

Special Sales and Other Ways to Diversify Sales Beyond Amazon Panel

Panelists: Dave Kimball, Adam Sidwell, Melissa Dalton Martinez, and Marci Monson

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Melissa Dalton Martinez: Alright. Hi, everyone. I am Melissa Dalton Martinez, and I am going to help with moderating this panel and you are on the panel to learn about distribution beyond Amazon. So I'll give you a quick introduction of myself and then we'll just go around and let all the panelists talk so Like I said, I'm Melissa Dalton Martinez. I've been working in publishing and film for the last 20 years. I started back in 2000, actually, doing marketing for God's Army. So I myself do a lot of marketing and distribution for inde authors and small publishers, and just do all that kind of fun stuff, as well as book reviews, and I host a TV show where I interview authors, artists, and others in the publishing industry. And once a month, I do book recommendation segments on the various TV stations in Utah and radio stations.

I love the book world and I love authors and publishers. So this is my people right here! So we'll go to Adam.

Adam Sidwell: Hi, thanks for that intro, Melissa. Always good to be on the panel with you again. My name is Adam Sidwell. I am an author, as well as a publisher. I founded Future House Publishing, a science fiction, fantasy, and children's book publishing company a few years ago, and we've partnered with some great distributors and an imprint of familius publishing.

And I also have an extensive background in film, having created several blockbuster movies—animation for them, digital effects, you know, working in places like—

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Alright, it looks like we've lost Adam, a little bit. So, yeah. Adam said well—Future House Publishing, great author, publisher, animator—he's got some good info. And then Marci.

Marci Monson: I'm Marci Monson, I'm at Gibbs Smith Publishing as of this morning, actually. I'm the Marketing and publicity manager. Just went from specialist to manager today so I have to remember my new title. Thank you. Thank you. I haven't even read my job description, yet.

So we focus on children's books, cookbooks, design, coffee table, we do BabyLit books and LoveLit gifts as well. I'm pretty new to the publishing industry. I worked most of my career in tech, and I worked for 10 years for the church working on Ids.org, so you have probably seen something that I've touched in the past.

But then I just started feeling like I needed a new challenge and went through a career change and went to Denver Publishing Institute, and I just started here in September. So I'm excited to be in publishing and work with books all day long.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Awesome, thanks Marci. And then Dave.

Dave Kimball: Hey everybody. My name is Dave Kimball. I've been at Deseret Book, this month is nine years. I'm the director of brand and product marketing there.

My background is in public relations. I have a degree in PR and I got my MBA several years ago as well, and I'm excited to be able to talk about diversifying where you can find your content here and be able to help. Great to be on the panel with all of you. Thanks for joining.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Awesome. Well, thanks everyone. So you've got a good stretch here of information—marketing, PR, distribution, medium sized publishers to larger size publishers and really all genres we have experience in. So, just to give you guys a little bit of an update of where the publishing world is because I'm sure we can all understand that 2020 is a little different than 2019 was. So just to help you see where we're at, these are some stats from Publishers Weekly. And if you don't subscribe to Publishers Weekly, I highly recommend that you do.

And as of right now, you can get a free subscription, too, so go check it out. So just to give you guys an idea: in April of 2020, brick and mortar store sales dropped 65.3%, So, if you're a publisher or an indie author, you've got to make sure that you are looking at places all over, not

just brick and mortar stores and not just Amazon. You've really got to see where you can diversify.

Also, during the pandemic, eBook sales went up, online print ordering went up. So people are not just buying eBooks, they're still buying the physical books as well as audio book sales. So in March, the audio book sales went down, but as of today, audio book sales are actually above where they were in March.

So keep in mind that it's not just about seeing your book on a shelf anymore. There are other things. But as we all know, you want to know how to get there. So, let's go ahead and jump in. And I want to start with Marci because, as well as being in marketing, Marci also takes some work with distribution, too, with Gibbs Smith Publishing. Tell us a little bit about what Gibbs Smith Publishing does with distribution.

Marci Monson: We do all of our own distribution. And we also distribute for four other companies: Angel City Press, which does a lot of L.A. focused books; Lil' Libros, which is a baby board book that's an English-Spanish board book series; and then Hubles is brand new, they're these little foldable toys. They're kind of fun. And Badge Bomb, which is a gift company. And so we distribute for all of those which means that we do a lot of—Oh, and also Flying Frog. I forgot that we have five. And they do a lot of books for dollar store and those kind of things.

So we do a lot of distribution out of our warehouse that is just two miles away from our office for trade and education. We have an education department, as well, that does textbooks and they work out of Kayesville and we're in Layton. We do a lot of distribution.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: And Dave, how have you guys been seeing with Deseret Book how the distribution is changing, with how, you know, Deseret book used to be a lot more in the stores. How have you been seeing the change in 2020?

Dave Kimball: We've been just as affected by all of this in 2020 as has everyone else. We've just worked really hard to make sure that we are where our customers are not only in terms of where they are looking in their channels, where they're spending their time on social media, on websites or whatever. But really, trying to put ourselves in their shoes as much as possible—and mentally and emotionally—to make sure that we are sending messages and help them realize that we're really there to help them along every step of their journey.

Yeah, our online sales have been up, our brick and mortar sales have been down. Our brick and mortar stores were closed for a long time and now they're open, but there's still, you know,

restrictions and things and our licensed dealer stores have not been immune. They're, more spread throughout the United States than the Desert Book chain stores are, and it's been hard. But I think the key—as I've been preparing for this panel, thinking about what I could contribute here—is we've been trying to use the content that we have in new in different ways. And I think that that's really important to do, not only in this time of a pandemic, but going forward. If you want to write a book, write a book and that's great. But if you want to help people, if you want to be in front of people, if you want to influence people, you can't just be a book author. You can't just be writing books and expecting to be influential and having people listen to you.

I would say that if you want to, you know, diversify where your content can be found, I would look at diversifying how you deliver your content, in what format that's given.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Yeah, Adam and I have a panel on that, too, about how you can take your books and expand them into other products. So that's another thing that you guys can look at.

So if it's okay, I'm going to go ahead and jump into where you can take your products. We're all super familiar with Amazon, but there are a lot of other distribution channels. And so just for example, Deseret Book, like Dave mentioned, they sell online, too. So in addition to having their products on Amazon, they also have it on desertbook.com.

And there are other stores, as we well know, that do that. If you have a book in the LDS industry, you know, you can have your book at Deseret Book. But if you're an indie author, what does that mean to you. So first of all, if you want to get into these brick and mortar stores, whether it be the actual physical store or on their website, there are a number of different things that you can do.

But let's start with some of the most common online distribution channels. So I'm going to go ahead and share my screen real quickly so you guys can see what do these online distribution channels look like.

Give me just a second. And I'm going to go right here and share the screen with you all. Okay, so you can get an idea right now.

Let me go to this. Okay, so here's some distribution channels that you are likely familiar with. So this is indie publishing, self-publishing, but also publishers like Dave with Deseret Book and Gibbs Smith and Future House Publishing, they have their books in other places as well. So

Amazon is just kind of the, you know, whatever the saying is—hundred pound gorilla—that we're all most familiar with.

But if you want to get your book into some of these other stores, you need to look at something like Ingram, or if you're an indie author on the back end, that's that's going to be Ingram spark.

And when your book is in the Ingram catalog, that allows bookstores to order your book. So that's one thing you've got to look at.

Now, you don't have to be on Ingram in order to be on Amazon. But that is something that you do need to be looking at if you want to be with some of the larger retail stores.

But outside of that is an online distributor for eBooks called Draft2Digital. If you're not familiar with Draft2Digital, I highly encourage you to go and look at them. So it's just like you see on screen: "draft", the number two, and "digital". And I can tell you guys a quick list of where they're at. But Draft2Digital can get you in all over the place with your eBook. So this is specifically for your eBook that I'm talking about.

And Smashwords is another distributor of eBooks that can also help you get into multiple platforms, as well as, Smashwords also sells eBooks. So if all you wanted to do is even just sell your book on Smashwords, that's an option for you.

I have Book Funnel on here because, if you're an indie author or a small publisher and you want to sell your own eBook, you can use book funnel to help you with that. And they format the book.

You do need to provide it in either a PDF or EPUB file or a Mobi file, but then your customer can choose whether they are going to read it on a Kindle or a nook or a Kobo reader. So that's another option.

And your own website that's kind of where I'm going with this. If you've got your own websites that you want to sell your own books on, you can also sell your own eBook.

And you can sell your own audio book, and we can get more into audio books in a minute, but that's another one. And of course, you can work on hand selling your own book to independent bookstores. So you've got options out there. Now with independent bookstores, some of them are requiring to order it through Ingram, others do consignment. So there are a number of independent bookstores that will do it on consignment and they'll just split it with you. And then

you've got your social media and other platforms. Anywhere that you exist online is an opportunity for you to sell your own. If you speak, like Dave mentioned on here, if you really want to make a big impact and have a greater sphere of influence and you're speaking or teaching classes or anything like that, those are the Back-of-the-Room sales that you can do.

And then the other thing that you really, really should look at our story bundles. These are hugely popular, especially right now in 2020, story bundle cells are going through the roof.

And the story bundle is essentially multiple authors coming together and selling their eBooks in a bundle. So if you wanted a romance story bundle, for example, you might have 10 different romance books in there, or fantasy, or whatever your genre is. So those are some quick overviews of some of your distribution channels. I'm going to stop sharing for just a second and if you're thinking, "how do I get into all of the different ones because there are so many?" When I mentioned on here Draft2Digital, one of the things with Draft2Digital is they can get you in everywhere. And that also allows you to distribute your audio book and some other things. But, do any of you want to add to the distribution channel options?

Adam Sidwell: I just—

Dave Kimball: Oh, go ahead. Adam, sorry.

Adam Sidwell: I think my Internet's back up and running. So I hope you guys can hear me okay.

I thought that was a great overview, Melissa. I appreciate that. I think that something to keep in mind as you're dealing with all these as an indie author or as a publisher or however you're approaching this, is you probably want to take a period where you're going to experiment with the breadth of these things. And what you'll probably find is that one or two of them is going to be your main source of sales. Because the truth is it's difficult to maintain all of these different types of channels in any meaningful way. You might turn them on and leave them on autopilot, but if you're diversifying your sales, you're going to find that there are a lot of different types of publishers who have found one method and they really focus on it.

So for example, you know, we've had a lot of success with school tour visits and hand selling at schools and have sold hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of books that way.

And it's made it where, okay, this as a publisher is something that we have specialized in and done really well at.

You know, if you're to spend all of your time working on Draft2Digital, Smashwords, and in 100 different platforms, you'll find that you'll probably not have sales on either of them. The example of this is that even Nook or IBooks, which are enormous, you know, Apple's a trillion dollar company, they pale in comparison to the sales of Kindle.

And so, you know, since we're talking about diversifying beyond Amazon, you just want to keep that in context is that you want to see what your channels really have to offer. And that will be by experimenting, because indeed, in this time of COVID, there are other authors who have found billing from their websites exclusively. You're probably going to have to sell more than one book or you're going to have to sell a bundle of books at a time.

You know, I know that [inaudible].com is a group that are selling middle grade fiction for kids and they sell a lot of bundles. And because of the way that they operate, their sales are almost exclusively from their website, is my understanding. So you know there's a lot to be said for once you find that area to be able to focus and have that through-line of sales.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Yeah, and Dave, Desert Book does a lot of stuff with their own website, I'm sure. What were some of the stuff you wanted to add?

Dave Kimball: Oh, I just had a question about those story bundles. How does one link up with other authors to become, to get their product in that story bundle, and then what's the distribution channel for that? Is that its own? I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with the story bundles, or do you still have to go through some of these other channels to sell that bundle in collaboration with other authors?

Melissa Dalton Martinez: So, there are a number of different ways you can do story bundles. One is actually, you can go to—Story Bundle is a website you can go to, and it allows you to work through them.

Your story bundles. And then you can also do it yourself.

Through Story Bundles, you can work with Book Funnel, for example, is one of the outlets that you can do it through, but also what I typically find is through the actual company Story Bundles. I see Draft2Digital also helps and they have a system that helps to bring authors together and to do that.

Now, really one of the best ways that I see authors do this is through getting out there and meeting other authors in like-minded groups. So, for example, if you're a member of a romance writing group but you know there's a lot of Regency romance writers and readers in the LDS market—and outside as well—but that's one place that a lot of folks will do that. And so really I highly encourage people to go to conferences, to meet up with other people, and find like-minded authors, because I think sometimes people look too much and say this is my competition, And really, you're in this together. Right? So, when you have a reader, they're not just going to read one book can be done.

They're going to continue to read and so it's to the benefit of everybody and especially, Dave, I know Desert Book does this too, where you guys bring authors together, right? **Dave Kimball:** Yeah, we try to create an environment where authors can get to know each other and work together and collaborate. One thing that we've been trying to do is not only link authors together, but authors and artists music artists and artists of all mediums, to collaborate across a number of different things. And so, yeah, I think the more people that you can get to know and the more ways you can leverage your circles of influence with each other and build something together, the more success you're going to have.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Absolutely.

Dave Kimball: Oh, I tell my kids all the time: I've had a lot of really cool experiences in life just because I've put myself in a position for them to happen. Not that I've tried to make them happen; a lot of stuff just falls in your lap. But you have to be in the place where it can fall into your lap. I've seen a lot of cool things, I've been able to experience and go a lot of cool places, just because I put myself out there, and that's it. Sometimes I found, sometimes book writers love to be in front of their computer, not in front of people.

And you've got to make yourself a little uncomfortable or a lot uncomfortable if you want to diversify. If you want to be successful and put yourself out there, get to know people. And I think that'll help a lot.

Marci Monson: I'll just add to that in two ways; that a lot of the cookbooks that we have we have found that author through another cookbook author who said here's who I published through.

And so just kind of getting to know—get in those places. We do a lot of Southern cookbooks, even though we're Utah-based because there's that connection of cookbook authors that tell each other about us. And then the second thing I was going to say is that something that we talk

about with our authors a lot is that you know where your audiences is, And that's where you need to meet them. And they're not going to get tired of you talking about your book because they like you and that's why they're following you on social media. That's why they are subscribed to your newsletter.

And they want to hear from you. So talk about your book, talk about it all the time in every place you can wherever your audience is. Because they're there for you. And so they will support you.

Because sometimes our authors get a little shy of, like, "oh, I don't want to just talk about my book," which probably you don't want to talk about your book all the time, but do talk about your book.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Right, well, and it's a lot easier when you are working with other people because you can help each other. You can promote each other's books and you become, I mean, you genuinely become friends too. I know when I was working at Covenants—like Covenant Books like 16 years ago, I'm still friends with the authors that I did marketing for 16 years ago.

And I still see them and just want to give them big hugs, but because of COVID, I'm not going to see them at this conference this time to get to give them big hugs. But I'm hugging them in my mind.

Adam, I wanted to see if you would talk about Kickstarter for a minute because I know for a lot of authors the concept of trying to do all of this and putting forth all of the money, it's a little overwhelming, but one way to be able to get yourself out there more is with Kickstarter. And you have some good experience with that, Adam. Right?

Adam Sidwell: I can talk about that for a bit. So, let me see if I can actually pull up a page here that might be of interest To everyone. So can I share screen? Yeah, so there you go. Okay. Sharing screen.

Way back in the day, I launched one of my books on Kickstarter, which was Fetch which is a picture book, and I was able to make that work. This was 2013.

And basically, the idea behind it is that if you've got a story that you want to launch, there are a rabid amount of Kickstarter fans who are buying products and it is essentially a marketplace that exists.

There are some things that are very important about how you approach that marketplace, but it is one where you put up a video like this here and you show your product in the beginning. And you say, look, this is 90% complete, I just need help with printing. In this case I was saying, here's some images from the book, I just need help with finishing out the money for printing and paying the illustrator.

And so we went on to fund this for about \$23,000 with 302 backers. And then this made me dive further into the Kickstarter space. I launched another of my books there.

And you can offer special prizes, you know, special rewards they can't get anywhere else because there's a direct connection between you and those consumers. So we went on to launch two anthologies on Kickstarter For a science fiction and a fantasy anthology. And then in addition, launched a novelization of a film called Mythica on Kickstarter. Now, just like any other storefront, you're going to have to drive the traffic to that store. Don't ever expect that you're just going to put that—I mean, imagine this: if you're going to slip your book in the shelf at Barnes and Noble, is anybody gonna find it? Probably not. Probably rarely, right? So, the same way, no one's going to find your link, unless you're promoting it and you're finding an audience. Now, one of the ways that this works is by cross branding with other Kickstarter artists or Kickstarter creators, to have them talk about you, you talk about them; build those alliances. We've had a fantastic time in this ecosystem, because then we went on to reach out to other creators who created board games, and we went to the successful ones—ones that we really like their content—one was Super Dungeon, and we loved what they made, we said, "hey, we'd love to do a book series with you." And there already were these fans that existed on Kickstarter, and the difference is that you own your fans, you have their emails.

You can send them messages when something new comes out, so that you can offer them a chance to purchase that. Now what I want to say is that initially, as an author, if you're launching your first time, you're going to have the good graces of your friends who are excited for you. They're going to buy your product to support you.

And you will come to a point where you hit a cusp, where you need to move beyond your friends to friends of friends, to people that don't even know you buying your products because they like. Because your friend pool is finite in how many products they can buy and you need to be able to go on and reach out further to others. But again, yeah. This is a great marketplace.

It's a thriving marketplace. It usually works for different types of products, but it's still working for books and graphic novels.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Yeah, absolutely. And it's also working if some of the attendees are musicians or our filmmakers, it is also working very well for musicians and filmmakers.

There is a group that I work with, and they had a movie called *Twice the Dream*, and they just had their Kickstarter finished and they were trying to raise \$50,000 to get started on the movie number two, and they did it. So, you know, it's still very much out there. So we've got about eight minutes left. Yeah. Marci.

Marci Monson: Can I just add to the Kickstarter? I was just going to say that, I know we're not the only publisher that does this, but we actually look on Kickstarter quite often to find new authors and to find new illustrators. We're publishing a book this spring, *Celestina the Astronaut Ballerina*, that we found on Kickstarter. And so we look there quite often. That's another reason to be on there.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Yeah, definitely. That's definitely a new route for distribution.

Yes. So with with the last few minutes, I just wanted to touch really quickly on some of the distribution—two different distribution things. One is if you are an indie author and you need a little bit of help getting into some of the big retailers. So we I mentioned Ingram earlier. But just because you're in Ingram, doesn't mean that you're getting in bookstores. Right.

There are literally millions of books. So you've got to do something. Right. And so all four of us here are also marketing people and something that you need to think about is what can you do to expand your physical distribution, not just in brick and mortar stores, but on their websites. Right? If you're going to do that, I can tell you, and I'm sure everyone here would agree, you need marketing, right? Do you want to buy a book if you don't have marketing? No. Publishers are going to want to know you want marketing, the stores are going to want to know you're going to do marketing. So make sure that when you're thinking, "hey, I want my book out there," and just like Adam mentioned, just because you put your book there doesn't mean it's going to sell. So you've got to do your marketing.

A couple of the most common distributors that folks here in Utah are familiar with are Snowy Peaks is one, or Life Beats, Ringmasters—they're all kind of under the same umbrella.

And Brigham Distributing is another one. And then you can also look at going to them on their own, like we mentioned.

But again, if you want to get into Seagullbook's store, for example, you need to be coming from a publisher or from a distributor.

It's not like it used to be where you could just talk to somebody at Seagull bookstore and they would bring your book in or even where you could do a submission on their website.

If you're not coming from a publisher or a distributor, you're going to have a really hard time getting in those stores.

And some of these stores like Deseret Book online, for example, they have their own subscription products. So this is something that you want to be considering as well, that Adam mentioned, is what are you doing with the distribution channels that you're in? So for example, with Deseret Book online, you can get a subscription and get eBooks from your subscription, and it's it's also an option with Amazon. But do you want to say something about your subscription model that Desert Book has online, Dave?

Dave Kimball: Yeah, we have—it's called Desert Bookshelf and depending on whether or not you're a platinum member, meaning that's our loyalty program, you can buy by the month or by the year, and you obviously you get bigger discounts if you do it by the year. And for a great price, let's say you're not a platinum member, and you buy month to month it's \$9.99 and the prices go down from there. Now with that subscription you get all of our audio books. The from the newest audiobooks to everything in our entire library at your fingertips at all times. It's not like the Audible subscription where you get for \$15 you get one credit a month. No, for \$9 or less, you get every single audio book we have and you get a huge proportion of our backlist eBooks readily at your fingertips as well. Not all of our brand new eBooks are free on there, but you do to get discounts and deals. Desert Bookshelf has been a way that we've just tried to, again, meet our customers where they are and provide for them opportunities to engage with our content in modern ways.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Awesome. Thank you. And then we just have three more minutes. So I'm going to just show this screen really fast. Adam and I talk about this in another panel, but if you want to see more audio book distribution options, this is something—I'm gonna make my screen a little bit bigger here for you all—so this is some other options that—

Dave Kimball: I'm sorry, one thing just to clarify. Just because we sell your audio book in our store doesn't mean that that's going to be free on Bookshelf. Those are books that we've published. So just to be really clear, I don't want to set false expectations about that, but you

can still have your book available on Bookshelf. If you distribute—if you sell your book through our stores as well. It's all part of the package that we're getting.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: Awesome. Thank you. Okay, so this really quick for you guys is just to show you—I've got to move—there's something covering my screen here then I can make this bigger. All right. Can you guys see this. Okay.

All right, here we go. So this is just to show you really quickly with audio book distribution there are other options, too. So if you're going to do an audio book outside of Amazon and Audible, there are more options. So ACX is the one that gets you on Amazon Audible and iTunes. However, you have other options. So another master distributor is Findaway Voices, and you can see there is a very long list associated with that.

And really, guys. You've just got to do your research. But at the end of the day, have a plan.

Don't just try to be everywhere and do everything, if you don't have a plan. So even Amazon offers exclusivity options and other folks do too. So if you're going to go exclusive, there are pros and cons. There are pros and cons to being exclusive with Amazon or non-exclusive So just make sure you're looking at that, whether you are a publisher or whether you're an indie author, because all these distribution channels are open to everybody, but maybe not everything on Deseret Book.

You've got to be in Deseret book stores, but keep in mind that there's a lot of things and you just, you need to do your research on it.

With that I'm just going to say if you guys have any questions, put them in the chat box and we will be here for the next 10 or 15 minutes to answer those questions for you guys online when this airs. Even though we're pre-recording it, we'll be there live. So do your marketing, guys! Do your marketing, and that's how you be successful in multiple distribution channels and I will leave it with that. Anyone else want to say anything?

Dave Kimball: Great being with you.

Melissa Dalton Martinez: That's fantastic.

Adam Sidwell: Glad to be on this panel with you all. Good luck to everybody out there. Thanks.