GENERATIVE PRINT COMMERCE

Personalized Books at Scale

How AI-Driven Personalization and Lulu's Print API Have Created an Entirely New Market Category



Contents

Foreword 2

Interest in Personalized Products Is Surging 4

Personalization: From Digital Designs to Printed Products 6

The Emerging Market for Personalized Books 8

Common Use Cases for Personalized Books 13

Case Study: EverFold 17

Indicators of Success 19

About Lulu 20

Foreword

Understanding how to utilize personalization and customization is proving to be a key differentiator for emerging content businesses. That opportunity includes AI book generators, personalized gift companies, children's book platforms, educational products, wellness and coaching, corporate gifting programs, family history services, and subscription-based content.

AI can create a one-of-one book experience

This is a unique business and content category we define as Generative Print Commerce.

Among the many things AI can do, creating custom, personalized experiences is one of the most tangible. This extends to printing, enabling truly personalized book experiences. That means a unique file is created for the book, usually based on inputs from the buyer. Things like images, context, and more can be used to generate a singular, custom output.

Lulu's Print API turns that experience into a physical product without inventory, manual order entry, or fulfillment infrastructure. Individual files can be uploaded via the API to Lulu's print-on-demand network, where the individual book is printed and shipped directly to the buyer.

This is a time of fast growth and development for creative industries, as workflows can be reduced to prompts written in plain language. Companies offering real-time custom book design through a browser interface are entering an emerging category of Generative Print Commerce. Data supports the consumer demand for personalized products, with the strongest indicator being Wonderbly, a personalized children's book company boasting over 11 million sales in a decade of operation.[1]

The focus is not on using AI to replace authors or mass-produce generic books. It is about bespoke products built from customer inputs. A buyer might provide a child's name, a family memory, a set of learning goals, a fitness profile, a company milestone, or a collection of photos. An AI workflow can turn those inputs into a story, workbook, journal, keepsake, training guide, or branded book.

That opens the door to a new kind of personalized product. But content generation via AIs assistance is only the first step for these businesses.

1 Graphite completes successful exit of digital publisher Wonderbly, Graphite Capital, June 2025

To sell personalized books at scale, companies need a repeatable workflow for collecting inputs, generating content, reviewing outputs, creating print-ready files, submitting orders, tracking production, managing shipping, and handling customer expectations. The interactive experience may be what attracts the buyer. The operational workflow is what determines whether the business can grow.

Lulu's Print API is the production layer for Generative Print Commerce.

Businesses control the customer experience, storefront, prompts, content rules, preview process, checkout, and brand relationship. Lulu connects the finished book files to print-on-demand production and fulfillment. Each order can be printed as a one-of-one product, then shipped directly to the buyer.

This report examines how AI-driven personalization is changing the opportunity for custom book companies and startups. It also outlines the workflow, infrastructure, quality controls, and business considerations companies need to turn AI-generated content into custom printed products customers can hold, gift, keep, and use.

Early Market Signals

Since ChatGPT was released to the broader market in 2022, businesses of all kinds have rushed to find ways to leverage this powerful technology. For custom books, the impetus has been in the making even longer.

As early as 2019, research conducted by Etsy showed that 9 out of 10 buyers purchased gifts on the platform. They also revealed that "personalized gift" was the top search term for 2020, showing a strong inclination by buyers to seek gifts they feel will have meaning and impact for the recipient.[2]

Businesses that offer personalized books are able to build an audience quickly...

Marketing Intelligence firm Mintel's own research in 2025 points to increases in "value-driven gifting," as consumers become more conscious of the real value of their gifts. They predict that AI will continue to play a large role in personalized, value-driven gifting, leading to growth in "emotional, practical, or experiential" gift-giving.[3]

2 Seller Handbook, Etsy, March 2021

3 US Gifting Market Report, Mintel, 2025

Shopify's 2025 holiday research reinforces the shift toward deliberate, AI-assisted shopping: 51% of shoppers planned to set spending caps, while 64% expected to use AI tools for holiday shopping, including finding deals and discovering products. While these are shoppers using AI to assist in product research and discovery, it shows the growing levels of comfort shoppers have with AI assistance.[4]

Interest in Personalized Products Is Surging

Consumers are enamored with custom, personalized products. Platforms like Printful and 4imprint have grown significantly as individuals and businesses seek simple, affordable, highly personalized items.

From 2018 to 2021, Printful grew revenue from $77.4 million to $289 million and continues to grow, with revenue estimated at over $400 million for 2025.[5] 4imprint saw steady growth, from $787.3 million in 2021 to $1.346 billion in 2025.[6]

These companies specialize in custom printing across a wide range of products, proving the value individuals and brands place on unique, branded goods—everything from company-branded merchandise to highly personalized individual gifts. It has become uncommon to find a medium- to large-sized business without some form of branded merchandise: shirts, water bottles, pens, mugs, and more.

In addition to new businesses emerging, existing platforms that specialize in custom or personal gifts like Etsy and Uncommon Goods present established means for discovery. Businesses that offer personalized books are able to build an audience quickly through these platforms, aiding in marketing efforts and showing proof of concept in very short periods of time.

Custom apparel, drinkware, bags, and branded merchandise have conditioned buyers to expect affordable personalization. Books have lagged because the personalization is more complicated. Aside from notebooks, journals, or planners with a custom cover, creating a personalized experience inside the book simply took too much time and effort. AI changes the economics of that effort, making personalized books commercially viable.

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4 Spending rebounds, shoppers embrace AI: Insights from our 2025 Global Holiday Retail Report, Shopify, October 2025

5 printful.com Annual Revenue and Growth, Grips Intelligence, July 2026

6 Financial Highlights, 4imprint Group plc, 2025

McKinsey reports that 71% of consumers expect personalized interactions, and 76% get frustrated when they don't receive them.[7] Books are one of the few personalization categories not yet dominated by a few established players, which leaves room for new entrants to grow quickly.

Modern AI Workflows Reduce Friction

By pairing AI-driven workflows with integrated printing and fulfillment, new businesses can offer personalized products at scale. Because overhead and startup costs are low, the opportunity to build and grow rapidly has opened doors to businesses that did not exist a few years ago.

Think back to the Choose Your Own Adventure books of the '80s and '90s, layered with plot options that gave the reader control over the story, direction, and ending.[8] Those books offered choices from a fixed set of prewritten branches.

AI changes the model: instead of selecting a path, the reader can become part of the source material.

AI changes the model: instead of selecting a path, the reader can become part of the source material

While using AI to generate commercial fiction raises unresolved questions about authorship, originality, copyright, and creative labor, personalized books are a different use case. The book is not a substitute for an author's original work; it is a custom product based on the buyer's data and inputs.

As a business, AI workflows cut down on a variety of potentially costly elements. Illustrators and designers are unnecessary when the files are systematically generated. Inventory doesn't apply, since each book is printed on demand. That removes warehousing and fulfillment costs.

Through carefully refined prompts and templates, almost all of the manual work is gone. Leaving the customer to quickly interact with the business's AI workflows, generating fully customized content in real time.

Once the reader becomes part of the source material, the business needs a system that can turn variable inputs into consistent outputs.

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7 The value of getting personalization right—or wrong—is multiplying McKinsey & Company, November 2021

8 *Choose Your Own Adventure*, Wikipedia.org, September 2026

Personalization: From Digital Designs to Printed Products

Businesses can build repeatable AI workflows using prompt templates, structured customer inputs, content rules, review steps, and automated layout tools.

The harder work begins after content generation: creating print-ready files, submitting orders, routing fulfillment, providing status updates, and managing customer expectations.

This is where technological solutions become necessary. Options like Lulu's Print API create a direct link between AI-driven workflows (to create the content) and Lulu's print network (to print and fulfill that content).[9]

Challenge	Impact	Lulu's Solution
Every order is unique	Inventory does not work for one-of-one books	Print-on-demand fulfillment
Files must be print-ready	Bad PDFs create production delays and support issues	Pre-print file validation
Order volume spikes seasonally	Gifts peak around holidays, requiring simple order management and logistics	Automated printing and global fulfillment
Fulfillment is operationally complex	Shipping, tracking, and support add overhead	API-based print production and status tracking
Sellers must own the customer relationship	Buyers expect the experience to come from the brand they bought from	White-label print and fulfillment

9 Print-API, Lulu.com, 2026

Understanding When & Where to Utilize AI Workflows

A study commissioned by Adobe and performed by Forrester Consulting in 2025 found that 76% of customers expect businesses to offer personalized experiences at the right time and in the right places.[10] Businesses need to understand their customers' needs and interests to ensure assisted workflows benefit the customer while creating efficiency for the business.

For a business using personalization to generate unique, custom products, it is particularly important to be aware of when not to use AI or other assisted technologies.

Print Turns Digital Outputs Into Premium Products

A printed book feels giftable, lasting, and high-value. That matters for the kinds of buyers who want a custom product. Children's books, family books, branded workbooks, wellness plans, journals, cookbooks, and keepsakes all make desirable printed books while leaving plenty of room for customization.

AI workflows can generate text, illustrations, captions, exercises, tables, reading prompts, summaries, lesson plans, and structured chapters. The customer-facing interface can also be built with AI. Digital printing turns that output into a finished product that customers are eager to buy, gift, and keep.

Across a sample of 20 companies that use AI to create personalized books and Lulu's API for book-of-one printing, the average retail price is about $45. For many consumers, this is a very reasonable cost for a customized book product. To ensure their customers are satisfied, personalized book businesses rely on consistent, high-quality printers.

That means colors are consistent from one printing to the next. Bindings are cured properly. Covers are vibrant. Because these books are so often a keepsake item, making certain it is of the highest quality is vital to the business's success.

A printed book feels giftable, lasting, and high-value

10 Personalization at Scale Study, Adobe, 2026

Generating Growth & Revenue with Low Overhead

Personalized book businesses can start with a relatively simple cost structure, but margins depend on product format, page count, AI costs, shipping region, support volume, and acquisition costs.

For most of these businesses, the core expenses will include:

- Printing & shipping
- AI tokens
- Website hosting
- Payment processing

As the business scales up, additional costs like customer acquisition, marketing, and customer support will fold into the core expenses.

The Emerging Market for Personalized Books

ChatGPT's 2022 launch signified a major shift in how we use technology. What was once a search bar is now a conversation. Over the last four years, numerous improvements to ChatGPT, along with a surge in other LLM platforms like Claude, Gemini, and Copilot, ushered in a wave of new, AI-powered industries.

There is not yet a reliable estimate for how many AI-personalized book companies are founded each year. But observable evidence (there are a plethora of these companies easily found online) and Lulu's own internal data show a sharp increase in the last year.

The AI-book market expanded almost immediately after ChatGPT became publicly available. Reuters found more than 200 Kindle ebooks listing ChatGPT as an author or co-author by February 2023.[11] Amazon subsequently introduced AI-content disclosure requirements and limited publishers to two new titles per week in each format (paperback, hardcover, and ebook), partly in response to concerns about mass-generated books using AI.[12]

What was once a search bar is now a conversation

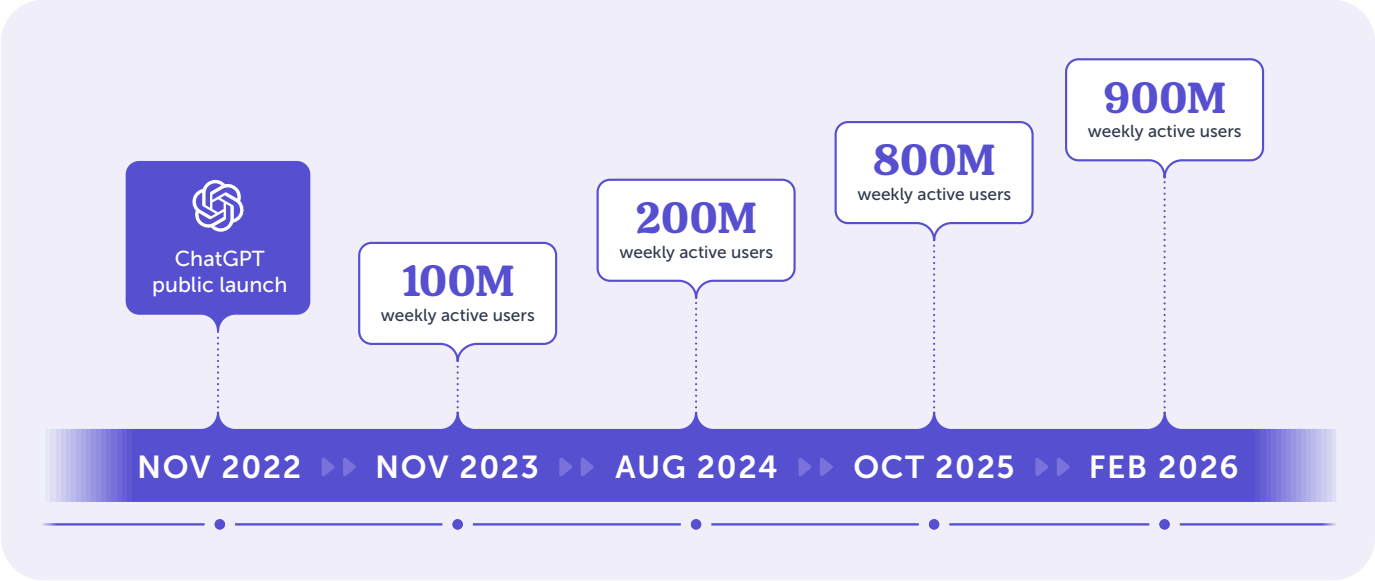
11 ChatGPT Launches boom in AI-written e-books on Amazon, StreetInsider.com, February 2023

12 Content Guidelines, Kindle Direct Publishing, 2026

These guidelines include generic AI books rather than personalized books, but they demonstrate how quickly the production barrier fell.

Perhaps the most significant large-scale evolution of AI for content generation is Gemini Storybook.[13] Launched in August 2025, this tool uses Google's Gemini AI to generate a complete story from a prompt or image upload. The AI uses the inputs to generate a short (usually 10-12 page) story with illustrations, primarily meant for children. While Storybook has fairly narrow uses, it highlights how easily an AI can use minimal inputs to create complete books.[14]

Significant Growth in AI Usage



Using ChatGPT as a representation of growth, we see an explosion over the last four years, from launch to 900 million weekly users.

13 Google Launches Personalized Gemini Storybook App to Industry Concern, Publishers Weekly, August 2025

14 Create Personal Illustrated Storybooks in the Gemini App, Google, August 2025

The Space for Personalized Books

To understand the growth in AI-powered books, Lulu looked at internal data around a group of businesses using the Print API to enable book-of-one printing. These users represent the quickly growing category of generative print commerce: businesses leveraging AI-assisted design and print-on-demand for efficient book printing and fulfillment.

In less than a year, looking at only 65 companies using AI specifically for personalization, internal data revealed over 77,000 individual book orders. At an average order value of about $15 and an estimated retail price per book of $45, these businesses can earn nearly 200% per sale (not allowing for overhead costs such as hosting and LLM tokens).

Perhaps the best early indicator in this space is Wonderbly, a UK company founded in 2013.[15] They've built a catalog of 150 'personalized' books, using simple inputs like a name or relation to turn the basic story into something unique. With more than 11 million books sold, they've solidified their place as a vital provider of children's books.

Generative AI expands on that possibility, allowing anyone to create completely original, unique pieces of content

But more than that, they prove that demand for personalized content is there. Wonderbly's model involves using preset templates for the stories, only inserting specific unique elements in precise locations in the book.

Generative AI expands on that possibility, allowing anyone to create completely original, unique pieces of content. The old model, pioneered by Wonderbly, was "Insert a name and appearance into an existing story." The new model, fueled by LLMs, is "Create a story, character, theme, tone, and message specifically for the recipient."

That leads to two distinct trends:

1. More companies can build personalized book products.
2. Basic digital story generation is becoming commoditized.

15 PRH Acquires Wonderbly, One of the UK's Fastest-Growing Independent Publishers and Leader in Personalized Gift Books, Penguin Random House, June 2025

Competitive Context

Historically, most readers and consumers think of Amazon and Kindle when they hear terms like ‘self-publishing’ or ‘print-on-demand.’ The pervasive nature of Amazon’s role in publishing and book selling is undeniable, but Generative Print Commerce needs tools that Amazon does not offer.

Because of the individualized nature of these products, the business must be able to link its AI workflow directly to the print-on-demand provider. Historical self-publishing platforms, like KDP or IngramSpark, are not crafted to meet these needs.

Services that offer direct API access are necessary to enable personalized, AI-generated books. Factors like ease of implementation, quality of documentation, and support determine whether the API will work for the commercial needs of custom book companies. One of the reasons Lulu focuses on making the API accessible and adaptable is to enable a variety of unique book printing companies to use AI-driven workflows.

Business Model and Unit Economics

A personalized book business needs more than a good concept; it needs a pricing model that can support content generation, file creation, printing, shipping, support, customer acquisition, and refunds. AI workflows reduce the cost of creating content, and print-on-demand offers affordable, low-risk production, which keeps the underlying model relatively simple.

Line Item	USD
Retail Price	$45.00
Print + Shipping	- $10.00
AI Generation	- $4.50
Payment Processing	- $1.15
Platform Overhead	- $4.00
Potential Margin	$25.35

This example assumes a 30-page children's book customized with unique images and generated text based on user inputs. Overhead represents additional costs such as web hosting, support, marketing, and paid advertising. All values are approximate and illustrative; they are not a Lulu pricing quote, and real figures will vary by product, page count, AI workflow, and order volume.

Common Use Cases for Personalized Books

Personalized books are a different use case than mass-producing "original" fiction with AI. These are not books meant to be passed off as original content. The value comes from the customer's own inputs, which the AI shapes into a finished book rooted in the buyer's personal context.

That makes personalized books a strong fit for print-on-demand. Each order is unique by design, and there is no practical inventory model for a book that only exists after the customer provides the source material. The market demand is real: in the first quarter of 2026, nonfiction categories accounted for 44% of U.S. print book units, according to Publishers Weekly, citing Circana BookScan data.[16] Many practical categories already depend on structure, prompts, exercises, reference material, and repeatable formats.

Period	Total Print Units	Adult Nonfiction	Children's Nonfiction	YA Nonfiction	Total Nonficiton
Jan 1 – Mar 31, 2026	163.5M	57.8M	13.2M	1.0M	44.0%

The strongest use cases share a few traits: they are personal to the buyer, built from structured inputs, repeatable through templates, valuable as physical products, and difficult to inventory in advance. The best candidates are products where customer inputs materially change the value of the finished book.[17] If the personalization is superficial, the product may not justify the cost of custom generation, file production, and print fulfillment.

16 Print Sales Fell 3.1% in the First Quarter of 2026, Publishers Weekly, April 2026

17 Global Personalized Gifts Market Size By Product (Non Photo Personalized Gifts, Photo Personalized Gifts), By Distribution Channel (Online, Offline), By Geographic Scope And Forecast, Verified Market Research, September 2025

Personalized Children's Books

Personalized children's books are an established direct-to-consumer category. Wonderbly, one of the best-known companies in the space, has sold more than 11 million personalized books globally and was acquired by Penguin Random House in 2025. Under prior ownership, Wonderbly reportedly doubled revenue and explicitly integrated AI and print-on-demand.[18]

AI expands what the category can do: instead of inserting just a child's name into a fixed story, businesses can build books around a child's age, interests, reading level, hobbies, favorite animals, family members, or learning goals. The result might be a more personalized bedtime story, an early reader, an educational adventure, or a recurring series that grows with the child.

This use case suits print especially well because the finished product feels personal, giftable, and lasting.

Custom Gift Books

Most gifts are tied to a specific person, relationship, or occasion, which gives an AI workflow ample material. A customer might provide memories, inside jokes, photos, dates, or names, and the finished book becomes a gift for a birthday, anniversary, retirement, wedding, or a way to memorialize travels and family stories.

A custom gift book feels more personal than a generic product without requiring the buyer to write the whole book themselves. Because these products are personal, the preview and approval steps are especially important before printing.

Most gifts are tied to a specific person, relationship, or occasion...

18 PRH Acquires Wonderbly, One of the UK's Fastest-Growing Independent Publishers and Leader in Personalized Gift Books, Penguin Random House, June 2025

Wellness, Fitness, and Coaching Books

Wellness and coaching books are often guides or journals that reinforce repeatable frameworks—plans, checklists, reflection prompts, progress trackers, and habit-building exercises. Offering custom elements based on individual needs fits well with structured AI workflows.

A customer answers questions about goals, habits, experience level, schedule, or current challenges, and the output is a guided journal, training plan, workbook, or accountability guide.

This category demands more care from the workflow. Businesses should include clear content controls, disclaimers, and review steps, especially for health-adjacent claims.[19]

Education & Training Books

Students learn at different speeds, employees enter training with different experiences, and customers need different levels of instruction. AI-generated workbooks respond to those needs through user inputs. A 2025 study by Springer reviewed 142 empirical studies to highlight how AI techniques improve access to learning, engagement, and equity.[20]

A learning platform could create practice books based on grade level, subject, assessment results, or course progress; a business could create training manuals based on role, department, product knowledge, or certification path.

Printed materials reduce screen dependence and give learners a structured, tangible path. This category works best when personalization happens inside a controlled curriculum, lesson structure, or training framework.

Printed materials reduce screen dependence and give learners a structured, tangible path

19 Adaptive Health Coaching Technology for Tailored Interventions, MDPI, March 2021

20 Artificial Intelligence in Adaptive Education: a Systematic Review of Techniques for Personalized Learning, Springer Nature, October 2025

Family History & Memoir Books

Family history and memoir books are highly personal but hard to create from scratch. Everyone has stories, photos, notes, timelines, recipes, and memories, but few have the time, software, or experience to turn that material into a finished book.

AI can shape interviews into chapters, turn family timelines into narrative sections, format recipes into a family cookbook, or create prompts that help users capture memories. The value is in preserving material that already matters to the customer; print makes that archive durable, shareable, and easier to pass down.

Corporate Gifting & Brand Books

Businesses already invest in branded merchandise, client gifts, event materials, and employee recognition. This is especially valuable for B2B companies that want a premium product without managing inventory. Templates, brand guidelines, and approved content blocks keep the output consistent while AI adds personalization where it matters.

Research shows that the corporate gifting market has grown by 7.6% since last year and shows no signs of slowing. That same research ties this growth directly to personalization and the growing ease with which corporations can offer unique products to their employees.[21]

The final product might be a client appreciation book, event recap, employee milestone book, onboarding guide, or personalized sales leave-behind.

21 Corporate Gifting Market Report 2026, Research and Markets, January 2026

Case Study: EverFold

everfold.net

EverFold uses AI-assisted workflows to turn customer photos into personalized coloring books.

The concept is simple: the customer uploads digital photos, and EverFold transforms those images into a custom coloring book. Once the upload is complete, the customer previews the book built around their image uploads before purchasing.

Once a customer completes checkout, EverFold's system generates the required print-ready book files and submits the order through Lulu's Print API. The workflow sends the relevant print and shipping details to Lulu, then receives fulfillment updates through the API and webhooks.

For EverFold, the integration depended on aligning three parts of the system:

- File preparation
- Product configuration
- Order flow



Once those pieces were in place, the API integration became a straightforward part of the broader ecommerce workflow.

EverFold uses Lulu's Sandbox environment to test changes before they reach customers. Their staging environment connects directly to the sandbox, allowing the team to test authentication, order submission, file handling, shipping options, and status updates before sending real orders to production.

EverFold also uses modern AI infrastructure to keep internal operations lightweight. Instead of building a large CRM or operations platform, the company uses AWS AgentCore Gateway with Lulu's API. This lets their agentic AI system query print order statuses using Lulu's API documentation as context, reducing the need for custom scripts to handle individual operational tasks.

The company moved from initial build to first sale in roughly eight weeks. That timeline included product development, checkout, customer experience, testing, and the Lulu integration.

EverFold's ideal customer is a parent looking for a more personal way to help children connect with memories. Instead of coloring generic images, children can interact with pictures drawn from their own family moments, places, and experiences.

The broader lesson is that AI-generated personalized books work best when the customer experience stays simple, and the backend workflow handles the complexity. EverFold's customers upload photos and preview a finished coloring book. The system manages image transformation, file creation, order submission, fulfillment tracking, and production updates in the background.

Indicators of Success

AI has changed what is possible for personalized content creation. Personalized books are a new product category and are opening up new market opportunities.

AI content generation is only one part of the business. A personalized book designed from user inputs and AI workflows still has to become a real product to generate revenue for the business. The companies that succeed in this space will be the ones that create repeatable processes using tested and proven AI workflows and templates.

They'll also be the ones that come with a defined, sustained marketing plan. Combining a dedicated effort to building awareness with a quality, reliable product is one of the most common traits in successful companies in this space.

It starts with a clear product offering. Defining the product narrows the range of formats you have to support, which matters enormously when designing custom file-generation workflows. From there, a business can test the content workflow, file generation, checkout, API integration, production timing, and support model. Once that system works, it scales.

Personalized children's books, custom gift books, illustrated stories, family history products, educational workbooks, wellness journals, and corporate brand books all draw on the same opportunity: customers want products made for them. AI makes those products possible; print-on-demand makes them reproducible without inventory or manual fulfillment.

Lulu's Print API is the connection between the digital workflow and the physical book. Businesses own the customer experience, content rules, storefront, pricing, and brand relationship. Lulu provides the print and fulfillment infrastructure that turns finished files into books customers can buy, receive, gift, keep, and use.

The opportunity is not just AI-generated content. It is customer-specific content, produced as a finished book, through a workflow that can scale.

About Lulu

Lulu is a leading provider of book-of-one print-on-demand. Book-of-one production means each order can be printed individually, without requiring inventory, bulk purchasing, or manual production coordination. A RESTful Print API lets businesses connect custom book creation workflows to print-on-demand production and fulfillment.

Lulu does not create the customer-facing AI experience; it provides the print production and fulfillment infrastructure behind it.

Lulu's API supports RESTful JSON communication, OpenID Connect/HTTPS security, production and sandbox environments, and API-based print job creation/status workflows. Using the API allows for white-label printing to 200+ countries and territories, more than 3,200 product combinations, no minimum print runs, and no upfront costs.