

**Hope to get published?
Check out Content
Cradle.**

Writers, take note

A SPIRING writers who are anxious to see their work in print may be in for a break, with the establishment of Content Cradle, an online service to help local writers get published.

Set up by former journalist and self-confessed techy, Oon Yeoh, Content Cradle (www.contentcradle.com) does not pretend to be able to "revolutionise" the publishing world. Its goals are modest – facilitating young writers who want to see their work published.

"Our aims are not so grand ... we do not hope to revolutionise the industry. I was involved with MPH's local author's month (events) for about a year and I saw that there are many local budding writers who do not know how to go about self-publishing and are intimidated by the thought of going to a publisher with their manuscript," says Oon.

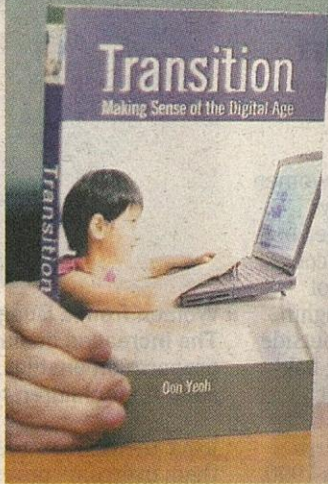
"Approaching a publisher for the first time can be very daunting. Rejection is a hard thing to accept."

Content Cradle comes under Oon's company, Basic Media Sdn Bhd. It aims to simplify the process for promising writers and minimise the apprehension of approaching publishers. Writers who think they have a solid idea or material worthy of being published can submit a 450-word brief on the website. Oon and a few other experienced, credible freelance writers will review the submissions and shortlist those that have potential.

"The online submission is like the initial filter. Some ideas just cannot be developed. But if we think a proposal has potential, we will contact the writer and move on from there," he says.

Content Cradle has several industry partners to facilitate not only funding but also distribution of its books. They include MPH Bookstores and Kinibooks, while funding (including seed money) comes in the form of a grant from the Finance Ministry's Cradle Investment Programme (CIP).

Under CIP, individual techno-preneurs and researchers with unique and innovative ideas are funded so they can convert their raw ideas into viable commercial ventures.



Close collaboration: Oon Yeoh wants to produce quality books, with the author involved every step of the way.

Since its inception about a year ago, Content Cradle has published four books, all non-fiction. Though Oon prefers non-fiction, Content Cradle is open to publishing fiction, too.

"We prefer non-fiction as we are more familiar with this genre. But we won't say no to a good piece of fiction.

"What we are not and do not intend to be, however, is a mass publisher. We want to remain focused on quality and not quantity. We can afford to be picky because this is not our bread and butter ... we have day jobs," stresses Oon, a senior researcher at a multi-national telco.

On that note, Oon also makes it clear that Content Cradle is not a vanity publisher – one that prints and binds a book at the author's sole expense, regardless of quality or content. Such publishers may exclude objectionable content, such as pornography, but usually do not screen for quality. As long as you have the money, you can get them to print your work. And, for an extra fee, some vanity publishers even provide editing, marketing, and distribu-

tion services.

With Content Cradle, authors have to share the cost of publication.

"We are joint-venture partners with the authors. All costs and profits are shared. It is a unique collaboration that gives the author more say in the development of the book (the paper used, the design, the cost and so on) and more responsibility, too.

"We will publish the book but the author is involved every step of the way."

Both publisher and author are therefore jointly responsible for how well – or not – the book does.

"We take the risk together," says Oon, a former deputy news editor with an English daily.

As such, the cost of publishing with Content Cradle varies – according to the demands of the author.

"If the writer wants better quality paper, the cost will be higher.

"Generally, we can publish a paperback for about RM15,000 to RM20,000. It is possible to spend less than RM10,000 but the quality of

the product will be compromised."

Response from budding writers so far has been "so-so". This, however, is a relief to Oon.

"For now, we are content with the response we have received. We are a small company and can only handle a small load. We want to always be able to pick and choose the authors and books we want to do.

"I would rather do one book very well, than many books half-heartedly."

What does he look for in potential writers?

"The author must have a specific expertise. He must be an expert in his field. It helps, of course, if he can write but it is more important that he knows his stuff. After all, not everyone is born to write. This is for non-fiction books, of course.

"For example, if someone is an expert in bicycle repair but cannot write well, we can help him produce a book."

Having said that, Oon has not had to contend with a writer who cannot write – so far.

Although he does some of the editing himself, he has a team of editors, professional proofreaders, designers and photographers who ensure the end product is of good quality.

"We outsource these jobs but we always use professionals. We will not sting when it comes to quality," he says.

One way to impress Oon and his team at Content Cradle is to make sure your idea is sound and well thought out.

"The more developed an idea is, the higher the chances of us taking it up. As we are joint partners (with the authors), we want them to have a marketing strategy in mind as well, and not leave everything up to us.

"After all, if the person is really passionate and serious about being published, he would have put some thought into it. This (whether or not the author has a marketing plan) is part of our assessment."

Oon's exposure to books and publishing while studying and working briefly in Britain left an indelible mark on him; he saw the need for quality books.

"Here, we tend to emphasise the 'finishing' (design, paper, etc) rather than the quality of the word. Many books are not edited properly. I want to produce books that are really good. That is my motivation ... I don't expect to make money from this venture," says Oon.