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HOW TO START A BARE-BONES PUBLICATION & BOOK BINDING ART FACILITY for under $1000

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The bookbinding area with a selection of colorful booklets made by the binding machine as well as folded and hand-stapled versions.

Introduction

In Fall 2016 I decided to set up a very basic bookbinding/bookmaking facility for my Project Lab at UC Berkeley's Art Practice Department. I have a 1,000 square foot room and apportioned about 150 square feet of it to accommodate space and equipment for students to print, bind, and display paperback books and booklets. The publications are meant for distribution and quick production. They are not "fine art books" in a traditional

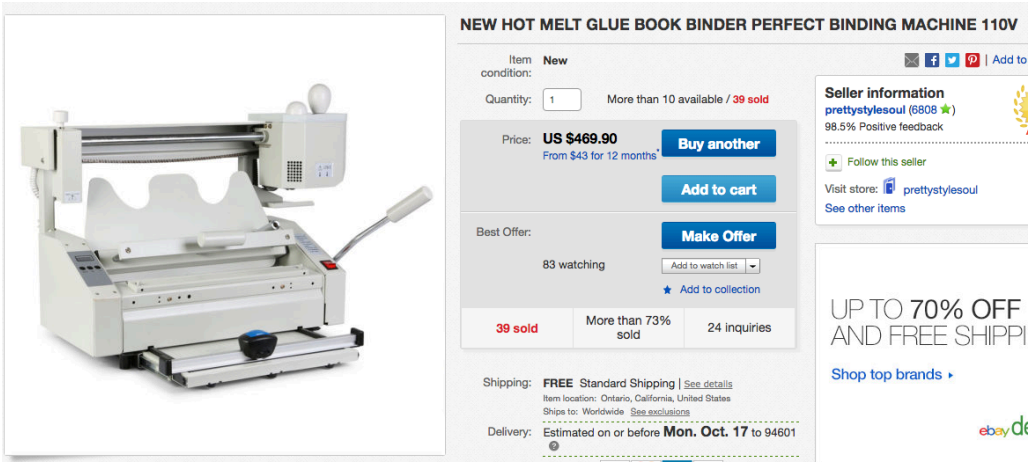
sense of making one-off or “special” books. The Project Lab exists for my Social Practice classes in which I have a different theme each semester to explore. This semester’s theme was on gathering knowledge and creating alternative distribution systems, so book making and publications was a logical extension. I spent time researching similar small-scale facilities and tried out some of the equipment that friends had before taking the plunge.

Why print things in an era of digital distribution? For one, students are more likely to get invested and engage in material that they can hold in their hands. I’ve found that PDFs are easily distributed but lack the physical “commitment” that a printed booklet can convey. Students love the tactility and power of being able to produce printed materials. I was pleasantly surprised how they became excited about book making and thinking that they could produce and distribute knowledge as opposed to just receiving it from outside sources. Since implementing this facility just a few short weeks ago, the enthusiastic response from other areas of the Art Department (staff/faculty/students) has been extremely positive. I foresee a lot of classes using this and the potential to upgrade and buy more expensive equipment if necessary.

Equipment needed:

1. Basic “perfect binding” book binder machine: approx $470

The model I got was from Ebay and was a cheaper brand than others. The method is called “perfect binding” and results in how most paperback books are produced. You use a thicker cover stock that wraps around the pages of the book to create the front, spine, and back.



I decided to buy a relatively cheap model. Most bookbinding machines are more like $700 + and because my equipment would be used by students and had the potential to get beaten up quickly, I decided not to overinvest until I found out how much usage and abuse it could handle. So far it's been great, pretty easy to use with just a few minor hiccups that can be figured out as you go along. Because it's cheaper I'm less afraid about letting people use it. If this model keeps working and gets good usage we may invest in a more expensive one as well.

You can view a video of a similar model being demo'ed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmdW_nGtEYI

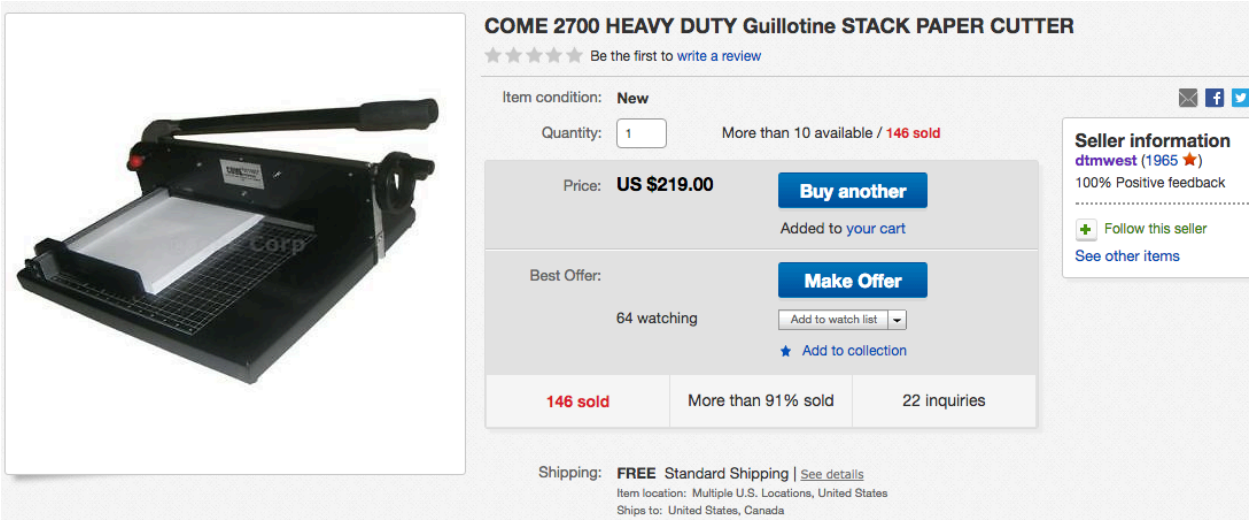
It takes about 20 minutes for the machine to heat up the hot glue pellets that are used for binding the spine. The actual binding process takes less than 2 minutes a book, or faster if you move faster.

It came with a small supply of glue pellets but you should buy more. I'm not sure if all glue pellets for all binding machines are interchangeable. I have to ask about this.

The manual is not great, and looks like it was badly translated from Chinese. I figured it out, however, and there seems to be enough people with similar machines to give advice.

We've been able to bind books that are about an inch thick. Technically you can bind thicker but we haven't needed to. The main trick is making sure that enough glue is put on the spine so that the pages don't fall out. It takes some trial and error and it's best to do many tests before you let students just use it. They learn better by seeing examples and spend less time getting angry or sad when they ruin their materials just learning.

- **2. Paper guillotine: approximately $219**



I bought an affordable and very basic model, again to just see how much it would be used and abused before investing in a more expensive one. So far it's worked well, but with a few quirks to make it run smoothly. It has a safety latch and blade guard that keeps people from chopping fingers off. It's really not dangerous if people use it correctly and I am not worried that students will hurt themselves if unsupervised.

- Only cut paper to keep the blade sharp. No metals or funny materials should go in!
- For sharp cuts every time, cut with a piece of chipboard on the bottom of your stack. A groove is made with each cut and the piece of plastic that it cuts into gets deeper and deeper as time goes by, resulting in cuts that are not as sharp. One remedy is to cut into a piece of board that you shift around slightly every time you make a cut. A bit of a time addition but better than a crappy cut.
- Fairly easy to assemble. Vendor sells replacement parts if contacted, but not obvious on the Ebay page.
- I need to add an extra washer on a part where the metal is rubbing on metal and not making a smooth turn on the handle. Not a biggie, but because its a cheaper model I think it's not as well thought out.
- Keep moving parts oiled (every week or so) for smooth movements.

3. Black and white laserjet printer that has a "duplexing" (double-sided) function: approx $125+. Saves time making double-sided prints. I use a Brother laserjet printer.

4. Toner cartridges: approx $25 for a set of 2

I buy replacement toner cartridges through a third-party vendor in order to save money since it's easy to ruin a lot of prints by accidentally setting the print settings wrong. If you send a 100-page book to print and it's formatted incorrectly, you waste a lot of toner and paper. To save toner printing, print a master set and then copy multiples with a xerox machine. You get better quality and the ink doesn't rub off as much with a xerox machine, especially on cover stock.

5. Large cutting mats

6. T-squares, rulers, and measuring tools

7. Long-arm stapler for making folding booklets: approx $12 - $150. If a book is less than about 30 pages it's better to print it as a booklet with staples in the middle. I bought one for $12 (pictured below) but think it will be better to invest in a heavy-duty one that costs more like $150 in the long term. A lightweight one can only max out at about 10-20 pages and that's actually not a lot.

Sparco Long Reach Stapler, 20 Sheet Capacity, Standard Staples, Putty/Black (SPR01316)

by Sparco

609 customer reviews | 11 answered questions

Price: $12.25 Prime

Note: Available at a lower price from other sellers, potentially without free Prime shipping.

In Stock.

Want it Monday, Oct. 10? Order within **23 hrs 38 mins** and choose **Two-Day Shipping** at checkout. Details

Sold by fantastic office products and Fulfilled by Amazon.

- Can be used for binding books, pamphlets, brochures or card mounting
- Throat depth adjustable up to 12"
- Uses standard staples

New (24) from $12.02 & FREE shipping.

Used (1) from $9.95 + $5.24 shipping

8. **Misc tools:** pens, pencils, staples, staple remover, sharpies,

7. Bone scorers or paper folders. Made of plastic, actually, and work well for burnishing or making creases

9. Table surfaces with enough area to put the equipment and allow students to lay out their materials. My tables are on wheels so that we can move the equipment and facilities around easily. If you are using wheeled tables, make sure they have locking mechanisms to prevent them from sliding around when you are using the cutter or binding machines.

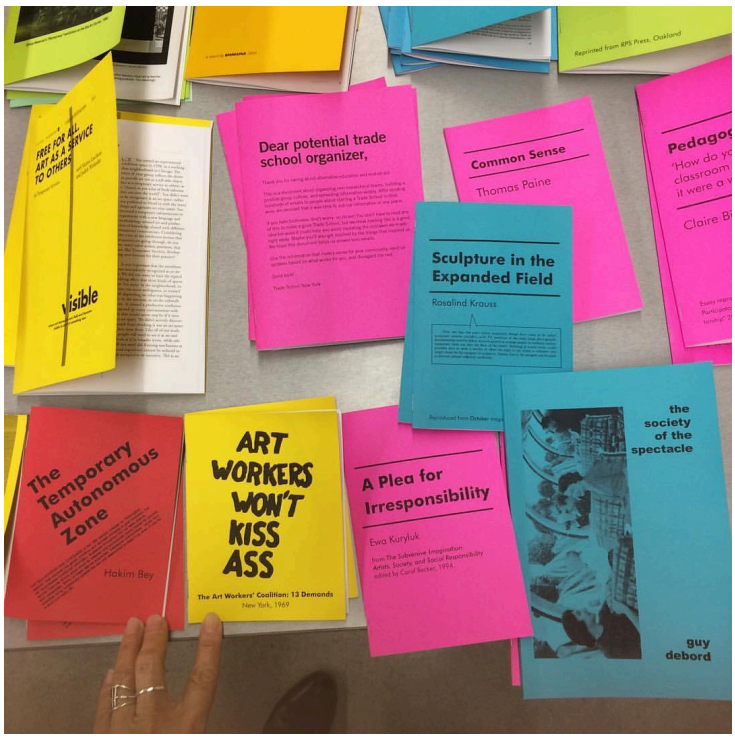
10. Papers: cheap laserjet/printer/xerox paper for the interiors, and a cover stock thicker paper for the exteriors. Manila folders in different colors (chopped to size) work well to create larger covers, and letter-size coverstock works well for smaller booklets.

Timeframe:

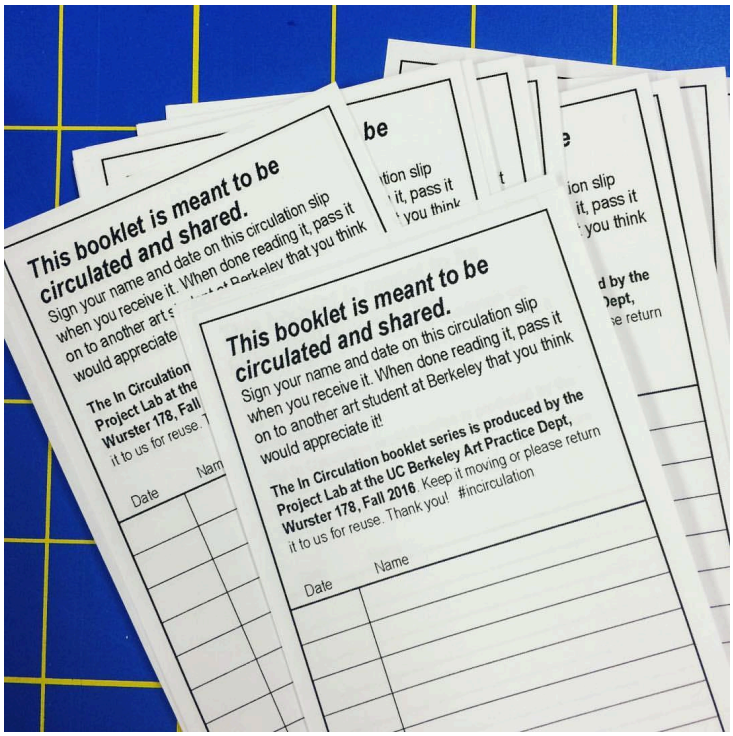
- Approximately 1-2 weeks for delivery of Binding Machine and Paper Guillotine.
- One day to set up the equipment.
- Several days just to play with it, make samples, and discover what is possible.
- 20-30 minutes to run a quick demo showing others how to use it.
- 1-2 minutes to bind each book, when experienced.

Thank you to these resources for consultation, expertise, and inspiration

- **Publication Studio Oakland:** artist Ian Dolton-Thornton for letting me look at his equipment and see how he sets things up. Ian prints small-run books for writers and poets.
- **Publication Studio at Temple Contemporary,** Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia. Curator Rob Blackson has a small facility that students can use and I bound my first book there in 2014 and got the idea to set up a similar version from seeing his. It was a great inspiration!
- Sam Gould's project **"Beyond Repair."** Based in Minneapolis, this publication/meeting space is at once an activist and community building site. Participants co-create publications based on shared interests, reading groups, and necessary information.
- **Half Letter Press / Temporary Services.** Based in Chicago, and run by Marc Fischer and Brett Bloom, Half Letter Press creates and distributes small booklets, artist projects, and catalogs.
- **The Art Lab at the Berkeley Art Museum.** Curator and artist David Wilson has set it up so that it is a functioning public facility at specific times, and includes a Risograph machine and methods for people to produce and distribute printed ephemera. We are hoping to partner with him for future projects.



A selection of our small booklets meant to be shared and distributed amongst art students.



The In Circulation booklet series is something we've produced for the Project Lab. These small slips of paper get glued into the inside front cover and act as a "circulation" slip.

Table one: The paper area where you can format and lay out your pages.

Table two: the two main components: paper guillotine on the left and book binding machine on the right.