

An Introduction To Publishing Your Oracle Deck At TheGamecrafter.com

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The example pricing and statistics on TGC products have changed since the material was originally published in my personal blog. Pricing for TGC items has been updated as of April 2,2022.

TheGamecrafter.com has neither paid for, nor approved, my comments.

Part 1: Publishing Your Oracle Deck

Even before the clusterf*ck that was 2020, there's been a rise in “*spiritual not religious*”/ mystical/ pagan believers interested in doing Card Reading as well as designing oracle decks. (Side note- although many people use “*Oracle*” to refer just to decks that are outside Tarot, leNormand or Kipper paradigms, they're all Oracle decks if used that way.) One of the ‘democratizing benefits’ of the intertubes is the ability to crowd-source funds for Creative projects- from musical albums to art books to oracle decks.

Many deck creators are using crowd funding sites, often successfully. However, that process has limitations and requirements that may not work for every designer. Such sites offer deck designers the ability to pre-sell their decks so they can then order in bulk. The cost per deck is obviously lower that way. Printers overseas have lower labour & operating costs that more than make up for shipping costs.

So long as campaign supporters are aware of the longer lead times.

Those crowd-sourced sites offer various kinds of support, but as with every form of self-publishing the bulk of Marketing effort and expense is on the creator. From creating the artwork to designing the campaign (pricing, premiums, marketing materials) to advertising and being very available on Social Media, to receiving (then shipping out) the finished product and any bumps along the way, a successful Oracle Deck campaign can easily consume life for an entire year. Not every deck creator has the ability or desire to do so.

Another benefit of the Internet is the rise of POD (*Print On Demand*) sites that will produce a single tee shirt, book or canvas art print to order. The Gamecrafter is a POD site, established in Wisconsin in 2001 to produce tabletop games to order. Of course decks of cards are a common part of such games, and TGC has a fabulous deck production system in place. As POD is still a form of self-publishing, designers are still responsible for marketing their creation. But TGC deals with processing payments, collecting sales taxes, delivery delays and claims for damage. What a relief.

I helped Sister Who publish *The Tarot of Sister Who* at The Gamecrafter and then created *Choose JOY: Sister Flirt's Meditation Tin and Portable Altar* also available at TGC. I love the quality of their product, and would like to help other deck creators use them, or at least appreciate the benefits that TGC offers. And perhaps encourage designers who have, or are considering, a deck at TGC offer some of the upgrades they have available.

At this point I'd like to address what seems to be the 2 major disadvantages POD sites have in competing with other options.

Not having to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket before making any sales was the primary USP (unique selling proposition) for crowd-source sites. Since then creators have experimented with increasing the visual and tactile experience of their deck. Custom boxes may include fabric lining or gold foil printing (exterior or interior). Some have a cardboard insert to hold the cards in the middle of a larger box that includes a book. As a deck buyer, I do appreciate an upgrade from the traditional tuck box. My marketing background knows the value of quality presentation.

Crowd-funded decks are generally printed overseas. Having a hundred complex boxes assembled by hand is not as expensive as it necessarily would be if manufactured domestically. Offering such complex packaging on a Print On Demand basis within the USA would drive costs (and production times) through the proverbial roof. TGC has expanded their packaging options from tuck boxes to sturdier Stout and Pro boxes. Not as fancy as those overseas custom boxes, but still a nice presentation. The following Parts go into more detail on these and other options.

The other concern is not so much POD vs Crowd Funding, as POD vs Mass Market publishers; pricing.

This is an issue that is faced by artists and designers who use POD sites for all kinds of items; from books to fine art prints to t-shirts & coffee mugs. Many (but not all) shoppers who use POD sites don't compare merchandise prices to products in discount stores. T-shirts may be found at lots of places for \$5, but few expect a made-to-order custom design shirt to be the same price.

As I've said, crowd-funded projects have confirmed that once an item is priced well above an average 'mass market' item, adding a few moderate-priced upgrades increase the perceived value more than the additional cost. Most Llewellyn, US Games, and Weiser decks have List Prices in the US\$20 to \$26 range (actual retail pricing online may be even lower) but other publishers have shown that prices up to double that range can succeed even for Mass Market items; your unique Oracle Deck should not be trying to compete with low end mass market prices.

Part 2: Oracle Decks: The Minimum

The Bare Minimum

As a POD (*Print On Demand*) site, TGC (TheGameCrafter.com) allows you, or anyone, to purchase a single copy of a game or deck. Their system doesn't actually require a deck be packaged in a custom box, or have any instructional material included. You can (and someone does) sell just a set of cards; shipped in a zip-lock plastic bag.

As a Card Reader, deck collector and marketing person, I really discourage anyone from doing that. To my mind the absolute minimum you should have to attract buyers is:

the deck of cards;

documentation (whether printed, a downloadable .pdf, or both);

a box.

Card Decks

All the decks produced at TGC are printed on 12 point (320gsm) black-core matte stock which results in stupendous colours on solid, but not too stiff, cards. They offer a wide range of sizes and shapes; 1 round, 1 hexagonal, 3 square, and 12 rectangular sizes. From a 1.75"x2.5" Mini Deck to the Jumbo 3.5"x5.5", all cards are die-cut for perfect rounded corners.

There are two upgrade options available; one of which I consider virtually required for Oracle cards receiving lots of use; a UV coating. They also offer a linen texture effect if desired. The next Part goes into more depth on pricing, using a variety of sizes and options.

Documentation

As noted above, you could sell a deck of cards without any documentation. If your Tarot deck artwork closely aligns with the RWS (Rider, Waite, Smith) paradigm saying "*just use any popular tarot book*" is acceptable. But even so, a single 8.5"x11" sheet document allows you to list a website or social media accounts, a basic spread or two, or perhaps a short list of popular Tarot book authors/titles. If your deck is non-RWS, or not a Tarot deck at all, not including more information on card meanings is a major shortcoming.

TGC offers the aforementioned 8.5"x11" full-colour document, which can be folded into any of their boxes. It's possible to upload .pdf files that may be freely available (promotional literature) or downloadable only after purchase. We use both for *The Tarot of Sister Who*.

They also offer saddle-stitched (folded and stapled) booklets in 5 sizes. And very recently they've added perfect bound and coil bound books. See Part 4 for more information on the books and booklets now available at The Gamecrafter.

Packaging

There are 46 items listed in [TGC's packaging category](#)– from paper or foil packs holding 18 Poker-size cards, to Tuck Boxes (for various card sizes and card counts), to Rigid 2-part Boxes for card decks or the board games for which TGC was created.

Tuck boxes, even in the thicker stock used by major deck publishers, are not really suitable long-term. In 1980 when I purchased my first Tarot deck most Card Readers had only a handful of decks, and people I knew mostly wrapped their decks in fabric or leather, and discarded the boxes.

Over the past few decades there's been an increase in the number of publishers, and an explosion of self-published decks. The majority of decks now available are not sold in tuck boxes. Both Deck Collectors and Card Readers are looking for sturdier deck storage; and having the deck name visible is helpful when trying to pull one specific deck from a collection of dozens (hundreds) of decks.

While choosing to use a rigid 2-part box rather than a tuck box means an increase in cost, I believe the increase in 'perceived value' will more than justify the higher price. Part 3 provides some pricing examples for various decks, documentation, and packaging combinations.



Part 3: Upgrades at The Gamecrafter

As previously stated, successful Kickstarter campaigns show that upgrades in packaging and literature can easily increase sales and customer satisfaction with the finished product. Once your offer enters 'premium pricing' it's easier for a potential buyer to accept incremental upgrades (of course with exceptions and limitations). A corollary is that once someone's paying a premium price, any failings or short comings (and perception is reality) are magnified.

In short, don't be afraid to offer a higher quality box, and sufficient literature to make using your deck as easy as possible. See Also Part 4- *Books & Booklets at The Gamecrafter*;

A side benefit to offering higher quality at The Gamecrafter is "[Designer Rewards](#)." That is, incremental discounts on production costs and incremental decreases in the Marketing Fee you pay for sales through their website's Marketplace as your annual sales increase. The pricing used in the following examples is their base fees as of August 25, 2021.

Example 1:

78 Tarot-Size (2.75"x4.75") Card Deck.

This size card is printed 10 per sheet. Using 8 sheets provides the 78 card deck plus up to 2 title/info cards.

Minimum Production:

\$16.40 = 8 sheets of cards @ \$2.05ea;

\$03.99 = 90 Card Tuck Box (1 sheet);

\$02.25 = UV coating 9 sheets @ .25ea;

\$01.35 = 2 page (single sheet) document;

\$00.89 = misc costs/ base fee.

\$24.88 production cost

Selling for \$32.99 in TGC marketplace:

\$32.99 Sale price;

(24.88) Production cost;

=8.11 Gross Margin;

(2.43) Marketing Fee.

=5.68 Profit.

Upgrade Product Offering:

Replace Tuck Box with Small Stout Box;

Add the Tarot Card insert for the box;

Replace Document with 16 page Booklet.

\$34.38 new production cost

Selling for \$44.99 in TGC marketplace:

\$44.99 Sale price;
(34.38) Production cost;
=10.61 Gross Margin;
(3.18) Marketing Fee.
=07.43 Profit.

Example 2:

45 Jumbo-Size (3.5"x5.5") Card Deck.

This size card is printed 6 per sheet. Using 8 sheets provides the 45 card deck plus up to 3 title/info cards.

Minimum Production:

\$12.80 = 8 sheets of cards @ \$1.60ea;
\$03.99 = Jumbo Tuck Box (1 sheet);
\$02.25 = UV coating 9 sheets @ .25ea;
\$02.70 = 4 page (2 sheets) document;
\$00.89 = misc costs/ base fee.
\$22.63 production cost

Selling for \$29.99 in TGC marketplace:

\$29.99 Sale price;
(22.63) Production cost;
=07.32 Gross Margin;
(02.20) Marketing Fee.
=05.12 Profit.

Upgrade Product Offering:

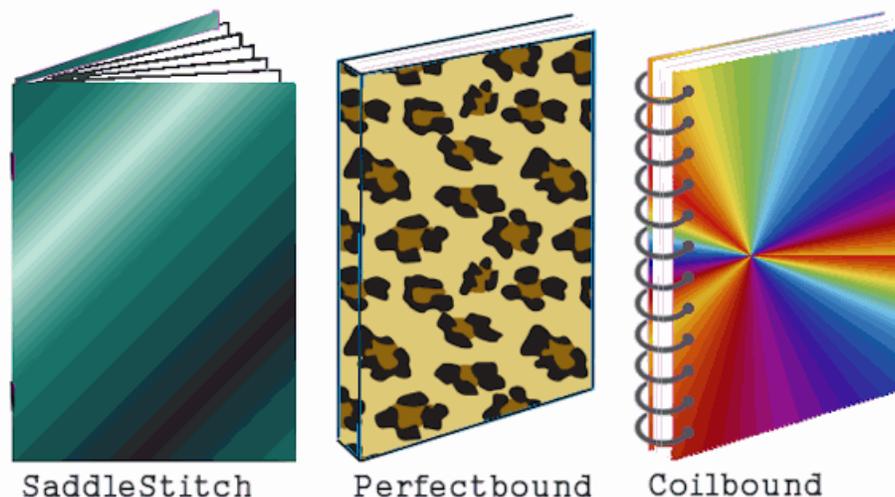
Replace Tuck Box with Small Pro Box;
Replace Document with 16 page Booklet.
\$25.07 new production cost

Selling for \$34.99 in TGC marketplace:

\$34.99 Sale price;
(25.07) Production cost;
= 9.92 Gross Margin;
(02.98) Marketing Fee.
=06.94 Profit.

Part 4: Books & Booklets at The Gamecrafter

The Gamecrafter offers a wide range of document formats sized to match deck and box sizes.

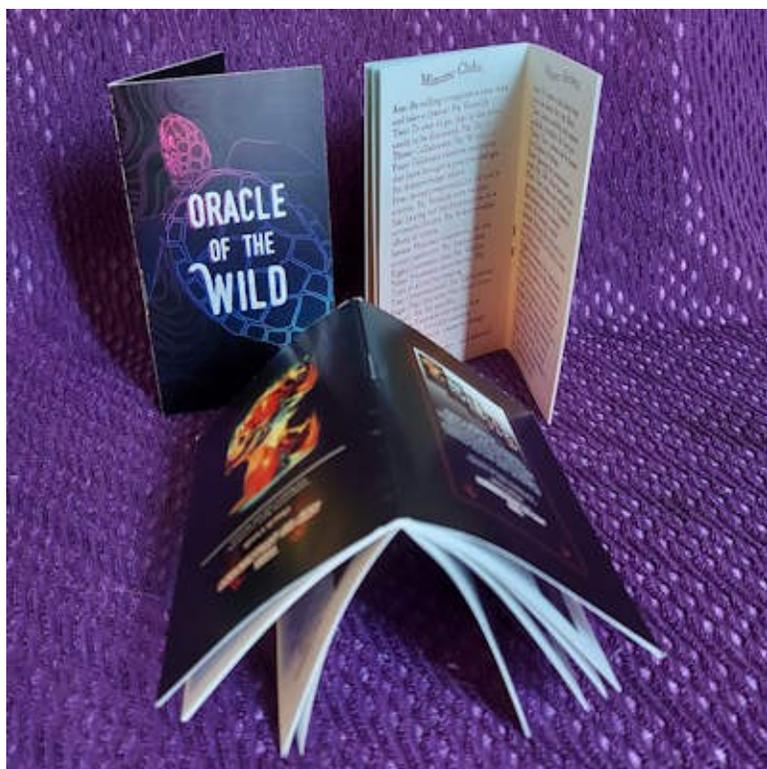


SaddleStitch

Perfectbound

Coilbound

The most popular- and certainly the least expensive- beyond the ‘Document’ (8.5”x11” sheets) is Saddle stitching. That is, pages held by “a stitch made by placing the center of the fold (as of a magazine or pamphlet) across the saddle of the stitcher and driving wire staples through and clinching them on the inside,” (source: Merriam-Webster).



The Gamecrafter offers 6 page sizes of Saddle Stitch booklets:

Jumbo Booklet- 8” x 10”

Large Booklet- 5” x 8”

Medium Booklet- 3.5” x 5”

Small Booklet- 2.5” x 3.5”

Tall Booklet- 4.5” x 8”

Tarot Booklet- 2.75” x 4.75”

Shown here; Tarot Size booklets from various TGC decks I've purchased.

Booklets are priced as a base cost plus per page fee; priced per sheet of 4 pages. As of August 25, 2021 a 4 page booklet costs ranges from US\$1.32 to 1.94. This product can have a maximum of 40 pages.

The next higher price point is Perfect Bound books; books with covers that are glued together at the spine. At TGC the covers are made from 12pt card stock and the pages are made from high quality letter stock. A perfect bound book with 200 pages would be 1.05" thick.

TGC offers 2 sizes; the Digest (8.39"x5.38") Perfect Bound Book is designed specifically for the Medium Stout Boxes. The Letter (8.5"x11") Perfect Bound Book was designed specifically for the Large Retail Box. Both sizes are priced at US\$4.95 + \$0.36 per sheet of 4 pages (US\$8.55 for a 40 page book). This type of book has a minimum 40 page count and a maximum of 200 pages.

The most expensive book is the Coil bound; it has 12pt card stock covers and high quality letter stock pages bound with a plastic, spiral coil. A Coil Book with 200 pages would be 0.85" thick. Finished size is 9.36"x10"- designed specifically for the Large Retail or Large Stout Boxes. A Coil book costs \$4.50 + \$0.64 per sheet of 4 pages (US\$10.90 for a 40 page book). This type of book has a minimum 40 page count and a maximum of 200 pages.

Find more information and templates in [this section of their website](#).

New since this was originally posted on my blog is *The GameCrafter Folios*.

Folios are printed on the same 148gsm paper as their original 'Document' (still available). A single sheet (2 sided) Document now costs US\$1.35 while Folios are US\$1.73 to \$1.97. Folios offer a more professional presentation; panels are laid out to be seen and read as folded, are scored to fold precisely, and allow full bleed (not possible on the Document).



This photo shows how a single sheet Document appears folded to fit inside a Mint Tin deck (in this case my Sister Flirt's Choose JOY Meditation Tin) beside a new Mint Tin Folio.

The Folio has less text area, but the Document in this case only had text on one side, so the Folio was large enough.

Part 5: TGC Tarot Inserts

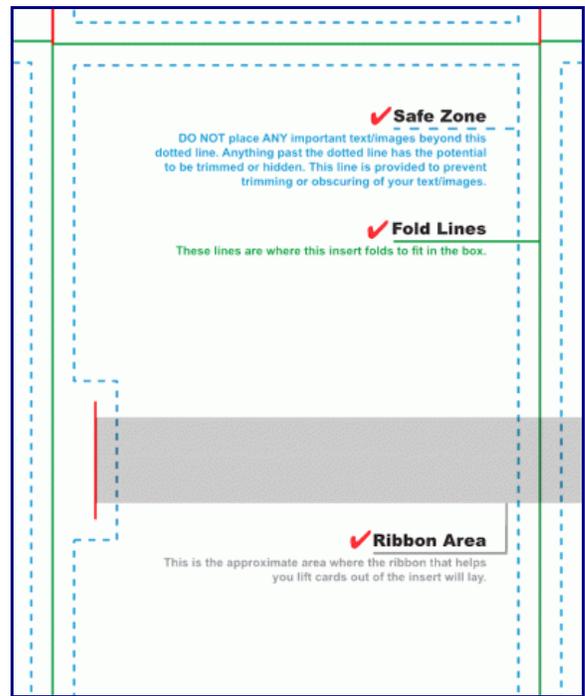
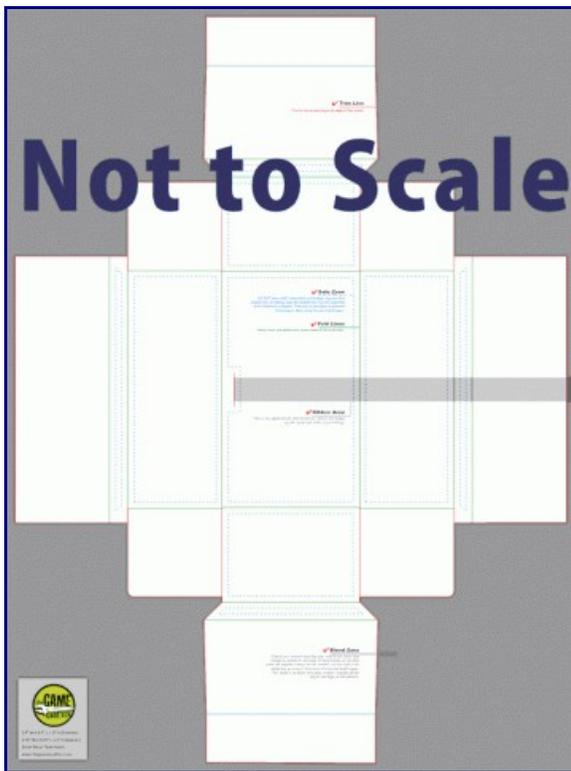
Earlier I noted that TGC does have some boxes sturdier than the tuck box. At that time the closest in size to traditional 2.75"x4.75" tarot cards were the Small Pro (5.85"x3.85"x1.15" holding 64 cards) and their Small Stout (4"x6"x2.25" holding up to 133 cards). I've purchased almost 2 dozen blank Small Stout to hold my mass market decks originally in tuck boxes, so I know the cards are a bit loose- but better than having the tuck boxes wear out.



The Gamecrafter just posted (06/07/2021) [this YouTube video](#) announcing the availability of custom printed inserts for both their Small Pro box and the Small Stout box. (*I just wish I coulda' known this was in development and get some for my current collection.*)

As with all aspects of using US-based Print On Demand, the pricing can not compete with bulk production overseas; but as I continue to believe (and SHOUT) **premium pricing for a premium product can work**. Indeed, it helps validate the buyer's opinion that your deck is, in fact, a premium product. As well as helping you, the seller, achieve volume rewards.

The following page shows the mock-up I made, reduced to fit standard 8.5"x11" copy paper.



@ Image 1 is the Small Stout Box Tarot Insert reduced to fit on 8.5"x11" paper (full size sheet is 11.75"x15.75");

@ Image 2 is a close up showing how the template clearly identifies the various bleed, trim and safe zones;

@ Image 3 shows a reduced version cut and folded, over top of an unassembled sheet. All areas of the insert visible after assembly may be used for text or image.

Note that the actual TGC product is made in 16pt matte card stock; my example was on standard copy paper.

Part 6: Color Printing Guide for TGC

There are many reasons why a printed piece doesn't match what your monitor displayed. Some are variations in your monitor; brightness setting and color calibration. Others are differences in the printing process; the inks, the color and texture of the paper, even the humidity level on the day of printing impacts the finished piece. There are various ways to handle these; matching your printing company's 'color profile' or having a test print done are standard.

The shift from transmissive to reflective light- light shining through your monitor screen will be brighter and more saturated than the light reflecting off a printed piece. Recall your early science classes. Printing is a subtractive process (inks absorb certain wavelengths; reflecting others) while monitors add various colors of light to build to the final image.



One quick way to adjust your production files for The Gamecrafter before taking the time and expense of placing a trial order is to have your own [Color Printing Guide](#) for TGC. Produced by the creators of *World of Legends* games, a few cards are specific to their game- ignore their character types/names as those are copyright and/or trademarked.

This mint tin contains 51 swatch cards with various thematic palettes; seasonal, environmental, skin tones, neons and more. Cards have different swatches front & back for over 700 swatches in total. Each swatch has the hex code so you can compare your monitor with an actual printed sample.

The cards all have the optional protective UV Coating- which (**Pro Tip**) your deck really should use. It includes a mini accordion fold look at the psychology of colour- so you have an actual sample of the Gamecrafter's glorious cardstock, their accordion fold and Mint Tin products.

Note; this is not an Affiliate link; I don't earn a commission if you place an order; this item is a valuable tool for anyone who will use The Gamecrafter to produce their game or deck of cards.

Part 7: More New TGC Products

The previously announced *New Box Inserts* at The Gamecrafter was just the beginning of a large number of new items, product upgrades and price increases [they announced in June](#). Here are some of the latest products, specifically reviewed from the viewpoint of Tarot (and non-Tarot Oracle) deck creation.

Cardstock



New, thicker card stock in Tuck & Hook Boxes and expanded range of Hook Box sizes.

From their news item linked above: "We'll be upgrading the heavy card stock used in tuck boxes, hook boxes, and screens from 295gsm 16pt stock to 360gsm 18pt stock. This will be coated on both sides unlike the last card stock, which means it will be dry erasable on both sides if you apply UV coating."

I understand that tuck boxes aren't actually evil and probably suitable for decks that are not used on a daily basis. Tarot and other Oracle decks tend to be used very frequently; designers are strongly

encouraged to consider Pro or Stout box upgrades. New sizes for both Boxes and Inserts are coming from TGC.

TGC has had Hook Boxes for some time; in a limited range of card sizes and capacities. As shown here, they are offering Hook Boxes to match all the sizes and card counts of their Tuck Boxes. As of today, a Tuck Box adds US\$3.99 to a deck, while the Hook Box costs only US\$2.41. I've not purchased any hook boxes so I'm not going to guess on how they'd hold up to daily use. They do offer double the printable area as the interior is fully usable.

Transparent cardstock

Plastic cards are available only as "Euro Poker Size" (63mm x 88mm) at the moment. Made of glossy 12pt PVC plastic they are clear enough that you can stack up to 5 above a standard card and read all the layers. Visit [this page and its links](#) for information on preparing artwork for front and back of these cards.

Foil cards

Launched September 6th, these cards are available in Poker (2.5"x3.5") and Tarot (2.75"x4.75") size:

"Foiled paper is a glossy, iridescent silver color, not bright matte white, so what this means for your artwork is that white areas are going to let the glossy foil fully shine through. Areas of light color and less color are going to get a little dulled but still have a bit of foil shine. Areas of dark, saturated color will cover up most of the foil but have a rich matte color instead." from [Designing for Foil help page](#). That article has some tips on designing for maximum effect.

There's a significant increase in cost; using a maximum of one Production Sheet (18 poker cards, or 10 tarot cards) can add a surprise to a deck of regular stock.



Mats; cardstock

Offered as an alternative playing surface to their 60pt chipboard game boards, Mats use the same 12 point/320gsm black-core matte cardstock as their decks. Now available in sizes from foldable 11"x17" to individual card sizes in both rectangular and hexagonal shapes.

These offer double-sided print; but with square corners instead of die-cut rounds. Possible uses for deck designers; a paper version of a reading cloth, or on smaller sizes, info cards with branding, web links, spread diagrams...

[The Mats section at TGC](#) also includes the Mint Tin Accordion-fold Set (4,6 and 8 panel versions) which have rounded corners matching the Mint Tin decks. An example is shown here, beside the similarly-sized Folio product discussed below.

The photo above (or to the left on some devices) shows [Sister Flirt's Choose JOY Meditation Tin](#) with the new Folio insert on the left. To the right is the Accordion Fold Set included in the *Color Printing Guide for TGC*. Produced by the creators of *Worlde of Legends* games and a valuable resource for printing on TGC cardstock.

The GameCrafter also offer 2 sizes of Neoprene mats, printed on one side. I guess they could be used as an upscale reading cloth- costs starting at US\$13.00

Paperstock

Folios are printed on the same 148gsm paper as their original 'Document' (still available). A single sheet (2 sided) Document costs US\$1.35 while Folios are US\$1.73 to \$1.97. Folios offer a more professional presentation; panels are laid out to be seen (and read) as folded, are scored to fold precisely, and allow full bleed (not possible on the Document).

Folios are offered in 7 sizes, from the Mint Tin up to 4"x8" trimmed size. They are a great complement to The Gamecrafter's range of Books and Booklets

More, More, More

Also mentioned in the June announcement as being developed:

More Inserts; *We recently released printed tarot inserts, and we're working on some other styles of inserts as well.*

More Boxes; *You've asked for more styles and sizes of boxes, and we're happy to report that we have many more on the way.*

3D Printing; *We've used 3D printing for many years at The Game Crafter for internal purposes. We're not sure how yet, but we're going to be bringing 3D printing into the fore-front. For starters, I think we'll probably start using it to make components that people often request, but that we've been unable to find suppliers for.*

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