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## Desktop Publishers

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(O\*NET 43-9031.00)

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### Significant Points

- About 35 percent work for newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers, while almost 25 percent work in the printing industry.
- Overall employment is expected to experience little or no change over the 2006-2016 decade.
- Most employers prefer to hire experienced desktop publishers; among persons without experience, opportunities should be best for those with certificates or degrees in desktop publishing or graphic design.

### Nature of the Work

Desktop publishers use computer software to format and combine text, data, photographs, charts, and other graphic art or illustrations into prototypes of pages and other documents that are to be printed. They then may print the document using a high resolution printer or they may send the materials, either in print form or electronically, to a commercial printer. Examples of materials produced by desktop publishers include books, brochures, calendars, magazines, newsletters and newspapers, packaging, and forms.

Desktop publishers typically design and create the graphics that accompany text, convert photographs and illustrations into digital images, and manipulate the text and images to display information in an attractive and readable format. They design page layouts, develop presentations and advertising campaigns, and do color separation of pictures and graphics material. Some desktop publishers may write some of the text or headlines used in newsletters or brochures. They also may translate electronic information onto film or other traditional media if the final product will be sent to an off-set printer. As companies bring the production of marketing, promotional, and other kinds of materials in-house, they increasingly employ desktop publishers to produce such materials in house.

Desktop publishers use a computer and appropriate software to enter and select formatting properties, such as the size and style of type, column width, and spacing. Print formats are stored in the computer and displayed on a computer monitor. Images and text can be rearranged, column widths altered, or material enlarged or reduced. New information, such as charts, pictures, or additional text can be added. Scanners are used to capture photographs, images, or art as digital data that can be either incorporated directly into electronic page layouts or further manipulated with the use of computer software. The desktop publisher can make adjustments or compensate for deficiencies in the original color print or transparency. An entire newspaper, catalog, or book page, complete with artwork and graphics, can be created on the screen exactly as it will appear in print. Digital files are then used to produce printing plates. Like photographers and multimedia artists and animators, desktop publishers also can create special effects or other visual images using film, video, computers, or other electronic media. (Separate statements on photographers and on artists and related workers appear elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Desktop publishing encompasses a number of different kinds of jobs. Personal computers enable desktop publishers to more easily perform many of the design and layout tasks that would otherwise require large and complicated equipment and extensive human effort. Advances in computer software and printing technology continue to enhance desktop publishing work, making desktop publishing more economical and efficient than before. For example, desktop publishers get the material as computer files delivered over the Internet or on a portable disk drive instead of receiving simple typed text and instructions from customers. Other innovations in the occupation include digital color page makeup systems, electronic page layout systems, and off-press color proofing systems. In addition, most materials are reproduced on the Internet as well as printed; therefore, desktop publishers may need to know electronic publishing software, such as Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and may be responsible for converting text and graphics to an Internet-ready format.

Some desktop publishers may write and edit as well as lay out and design pages. For example, in addition to laying out articles for a newsletter, desktop publishers may be responsible for copyediting content or for writing original content themselves. Desktop publisher's writing and editing responsibilities may vary widely from project to project and employer to employer. Smaller firms typically use desktop publishers to perform a wide range of tasks, while desktop publishers at larger firms may specialize in a certain part of the publishing process. (Writers and editors are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Desktop publishers also may be called publications specialists, electronic publishers, DTP operators, desktop publishing editors, electronic prepress technicians, electronic publishing specialists, image designers, typographers, compositors, layout artists, and Web publications designers. The exact name may vary by the specific tasks performed or simply by personal preference.

**Work environment.** Desktop publishers usually work in clean, air-conditioned office areas with little noise. They generally work a standard workweek; however, some may work night shifts, weekends, or holidays depending upon the production schedule for the project or to meet deadlines.

These workers often are subject to stress and the pressures of short deadlines and tight work schedules. Like other workers



*Desktop publishers format and design photographs, art, and data with text for electronic page layouts.*

who spend long hours working in front of a computer monitor, desktop publishers may be susceptible to eyestrain, back discomfort, and hand and wrist problems.

**Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Most desktop publishers learn their skills by taking classes, completing a certificate program offered on line or through an accredited academic program, or through experience on the job. Experience is the best training and many desktop publishers get started just by experimenting with the software and developing a knack for designing and laying out material for publication.

**Education and training.** There is generally no educational requirement for the job of desktop publisher. Most people learn on the job or by taking classes on line or through local learning centers that teach the latest software. For those who are interested in pursuing a career in desktop publishing, an associate degree or a bachelor’s degree in graphic arts, graphic communications, or graphic design is preferred. Graphic arts programs are a good way to learn about the desktop publishing software used to format pages; assign type characteristics; and import text and graphics into electronic page layouts. The programs teach print and graphic design fundamentals and provide an extensive background in imaging, prepress operations, print reproduction, and emerging media. Courses in other aspects of printing also are available at vocational-technical institutes, industry-sponsored update and retraining programs, and private trade and technical schools.

**Other qualifications.** Although formal training is not always required, those with certificates or degrees will have the best job opportunities. Most employers prefer to hire people who have at least a high school diploma and who possess good communication skills, basic computer skills, and a strong work ethic. Desktop publishers should be able to deal courteously with people, because they have to interact with customers and clients and be able to express design concepts and layout options with them. They also may have to do simple math calculations and compute ratios to scale graphics and artwork and estimate job costs. A basic understanding and facility with computers, printers, scanners, and other office equipment and technologies also is needed to work as a desktop publisher.

Desktop publishers need good manual dexterity, and they must be able to pay attention to detail and work independently. Good eyesight, including visual acuity, depth perception, a wide field of view, color vision, and the ability to focus quickly also are assets. Artistic ability often is a plus. Employers also seek persons who are even tempered and adaptable—important qualities for workers who often must meet deadlines and learn how to operate new equipment.

**Advancement.** Workers with limited training and experience assist more experienced staff on projects while they learn the software and gain practical experience. They advance on

the basis of their demonstrated mastery of skills. Desktop publishing software continues to evolve and gain in technological sophistication. As a result, desktop publishers need to keep abreast of the latest developments and how to use new software and equipment. As they gain experience, they may advance to positions with greater responsibility. Some may move into supervisory or management positions. Other desktop publishers may start their own companies or work as independent consultants, while those with more artistic talent and further education may find job opportunities in graphic design or commercial art positions.

**Employment**

Desktop publishers held about 32,000 jobs in 2006. About 35 percent worked for newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers, while 24 percent worked in the printing and related support activities industry. Other desktop publishers work for professional, scientific, and technical services firms and in many other industries that produce printed or published materials.

The printing and publishing industries are two of the most geographically dispersed industries in the United States, and desktop publishing jobs are found throughout the country. Although most jobs are in large metropolitan cities, electronic communication networks and the Internet allow some desktop publishers to work from other locations.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of desktop publishers is expected to experience little or no change over the 2006-2016 decade because more people are learning basic desktop publishing skills as a part of their regular job functions in other occupations and because more organizations are formatting materials for display on the web rather than designing pages for print publication.

**Employment change.** Employment of desktop publishers is expected to grow 1 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is considered little or no change in employment. Desktop publishing has become a frequently used and common tool for designing and laying out printed matter, such as advertisements, brochures, newsletters, and forms. However, increased computer processing capacity and widespread availability of more elaborate desktop publishing software will make it easier and more affordable to use for people who are not printing professionals. As a result, the need for people who specialize in desktop publishing will slow, as more people are able to do this work.

In addition, organizations are increasingly moving their published material to the Internet to save the cost of printing and distributing materials. This change will slow the growth of desktop publishers, especially in smaller membership and trade organizations, which publish newsletters and small reports. Companies that produce large reports and rely on high qual-

**Projections data from the National Employment Matrix**

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Desktop publishers.....	43-9031	32,000	32,000	300	1

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

ity and high resolution color and graphics within their publications, however, will continue to use desktop publishers to lay out publications for offset printing.

**Job prospects.** Despite the little to no change in projected employment, job opportunities for desktop publishers are expected to be good because of the need to replace workers who move into managerial positions, transfer to other occupations, or leave the labor force. However, job prospects will be better for those with experience as many employers prefer to hire experienced desktop publishers because of the long time it takes to become good at this work. Among individuals with little or no experience, opportunities should be best for those with computer backgrounds, certification in desktop publishing, or who have completed a postsecondary program in desktop publishing, graphic design, or web design.

### Earnings

Earnings for desktop publishers vary according to level of experience, training, geographic location, and company size. Median annual earnings of desktop publishers were \$34,130 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$26,270 and \$44,360. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,550, and

the highest 10 percent earned more than \$55,040 a year. Median annual earnings of desktop publishers in May 2006 were \$36,460 in printing and related support services and \$31,450 in newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers.

### Related Occupations

Desktop publishers use artistic and editorial skills in their work. These skills also are essential for artists and related workers; commercial and industrial designers; prepress technicians and workers; public relations specialists; and writers and editors.

### Sources of Additional Information

Details about training programs may be obtained from local employers such as newspapers and printing shops or from local offices of the State employment service.

For information on careers and training in printing, desktop publishing, and graphic arts, write to:

► Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation, 1899 Preston White Dr., Reston, VA 20191-4367.

Internet: <http://www.gaerf.org>

► Graphic Arts Information Network, 200 Deer Run Rd., Sewickley, PA 15143. Internet: <http://www.gain.net>