

## Publishing Now '21: Looking Forward Webinar - Questions for Panel

The Publishing Now '21: Looking Forward webinar took place Tuesday, April 6, 2021, and featured panelists Cathy Felgar from Princeton University Press, Dominique Raccah of Sourcebooks, Lorraine Shanley of MPI (Market Partners International), and Tom Chalmers of Legend Times Group. Jim Milliot, Senior Vice President and Editorial Director of *Publishers Weekly* moderated the discussion.

Below is a summary of the questions received prior to and during the webinar, along with answers the panelists shared live or after the session.

### Publishing Services

- Has the impact COVID has had on the publishing industry vary by global region, or has the impact affected all global regions the same? In other words, was the impact different in North America vs. Asia? US vs China?
  - Tom: the markets where online and digital sales are a key aspect, such as in the US and UK, have fared surprisingly well in the circumstances. Those that are more literary and bookshop focused, such as some in Europe, have struggled to a greater extent. This is seen in licensing sales where we have seen the demand in fiction move more to crime and thrillers - traditionally strong online sellers - and away from literary at the present time.

### Education, Educational Publishing, and Children's Publishing

- Is the informal learning arena one with long-term growth – workbooks, activity books, non-fiction? Did it enjoy a boost this past year and, if so, is there expectation that it was a one-time spike or a longer-term trend?
- How can publishers maintain the strong sales they have experienced with workbooks and educational materials as students transition back to in-school learning environments?
  - Jim: The segment benefitted early on from strong sales, due to parents needing to quickly obtain resources to keep children occupied while at home. While the numbers have pulled back a bit compared to a year ago, they are still strong compared to 2019.
  - Lorraine: Bookscan believes this segment will continue to grow, but content such as cookbooks and fitness have peaked. Overall the expectation is that book sales will continue to be strong in 2021.
  - Here's a recent PW article about [how publishers of STEAM activities are addressing the interest](#) in their sector..

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### Small Publishers

- I would be interested in hearing panelists' thoughts on the challenges facing small publishers.
  - Tom: small presses have the advantage of being nimble and able to react and change quickly, which is highly valuable in a crisis situation and with a quickly changed market. However, one challenge is that while the industry can see a big shift to backlist sales, they have by nature a much smaller backlist than the major conglomerate publishers. As a result, they have to be more proactive with a strategy that reduces the divide between how they treated backlist and frontlist previously.

### Production and Manufacturing

- Understandably the pandemic has considerably slowed down the publishing industry, but what is the typical turnaround time for a general youth non-fiction title from greenlight on a title to print?
  - Sourcebooks: Hard to pinpoint when to “start” but from a manufacturing perspective, we work backwards from when the book goes on sale. To hit the pub date, it needs to be in stores on shelf for people to buy on a certain day, and the supply chains on getting a book through large distribution centers as well as shipped to smaller independents has grown to almost a month in some cases. If we are talking about a book printing in the states, trade paper format, black and white internals – it can take 6-8 weeks to print and ship to our warehouse or to those DCs. So that’s 3-4 months before it goes on sale that files need to be at the printer. And yes, we have to pre-schedule that press time or when the files close, there’s no place with press availability and you could wait weeks or months before they can even put your book on press. Without getting into too many of the logistics, we are already planning our printing and press time for Fall of 2021 in late summer of 2020, if not actually booking time, setting the schedules to plan for that time. The more books you publish, the more complicated the logistics get. The books we are getting ready to print now will hit shelves in July and August this year.
- I know that time needs to be booked at a printer and that availability may vary but for example, when are the titles for a fall line up set into motion? How does that timeline compare between children’s and general non-fiction adult titles?
  - Sourcebooks: The timeline is generally the same for adult and youth. I guess the biggest difference really is if you are planning a hardcover book or a trade paper, and if you are planning black and white internals or color. If it’s color, normally you’d want to print overseas for the best cost and variety of paper, but right now we are seeing paper costs in China start to rise significantly.

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### Production and Manufacturing (continued)

- When do you foresee the industry getting back into more of a routine, and do you feel that the pandemic has altered these timelines permanently?
  - Sourcebooks: I don't know that there will be a "back to routine." I think, unfortunately, like the rest of the changes the world has gone through this year – this may be our new normal. And there will always be opportunities to move some things at lightning speed through production and printing, but they will be the exception to the rules.

### Printing

- What is future of small/midsize domestic printers? Should they invest in equipment for future?
  - Cathy: Well, I think that there are quite a few printers closed in the last 10 years in the US and we're finally seeing the risk that was inherent in that all along. I think that printers had been forced to get bigger for the most part to survive, because as a printer you have to keep investing in the technology to stay up to date and some of the smaller ones just couldn't. I hope the capacity grows. PUP is definitely doing a lot of simultaneous US/UK printings so we can maintain a global pub date, and we're doing more POD. We're trying to find more printers, to be honest with you, and working on more in Canada and Mexico, and It's definitely a problem.
  - Dominique: Cathy said that so wisely. I have to say, you know, we are paying for some short-sightedness that we had in the past, and I am really hoping that we are going to see people invest and grow printing businesses, hopefully in the United States, as well as overseas. So, that is certainly a hope of mine, because this constraint that we are all operating under, you can't do. The amount of growth that we're projecting as an industry and then cut back on the supply side, I mean the math doesn't work, so we're going have to make these things balance out.
- Is there an industry-wide movement toward revitalizing or growing more US-based printing and production efforts, especially toward eco-friendly practices over the next few years as a result of the increasing impacts of climate change?
  - BISG, BIC, and Booknet Canada have formed the Green Book Alliance, which plans to gather information and create guidelines to identify ways businesses throughout the publishing industry supply chain are already and can further improve their sustainability efforts. They will be speaking more about this during [BISG's Annual Meeting](#) on Friday, April 23, which will feature a keynote from Sherry Aldis, Chief of UN Publications.

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### Printing (continued)

- Best practices for PDF markup, now that proofreading has migrated to being done in the electronic file?
  - Last year, Westchester created this short video about [annotating PDF files](#).
- Are publishers considering design standardization as a result of supply chain challenges?
  - Cathy spoke about this in her segment about needing to do so for certain titles as a result of shortages in certain types of paper and binding materials.
- What emphasis are you seeing on print on demand as part of your long-term strategy now that it has become more commonplace over the past year?
  - Tom: Particularly with the issues around the logistics for printing and delivery as well as the increase in sales share to the backlist, POD is becoming an increasingly useful tool for publishers. With the customer now more likely to find a title of interest online from anywhere in the world with little consideration for publication date, not having a book available or 'in stock' in that particular market is a lost sale. The increasing presence of POD in new international markets, such as in India, is likely to increase in the months and years ahead.

### Conferences, Trade Shows, and Marketing

- Will book fairs keep virtual components? Will there be a significant change/shift in fair organizing as we move towards a hybrid model, or will the in-person model prevail?
- Virtual events don't yield enough sales unless they are ticketed. Book festivals want to make those events worthwhile for authors, but it's difficult to guarantee sales upfront. How can this be handled?
  - Dominique: It's a very challenging environment for authors to tour virtually and Sourcebooks is looking at new ways to promote authors. Experimentation and trying new things are key at this point to see what works.
  - Lorraine: Zoom tours started off very strong last spring and summer, but have waned in popularity and have diminishing returns.
  - Tom - The pandemic has provided an opportunity for innovation, trying new things and pivoting quickly. Possibility of hybrid events depending on the content. Retailers will also need to consider new ways of engaging with consumers.
  - Overall, the sentiment from the panelists was there is no expectation for employees to travel for any conferences, trade shows or events prior to 2022, though Tom Chalmers did allow that if London Book Fair decides to go through with an in-person event in 2021 that while the company would place no obligation on employees, they could attend if they personally felt comfortable to do so.

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### Conferences, Trade Shows, and Marketing (continued)

- How have trade shows or the lack thereof impacted the business?
  - Several panelists (and attendees via the Q&A!) shared how much they miss shows including London and Frankfurt Book Fairs. They miss the ability to connect with colleagues and industry friends, along with the serendipitous opportunities that occur at an in-person event.
- Has the pandemic affected rights buying and selling policies?
  - Tom: the good news is that rights licensing is the selling of intellectual property rather than physical product, so it is not impacted by current logistical issues and in fact is aided by the increasing use of technology to complete business. It will though follow the market, which is likely to see quick changes in the months ahead. For instance, at the moment, we are seeing higher demand for books that are likely to sell well digitally, plus audio continues very strongly, and also for more feel-good books as people looking for an escape from the anxiety and fear caused by the pandemic. As always, rights interest trends will follow the changing trends of sales in the market.

### Impact of Self-Publishing

- How does self-publishing impact traditional publishers? Have the consequences of the pandemic made it more difficult to compete on online markets like Amazon with smaller and self publishers, or has it not had much effect?
  - Tom: The market has developed over the last ten years into much clearer viable options for authors and I don't see small presses and self-publishers in the same bracket as they offer different opportunities for authors. Self-published sales tend to be focused online rather than through bookshops so may well avoid the worst of the pandemic impact and the emphasis as ever is for publishers, particularly smaller ones with smaller advance budgets, to prove to author the value they add in terms of guidance, editorial, production, market knowledge, sales and marketing etc. I've always believed the more options the better for authors, which pushes all publishers, large, smaller or self-publishers, to improve what they offer and ultimately provide to the customer.

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### Sales/Publicity/Marketing

- Have frontlist books received fewer ad/promotion dollars or opportunities due to the pandemic, therefore readers are turning to backlist books?
  - Dominique: In terms of advertising dollars, I think we're actually spending more. The online platforms require a certain amount of investment or Advertising spend, and we're watching a lot of different kinds of digital dollars. Digital players are evolving, and we're certainly engaged with I think everyone so, I think actually we're spending quite a lot on frontlist. My guess would be that that cost per frontlist dollar has probably increased. That would be my bet that that's true and what we're seeing is just that. Retail brick and mortar retail is easier, and we've known this all along, is an easier and more appropriate discovery mechanism.
  - Tom: It's interesting as Dominique said, we actually spend more on Sundays titles than we have been doing, I think. Where the big shift is, is actually online sales, giving much more of the power to the customer, rather than the curator, so what we're actually seeing is where titles are building momentum which is driven by that ad spend building, our customer reviews and word of mouth and that side of stuff which happens online. We're seeing the growth in sales, so I think it's actually not a move in advertising spend, it's a move on who's making the decisions on buying the books and what's popular and not, and I think well, that sits more with the customer, you know, particularly via all the online platforms and you know, outside of them review sites, peer review sites, I think that's generating the growth in backlist sales. It's created a pure cycle of word of mouth and purchase so that's where the backlist growth is coming from, not so much in the ad spend from our side. We feel, now we need to make the ad spend in order to get the snowball rolling into that next stage, rather than selling on what is now does that make sense.
  - Cathy: it's not something I study at work, but my sense is that we spend just as much advertising front list and I was thinking, maybe it has to do with buying behavior around author events you know, like if you're going in person to see an author, maybe you're more likely to buy the book there and then, then you are on an online event.
- Which digital advertising platforms do you find work better than others?
  - Dominique: The other thing that we haven't mentioned that I do want to mention, is TikTok is so unbelievable. If you have not seen the TikTok effect on YA, for example, young adult titles, it's significant and making a huge difference.

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### Sales/Publicity/Marketing (continued)

- How has Amazon had a continued impact and domination in how books are published and sold?
  - Tom: With the huge increase in online sales, this has obviously also greatly increased Amazon's sales numbers and their Prime next day free delivery service is one the background one of the standout business services launched - it is one of the main reasons customers choose Amazon and hard for other companies to compete against. That said, part of the online story over the last year is the number of other online retailers that have launched or grown, such as Bookshop.org or BOOKS etc and Paperback Shop here in the UK. Plus we have seen traditional physical retailers launch new online services and initiatives, plus producers of products launch new direct sales channels and initiatives. So while Amazon is a huge part of online sales, it is part of wider evolution that has been happening during the last year.

### Publishing segments/Author submissions/Book reviews

- Can anyone address the health of Academic/STM Publishing?
  - Tom touched on this during his segment saying that growth has been incredibly strong in academic and journals, particularly in content directly related to the pandemic and research being done around it.
- Should authors adapt their own creative process or marketing efforts to align with where publishers are?
  - Dominique: No, I don't see a big shift there, but what this author is pointing to is a really interesting question, right? I think the question that this person is asking is do we need to rethink if the world that we've lived, we are living in, it has moved from 65% frontlist to 65% backlist then the fundamental infrastructure that we've all built into our businesses needs to shift to represent that. So we need to, and that includes the efforts that we ask from our authors, we need to be talking to our authors in different ways, and asking different things from them so that's the question I think that's fundamental and I don't know whether we have data on that. I certainly don't. I don't know whether the shift that we're looking at is going to be an ongoing one or whether we're going to go back to having the same frontlist momentum we've had in the past.
  - Cathy: I would say to Dominique's point, keyword enrichment of the backlist is going to be important and in terms of author behavior, you know, I have a lot of sympathy for authors who are trying to get their manuscripts in in the modern climate, and I would also say, if you have a topic relevant to the pandemic or about plagues, that's a good thing.

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### Publishing segments/Author submissions/Book reviews (continued)

- Has there been an increase in direct submissions or have agents been able to retain their access/influence?
  - Tom: As a publisher still accepting direct submissions, we have seen a considerable and incremental growth over the last year, which we put down to many people taking stock and deciding to write that book they always wanted to, or being at home and having a better opportunity to write it. We are still seeing as many submissions from agents as well so for us that is positive on both sides and not a case of one having an influence on the other.

### Remote working/workforce model

- What have you learned about building and maintaining staff morale and company culture during the past year?
  - Dominique said that Sourcebooks does fun events such as Wacky Awards to gather employees together virtually and try to foster connection however possible.
  - Jim indicated that PW has Zoom Fridays and similar events for employees
  - Lorraine shared that some companies have instituted no-email days to give employees a break, and noted that employee mental health and burnout are major concerns.
- What opportunities has your business identified as a result of remote working that you're considering making permanent?
  - Cathy discussed in her segment how Princeton University Press is considering offering flexible hours and locations, particularly with so many members of their staff needing to be home-based due to family requirements. PUP isn't looking at a return to the office prior to September 2021, and no travel for shows before 2022.

For additional information, please visit the [Westchester website](#) for links to the articles referenced by the panelists during the discussion.