

Iconic Brand

An Anniversary For Dummies

You know the iPod commercial that says "there's an app for that"? Chances are, if there's something you want to learn how to do, there's a Dummies book for that. With some 1,800 titles in print, there are guides to 529s and other college savings plans, auto repair, budget weddings, building chicken coops, and even self-publishing. But as the brand hits its 20th anniversary, books are just a portion of the vast business that has spun off of what started as *DOS for Dummies* in 1991.

Within three years of that book's 7,500-copy initial print run (by IDG, which Wiley acquired in 2001), it had 10 million books in print, and a best-selling series was well underway. Typical book series spinoffs like page-a-day calendars came next. The big move beyond books happened in 1996, when Dummies partnered with music company EMI on *Classics for Dummies*, a series that paired books with CDs containing more than 60 minutes of music. They sold very well, with *Beethoven for Dummies* hitting #2 on a *Billboard* chart. "That was the beginning of Dummies being treated as a brand that could be licensed out for products and services beyond its core publishing program," said Marc Mikulich, v-p of brand management, who has been with Dummies since its inception.

Board games, exercise videos, and sewing patterns followed, all tied to Dummies books. In fact, the sewing patterns license, held by pattern company Simplicity, continues to this day. More than 100 patterns are sold primarily in JoAnn's and Wal-Mart. They've sold so well at Wal-Mart that the retailer changed the way they are displayed, moving them out of the traditional file cabinets that retailers have used for



Guitar Starter Pack for Dummies comes with a Kona steel-string acoustic guitar, a book, an audio CD, a "gig bag," a digital tuner, and three picks. The list price is \$159.99, and Amazon sells it for \$99.97. There's an electric guitar version, too. Mikulich said the packs were "extremely successful" this past holiday season on Amazon. Tech Support for Dummies, which launched at CES in January, is also doing well. For \$14.95 a month, customers get unlimited tech support for 30 days, covering PCs, printers, scanners, digital cameras, iTunes, and other devices and applications. GPS Navigation for Dummies is another popular program, complete with the familiar Dummies man and his triangular head right on the GPS screen.

Dummies' licensing team continues to look for opportunities to extend the brand into new channels and products. Employees working on the Dummies brand even go through extensive "Dummies brand training."

Of course, all Dummies licensing comes back to the books, and the Dummies publishing program continues to be a robust one for Wiley. There are more

another early license; the how-to format lends itself particularly well to exercise (like yoga and Pilates), sports (e.g., golf), and games (e.g., poker).

These days, the Dummies franchise is estimated to bring in approximately \$100 million to Wiley annually. One of the most recent successful Dummies licensing programs is musical instruments. Acoustic

books in print, and on average the global Dummies publishing "teams" create more than 300 new titles a year. Those "teams" are in the U.S., Canada, U.K., Australia, and Germany.

All frontlist titles have been available as e-books for a number of years, and many are available as mobile apps (Spanish for Dummies has been an especially strong-selling mobile app).

Wiley is celebrating the anniversary with author interviews, local events, consumer sweepstakes and prizes, giveaways on Dummies social media sites, retailer and library contests, and Dummies man appearances. On March 1, Wiley will launch a 20th anniversary landing page on Dummies.com.

There are many reasons for Dummies' success, but Mikulich sums up Dummies' allure this way: "It gives people permission to try things that are beyond their reach." —Lynn Andriani



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IDG Books is no dummy in the business world

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John Kilcullen is no dummy.

But he's capitalized on helping millions of so-called "dummies" do everything from working on their computers to selecting the right wine with dinner.

Mr. Kilcullen is chairman and CEO of IDG Books Worldwide Inc. a Foster City publisher of technology, financial and other guide books.

IDG publishes about 700 titles within 18 brands, but the public company is perhaps best known for its "For Dummies" series.

This includes its top-selling "Windows For Dummies" and 360 other "For Dummies" titles, such as "Beauty Secrets For Dummies," "The Internet For Dummies" and "Wine For Dummies," which is used in the hospitality management course at Cornell University, in Ithaca, N.Y.

Most experts agree that IDG was a pioneer in creating a line of easy-to-read guide books.

"For Dummies" books are characterized by easy-to-read charts and graphs that break down a complex subject into a digestible course.

The books, which cost up to \$25 each, incorporate pop culture, such as top 10 lists, and their yellow and black covers have made them an easily recognizable brand, much like people associate the trademark "Rollerblades" with in-line skates.

"The people who buy our books feel intimidated and left out," Mr. Kilcullen said. "With our cartoons and approach to educating, we make them empowered."

Mr. Kilcullen, 40, co-founded the company in 1990 as a subsidiary of International Data Group Inc., a Boston publisher of computer magazines such as Infoworld.

Mr. Kilcullen, along with three others from the parent company, started IDG Books to publish computer reference books, and after the first year had nine titles. But the information was old, and the company lost more than \$1 million in its first two fiscal years, before the "For Dummies" line was invented.

"Thankfully we had the support of a benevolent investor to keep us in business," Mr. Kilcullen said of IDG's parent, which still owns about 75 percent of the firm.

Then IDG decided to dummy-down the information. The company inserted catchy icons, humor and friendly graphics to come up with "DOS For Dummies" in 1991, months after DOS 5.0 was released.

Waldenbooks rejected the book because the "Dummies" moniker sounded too negative and the information wasn't technical enough.

But a brand was born.

More than four million copies of "DOS For Dummies" have been sold.

response, he changed it to yellow.

He may be on to something.

The Color Association of the United States reports that yellow is the most luminous color and can be used to signify wisdom. The New York-based association lists black type on a yellow background as the color combination that's easiest on the eyes.

IDG went on to earn about \$1 million in sales in the fiscal year after the DOS book debuted.

For the 1998 fiscal year ended in September, IDG reported profit of \$10 million on revenue of \$140 million, compared with a profit of \$7 million on \$120 million in revenue the year before.

It launched the ninth-largest initial public offering in Silicon Valley in 1998, raising \$50 million when it debuted on the stock market Sept. 30.

Though the company is indelibly associated with "For Dummies," those books and sundry products - CDs, calendars and games - now account for only 60 percent of the firm's revenue, compared with 90 percent in earlier years. IDG's 17 other lines of products make up its remaining revenue base.

"IDG knows how to package and sell books; that's their success," said Malcolm Kushner, a Santa Cruz consultant and author of "Public Speaking For Dummies."

"Their books are easy, simple and they read just like how people think," he added.

IDG's 450 or so employees have a host of competitors, such as Simon & Schuster, McGraw-Hill and Microsoft Press. But probably none more so than Macmillan, which publishes some 300 titles under the "Idiot's Guide" series, such as "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dating."

The books are similar to "For Dummies," though "Idiot's" come with a white cover. Last year, Macmillan's line reportedly earned sales of about one-fourth that of what "For Dummies" earned for IDG.

"Being called a dummy is cute and friendly, but being called an idiot is not so nice," said Karen Park, marketing manager for Stanford Bookstore.

She said "For Dummies" outsells "Idiot's" 10 to one at Stanford Bookstore.

"There's a universe of possibilities out there and we get a lot of title ideas," said 40-year-old IDG president Steven Berkowitz. "That says how well our brands have penetrated the market."

During IDG's road show - when soon-to-be public companies meet potential investors - Mr. Berkowitz said many of the staunch bankers recommended titles such as "Funeral For Dummies" and "Judaism For Dummies."

But IDG is more than "For Dummies."

The publisher bought MIS: Press and M&T Books from Henry Holt & Co. of New York in 1991; IDG has extended globally by becoming a 40 percent partner in a Canadian joint venture called CDG Books Canada; and IDG is 25 percent owner of TransQuest Publishers, a book distributor in Southeast Asia.

IDG also has teamed with Netscape Communications Corp. to publish books and CD-ROMs under the name Netscape Press.

At the end of last year, IDG bought the venerated student-aid publisher Cliffs Notes of Lincoln, Neb, for \$18 million. Coincidentally, the 300 titles of Cliffs Notes feature yellow covers and black lettering.

Messrs. Kilcullen and Berkowitz noted that the color scheme of Cliffs :Notes fits well with IDG. They also said the concept of Cliffs helping to educate the masses makes the 40-year-old company an even better sibling of "For Dummies."

"IDG has grown well because their products have a great marketing approach," said Frank Romano, professor of digital publishing at the Rochester Institute of Technology. "Who would have thought that insulting your readers by calling them 'dummies' would be so successful."

Facts and figures 'For Dummies'

First book in the "For Dummies" series: "DOS For Dummies" by Dan Gookin, November 1991 4.2 million copies in print

First non-computer "For Dummies" book: "Personal Finance For Dummies" by Eric Tyson, April 1994 939,000 copies in print.

Most "For Dummies" books in print:

First edition published October 1992 7.8 million copies in print

Number of "For Dummies" titles: 369 (260 are about technology)

Number of non-"For Dummies" books published by IDG: More than 300

More than 40 "For Dummies" titles have reached more than 250,000 copies in print

"For Dummies" books are translated into 31 languages

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