

Publishing Now: Day to Day Challenges & Solutions - Questions for Panel

The Publishing Now webinar took place Wednesday, July 8, 2020, and featured panelists Cathy Felgar from Princeton University Press, Kelly Gallagher from Ingram Content Group, Marina Padakis Lowry from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Brian O'Leary from Book Industry Study Group.

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.

Workflow / Technology Questions

1. What tools are you using to manage projects remotely, like Dropbox or project management systems? Zoom? Slack? What has gone well and what has not? (This was answered live by several of the panelists)
A: Cathy: Princeton University Press (PUP) uses Biblio, including DAM and Contracts, Rights and Royalties modules. We also use Zoom for phone, meetings, and chat, and OneDrive, Teams, and Sharepoint.
2. How are you handling reviewing page proofs?
A: (Cathy) PUP uses PDF annotation.
3. Curious how many publishers are going to move to something like RSuite and custom-built DAM systems rather than Box, etc.
A: (Cathy) PUP uses BiblioDAM (not custom built) and also a local network with VPN access.
4. Do the freelancers work on VPN? Does Acquisitions interact with Production and Design on a VPN?
A: (Marina) At HMH we are Web based so no VPN for anyone other than employees. We use Microsoft Teams for internal and external meetings.
A: (Cathy): Freelancers do not have access to PUP VPN or directly to DAM, but files can be placed in the DAM with links sent to freelancers or vendors to download, or invitations sent to them in the DAM to upload.
5. Curious to know what kind of database (for book and contact information) and project management software/systems you use and recommend?
A: (Cathy) Other than Biblio, Firebrand and Allbooks are title maintenance systems. We currently maintain freelancer lists in an Access database.
A: (From attendee Michael Weinstein) We use an online database called PressWorks. Built in FileMaker. Has all the project information, contact info, etc. Can also attach files. Changed how we work in a positive way.
6. Cathy mentioned copyediting is done in Word, except for manuscripts submitted in LaTeX. How is CE typically done?
A: (Cathy) We prefer copyeditors to annotated PDFs of the TEX manuscripts. Overleaf is an option.

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Workflow / Technology Questions (continued)

7. With digital bluelines, have you noticed a difference at how well you find errors that need corrections? We review everything digitally _except_ our bluelines because that is the last time we check the text and seeing it physically changes how we interact with it.

A: (Marina) At HMH it's been fine--InSite provides download and two different views for review so we haven't had issues rooting out errors--plus they will point out color issues, bleed and so on.

8. What is the primary area in your publishing process that could be improved?

A: (Cathy) This one made me laugh. I'll go with streamlining specs and decision making.

Work from Home Questions

1. What are the things you're doing to motivate your staff and teams while they're remote? (Marina and Cathy both provided in-depth answers to this live)

2. How is the pandemic impacting the vendors or freelance publishing professionals you work with?

A: (Cathy) I imagine similar to the in-house people. Challenges with child care.

A: (Marina) Many of the freelancers in my acquaintance report that they have lost work due to the pandemic due to cancellations; while others have more work than ever from companies that are using more freelance labor due to layoffs and other pandemic-related events.

3. Do you think the industry will start adopting virtual/remote work experience and internship opportunities for publishing hopefuls? Is anybody working on this at the moment or hopes to?

A: (Cathy) I think internships work best in person, but we have interns fully remote this summer and plan to have them in the fall remote as well.

A: (Marina) HMH has been surveying employees extensively on their experiences and preferences for working from home. They are considering many possibilities, including having more employees working remotely, which might include lower-level positions.

4. Do you all feel, based on the past few months, that this work-from-home experience/model is not only a suitable one for the publishing industry, but a sustainable one?

A: (Cathy) For many roles, it has been working better than I would have guessed over the four months so far. It remains to be seen what will happen to editorial travel, Frankfurt, etc. the commute has been a big attraction. I think we will certainly see many more full and partial work-from-home policies in the near future.

A: (Marina) My personal feeling is that it can be sustainable for most companies in the industry, especially those that have already moved to a mostly digital workflow. I have found that WFH is especially attractive to publishing employees; publishing pays less on the whole, and being able to live farther away could allow a better quality of life for many who currently pay a premium to live in the city. For those who already live farther out, removing the commute has been a big attraction. I think we will certainly see many more full and partial work-from-home policies in the near future.

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Work from Home Questions (Continued)

5. Do you think that remote working full time, or working from home will become a norm for some roles?

A: (Cathy) My guess is yes, for some roles and some companies.

Printing / POD / Supply Chain Questions

1. Are there areas of the supply chain you are concerned about? (NT: Addressed live by all panelists)
A: (Cathy): Yes—around print capacity, especially domestically in the next three months, and also with independent bookstores.
2. A recent article from Ithaca S&R discussed how university presses have introduced more process reengineering in the last few months, including a move away from print wherever possible, putting more books into print on demand (POD). What role do you think print-on-demand technology will play in publishing moving forward? (Note: Kelly referenced what Duke University did to completely convert to POD when they were required to shut down their warehouse to make room for Duke Hospital medical supplies, and Cathy has provided links to both articles written by Laura Brown [Ithaca S&R] about UP response)

A: (Brian) Growing, as the economics of no- and limited inventory are compelling, particularly for niche titles.

A: (Cathy) Some UPs saw warehouse closures during the early part of the pandemic and they had no means to fill orders during those weeks aside from POD. Some presses already were sending a majority of titles straight to POD in the “zero inventory” model. Some big trade houses are putting numerous recently published titles into POD to avoid out-of-stock situations. I think this is going to become more of a norm, especially with compressed and chaotic ordering patterns.

3. What are 1 or 2 changes you have seen to your manufacturing process?
A: (Cathy) Printing simultaneously in more than one location. More POD. More streamlining of specs. Dispensing with more hard-copy proofs.
4. What changes to your manufacturing workflow do you think are just temporary band-aids, and which are long-term changes that the pandemic has allowed you to consider?
A: (Cathy) I think we will want to see the finished advances again. Otherwise, I think many of the changes are likely to stick.
5. In the near future, do you see certain areas of the industry going back to 'normal' while others stay digital (e.g. books still made traditionally while trade and university publications remain digital w/POD), or do you believe the industry has been permanently disrupted?

A: (Cathy) Permanent.

A: (Marina) At HMH we are continuing to print and sell books as before; sales have returned to pre-COVID levels—trade books are selling as well as ever, though more so in different categories than before (for example, cooking, gardening, and other lifestyle topics). That said, ebook sales are up considerably this year, a trend that may continue.

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Printing / POD / Supply Chain Questions (Continued)

6. Which partners do you use for international POD?
A: (Marina) We use mostly Ingram.
7. POD, Short-run, Off-set, do you think the proportion will change after COVID-19?
A: I do think it will change - smaller offset runs due to either lower cash flow or uncertainty of sales patterns. Short run will increase with more rapid fulfillment opportunities, and POD of course as an insurance policy. (NT: Kelly and Brian discussed this live)
A: (Cathy) I would guess the mega-runs will continue for bestsellers, but the mid and smaller runs are both decreasing.
8. As recent supply chain demand shocks have hit the industry and the use of POD has become a necessity to keep books in stock, will POD options (dimensions, choice of paper, binding) ever get better so we don't need litho anymore?
A: (Cathy) I hope they get better, but it would be sad if litho died completely. It's certainly required for high-end 4-C and special effects now.

Sales / Business Questions

1. What changes have you seen in retail order patterns – especially related to product genre mix and other order patterns?
A: Kelly: We have seen some significant shifts in both – from fiction to children's education and gardening... from stocked warehousing to consumer direct fulfillment back to stocked warehousing to ??? (NT: Kelly elaborated more in-depth in the live Q&A)
2. With fewer customers visiting bookstores, what strategies do you recommend to maximize book sales? Answered live by several panelists regarding strategies they've been able to use in their business (online book sales, Bookshop.org)
3. How are book proposals being treated during this time? With so many book releases pushed back, when are new books likely to come out? (Spoken about by several panelists in terms of pipeline capacity, contingencies, etc)
A: (Cathy) PUP is continuing to review, sign, and publish books as normal.
A: (Marina) HMH is acquiring new projects at the same pace as ever. We, like most publishers, adjusted some schedules due to COVID-related circumstances out of our control, but for the most part we are publishing on or close to original schedule and will continue to do so.

For additional information, please visit the [Westchester website](https://www.westchesterpublishingservices.com) for links to the articles referenced by the panelists during the discussion.