

Back in Circulation: Using the Web to Reissue Books

This article appeared on eBookNet.com on November 19, 1999. The site closed down in April of 2001. The article, which follows a list of the digital reissues at the Times Two Publishing Company, is archived as a PDF of the Web pages.

Much has changed in e-publishing since the article's publication. In the past two years, several e-book pioneers have been bought or have gone out of business. Gemstar, the parent company of *TV Guide*, has acquired the makers of the Rocket eBook and the SoftBook; Librius has shut down; and MightyWords, the provider of the eMatter service, has announced that it will close down in January.

Still, even though the e-book industry is struggling, the number of electronic titles has continued to increase. Many publishers are now releasing their new books in simultaneous print and electronic editions, and are converting their backlists to digital formats. Publishing services now exist, too, that can handle the scanning and preparation of a print book for digital distribution, making it easier and faster for authors to republish their work than it was two years ago.

Despite these changes, the procedure for reissuing a book electronically remains the same, and this article can serve as a blueprint for how you can make your own out-of-print work available again.

—*Donnali Fifield*
Times Two Publishing Company, San Francisco

December 28, 2001

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Digital reissues at the Times Two Publishing Company

The William Fifield Collection

timestwopublishing.com/wmfifield.htm

A digital archive of the work of the writer William Fifield (1916-1987)

Recorded conversations

Marcel Marceau Speaks (recorded in English)

Jean Cocteau: A Self-Portrait (recorded in French)

Nonfiction

Modigliani, a biography of the artist

In Search of Genius, conversations with Picasso, Cocteau, Dalí, Marceau, Chagall, and others on the creative process

Jean Cocteau par Jean Cocteau, a book-length interview of the artist in French

Jean Cocteau, published in the Columbia Essays on Modern Writers series

Fiction

Matadora, a novel about a female bullfighter

The Devil's Marchioness, a novel based on the life of the Marquise de Brinvilliers

The Sign of Taurus, a novel set in Mexico about a Jewish refugee, a skeptic who is forced to earn her living as a fortune teller

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Essays and magazine articles, from the *Paris Review* to *Penthouse*

Short stories, including "The Fishermen of Pátzcuaro," the winner of an O. Henry Memorial Award

Wine writings

The Sherry Royalty, a history of the great sherry-making families of Spain

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Back in Circulation: Using the Web to Reissue Books

 Donnali Fifield
 Posted Fri Nov 19, '99

"If you're a writer or literary executor, get your rights back. Today, thanks to PDF and eBooks, you can afford to reissue your books and give them a second chance," writes ePublisher Donnali Fifield, who created Times Two Publishing to publish her father William Fifield's out-of-print book "In Search of Genius."

If you're a writer or literary executor, get your rights back. Today, thanks to PDF and e-books, you can afford to reissue your books and give them a second chance.

To reissue an out-of-print book, you first have to apply to the publisher for a formal reversion of rights. Once you have the rights back, you will have to format your book for digital distribution, get a Web site ready, and obtain an ISBN number. Altogether, it may take you up to two years before your work is online.

My first digital reissue will come out next spring. I am the literary executor for my father, William Fifield, whose books had disappeared into the vacuum of the OP--the publishers' friendly-sounding acronym for "out of print."

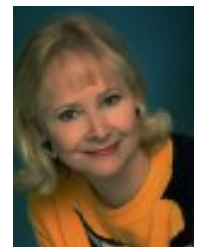
His works include a biography of Modigliani, a monograph on Jean Cocteau, and fiction that was published in the United States and England in the fifties. Just three years ago, I couldn't have made them available again because of the printing costs. But now, with desktop publishing software and the Internet, it has become possible. PageMaker brought professional typesetting within my budget, and the Web has solved the biggest problem of all: distribution.

In January of last year, I launched the Times Two Publishing Company to reissue my father's books,



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as well as do other publishing projects. I would like to hear from other writers and literary executors who are making their books available again through the Web, too.

If you are just starting out, the best of luck. Here are some pointers to consider as you set out to rescue your own works from the void of the OP.

1. Don't delay in asking for the reversion of rights.

Once e-books take off, publishers will realize what a mother lode they have in their backlist. Even if they don't do much to reissue or promote a book, they won't want to give back the rights.

As the author or writer's heir, you will naturally care more than the publisher about giving a book the best second wind it can have--especially if the publisher didn't give it much of a first one--so asking for the reversion of rights now, while they're still easy to get, is the surest way to guarantee this.

2. Be prepared for a long wait.

I started asking for the reversion of rights last September. A year later, I'm still waiting for some of the rights to revert. In two of these cases, the publishing houses had changed hands, and I had to track down the company's new name and owner.

3. Choose a format that's right for your publication and readership.

After you get the rights back, the next step is to scan the text. Then comes the difficult part: deciding on a format. I will describe the choices I made. Until I discovered ebooknet.com a few months ago, I wasn't aware of any sources of information on e-books. Last fall, at the time I was choosing a format, I looked at the few e-books I could find on the Web, studying them to see how they were done. The following formats seemed the right ones for my books, at this point in the evolution of e-books. The technology is changing rapidly, and you will need to keep up with the trade news to learn which formats are becoming standard, and which of those will work best for your book.

I am doing my father's books in PDF and in two e-book editions: an HTML version for the Rocket eBook and an RTF format for Librius.

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For the PDF edition of my first reissue, "In Search of Genius," a collection of interviews my father did with Picasso, Dalí, and others, I plan to use a 6x9 text size, with a standard portrait orientation. This format allows for large margins and for reading on-screen, which will make the book useful for researchers.

PDF book format

For my father's fiction, however, I'll use a spread format--two facing pages on a single sheet of paper in a landscape orientation. In a book where intimacy matters, I decided that the familiar design of the two-page spread was better.

In a few years, it probably won't be necessary to provide readers with a style that recreates the look of a traditional book. But for now, it seems to me, it's important to maintain as much as possible the feel readers expect when they immerse themselves in a book of fiction. The style, which I call the "PDF book format," is meant to be printed out and read offline. The pages fold in two along the one-inch gutter, and you can hold them in your hands as if you were reading a bound book.

I had worked out this format for my own book, which I am publishing late this fall. Although it's a work of nonfiction, the intimacy of the two-page

layout is more suitable for what I wrote than the single-panel format. (Based on personal experience, my book, "William & Wendell: A Family Remembered," is a critique of the current, therapy-based view of grief.)

When I decided to publish the book electronically, I redid the version I had prepared for a print edition, reworking the margin settings in PageMaker until the text fit the two-panel format. This style also fits more text per page than does the layout with just one panel. As a result, the PDF file downloads faster and uses less paper for the printout.

You can look at the first chapter in the PDF book format on my Web site at <http://www.timestwopublishing.com>. Go to Binary Books>About the book>Sample chapter.

4. Consider how you will distribute the book.

When you choose a format, keep in mind the distribution methods available for it. With an edition formatted for an e-vendor such as Rocket or Librius, you will have the benefit of having an online retailer. RocketEditions are sold through barnesandnoble.com and powells.com; Librius has its own retail site, books2read.com.

The PDF format now also has a bookselling outlet on the Web, through eMatter, the new downloading service at Fatbrain.com. In addition, Adobe has just released a beta version of a new Acrobat Reader that has a Web-purchasing feature. This technology will make the PDF format even better equipped for online selling.

If you also want downloading capability on your Web site, check the MyPublish feature at Wave Systems. Last year, when I was trying to figure out how to offer downloading on my site, it was one of the few companies I found that had this service, and it had the least complicated payment mechanism. I won't know how well the MyPublish function works until I upload my book. I haven't seen much press about this company and would like to get comments about it from anyone who has used it to buy or sell books.

5. Set up a Web site.

A site can give readers a way to contact you. A Web address will also help you supplement the presentation of your work. I spent nearly a

year--not straight through but working after hours after my paying job--building my site. This has kept me from getting my books out quickly, but it has allowed me to add excerpts and give more information about each book than is possible on a retail site.

6. Get ISBN numbers for your books.

You will need ISBN numbers for each electronic edition you plan to publish. You can fill out an order form for them online. R.R. Bowker issues them in the United States and has links for the ISBN agencies in other countries.

As for the copyright registration, if you are a literary executor in the United States, you may want to have the copyright transferred to you. The Library of Congress makes the necessary form, Circular 12 (Recordation of Transfers and Other Documents), available online at <http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/circs/circ12.pdf>.

7. Use the Internet to build up an audience.

After you have decided on a format and a distribution method for your book, the final step is finding an audience for it.

By using the directories on the search engines, you can discover the groups or individuals who might be interested in the book's reissue. And you don't have to limit yourself to contacting only those who live in your own country. Since your book is in a downloadable format, readers can access it around the world.

8. Factor in the future when you weigh copyright issues.

An electronic format can allow you to sell your book globally, unlike a traditional book, for which territorial rights are defined by contract. The Web gives a book the potential for a much wider audience. The chance of piracy or of having your work duplicated does exist, however. Rocket, Librius, SoftBook, Adobe, and other companies are working to make e-book distribution as secure as possible. But copyright protection may not be perfect for some time. You will have to decide whether having your book available again is more important to you than this risk.

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begins to break down, as it's doing with making purchases online, it will become routine to download books. By that time, your work will already be online and cataloged on the search engines.

Also, figure that the publishing industry will eventually start developing a presence on the Web. The advantages of the digital format make it inevitable, I think, that the industry will come to embrace the Internet and the new, electronic technologies. Within a few years, the trade houses may not only be reluctant to give back the rights, they may well--as converts to e-publishing--crowd out small publishers.

Now, midlist and backlist books have a good chance of getting accepted by the outlets that sell e-books, since the supply of books is still limited. But as soon as the mainstream publishers do books in a combined print and electronic format, it will be hard to compete with them, and we may end up with a new version of the present system, which pushes aside the books that aren't best-sellers.

9. Remember why it's worth it.

Doing a digital reissue takes a long time. You can farm out some of the tasks, such as scanning and file conversions. Still, you may spend a year or more just getting launched. You probably won't make much money from the reissue, either. But once the work is done, your book can be online for as long as you want. You won't have to worry about shelf life, and you will have the reward of knowing that you have brought your writing back from the waste of the OP.

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Originally published by William Morrow in 1982, "In Search of Genius" is a collection of interviews William Fifield conducted with Picasso, Cocteau, and others on the creative process. To read more about its reissue, visit the Times Two Publishing Company at <http://www.timestwopublishing.com>.

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