The term *publishing* means, in the broadest sense, making something publicly known. Historically, it came to refer to the issuing of printed materials, such as books, magazines, periodicals, and the like; it now also encompasses issuing such materials in an electronic form. There is, however, great latitude of meaning, because publishing has never emerged, and cannot emerge, as a profession completely separate from printing on the one hand and the retailing of printed matter on the other.

**Early History**

The practice of making extra copies of manuscripts goes back to ancient times; in Rome there were booksellers—Horace mentions the Sosii, who were apparently brothers—and the copying of books by trained slaves reached considerable proportions. With the introduction of printing into Europe in the middle of the 15th cent. (see type), book publishing sprang into lively existence. The author, the printer, and the publisher of a work were sometimes all the same person, as in the case of members of the Estienne family in France in the 16th cent. The differentiation of printer, publisher, and bookseller appeared early, however, as patrons of literature had books printed for distribution and booksellers had their printing done by others to meet the growing demand.

**The Emergence of Publishing Houses**

The first important publishing house (1583–1791) was that of the Elzevir family in Holland (see Elzevir, Louis). The Elzevirs were businessmen rather than scholars, and the business of bookselling grew as literacy increased. Concurrently, printing, publishing, and bookselling spread learning across the West. Religious controversy bred polemics, and arguments printed in broadsides, pamphlets, and books were handed out zealously and bought eagerly by partisans. An interest in knowing the future also increased the amount of literature issued by bookseller-publishers, and almanacs and the like were issued for the wider public.

With the steadily broadening mass of readers, great publishing houses slowly came into being; many were well established by the late 18th cent. Leipzig had become a printing center in the 15th cent. and retained its eminence, along with Munich; most of the larger German cities had flourishing publishing concerns by the end of the 19th cent. Modern European cities with long traditions of publishing are Vienna, Florence, Milan, Zürich, Paris, London, and Edinburgh. In the United States, Boston, Philadelphia, and especially New York City took the lead.

**Specialization**

During the late 19th cent. and throughout the 20th cent., specialization has been an increasingly important factor in book publishing. Music publishing became a completely separate business, as did map publishing. Some publishing houses now specialize in religious books, textbooks, art books, technical books, and children's books. Frequently a house issuing works for the general trade may also have a strong textbook department, juvenile division, or reference department. A house founded for more or less special purposes may broaden its scope, as sometimes happens with the university press.

In the late 19th and 20th cent., specialization also grew within publishing houses. Editorial departments
became distinct from production, and both were quite separate from the sales or marketing departments. Publishers also specialized in the means by which their books were distributed. Trade books are fiction and nonfiction books sold to readers primarily through bookstores, whereas textbooks are directed toward school boards and faculty for use by students in the classroom. Many volumes are issued with the book club market in mind.

**Paperback Books**

Since books are basically a luxury item, a purchaser can dispense with them in hard times. One partial solution in the United States has been the issuance of paperback books, long a standard form of book publication in Europe. During the 1930s and 40s the paperbound, pocket-size book rose meteorically in popularity in English-speaking countries, and in the 1950s the “quality” paperback appeared, presenting durable yet inexpensive editions of well-known writers. By 1998 mass-market and trade paperbacks represented about 14% of all books sold in the United States.

**New Technologies**

By the 1970s, the advent of new technologies for the transmission, storage, and distribution of data, once the prerogative of book publishing, had become a problem for the industry; television screens and databases became symbols of the challenges to editors and publishers (see computer; information storage and retrieval). The increasing use of sophisticated copying machines posed new problems to the need of publishers and authors to protect their property by copyright, and in 1976 the U.S. Congress passed a major revision to the federal copyright law that attempted to define to what extent published material could be reproduced without payment of royalties.

In the late 20th cent., computers and such related innovations as the CD-ROM (see compact disc) and the Internet allowed publishing to expand, making readily updated texts available on line and on disk and fostering multimedia presentations and interactive uses (see hypertext). The easy access to and copying of electronically published material raised additional copyright issues, and in 1998 Congress passed legislation that extended copyright protection to on-line material. In addition, the wide availability of computer-driven desktop-publishing technology to small presses and individuals gave impetus to the production of a wide variety of self-published books. By the beginning of the 21st cent. several large U.S. publishers had set up separate electronic ventures and a number of independent on-line print-on-demand (or publish-on-demand) web companies had been created. It is also now possible for an individual to print and bind a book on demand in a retail store that has the appropriate equipment in a few minutes.

Technology also led to the development of the electronic book or “e-book,” which combines the storage, search capabilities, and adaptability of a computer with the simulated page format of a traditional book; early versions appeared in the late 1990s. By 2000, thousands of books were being digitized, to be read on line, downloaded, printed out by the reader, or printed on demand by the publisher, thus assuring that their electronic versions need never go out of print. That same year, as reading devices became more compact and sophisticated, several of the largest U.S. publishing houses opened separate on-line publishing ventures while smaller electronic publishing start-ups became more common.

Meanwhile, some books also became available in component parts (chapters, maps, tables, and even paragraphs) that, for a price, could be customized into new entities created by their readers and, like other electronic books, be either downloaded from the Internet or printed on demand by the publisher,

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/book_publishing
bound, and shipped to the customer. Since 2000, e-book readers have been developed that can store hundreds of publications, and they have become extremely popular with segments of the reading public. Software for reading e-books on computers, electronic tablets, and smartphones also has been developed. With e-books and e-book readers widespread, previously unknown writers have found it relatively easy to self-publish on websites that make their books available for download; by 2011, several of the books of such “indie authors” had become electronic best sellers.

Mergers and Acquisitions
Publishing traditionally had been an industry of numerous, small, family-owned firms. After the 1960s, however, publishing houses were regularly purchased by and consolidated with other companies. For example, Rinehart & Company and the John C. Winston Company were purchased by Henry Holt & Company to form Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. In addition, publishing firms were being taken over by conglomerates, e.g., Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., was purchased by the Columbia Broadcasting System; in 1986, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (now Harcourt, Inc.) bought the educational and publishing division of CBS Inc., which included Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Henry Holt & Company was then sold to the Holtzbrinck group of Germany (Holtzbrinck now also owns St. Martin's and Macmillan). Time Warner, the world's largest entertainment and media company, owned Little, Brown & Co., Warner Books, Time Life Books, Book of the Month Club, and many popular magazines, but over a period of years the book imprints were sold off to Bertelsmann and other companies, and the magazines became an independent corporation, Time Inc., in 2014.

Some publishing houses became part of larger corporations in other countries. Rupert Murdoch's Australia-based News Corporation acquired HarperCollins (formerly Harper & Row), William Morrow, and Avon, plus many other American, Australian, and British publications as well as television and radio stations. Doubleday, along with its houses Delacorte and Dell, was bought by the German firm Bertelsmann and merged with Bantam; when Bertelsmann later (1998) acquired Random House, it became the largest U.S. trade publisher. Robert Maxwell of England bought Macmillan (U.S.), the New York Daily News, and many other publishing enterprises. Maxwell's empire collapsed in the early 1990s, and Macmillan (U.S.) was eventually acquired by Viacom, which already owned Simon & Schuster. Viacom (which also owned Prentice Hall, Scribner, and other companies) later (1998) sold many of these publishing operations to the Pearson Group of England. In 2001 Pearson largely sold the rights to the Macmillan name in the United States to Holtzbrinck, which also owned the British publisher Macmillan. Pearson and Bertelsmann merged their trade publishing houses in 2013 to form Penguin Random House.

Associations and Awards
Among publishers' associations, the most notable in the United States is the Association of American Publishers. Some professional associations present awards for books of unusual merit. The National Book Committee, for example, presents the National Book Awards in five categories: fiction; poetry; arts and letters; history and biography; and science, philosophy, and religion.

Related Entries
For material on magazine and newspaper publishing see journalism; newspaper; periodical; see also book; book collecting; children's literature.

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