



Westchester
Publishing Services

Publishing Now: Day-to-Day Challenges and Solutions

The technology used to support the transition to working from home, changing sales patterns, and concerns about printing capacity for the fall and holidays were some of the main takeaways from the “Publishing Now: Day-to-Day Challenges and Solutions” webinar conducted in early July, cohosted by Publishers Weekly and Westchester Publishing Services.

Tyler Carey, chief revenue officer for WPS, an employee-owned U.S. company that provides editorial and production services to more than 200 publishers, opened the discussion by observing that the coronavirus pandemic has brought about tectonic shifts in how publishers think about creating and distributing their content. At least some of those changes are likely to become part of publishing after the pandemic finally begins to fade, he predicted.

Accelerating the shift to digital across all aspects of publishing was touched on by all speakers. Marina Padakis

Lowry, who is senior managing editor of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books & Media and oversees HMH’s lifestyle production editorial team, said HMH’s workflow is now nearly 100% digital. The only thing HMH still does in hard copy is the color proof reviews by the production and design teams who still need to approve shipments.

HMH employees have been working from home since mid-March, and that transition has been supported well by the company and aided by the company’s use of web-based systems, Lowry said.

How and when employees will return to their offices has yet to be decided.

In addition to adapting to nearly all digital platforms, many publishers and distributors are adopting virtual warehousing methods in order to guard against disruptions to the supply chain, said Kelly Gallagher, who is v-p of content acquisition at Ingram and manages publisher relations for North America for Lightning Source and CoreSource. Gallagher gave an example of how Ingram had assisted Duke University Press in moving from a physical to virtual warehouse over a weekend when

the press had to shutter its print warehouse to make room for Duke University Hospital medical supplies.

Gallagher also gave an overview of how buying patterns have changed. Online buying shot up shortly after lockdown orders forced stores to close, and Ingram found itself racing to meet the growth in online consumer-direct fulfillment programs such as Bookshop.org for

independent bookstores and other similar direct-to-door options. At the same time, there was a spike in book business from such bricks-and-mortar giants as Walmart and Target, Gallagher said.

Cathy Felgar, who oversees a staff of 25 as the publishing operations director for Princeton University Press, cited other buying shifts, particularly the boom in e-book sales during the pandemic, as well as an increase in online sales of print books through such channels as Bookshop.org. After slumping from mid-March through April, print

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—Tyler Carey, Chief Revenue Officer, Westchester Publishing Services

sales rebounded in May and were strong again in June. Felgar said PUP employees had been working from home since mid-March, with a goal of returning to the office on September 8, although she said she was not sure if PUP would meet that date.

Brian O’Leary, the executive director of the Book Industry Study Group, emphasized the need for maintaining connections as the publishing industry continued to navigate the pandemic. The BISG has been developing a series of webinars to help streamline workflow and supply solutions, but part of the challenge in doing that, as O’Leary put it, is that solutions are being arrived at by “the skin of our teeth.”

Though publishing has been preparing for a shift to digital, O’Leary said the industry had never experienced anything like the pandemic-induced changes. “And so our mindset is how can we collaborate together?” he said. “And so a lot of competitive relationships are being put aside in favor of getting things done for the benefit of the industry and what it will look like going forward.” He noted that, though the industry has shown a remarkable ability to adapt, it has become clear that the supply chain needs more flexibility.

One issue that may need to be addressed soon is printing capacity. Because of the large number of titles that have been moved by publishers from the spring to fall (though PUP and HMH didn’t move too many books) and consolidation in the number of domestic printers—not to mention an unforeseen disruption caused by the pandemic and the usual surprises that a presidential election can bring—there could be a printing crunch later this year. Felgar said PUP was watching print capacity very closely.

To guard against problems, Felgar is looking to diversify PUP’s print suppliers and putting more books into short digital print or “gap strategies” in case PUP needs to do some quick reprints. In

addition, PUP is exploring adding more international print-on-demand partners.

Gallagher said Ingram was expecting a tight printing market and advised publishers to reserve printing time soon. In addition to the lack of capacity, Gallagher said Ingram (which specializes in POD through its Lightning Source division) had seen some publishers do more short runs in order to save cash during the pandemic crisis.

One topic discussed at length was international distribution. Gallagher said Ingram had seen a slower sales rebound in the U.K. and Australia, but, he added, business has improved since May. About 20% of sales at PUP are from the U.K. and Europe, Felgar said. PUP has been doing simultaneous printings in the U.S. and U.K for certain titles for about 18 months, and Felgar said the company was exploring methods to print locally in overseas markets.

It’s not only workflow that was discussed. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, diversifying the publishing industry has become a relevant and needed topic. Felgar said PUP was looking to expand its mentoring for people of color. PUP is also examining the demographics of its author roster with an eye toward giving

opportunities to a range of voices. The publisher has also established equity and inclusion teams at different levels and has multiple rounds of staff education on such topics as unconscious bias.

Resources from the Publishing Now webinar, including links to the webinar recording, the questions and answers covered by the panelists, BISG’s study results, PUP’s information about its equity and inclusion efforts, and other resources from the panelists are available at this link: <https://www.westchesterpublishingservices.com/webinar-publishing-now-day-to-day-challenges-solutions>

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