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IBPA, PubWest, and Portland State University Publish Students' Research on Distribution Practices

Research shines light on five key issues facing publishing distribution today

The Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA), PubWest, and Portland State University's (PSU) Graduate Program in Book Publishing have released a report outlining the findings from PSU's student-led research on publishing distribution practices.

The report can be viewed [here](https://pubwest.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/GoodDistributionPractices_Final.pdf):

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The report presents analysis and recommendations to address five important issues facing publishing distribution today, namely:

- How can the book industry decrease the return rate for books sold into trade channels from an average of 30% to an average of 15% (or less)?
- As consumer buying habits further migrate from retail to online, what does efficient and cost-effective delivery of print books to readers look like going forward?
- What needs to be done to make book printing truly carbon neutral by 2050?
- What's stopping the industry from embracing POD as the preferred means for printing non-illustrated, black-and-white trade books?
- Although COVID-19 did not create the book industry's supply chain problems, it certainly exacerbated them. What shortcomings in the book industry were most exposed due to the pandemic?

IBPA and PubWest partnered with PSU's Graduate Program in Book Publishing on this project. Volunteers from IBPA and PubWest, comprising book publishing industry veterans, helped identify the problem sets which the students in PSU's winter term graduate-level class "Researching Book Publishing (WR 579)" then went on to apply research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to understand the issues and recommend solutions.

The student research was directed by Portland State University assistant professor Dr. Rachel Noorda. "Utilizing surveys, interviews, and careful review of secondary materials, this report illuminates the important questions facing the publishing industry right now," says Noorda. "As we come out of the pandemic, it's even more important than ever to discuss the issues that COVID-19 has exacerbated."

Insights gained from the report include the following:

- Local buying can restrict supply chain disruptions caused by outsourcing and support cost-effective delivery.
- Paper company emissions assessments are important first steps toward eco-friendly publishing and carbon neutrality in the industry.
- Trade organizations such as IBPA and PubWest are vital for creating systems and alliances for the best publishing distribution practices.
- Reduced print runs and more effective book marketing and promotion are key to minimizing returns.
- Pre-orders (especially direct-to-consumer) can be particularly effective for combating returns and accurately determining print runs.

The industry advisors from IBPA and PubWest included Mel Corrigan (Scribe Publishing), Karla Olson (Patagonia Books), Karen Pavlicin (Elva Resa Publishing), Brooke Warner (She Writes Press), IBPA CEO Angela Bole, and PubWest Executive Director Michele Cobb. Advisors also met with students throughout the semester-long project, providing guidance and resources in addition to being their audience in the final project presentations.

"Many practices in the publishing industry haven't changed much in decades. But as sustainability becomes an increasingly important topic today, not to mention the very real challenges of supply chain disruptions at the moment...we need to take a good hard look at many of these ingrained practices that are wasteful and contribute to global warming," says Bole of IBPA.

Cobb, from PubWest, adds: "These big challenges bring a need for fresh thinking. By working with the students from PSU we were able to get unvarnished perspectives from the next generation of publishing leaders. Their work has the potential to encourage new and exciting changes – to benefit publishers and readers alike."

About the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)

Founded in 1983 to support independent publishers nationwide, the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) leads and serves the independent publishing community through advocacy, education, and tools for success. With over 4,000 members, IBPA is the largest publishing association in the U.S. Its vision is a world where every independent publisher has the access, knowledge, and tools needed to professionally engage in all aspects of an inclusive publishing industry. For more information, visit ibpa-online.org.

About Portland State University (PSU)

Portland State University is more than Portland's public research university. It's a place to test ideas and projects that show the world how different is done. Their innovative

approach combines education with creative problem-solving and collaboration across campus for maximum impact. With more than 200 degree programs to choose from, PSU is Oregon's most diverse, innovative and affordable research university. Nestled in the literary hub of Portland in the beautiful Pacific Northwest, the Book Publishing Program at PSU equips students with skills in writing, editing, design, and marketing that prepare them for work inside and outside of the publishing industry. It is the only graduate program in U.S. with a trade publishing house (Ooligan Press) that is completely staffed by students who gain valuable work experience and make real books. For more information, visit pdx.edu/english/mams-book-publishing.

About Publishers Association of the West (PubWest)

The Publishers Association of the West (PubWest) is a national trade organization of publishers and of associated publishing-related members. PubWest is dedicated to offering professional education, providing publishing-related benefits, creating opportunities for their members and associate members to do business, speaking as an advocate for members, recognizing outstanding achievement in publishing, and providing a forum for networking to our publishing and associate members from across the United States and Canada. For more information, visit pubwest.org.

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