrastructure of publishing provides an opportunity for authentic learning, to understand the tools of the trade and develop an appreciation for the processes at work. Lulu and other self-publishing services also give students an easy way to "professionally" prepare and present their work.