

As Seen in March 2009

**TwinCities**  
**BUSINESS**

## Your Book, Your Way

Brio began as a standard printer. Then it found a way to stand out from the crowd—contract book publishing.



William Reynolds (left) and John Marino liken their book-production business to that of an independent record producer.

John Marino and William Reynolds founded their printing company in 2003 to print just about everything—postcards, business cards, brochures, catalogs. But they soon realized that in order to grow, they had to narrow their focus.

“Early on, we had a consultant that said, ‘You guys are a mile wide and an inch deep, and you need to be an inch wide and a mile deep,’” Marino says. “That was a great piece of advice, which we took.”

Having printed books, and finding that there was less competition there—as well as a growing market—Marino and Reynolds decided to put their focus there. Today, book publishing makes up 95 to 98 percent of the company’s revenue.

Brio is a contract book publisher, meaning it helps an author edit, design, market, and distribute a book for a fee that the author pays; the author keeps all rights and royalties. (This approach contrasts with that of vanity publishers, where the author pays for the publication and the press holds the copyright, and typically doesn’t promote its titles.) While Brio helps its authors execute the project, the authors retain creative control. The company prints both hardcover and soft-cover books.

Brio doesn’t limit its book production services to printing. It offers a menu of services that includes marketing, editing, designing, printing, storing, and distributing books. (Its distribution system extends to 25,000 retailers, including Barnes & Noble and Amazon.) The company also can develop dedicated Web sites for the books it publishes. All of these services are available à la carte.

The service Reynolds and Marino are currently most excited about is ghostwriting, which Brio started offering in early 2008, targeting primarily CEOs and other high-level executives. A customer can now hire Brio to produce a book from conception to distribution—plus an ancillary Web site and marketing plan—for \$25,000 to \$50,000. The entire process can take as few as four to six weeks.

Besides business titles, Brio publishes books in other genres, including children’s, biography, religion, cooking, and self-help. It also has published textbooks. All told, it produces up to 400,000 to 500,000 books a year, averaging 250 titles annually. A staff specialist in search engine optimization creates roughly 10 Web sites a year to market these books.

Reynolds, who formerly owned a recording studio, makes a comparison between contract publishing and the music industry. Just as an independent record producer hopes for an artist of his to be a success, so does an independent book publisher.

“I’m always evaluating authors on the basis of ‘Is this book that I have in front of me the next *Nevermind* album?’” says Reynolds, referencing rock group Nirvana’s 1991 chart-topper. “Is this the book that could turn into multipressings, a million, 2 million, 3 million?”

Brio also has had success solely as a book printer. It has produced Neal Lozano’s *Will You Bless Me?* and *Can God See Me in the Dark?*, which were picked up by New York-based publisher Scholastic. It also has produced the children’s book series *The Many Adventures of Pengey the Penguin*, by John Burns, which has been optioned for a feature-length animated movie.

—Megan Wiley