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# Something Old, Something New: How Chapbooks and Crowdfunding can Reduce Financial Risk for Small Publishers

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## Recommended Citation

Lindsay, Jennifer, "Something Old, Something New: How Chapbooks and Crowdfunding can Reduce Financial Risk for Small Publishers" (2021). *Book Publishing Final Research Paper*. 61.  
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# Something Old, Something New:

How chapbooks and crowdfunding can reduce

financial risk for small publishers

Jennifer Lindsay

Final Research Paper for Master of Science in Book Publishing

Portland State University May 2021

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Rachel Noorda for her research support. She has encouraged me since I took my first class with her, even before applying to the Ooligan Publishing Program. I would also like to thank the other faculty members that taught me while I finally pursued my master's degree, especially Dr. Kathi Inman Berens and Robin Crummer-Olsen, who demonstrated the benefits of feminist-inclusive teaching. I would like to extend my gratitude to the local publishers who responded to my interview questions with patience and insight; their input made this paper richer. My backers on Kickstarter have repeatedly heard how much I appreciate them and are listed for posterity on [www.paperplaygroundpress.com](http://www.paperplaygroundpress.com). A further thanks to Siri Vegulla, for last-minute editing and general cheerleading during the 2020 pandemic. My biggest thank you is for my husband — I literally couldn't have done this without him. From being a sounding board for a trapped EFNP, providing financial support, household management shuffling and daily reminders of relevance... his belief in me finally made this happen while navigating age and neurodiversity challenges.

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## Abstract

Small publishing houses often follow lean and nimble business models, yet the financial risk inherent in publishing for niche readerships can be a barrier for such entrepreneurial practices. Exploring the dual conditions of a less expensive and more eco-friendly format of a chapbook instead of an initial hardcover illustrated book, while determining pre-order interest through a crowdfunding platform, this paper looks at a process to reduce financial risk for small publishers who can't necessarily do accurate comparative analysis for their sales projections.

Common terminology is defined, supplemented by a literature review and a detailed ethnographic approach, including a case study of the author's crowdfunded chapbook project. The case study includes data on social media advertising and other marketing activities. This paper stands out from existing research in terms of the extent of other publishers interviewed, data collected and the analysis of the marketing information, as well as the children's picture book and chapbook history that is explored. This case study also occurred **during the 2020 pandemic, limiting all marketing activities to online.**

## Introduction

There is a special, sensory appeal to the glossy weight of a new hardcover picture book, with thick pages large enough to see from the edge of the nap-time mat, and bold fonts easier for adults to read in their peripheral vision. Oversized hardcover books, however, are not the only way children read books or, historically, had them read to them. Meeting their perceived needs has become a whole publishing industry sector. As publishers continue to seek technical solutions for digital picture books that can reach mainstream audiences, smaller specialty houses are starting to reach niche markets with hard copy books. Following the conventional practices of larger companies with their bulk purchasing power and distribution channels is less promising, as smaller companies are more often successful applying lean business model strategies and filling needs that larger publishing houses can't efficiently meet. Challenging the presumption that picture books need to be in a certain format or distributed in a certain way provides opportunities for small, diverse publishers to create engaging experiences for readers.

## Rationale

The standard financial barriers to entry for small picture book publishers are onerous, over \$8,000.<sup>1</sup> While books for adults can be launched with e-copies on various online platforms or using a Print on Demand service, those options are not yet ideal for illustrated picture books, even for larger publishing houses. Typically, startup publishers will also need to pay for direct storage and shipping expenses, since even small distributors won't take on a publisher without a proven sales record and several titles establishing a predictable schedule. These additional expenses have to be paid for up-front—not an ideal requirement for keeping startup costs low and staying responsive to the interests of smaller markets.

There is also the environmental impact to consider—a print run of 2,000 hardcover books leaves a significant carbon footprint in production and shipping. Such an order also uses more timber and water resources to print, and if those books do not sell (a common enough fate for publishers<sup>2</sup>), that virgin paper goes straight into the recycling process; hopefully via a used bookstore, but sometimes just in a paper reclamation/pulping facility.

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<sup>1</sup> Given that the current average manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of hardcover children's books is around \$16, and the minimum print run most printers will do are around 2,000, that means a typical startup print expense of \$8,000 as the MSRP is often a quarter of the cost of the materials.

<sup>2</sup> Alberge, D. (2009, December 30). How 77MILLION books a year are turned into pulp fiction. Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1239252/How-77million-books-year-turned-pulp-fiction.html>

All of these expenses and considerations are in conflict with the core approach of the lean business model: finding opportunity in industry disruption, establishing the needs of the target market, testing the concept by surveying, offering pre-order options or other assessment tools, finally bringing the product to market at the appropriate price point.

Historically, major publishing houses haven't had to follow a lean business model. Their distribution reach promotes economies of scale, but also results in an unwillingness to gamble on stories that might appeal to smaller audiences. Given the growth of the independent publishing sector and the explosion of the self-publishing movement, application of a lean business model could help reduce financial barriers for small publishers. Combining new technologies to assess and reach smaller audiences directly while keeping initial costs down with smaller print runs could prove the viability of titles. This is proving a successful strategy for the comics industry, especially during the upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

## Research Question

Can crowdfunding chapbooks reduce financial risk for small children's book publishers?

## Definitions and History of Frequently Used Terms

### Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is defined succinctly by [Investopedia](#) as "...the use of small amounts of capital from a large number of individuals to finance a new business venture." The concept of raising funds from multiple small investors before a business or product is launched is well-suited to the internet.<sup>4</sup> So well, it's become a standard term only a decade after it was coined. Despite most analysis of success being through the financial lens of entrepreneurship, the benefits can be for all parties: crowdfunding sites take a percentage of the revenue. They limit investor risk by setting standards, providing planning guides, and reviewing the submissions for basic legitimacy before authorizing them. Companies using crowdfunding sites not only gain potential access to investors beyond the usual "friends and family", but the guidelines provide a course in basic business planning and marketing. The marketing effort is significant but continues to be leveraged long after the campaign is over, with residual search engine optimization (SEO)

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<sup>3</sup> Barnett, D. (2020, December 8). Even Keanu Reeves is doing it: Why are comics going to Kickstarter? *The Guardian*.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, T. (2020, September 07). Crowdfunding definition. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/crowdfunding.asp>

exposure from the higher placement on the sites as well as publicity generated by the platforms. Crowdfunding can be an effective strategy for all involved, if everyone does what they need to, and if the target market for the product is comfortable with online purchasing.

Crowdfunding sites are often frequented by tech-savvy consumers, reflected in the popularity of categories such as video games, comics, and consumer electronics. Publishing companies have been slower to use the platforms. Some are similar to self-publishing efforts, while other small publishers are incorporating crowdfunding into their regular launch process. The three most commonly recognizable sites used by creatives are:

#### Kickstarter

[www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com) is a global (but primarily American-populated) crowdfunding platform focused on cultivating creativity. As a Public Benefit Corporation, their charter includes commitments to benefit society as well as shareholders. Launched in 2009, it has passed through over \$5.6 billion dollars in pledges to almost 200,000 projects, including films, games, books, comics, consumer gadgets, apps, and many others.<sup>5</sup>

#### Indiegogo

[www.indiegogo.com](http://www.indiegogo.com) is an American-based crowdfunding platform founded in 2008 that supports entrepreneurs by connecting them with funding from small investors, for products that solve “everyday problems in clever and unconventional ways.”<sup>6</sup> They have helped launch solutions with tech and/or design focus, with over 9 million backers and 47% of fully funded projects are headed by women.

A survey of online material comparing the two primary crowdfunding platforms was useful, although none of them cited their data sources other than references back to the sites themselves. The conclusions are summarized below, with the most relevant data for publishers falling into a few different categories:

1. *Where the targeted niche markets are located in the real world.* Kickstarter has much larger participation in the USA and other first-world nations, while Indiegogo reaches 253 countries.<sup>7</sup> However, niche markets participating in online communities can cross political boundaries, so the publisher would need to determine demographic information on social media participation, purchasing preferences and other online behaviors associated with each group to determine which crowdfunding platform they are most likely to connect with.

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<sup>5</sup> About Kickstarter. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.kickstarter.com/about>

<sup>6</sup> About us. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.indiegogo.com/about/our-story>

<sup>7</sup> About us. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.indiegogo.com/about/our-story>



2. *Increasing the reach of the publisher's marketing.* All crowdfunding sites leverage the publisher's initial reach because of inclusion in the platform's corporate marketing campaigns. Some of these mentions will result in continuing sales, others are more launch-specific. Kickstarter has gotten more media coverage, ascribed to their curation policy, which results in more products actually going to market. This makes their SEO rates higher and their platform participants more loyal. In comparison, Indiegogo has more remarketing tools including their email newsletter, and greater placement on Youtube.
3. *The payment structure:* Kickstarter requires the initial funding goal to be met before charging the backers and doesn't release demographic information. Indiegogo transfers any money pledged to the publishers and provides demographic information on the backers. The latter can be an off-putting privacy concern for backers, while the former can hamper further marketing efforts with limited resources.

These inherent differences seem to indicate that certain target markets will prefer particular platforms, and that would provide a more evergreen marketing connection with those communities as well.

## Patreon

Since their founding in 2013 in the United States, Patreon's "membership business" primarily serves artists, putting them in competition with small publishers.<sup>8</sup> Publishers looking to use this platform also have the additional challenge of a traditional lack of publisher brand awareness among end consumers, with a few notable exceptions in genre fiction. Patreon creates communities invested in exclusive content or provides a structure for transforming them from discussion groups into financial support. This is a low-scale but good example of the multi-beneficial potential of crowdfunding.

## Inkshares

Www.inkshares.com, has a different publishing model of crowdfunding for publishers. Founded in 2013, Inkshares functions as a publisher that solicits reader/audience input directly through voting contests, with the winners getting a publishing arrangement with the company.<sup>9</sup> Inkshares also leverages their American distribution with a partnership with one of their startup investors, Ingram. However, despite the media coverage, good reviews and participation statistics when the platform first launched, it appears to be overlooked now, with the most popular "partial manuscripts" having only a few thousand votes, and only occasional blog posts.

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<sup>8</sup> About: Patreon. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.patreon.com/about>

<sup>9</sup> Swanson, C. (2014, August 15). Inkshares looks to marry the old with the new. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/63694-inkshares-looks-to-marry-the-old-with-the-new.html>

## Chapbook

The current perception of a chapbook is that it is a small, brief, inexpensively-printed, soft-cover book of poetry or prose. They are most commonly published in small runs by writing programs featuring artistically curated material. rain taxi, a literary organization that publishes a magazine of reviews, also specializes in chapbook publication and showcases quality editions from the field.<sup>10</sup> Their catalog is a good survey of the current view of chapbooks within the literary community—poems and art books, with the occasional treatise.

However, historically chapbooks presented a much wider range of affordable material in order to reach a broader audience.<sup>11</sup> Some of those audiences were children and the adults who read to and with them. Johanna Bradley's dissertation, *From chapbooks to plum(b) cake: the history of children's literature* (2007), quotes a nearly perfect earlier, historical definition of the chapbook: "...in *The Penny Histories: A Study of Chapbooks for Young Readers for Over Two Centuries* (1969 ), Victor E. Neuberg defines chapbooks: Chapbooks may be defined as the paper-covered books offered for sale by peddlers. By 1700 [these] small books, whose varied subject matter included devils, angels, scoundrels, heroes, love, hate, fairy tales, religion, fables, shipwreck, executions, prophecies and fortune telling [had begun to flood the market]." Illustrated with woodcuts, they usually cost one penny.<sup>12</sup> As the market grew, popular content in England was more imaginative tales that appealed directly to children, in contrast with American markets that focused more on religious tracts and didactic materials, especially as proselytization or educational tools.

In the early 1970s, Bobby Lyn Maslen, a local educator in Portland, OR, developed a series of early literacy and decoding readers. The "Bob Books" were launched as booklets with stapled, saddle-stitch binding and soft covers in small sizes for small hands. They began as an internal tool, with Ms. Maslen's school getting 300 copies printed for use in their own classrooms.<sup>13</sup> For several years, Portland State University published them until regional direct sales growth eventually led to its acquisition by Scholastic around 1994. The titles have become an

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<sup>10</sup> About rain taxi. (2020, June 25). Retrieved March 10, 2021, from <https://www.raintaxi.com/about/rain-taxi-history/>

<sup>11</sup> Chapbook - definition, examples, related words and more at Wordnik. (n.d.). Retrieved March 10, 2021, from <https://www.wordnik.com/words/chapbook>

<sup>12</sup>Bradley, J. (2007). *From chapbooks to plumb cake: The history of children's literature*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

<sup>13</sup> Bob Books: Our Story. (2021). Retrieved March 10, 2021, from <https://bobbooks.com/about/>

“evergreen” backlist success.<sup>14</sup> Not only are these books filling a targeted niche market, but they are affordable and accessible.

Per the current definition of chapbooks, Bob Books do not have the sturdy, oversized appeal of hardcover picture books or early readers—they are lightweight, small, and fragile. Yet their success and popularity is undeniable, despite their educational focus. With the support guides and supplemental materials, they can be found in classrooms, therapy offices and at home. Bob Books are a good example of how chapbooks can reach modern audiences with content beyond poetry. If they had been launched in 2021, with access to self-publishing tools such as crowdfunding and social media promotion enabling direct sales, their growth trajectory would have taken a completely different path. This is the point of synergy that new independent publishers are now striving to reach even more quickly.

## Review of Relevant Literature

### Portland State University Theses

Holley, Alan Scott, "We'll Want It When We Say We Want It: How the Market Speaks to the Publishing Industry via Crowdfunding, and Why Publishers Should Listen" (2016). The background information on crowdfunding is presented from primary sources, making it similar to what I have covered. However, it also covers case studies of two titles from Zeal Books. Without providing much detail on the marketing efforts, the paper attributes the success of one crowdfunding campaign and the failure of the other to the different markets for the books. One was targeted at a LGBTQ-sympathetic readership, with a presumed younger demographic and significant online presence. The other was a more conservative topic, aimed at an older audience, presumed to be less comfortable with online purchasing, let alone innovative platform participation.<sup>15</sup> The former campaign was successful beyond the original goal, the latter was unable to reach their funding goal. The publisher attributed the crowdfunding failure due to the absence of the target market, rather than a lack of interest, and decided to publish the title for the older audience anyway. Further inquiry revealed sales figures beyond the 2k minimum print run.

Schimming, Margaret, "Changing Publisher-Author Relationships in the Midst of Developing Crowd-Funded Publishing Platforms" (2015). The paper focuses on the power dynamic between

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<sup>14</sup> Bean, J. (2003). Backlist Heroes: Perennial favorites prove they can sell themselves. *Publisher's Weekly*, 250(47).

<sup>15</sup> Holley, Alan Scott, "We'll Want It When We Say We Want It: How the Market Speaks to the Publishing Industry via Crowdfunding, and Why Publishers Should Listen" (2016). *Book Publishing Final Research Paper*. 15. <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/18134>

authors and publishers. The gatekeeping aspect of publishing has long been debated. A smaller publishing-focused platform referenced, PubSlush, is no longer in business. However, the examination of Inkshares was informative. As a publisher, Inkshares provides the platform for reader input prior to publication. However, their emphasis is on the process of determining the readership for various genre manuscripts, as they have several ways to both engage and measure this support.<sup>16</sup> Given the minimal material on the site, including sparse blog entries and low numbers of followers for the most popular titles in progress, it probably didn't reach the success level that was anticipated in 2015, when it was examined by M. Schimming in her paper.<sup>17</sup> In the six years since this paper was published, self-publishing has continued to grow, despite resistance from some institutions and booksellers.

Dissertation:

Bradley, Johanna. (2007). *From chapbooks to plum(b) cake: The history of children's literature*. The author, for her PhD in Library Sciences, undertook a thorough literature review of the materials that were available at the time, focusing on the detailed historical context of the background and emergence of literature, specifically for children as written up by Mrs. E.M. Field in her book, *The Child and His Book*. Bradley also follows Field as she explores the different impacts of societal influences on English and American publishing, with everything from the Puritan religious zeal to the horrific conditions of early grammar schools, quoting primary sources.<sup>18</sup>

Once Bradley shifts to an examination of chapbooks, she quotes from primary sources, including writers' journals on their experiences collecting chapbooks. She puts this in the context of the English publishing industry, which only started publishing "penny chapbooks" after 1600. She identifies Victor Neuberg as a preeminent chapbook scholar.<sup>19</sup> He not only identifies cataloging statistics pertinent to historical chapbook content categories, but provides a clear description of their defining appearance: "They were small books approximately three-and-a-half to four inches by six inches, although these dimensions could be slightly larger or

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<sup>16</sup> Inkshares Project Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.inkshares.com/start\\_project/overview](https://www.inkshares.com/start_project/overview)

<sup>17</sup> Schimming, Margaret, "Changing Publisher-Author Relationships in the Midst of Developing Crowd-Funded Publishing Platforms" (2015). *Book Publishing Final Research Paper*. 8. <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/15978>

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, Johanna. (2007). *From chapbooks to plumb cake: The history of children's literature*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley, Johanna. (2007). *From chapbooks to plumb cake: The history of children's literature*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

smaller; nineteenth century chapbooks, for example, were actually much smaller.”<sup>20</sup> Bradley goes on to explain the different layouts and cover materials of these historical chapbooks, as the inexpensive material explains why they were sold for only a penny or two. She states quite firmly that most books were too expensive for common consumption at the time. Hence some of the alternative names for chapbooks: “Penny Histories” or “Toy Books.” Bradley mentions some of Neuberg’s historical evidence, particularly that chapbooks were printed in Roman font instead of Black Letter/italics, making them easier to read and therefore replacing broadsides in popularity. This deliberate design choice is similar to the ones still made by publishers today, producing content in the most easily accessible format and thereby expanding the audience.

A final mention is one of the prominent texts on children’s literature, *The Minders of Make Believe* by Leonard Marcus. In his very first chapter, contextualizing discussions of the American history of children’s literature, he mentions Samuel Wood as producing one of the first quality chapbooks targeted at children in 1806, a primer titled “The Young Child’s A, B, C.”<sup>21</sup>

While examination of historical contexts and contents are valuable, the impact of the current global pandemic on the publishing industry is resulting in enormous shifts even as my research is being undertaken. On Kickstarter’s website, an article details some of the highlighted projects they consider to be “publishing”, and includes more than just books.<sup>22</sup> Of course, it features some of their most fiscally successful projects such as *Good Night Rebel Girls* (detailed below), but it also mentions smaller projects that are in alignment with their mission commitments. This includes chapbooks, but in their common form as poetry vehicles. There are projects from a few small publishers included on the list (including Tavern Books of Portland, OR, and Copper Canyon Press of Port Townsend, WA), but there are no projects from any of the “big five” publishers or their imprints. It sends a message that small publishers are encouraged to participate on the platform and have the potential to leverage success in funding their projects into further marketing exposure. Even for less mainstream products like zines and chapbooks.

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<sup>20</sup> Bradley, Johanna. (2007). From chapbooks to plumb cake: The history of children's literature. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

<sup>21</sup>Marcus, L. S. (2008). *Minders of make-believe: Idealists, entrepreneurs, and the shaping of American children's literature* (pp. 1-16). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>22</sup> Leckert, O., & Atwell, M. (2020, October 26). 117 publishing projects showing what's possible on Kickstarter. Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <https://www.kickstarter.com/articles/117-publishing-projects-proving-possible-on-kickstarter?ref=section-creators-publishing-promo-117-publishing-projects-showing-whats-possible-on-kickstarter>

## Methodology

Interviews for Preliminary Paper, 2019

Crowdfunding is ideally positioned to take advantage of the nimbleness of smaller publishers, thereby reducing risk and maximizing advantages. Reaching and serving niche markets is never going to be about bulk discounts and huge print runs. That seems like an obvious fit for online crowdfunding, as the most popular platforms focus on smaller endeavors. So, the direction for these interviews became:

*How can crowdfunding reduce the financial risk of experimentation for small publishers?*

The most financially successful example of broad leveraging of financial resources, platforms and media connections is Timbuktu Labs, which successfully crowdfunded two books: *Rebel Girls* and *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*. Raising over \$600k on Kickstarter and then over \$1.2m on Indiegogo, they also reached out to a [blogger](#) who posted about it on Patreon, getting continuing marketing coverage on all three sites.

Local publishers Hazy Dell Press and Microcosm Publishing each took very different philosophical approaches from that of Timbuktu Labs. Joe Biel, founder of Microcosm and author of *A People's Guide to Publishing: Build a successful, sustainable, meaningful book business from the ground up*, uses his book, blog and other platforms to outline his strategy for crowdfunding. While both Microcosm and Hazy Dell use Kickstarter for crowdfunding, Joe clearly states that it is primarily another marketing platform for Microcosm. Their strategy includes keeping their financial project goals under \$5k to cover printing costs, the rewards and stretch goals low-cost while avoiding discounting the actual books and continuing to use Kickstarter as one of the many platforms to connect with their markets and identify their brand. As of 2019, they had at least 40 successful publishing projects on Kickstarter.<sup>23</sup>

Hazy Dell, however, only used Kickstarter for their initial project launch. They also kept their financial goal low, linked to printing costs of \$8k. Per Renee Kama, co-owner and marketing manager, their philosophy reflects their position that crowdfunding is more similar to a charitable funding model.<sup>24</sup>

In Spring of 2019, these two publishers were interviewed via email to understand the role of crowdfunding in their business strategies. One existed before crowdfunding began, the other was founded afterwards. They have very different audiences and business models, but both agreed that crowdfunding was a crucial marketing tool.

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<sup>23</sup> Biel, Joe. *A People's Guide to Publishing: Build a Successful, Sustainable, Meaningful, Book Business From The Ground Up*. Microcosm Publishing, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Brill, Pamela. "Hazy Dell Press Enters the Board Book Market." *PublishersWeekly.com*, PWxyz, LLC, 11 Sept. 2018, [www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/77961-hazy-dell-press-enters-the-board-book-market.html](http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/77961-hazy-dell-press-enters-the-board-book-market.html).

This initial small survey of crowdfunding options for publishers and how they are being used does not directly answer the question about reducing financial risk. Only one publisher, Microcosm, is using crowdfunding for multiple projects in different subjects, and they are focused on its use as a marketing campaign, not for establishing proof-of-sales. Attributing Timbuktu Labs' financial success to their hyper-focus on their niche is a reasonable conclusion but not explicit unless it can be compared with other data for marketing campaigns with angel investors.

#### Creation of a book and Kickstarter campaign

This case study is limited to examining the process of publishing a chapbook with funding and pre-orders raised. Kickstarter was selected because of several factors: I have successfully funded a previous non-publishing project there establishing a record and profile; the material was intended for American audience; and the recent emphasis on publishing projects on Kickstarter provides another opportunity for increased exposure.

For this thesis project, the full publication process, aside from manuscript acquisition, was followed. A developmental editing contract was signed with Nevin Mays, former editor at Scholastic and instructor of the Children's Book Publishing class at Portland State University.

Following revisions, a local Portland artist was contacted through the directory at Portland In Color.<sup>25</sup> This freelance illustrator was selected from the same community as the main character (Latinx). Due to the nature of the project, a smaller stipend was offered up front with higher royalties on the back end (per literary agent Kelly Sparks, standard royalties offered are 12.5% for a children's book, and this contract offered 20%). An additional clause was added to encourage promotion of the crowdfunding campaign—if the illustrator participated with social media promotion and provided materials for use in the campaign, a percentage commission would be awarded once the funding goal is met.

All timelines for the project had been established and met. Autism Society of Oregon (ASO), a local nonprofit, had been identified as host for a campaign pre-launch tabling at their annual walk-a-thon event in April, with the intent of garnering publicity as well as an email list. This event was cancelled with the pandemic lockdown imposed in March 2020. Instead, ASO was designated as the beneficiary of any profits from the sale of the chapbook, titled *Rodrigo Runs Off: An Autism Adventure*. ASO has a policy against commercial promotions to their mailing lists, but the executive director made a testimonial video which was posted on Youtube and mentioned on their social media.

Due to the traumatic circumstances and impact of the pandemic, illustrator participation in the Kickstarter campaign wasn't pursued.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.portlandincolor.com/directory/>

Over the summer of 2020, marketing materials for the Kickstarter campaign were drafted and I launched our website, [www.paperplaygroundpress.com](http://www.paperplaygroundpress.com), with the web design services of a small, BiPoc woman-owned business. Two Ooligan peers volunteered to support my efforts during the fast-paced turnaround requirements of the Kickstarter campaign. Keeping the commitment to our diverse communities is critical, in alignment with our mission statement:

*Paper Playground Press books help community members who want to acknowledge “invisible” (therefore under-represented) differences by increasing representation through engaging picture books, thereby forwarding the UN sustainability goal #10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries.” We do this while prioritizing universal design, quirky content, and a commitment to promoting the diverse communities we present. We measure our success with a triple bottom line of social progress, fiscal sustainability and environmental impact.*

The 30-day Kickstarter campaign was launched in early October. Announcements went out to a personal mailing list of 120, and on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as occasional mentions in social media groups. We immediately received encouraging responses from known contacts. However, posting the campaign video to Youtube seemed to award us the coveted “Projects We Love” badge and newsletter mention on Kickstarter, prompting several pledges from unknown supporters. It increased our project profile, as we started receiving various email solicitations from printers and other production services after this. A complete version of the project, including videos, is online.<sup>26</sup>

#### Data Collection

The marketing campaign for Kickstarter during the pandemic did require a focus online, in lieu of gathering targeted emails at community events. Using Facebook as the primary platform due to the initial target demographic (aged 25–45, west-coast and northeast parents with college degrees), I ran several ads to promote the book, the crowdfunding campaign, the mailing list, and the Paper Playground Press Facebook page.

Kickstarter encourages updates on the project via the platform, making bulk contacts to the backers through their internal message system. This campaign generated at least 13 update messages, that are presented for posterity directly on the landing page of the project. From an archival and research perspective, this is ideal. From a marketing perspective, the lack of demographic statistics is challenging. The following data was gathered from this process.

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<sup>26</sup> Lindsay, J. (2020, September 29). Rodrigo runs off: An autism adventure. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/nifL/Rodrigo-runs-off-an-autism-adventure>



## Data Analysis

The foundational data for this case study was a basic comparison of costs between hardcover print runs of 2,000 and smaller print runs of chapbooks. The latter was assumed to have a significantly higher cost-per-book, with some savings in the shipping charges, because of the smaller projected print run of 750; however, the total cost should have been lower.

Interestingly enough, the process of getting a quote from a printer was more difficult than expected, especially when social responsibility filters were applied. Friesen's Press, in Canada, was eventually contacted and their quote was quite different from the others in both amount and assumptions (see Appendices for quote.) Firstly, they were willing to do a hardcover run of 750 books, not the standard minimum of 2,000 that most printers have. Secondly, their hardcover books did cost more per book—\$3.41 compared to \$2.32 for softcover on recycled paper. In addition, their shipping charges reflected a significant savings for the softcover books—\$.06 per book was almost half the freight costs of \$.11 per book for hardcovers. In an industry with historically low margins of profit, even small differences can help offset initial financial outlays for a lean business model—\$1785 is less than \$2640. No other printer, even those who contacted us later in the process through Kickstarter, could match the prices or services offered, without even considering overseas supply chain challenges highlighted during the pandemic. Given the triple bottom line commitment of Paper Playground Press and the efforts already made to keep other practices in line with our mission, using Friesen's seemed a strategic choice, grounded in solid data.

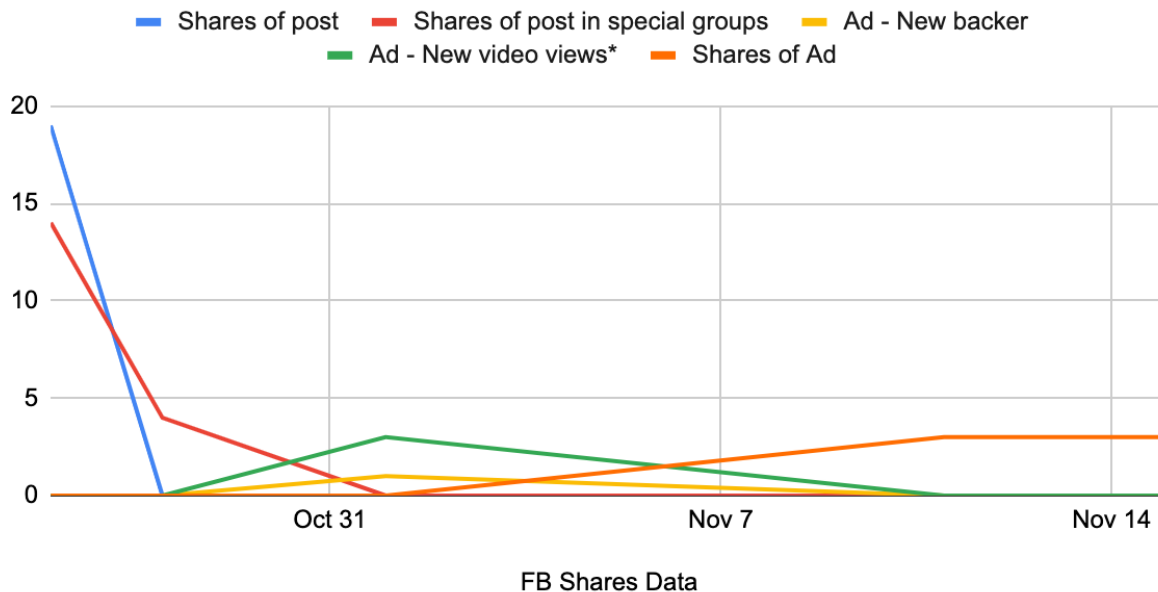
However, the most relevant data gathered in the crowdfunding process was from the Kickstarter backers themselves. Most of them were from personal circles. Out of the 78 total backers, only 70 hard copies of books were requested as rewards (preorders.) However, after the receipt of the badge from Kickstarter a week into the campaign, 15 previously unknown backers signed on. Due to the restricted access to demographic information, it's impossible to place the context of these contacts, but interestingly most of them preordered a book. This is nowhere near a complete demand for a print-run of 1000, but in comparison with other small publishers who began their first books with 200 sales in a year (per an informal assessment of small publishers on NPD's DecisionKey database), it seems an acceptable indication of interest and validation of risk. Full funding was almost reached without tapping pre-established support, so the final expected pledge put us over our goal of \$5,000, ensuring project completion.

An additional data source was the outreach done on Facebook. Starting from a personal platform of over 700 "friends", and a professional page for Paper Playground Press with over 100 likes, the marketing campaign included daily posts, with photos or links, and had actionable suggestions and helpful information. Posts were shared in personal social media groups, and via

targeted Facebook messages among certain demographics (including teachers, therapists, parents of autistics, etc.) There was NEVER a financial action request for backing or pledges, just sharing the ads with people’s networks.

Sample data from the week following author’s birthday, when Facebook promotes extra connections:

### Shares of post, Shares of post in special groups, Ad - New backer, Ad - New video views\* and Shares of Ad



*\*Kickstarter allows tracking of the project video views, but not by whom.*

All of these numbers are too small to have a statistical impact, especially in the context of how many users the ads reached: according to Facebook, (screenshots included in the Appendices), one ad reached around 1,500 with a more general message aimed at a broader audience. Later in the campaign, a more targeted message about the involvement of ASO was sent to a more specific audience: adult women on the west coast interested in self-help and other family-related topics. This ad reached 21,000 Facebook users, and garnered 170 link click-throughs. From the timing of pledges from unknown users, neither ad campaign actually resulted in a pledge from a new backer or brought new viewers to Kickstarter.

As mentioned above, the “preorder sales” benefit of crowdfunding was slight. Pledges for 70 copies of the book doesn’t quite amount to a ten percent preorder from the 750-print run, but it does indicate some interest. Since most of these are going to personal contacts, that does not present a cogent argument to libraries and schools that they should place preorders for

hardcover or library-bound copies of the book in advance of printing (with the intent to further offset the financial risk in the next step of the children's book publishing process.)

## Conclusion

The biggest issue that arose (which had also been concluded by Holley earlier) is that it is not sufficient to know where to connect with target markets. It is critical to knowing where they are willing to act. While many potential audiences are squarely in the Facebook demographic, if they are uncomfortable with Facebook advertising or less likely to make online purchases through that platform, that impacts the effectiveness. In the future, their approachability should be assessed beginning with the identification of potential social media influencers or champions. Traditionally, new publishers craft marketing and publicity campaigns that solicit reviews and blurbs and participate in award competitions. However, the pandemic forced an abrupt shift to a complete online approach this year, challenging those processes.

Raising all of these questions suggests that premature conclusions based on just the sales figures from one crowdfunding campaign are not the answer. Just as the successful complete "funding" of the Kickstarter campaign is not a full picture of the financial engagement of the backers, the lack of a full print-run sellout does not seem to reflect the potential success of the book. It does, however, reflect the challenges in reaching the appropriate audience for each book. In all cases, establishing interest and marketing presence through crowdfunding informs the decision-making process for small publishers, making the publication of chapbooks less financially risky than investment in a larger run of hardcover books.

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## Appendices

### Quote from Friesen's Press

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**Title:** Rodrigo Runs Off

**Trim Size:** 4 x 4 (no bleeds in text)

**Pages:** Hardcover: 32 pages plus endsheets, plus casebound cover **Or** Softcover: 32 pages plus paperbound cover

**Text:** 60 lb. #2 Offset White; 4 process colours throughout (Digital)

**Endsheets:** Offset White; 4 process colours throughout; (printed image)

**Hardcover:** 95 lb. Gloss C1S White over 80pt. board; 4 process colours plus matte lamination

**Softcover:** 12 pt. C1S Cover White; 4 process colours plus matte lamination outside only **Warning:** Matte lamination frequently scuffs during shipping.

**Prepress:** Customer to supply text, softcover, hardcover and endsheet copy as application or PDF files to Friesens specifications.

**Bindery:** Hardcover: Perfect bind, square back (board in spine) encase with tightback, and pack in cartons (ECT 44 - 275# single wall)

Softcover: Perfect bind, trim, and pack in cartons (ECT 44 - 275# single wall)

**Freight:** F.O.B. Plant

*A \$200 fee will be applied for each collect or 3rd party shipment.*

**Prices:**

**Hardcover**

**250 500 750 1,000 Add'l 100's**

\$7.92/book \$4.54/book \$3.41/book \$2.83/book \$1.01/book

Above prices **INCLUDE** one time preparation costs of \$700.00

**Softcover**

**250 500 750 1,000 Add'l 100's**

\$4.97/book \$2.97/book \$2.32/book \$1.96/book \$0.91/book

Above prices **INCLUDE** one time preparation costs of \$502.00

**Option #3: Freight**

F.O.B. Portland, OR, 97219 (one bulk shipment via ground courier), add:

**Hardcover**

**250 500 750 1,000**

\$0.21/book \$0.15/book \$0.11/book \$0.09/book

**Softcover**

**250 500 750 1,000**

\$0.10/book \$0.10/book \$0.06/book \$0.06/book

**Includes residential delivery. Freight pricing not valid in combination with any other options.**

# Screenshots of Facebook Ad Data

This screenshot shows the Facebook Ad Performance dashboard for a campaign. The top section displays key metrics: \$25.00 spent over 5 days, 1,583 Reach, and Messaging Conversations Started. A bar chart under 'Activity' shows Post Engagement (4), Link Clicks (1), and Post Reactions (1). The 'Ad Rating' section includes a thumbs-up icon and the text 'Thanks for helping us improve!'. The 'Details' section shows the status as 'Completed', goal as 'Get more messages', total budget as '\$25.00', and duration as '5 days'. A 'Preview' section at the bottom indicates 'Our first FB ad is running, let us...'. The browser's address bar shows the URL: facebook.com/ad\_center/manage/?boost\_id=666303570604108&entry\_point=www\_ad\_center\_overview\_ad\_cards.

This screenshot shows the Facebook Ad Audience and Payment details. The 'Audience' section states 'This ad reached 1,583 people in your audience.' and includes a bar chart showing gender distribution (52.1% Women, 47.9% Men) and age groups (13-17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+). The 'Audience Details' section shows the location as 'United States' and age as '18 - 65+'. The 'Payment Method' section shows a card ending in '3373' with a 'Change' button. The 'Amount Spent' section shows a 'Total Amount' of '\$25.00'. A 'Preview' section shows a thumbnail for 'Rodrigo Runs Old' with the text 'Our first FB ad is running, let us know if you see it! And don't forget to share share share: FB, Twitter, IG, etc! This is one way we can make small changes t...'. The browser's address bar shows the URL: facebook.com/ad\_center/manage/?boost\_id=666303570604108&entry\_point=www\_ad\_center\_overview\_ad\_cards.

Chrome File Edit View History Bookmarks People Tab Window Help

facebook.com/ads/manager/billing/transaction\_details/?act=42030192&pid=p1&txid=3507799952669230-6661317&tx\_type=3&page=billing&t...

FB Billing Search Nif Jennifer Lindsay (42030192) Create Ad

Account: Nif Jennifer Lindsay >  
Transaction: 3507799952669230-6661317

### Billing Summary

Amount Billed	Billing Reason <b>Remaining ad costs at the end of the month.</b>	Product Type <b>Facebook</b>	Payment Method <b>MasterCard*3373</b>
<b>\$42.88</b>	Payment Date <b>Nov 30, 2020, 6:36 AM</b>	Status <b>Paid</b>	Reference Number <b>AQFYGYS6R2</b>

[11/01/2020] Promoting www.kickstarter.com/projects/NiFL/Rodrigo-runs-off-an-autism-adventure  
From Nov 18, 2020, 12:00 AM to Nov 25, 2020, 11:59 PM

Ad Set Name	Results	Amount	Ad Set ID
[11/01/2020] Promoting www.kickstarter.com/projects/NiFL/Rodrigo-runs-off-an-autism-adventure	6,161	\$42.88	6231539842657
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,161</b> Impressions	<b>\$42.88</b>	

Report a Problem

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Chrome File Edit View History Bookmarks People Tab Window Help

facebook.com/ad\_center/manage/?boost\_id=662097187691413&entry\_point=www\_ad\_center\_overview\_ad\_cards

This ad reached 21,534 people in your audience.

People Placements Locations

100.0% Women 0.0% Men

**Audience Details**

Location  
United States: California; Oregon; Washington

Age  
30 - 60

Gender  
Female

People Who Match  
Interests: Meditation, Community issues, Yoga or Charity and causes and Parents: Parents with toddlers (01-02 years), Parents with preschoolers (03-05 years), Parents with school-age...

Daily budget  
**\$1.00**

Duration  
24 days

See All

Preview

Our book on elopement is also raising funds for the Autism Society of Oregon! Find out why: www.kickstarter.com/projects...  
Learn More

Edit Ad

Payment Method  
MasterCard 3373 Change

Nif Lindsay: *Something old, something new: how chapbooks and crowdfunding can reduce financial risk for small publishers.*



