Reflection on Digital Design for Marketing —
Summer 2018 with Simon & Schuster Canada

by
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Abstract

This report examines the 2018 summer digital marketing campaign by Simon & Schuster Canada, during this report’s author’s professional placement. The core message of the report is that digital design skills are more necessary than ever for publishers. Firstly, an overview of the Simon & Schuster parent company is offered but the focus will be on the Canadian branch’s team in Toronto, Ontario. Secondly, the 2018 summer campaign will be discussed, with notes on the 2017 campaign and lessons for the 2019 campaign, and successful digital assets built in support of the 2018 summer campaign will be shared. Thirdly, two 2018 spring titles’ digital marketing plans will be featured as case studies: Ocean Meets Sky by the talented illustrator brothers Terry & Eric Fan for the Children’s section, and Come From Away by Genevieve Graham for the Adult one. The report concludes with a brief examination of reasons why publishing industry hopefuls need to include digital design skills in their professional repertoire. All figures and stats are accurate as of March 2019.

Keywords: digital, marketing, design, assets, campaign, skills, publishing
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Canadian book publishing is in fact a cultural ecosystem. The ecological metaphor is apt for an industry composed of multinational subsidiaries and indigenous firms of varying size, ambition and vocation scattered throughout the country, which together produce a literature rich in genres and in value to the reading public. Regardless of ownership, these publishers complement and nourish each other, especially given the way authors are discovered and developed, and the frequency with which they move from one house to another.

Roy MacSkimming, *The Perilous Trade*†
Introduction

The first social media site, Six Degrees, was created in 1997, and after the invention of blogging, social media exploded — triggered by the advent of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. In the years that followed, customers’ favourable attitude towards social media marketing changed business marketing preferences. In fact, social media marketing is now a medium in which billions of dollars are spent around the world.

While it is difficult to predict or plan success in online marketing – similar to how difficult it is to predict the success of a book – a publishing house can plan a marketing campaign by studying and analyzing digital trends and use those findings to design necessary digital assets. Whether working with a new or established author, the publishing house must do its due diligence in promoting the author’s work, and must do so by taking advantage of the multiple communication avenues popular in current times (both traditional, like newspapers and radios, and new media, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.).

To be able to do so, however, publishing industry hopefulels must embrace or improve their skills of digital design as part of their professional repertoire.

Over the last several decades, writing and editing, accounting and marketing skills

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have been key, but with the rise of social media, digital design has become just as important. As Roy MacSkimming writes in *The Perilous Trade* (quoted in the beginning), Canada is home to a multitude of publishing houses, most of them small to medium enterprises, and this report will argue that digital design skills have become an essential part of the marketing staff’s toolbelt.

First, the report will look at the history of Simon & Schuster Canada (S&S Ca), offering an overview of the parent company, followed by how the Toronto office came to be. Serving different markets and representing different creative voices north and south of the border, the Canadian and American branches have their own digital presence with their own social media channels and their own sets of followers. Month by month and year by year, both entities’ online audiences continue to expand and follower numbers are ever-growing.

Second, the report will focus on the marketing campaign that S&S Ca developed in the summer of 2018. The marketing plan was built from a seed idea to a full-fledged campaign around the theme of “Books On Vacation” and the company’s marketing staff worked together to implement a successful campaign: books for both the children and the adult sections were selected, photography tasks were assigned, texts to accompany photos were prepared, social media posts were released in a staggered fashion between June and August, and a summer giveaway contest was organized to encourage readers to interact with the campaign over the summer. Compared to the previous year’s summer campaign that was provincial, the online reach of the 2018 campaign spread nationwide. The campaign was successful for several reasons, including cross-Canada engagement, quality photography, planning for staggered posts released across social media
channels, and, importantly, the quality of the digital assets.

Third, this report will look at digital design skills necessary for online marketing campaigns developed by publishing houses for individual books. Two Canadian summer releases are discussed as case studies, the Fan Brothers’ children’s book *Ocean Meets Sky* and Genevieve Graham’s historical romance novel *Come From Away*. Similar to the multi-book seasonal campaign, both the children and adult title received thorough attention in terms of digital marketing and advertising. Planning was done in conjunction with the authors, who also promoted their work via their own social media channels. In addition, S&S Ca also reached out to their network of bloggers and social media influencers. In exchange for advance reader’s copies, these avid and loyal readers shared and re-shared online content that helped promote the titles.

Throughout the chapters, there are several concrete examples of the digital assets discussed above, showcased in support of the main argument, namely that digital design has become an instrumental part of a publisher’s marketing strategy. As part of the sales & marketing team, the author of this report was assigned several tasks related to digital design, such as the design of the campaign contest tailored to the summer reading community, as well as her own set of books to photograph, edit and prepare for social media releases. In addition, she helped build multiple banners showcasing summer release titles for the Canadian homepage, digital banners for authors looking to promote their books on their own platforms — all of these assets designed so that they would aid S&S Ca’s engagement with their online audience. The author was also tasked with the
research and creation of contacts and so-called “influencers” lists that could help spread the word in the digital realm about the publishing house’s upcoming titles.

Finally, this report concludes with thoughts on the success of the online reach of the 2018 summer campaign developed by Simon & Schuster Canada, and discusses multiple resources that publishing hopefuls may find helpful as they begin or develop their career in the publishing industry. These resources (e.g. Canva and Crello) have been created as a direct response to the gradual presence of brands on social media – and the design needs associated with their online personas – and they require minimal prior experience.
Chapter 1: Simon & Schuster Canada

1.1 Parent Company History

Simon & Schuster started when Richard L. Simon and Max Lincoln Schuster published the first collection of crossword puzzles and had immense success with it. Another significant milestone was the 1936 release of *How to Win Friends & Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. Since it was first published, the latter has sold more than 15 million copies, and continues to be on bestseller lists on a weekly basis even now, in 2018.\(^5\) The underlying modus operandi that has made the company a success has been their challenge of conventional publishing wisdom, by first generating ideas for books and only afterward assigning authors to write them.\(^6\) The company’s innovative and disruptive business minds over the years have led to the house now being part of the “Big Five” list of publishing houses, alongside Hachette, HarperCollins, MacMillan, and Penguin Random House.\(^7\)

This entrepreneurial spirit has defined the company from decade to decade. For example, during its earliest days, the advertising dollars that Essandess (as the house was commonly known in the 1920s) spent per book were five to ten times what most other publishers spent.\(^8\) Robert Gottlieb, who arrived in 1955, once again challenged the company by pushing it to publish books that were fresh, controversial, and occasionally a bit shocking, thus continuing its high ranking in the publishing industry. Further down the road, in 2005, Simon & Schuster acquired Strebor Books, an imprint founded by bestselling author Zane as a home for fellow African-American authors. This grew into a partnership between Atria and

\(^6\) Id.
\(^8\) supra 5

Another successful trait for Simon & Schuster as a publishing house is its ability to research and keep ahead of each technological development. While audiobooks and podcasts are now becoming a growing trend, Simon & Schuster Audio actually turned thirty in 2016. Of course, the audio business has undergone significant changes in said thirty years, but thanks to this endeavour, this branch of the company maintains a backlist of 2,600 active titles and now publishes approximately 200 new titles each year. At more than two million copies sold, Stephen R. Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* ranks as Simon & Schuster’s bestselling audiobook of all time.⁹

As for its online presence, Simon & Schuster made its first concerted foray onto the World Wide Web 70 years to the day after Richard L. Simon and Max Lincoln Schuster first opened its office, namely in January of 1996. Updated and rebranded consumer-oriented versions were relaunched in 2009 and 2018, and to this day, the website serves as both a marketing and a promotional vehicle, directly targeting readers through e-mail newsletters, interest groups, bestseller landing pages and author news.¹⁰

Equally valuable from a business perspective was Simon & Schuster’s anticipation of the market for digital books. In the early 2000s, the company embarked upon a massive project to digitize all the books on its frontlist and backlists, in order to be ready for the moment when consumers started to gravitate towards the ebook format. In addition, Simon & Schuster were the first publishing

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¹⁰ - *Id.*
house to publish an ebook as a digital exclusive by their prolific and world-renowned author, Stephen King. In 2009, income from ebooks was barely 3 percent of its total revenue, but as per the most recent estimate publically available of 2013, digital content accounted for nearly 30 percent of its worldwide revenue.\textsuperscript{11}

Alert to the significance of an online brand existence, Simon & Schuster has built a presence on all the current popular channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. As of March 2019, the publishing house has 144,351 followers on Facebook,\textsuperscript{12} 696,264 followers on Twitter,\textsuperscript{13} 140,136 on Instagram\textsuperscript{14} and 51,804 subscribers on YouTube.\textsuperscript{15} In reference to the latter, Simon & Schuster has been a leader amongst publishers in terms of the creation and distribution of video to promote its authors and their work. Entitled Studio4, the in-house production arm has created thousands of high definition videos, and the Canadian branch will sometimes discuss over conference calls their own video needs that the studio will then produce for them.

This brings the overview to our current years: in 2008, after a succession of talented executive leaders, Carolyn Reidy became president and CEO. Reidy, like many of the leaders before her, has also got her finger on the pulse and admits that the importance of having a digitally savvy staff will only increase in the years to come.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} supra 11
1.2 The Canadian Branch of Simon & Schuster

In the twenty-first century, the increasing globalization of commerce and culture, and the capacity for news and information to instantaneously reach a worldwide audience, have enabled international publishing companies to grow their presence and build an extensive distribution network in every corner of the globe. Some of the biggest changes to Simon & Schuster's international profile have happened here in Canada.17 Beginning in 1976, under a Canadian government mandate, Simon & Schuster titles were sold by General Publishing, and USA-imprint Pocket Books titles’ were distributed by Paperjacks, both of which were independently owned. In 1989, Paperjacks was renamed Distican and began handling distribution north of the border for all Simon & Schuster books and audios. In 2002, Simon & Schuster took ownership of its Canadian distribution when it acquired Distican and renamed it Simon & Schuster Canada (S&S Ca).18

In 2005, Kevin Hanson was brought on board as president of S&S Ca and continued to focus and refine the company's role as a seller and marketer of titles. The application of “Made in Canada” marketing campaigns for books of special appeal to the Canadian audience established the company as a force in the Canadian marketplace. The biggest change for S&S Ca’s status came in 2013, when Canada’s Heritage Ministry granted the company permission to expand its operations from the previous distribution of foreign titles to full-fledged editorial and publishing activities.19

CEO Kevin Hanson has talked about his passion for taking great Canadian books written by great Canadian writers across the Canada-US border and the oceans.20,21 Lobbying for this permission began with the company’s inception but

18 - Id.
19 - Id.
20 - Kevin Hanson, Simon and Fraser Student Guest Speech (November 2017).
21 - Kevin Hanson, Emerging Leaders Conference, Simon Fraser University (February 2018).
came after more than a decade, a month after the global merger of Penguin and Random House.\textsuperscript{22} Heritage Canada’s decision provided Canadian writers with opportunities that could have been reduced by the merger. With this capability to directly acquire and publish works by Canadian authors, S&S Ca has been able to compete with other local and international publishing houses and play a more significant role in serving Canadian authors and readers.

S&S Ca has published many great names in the Canadian literary landscape, such as Robyn Harding, Sarah Raughley, Iain Reid, Amy Stuart, Genevieve Graham, Ann. Y. K. Choi and many more.

1.3 Overview of Simon & Schuster Canada’s online presence

Similar to its parent company, S&S Ca has its own dedicated Canadian website (see Fig. 1 on next page for new and old version) as well as a Facebook, Twitter and Instagram page. Several marketing team members contribute in terms of the production of posts or digital banners, but different members of the team are in charge of channel updates. One marketing assistant is in charge of updating the website, another is in charge of the Instagram channel via their smartphone, and a third one manages the Facebook and Twitter posts.

In November 2018, the S&S Ca website was updated to a modern look (see Figure 1 on next page). The responsive design update answers to current digital needs, including a great mobile user experience (“responsive” in web design means that website pixel dimensions resize automatically depending on the device used). Both the former and current versions function as a marketing and promotional vehicle: each book’s page has a “Buy from Another Retailer” section that helps customers with their purchase. In addition, each page also has a button for “Amazon,” a second one for “Indigo,” as well as a third “Buy Local” one that relies on proximity-based internal parameters. Moreover, some book’s custom landing pages offer sample chapters, reading guides for book clubs, reviews and blurbs, author images, and other promotional material that further entices readers to purchase the book in either hardcopy or e-book version.

Social media channels are monitored on a daily basis by one marketing assistant. As of March 2019, the Facebook channel had 22,326 people who like it, of which 21,952 actually followed the page.23 On Instagram, there were 13,003 followers24 and on Twitter, 21,784 followers.25 Once a week, the marketing assistant shares a summary of online audience growth with the team. The tactic is reflective

of S&S Ca’s team-oriented environment, and helps keep all members of the sales & marketing team informed about online response to the work they contributed in each season’s campaign. Keeping track of these numbers, for example, is how the team recorded impression and click rates for the summer campaign of 2018. These numbers can then be used for comparison when the marketing team sets new goals for the 2019 campaign.

Fig. 1 — Screenshot of Simon & Schuster Canada’s Homepage, former version and new version
Chapter 2: Digital Design Skills for a Marketing Campaign

In 2017, S&S Ca designed a print campaign in partnership with a local franchise. This campaign resulted in great engagement across Ontario but did not involve or engage with readers in other provinces. By contrast, S&S Ca planned a nationwide campaign for 2018: a digital marketing campaign across all three social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). To serve the team’s vision and goals, digital design skills were essential for this edition, as they helped establish the theme and offered visual unity. This latter campaign also introduced personalized marketing as a goal, a new trend in marketing where a company invites interaction with its fans and followers. Analytics for impressions and click rates recorded by the responsible marketing assistant will act as a frame of reference for the 2019 campaign; the team will judge what worked and what can be improved, and in tracking the new numbers, will create comparison charts and graphs.

2.1 Short overview of the 2017 summer campaign

In 2017, S&S Ca partnered with Aroma, an Ontario-based espresso bar that opened its first location in 2007 in Toronto’s Annex neighbourhood, and expanded to nearly 50 cafés across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Southern and Western Ontario since. The campaign theme was the pairing of an Aroma beverage with a S&S Ca summer title. In order to promote the theme, the team agreed on the tag line “Read. Sip. Repeat.” (see Figure 2 on next page). S&S Ca prepared five in-store signs for the GTA stores that measured 22” × 28”, as well as thirty-four more signs that measured 8.5” × 11” for the other locations. In addition, they prepared seven mini-libraries: five for the GTA stores, and one for their Ottawa location.
For the campaign’s contest, the team prepared a link on the homepage that led to a custom landing page. In terms of online marketing, the team prepared only Twitter posts for digital marketing. The summer contest gained 515 entries in total over the full duration of the campaign. This campaign was successful locally but did not take into consideration all their Canadian readers. This point was taken into account when planning the 2018 campaign.

From a design point of view, the colour palette is another aspect that needed improvement. The red, grey and brown combination are a better fit to a fall or winter campaign, and bright colours (yellows, oranges, light blues and greens) to a summer campaign. The arrangement of elements is also a bit chaotic and scarce.
and the books are not well featured. When planning a project, artists and graphic designers consider basic elements of design, such as lines, shapes, textures, colours, and basic principles of design, such as balance, alignment, proximity, contrast, and space. These points of improvement were implemented into the 2018 design.

After the 2017 campaign, the sales & marketing team evaluated their work and summarized positive aspects and areas of improvement. They received great feedback from people that saw the signs in-store (visibility), and they reached a new public through their partnership. In addition, by bundling books together, they were able to group lesser-known books with well-known authors and therefore, increase their titles’ visibility.26 In looking ahead to the 2018 summer campaign, the marketing team wanted to expand the digital marketing reach and engage with all Canadian readers via a cohesive online marketing strategy.

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*N.B.:* There are a multitude of books written on the topic, such as *Graphic Design School* by David Dabner et al., *Graphic Design Manual: Principles and Practice* by Armin Hofmann, and even *The Non-Designer’s Design Book* by Robin Williams. Leafing through materials or browsing online through ideas is the best approach.

26 - Alexandra Boesterli, Email message to author, August 30th, 2018
2.2 The 2018 Summer Campaign

The 2018 summer campaign was planned in accordance with the lessons learned and goals established during the review of the 2017 campaign. The team’s first meeting in mid-May was dedicated to the brainstorm of possible creative directions. Ultimately, the chosen campaign theme was “Books on vacation.” Social media channel posts were planned for the period between June 1st – August 31st, and the hashtag #BooksOnVacation was shared across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The first step was building the banner for the campaign contest custom landing page. The author produced several iterations for the marketing team and after feedback sessions, the supervisors approved the warm, summery colour palette, friendly typeface and also procured the chosen image’s copyrights (see Figure 3).

![Banner](image.png)

Fig. 3 — Simon & Schuster Canada’s 2018 banner and colour palette (banner built by author)
Procuring and securing accurate copyrights for images and typefaces is an essential component, especially for publishing hopefuls that have little experience in design. The golden rule is to pay the correct fee (choice between standard and extended licenses) in the very beginning, so that the artist, photographer or creator behind the resource is correctly rewarded and/or attributed. In the case of S&S Ca, the image was acquired with credits through their “iStock by Getty Images” account.

The second step was to build the contest landing page and select titles from both the children/youth sections, as well as from the adult section (see Figure 4 below). This was done: to accommodate the Marketing team’s list of releases for

![Book A Vacation Image](image-url)

Fig. 4 — Simon & Schuster Canada’s 2018 banner and top part of contest custom landing page (banner built by author)
the summer season, and to appeal to the target audience of a summer campaign (e.g. summer vacation for students and planned holidays for the whole family). The marketing team of S&S Ca worked in a contributory-fashion, meaning that the books were divided into two or three titles per team member, and each team member submitted their entries to Trello, an online productivity platform built for team environments. A column of tasks was assigned specifically to the Summer Campaign #BooksOnVacation, and the posts were scheduled to be released in a staggered fashion on a nearly daily basis. Some team members, knowing that their scheduled time off would soon follow, even took their assigned books with them on vacation in order to diversify the looks of the backgrounds of each entry. Some books travelled as far as Chicago, LA, Mexico and Jamaica.

When a team member completed their photography assignment, they prepared their entry by “pinning a note” to this column. They uploaded their photo(s), and wrote a fun, summery, engaging description that included a specific set of hashtags. These hashtags were pre-planned in early June for several reasons: to aggregate posts, to help identify and track impressions and click rates, and to build a baseline for reference for the 2019 summer campaign engagement.

In addition, each prepared post incorporated links to authors’ websites and social media pages to build relationships over social media channels, and also featured direct purchase links. Just before finishing their entry into Trello, the team members made sure to update the post’s date to the correct release date. This way, even if someone was photographing their title in June but was preparing the post for an August release, the information and the work was readily available.

The next step was the daily release of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts (on business days). The photos featured the books against beach, dock, water sport activity and other such backgrounds, with the effect of a cohesive summer visual theme. They were also all photographed on sunny days, to ensure that the covers
Fig. 5 — Example of summer campaign posts for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with engagement data
were similarly well lit (see Figure 5 on previous page). In addition to the individual book posts, the adult titles were bundled together in “special release” images (shared via Facebook and Twitter). The author was asked to create fun, colourful and playful images that visualized the literal meaning of #BooksOnVacation. The two images were released as long weekend specials (see Figure 6 above).

At the end of the 2017 campaign, the marketing team recorded 515 Ontario-wide contest entries in total. The nationwide summer campaign of 2018, with an
online strategy spanning across all three social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), naturally bred far higher numbers. The marketing team recorded thousands of impressions from across Canada, as well as a 280% increase in contest entries, with a total of 2,076. For the 2019 summer campaign, this number can be used as a benchmark for success, with an established percentage (say 20% or 30% higher) as the new goal.

Another goal for the 2019 summer campaign will be higher engagement in terms of personalized marketing. In analysing the 2018 posts, the digital campaign did give S&S Ca a chance to interact with readers coast to coast. The team was happy to see some improvement in this regard, but few followers responded to the challenge by actually promoting and perpetuating the summer campaign’s hashtags. The team hopes to improve this aspect of audience interaction and communication in the 2019 summer campaign.

For the 2019 campaign, another point of improvement will be accuracy of hashtag spelling. This issue created some confusion over the weeks of the 2018 campaign, in that there was a misunderstanding over the actual spelling of the campaign theme. Some posts were uploaded as #BooksOnVacation (in the plural), whereas others were posted as #BookOnVacation (in the singular), while the initial banner had been approved as “Book A Vacation.” Since Instagram and Twitter bots are designed to aggregate posts by exact spelling only, this is an important matter to take into account. Perhaps creating a master list that includes exact hashtags for team members to simply copy/paste, and making this information available in a Trello post (or equivalent, as per publishing house’s habitual methods) pinned at the top of the assigned column will be a good addition to the campaign strategy.
2.3 How the digital landscape is changing

In recent years, the explosion of information at our fingertips has led to the ultimate battle for attention.\(^{27}\) What makes navigating the digital landscape even more complicated is the pace of change. In the last two years alone, for example, Google updated its algorithm 17 times.\(^{28}\) Given this, for publishing industry hopefuls to remain competitive in marketing their titles, it is important to adapt strategies to changes as they happen. Another summer task the author of this report was involved in provided some sample data in terms of user behaviour and marketing changes relevant to the field of publishing. The task over the summer included reviewing, cleaning up and organizing the information for accuracy, and curation of active users for S&S Ca’s network of book bloggers.

S&S Ca had an existing database that encompassed a network of bloggers, teachers and reviewers. The sales & marketing team had also recently prepared a marketing survey for readers across Canada. It included names, blog titles, social media handles, as well as channel follower numbers. These contacts offered details on their online personas to support their interest and “value” in reviewing and promoting S&S Ca titles (in exchange for early copies).

The task included several steps: to research appropriate data when answers were incomplete, to verify bloggers’ online activity, such as book reviews, cover releases or author interviews, and to highlight a selection of names that were active and “valuable” in terms of digitally spreading the word. After a month of research, what emerged was a small list of observations on changes in the book marketing niche of the digital landscape. First, while a vast majority of book review bloggers grew their social media channel presence in addition to their blog, some


discontinued their blogs altogether and instead, chose to focus their attention on their social media channels presence. Second, less traffic on a blog post led to less posts, and less posts with less traffic became less valuable, further pushing many book bloggers into social media channels, and thus transferring the former value of “blog traffic” into “channel followers.” Third, with this move to the social media channels trio, there is a tabula rasa opportunity for higher quality content. A vast number of these book review blogs featured images that were distorted, pixelated or poorly designed, whereas publishing houses can now take advantage of the established pixel dimensions required for cover images or shared posts on each channel. These dimensions are only a Google search away, and creative software resources like Canva and Crello even offer pre-established canvases built in the exact pixel dimension required by each social media channel. For example, for best quality, a single shared image on Twitter should be designed in a landscape format of 1200 pixels by 675 pixels.

In total, there were 343 blogs listed in the spreadsheet. Out of the 343, 25 blogs were discontinued in the last two years, meaning that the links were broken and the page no longer existed. Then 37 blogs still existed, meaning the links and pages could be found, but the pages appeared abandoned, with their last posts ranging from 2014–2017. The remaining 281 blogs still actively featured book material or author interviews, but these numbers will most likely continue to decrease over the next few years. All in all, this represents an 18% blog attrition rate, meaning that as of 2018, 1 in 5 book readers and bloggers no longer saw value in maintaining their blog websites, choosing social media channels instead.

Cultivating an online persona for book reviewers, in other words, is the constant, and the rapid rise of social media influence is the change. In fact, the scale of potential audience reach for “ordinary” people through social media is such that popularity and prominence no longer rest on the go-ahead from
traditional gatekeepers (editors, producers, etc.). Therefore, publishing houses must build connections and relationships with these influencers, and stay ahead of the curve in terms of digital design needs. As previously mentioned, publishing houses can also take advantage of social media channels’ structured content dimensions and offer book reviewers title material that is well designed, appearing as high quality, and using appropriate colours and legible text. In other words, the publishing house’s campaign must anticipate the needs of this new generation of tech-savvy digital–natives.

Another matter to take into consideration is that as it stands right now, a celebrity or social media influencer who has between three and seven million followers can charge business prices averaging $30,000 per Twitter post, while a vlogger with over 50,000 subscribers can earn $3,000–$5,000 per video. Although these numbers better reflect the American market, social influence in book marketing has grown in popularity in Canada as well, as statistically exhibited by the database review findings herein described.

Publishing industry staff, in particular, must be innovative in their marketing efforts due to limited resources (and staff, in some cases). Many resources are available online (some free) that teach how to tackle photo editing, design, and typography, i.e. tasks that will help their brand appeal to their contemporary audience. It is therefore wise for members of the publishing community to educate themselves in how to effectively communicate with the present–day reader, especially in this age, when children are born into a world of global–scale digital communication and “blink of an eye” information dispersion.

Chapter 3: Digital Design Skills for Marketing Books

In addition to being significant in creating successful seasonal multi-book campaigns, digital design skills are also valuable in promoting individual titles. Over the summer, S&S Ca released several titles that needed quality digital assets for online promotion. For example, the marketing team asked the author of this report to design digital banners for monthly updates on title releases for the company’s homepage, multiple formats of book mockups — featuring book quotes, blurbs or tag lines — built specifically so that authors would be able to promote their work via their own social media channels and websites, as well as Instagram InstaStories, a new feature kickstarted in June of 2018. These assets, similar to the summer campaign posts, helped increase title visibility, author recognition, and reader engagement.

In this chapter, two Canadian titles will be discussed as case studies for digital marketing campaigns and promotional digital assets for individual titles. One case study is from the Children’s section, entitled *Ocean Meets Sky*, and the other is from the Adult section, entitled *Come From Away*. Both titles appeared on Bestseller lists for their respective category and received great reviews in the media.

3.1 Canadian children’s title case study: *Ocean Meets Sky* by Terry & Eric Fan

On May 15th, 2018, S&S Ca released the new children’s book by writer and illustrator brothers Terry & Eric Fan. The brothers’ work is a blend of traditional and contemporary techniques, using ink or graphite mixed with digital tools.  

31 - “About Section,” The Fan Brothers, accessed November 12, 2018 http://www.thefanbrothers.com/about/
(see Figure 7). This splendid book, *Ocean Meets Sky*, followed their widely acclaimed debut picture book *The Night Gardener*.

Terry and Eric Fan both attended the Ontario College of Art and Design for formal art training and have both received multiple awards for their illustrative work. While one was born in Hawaii, and the other in Illinois, they now call Canada home and like many Canadian artists, intertwine the beauty of their heritage (in their case Asian) and worldly experience into their art (see Figure 7 below).

![Image](image-url)

*Fig. 7 — The cover for Ocean Meets Sky by Terry & Eric Fan*

S&S Ca anticipated *Ocean Meets Sky* to be a valuable title, and developed multiple digital assets showcasing the cover art. In fact, over the summer, the title received special marketing treatment in partnership with all Indigo stores across Canada. The event was entitled *Indigo Kids Presents: Ocean Meets Sky* and all 80 stores hosted the same event at the same time, 11 am on July 28th. In preparation for the Indigo event, the Marketing team prepared a digital poster to be featured on both theirs and Indigo’s Facebook page, as well as a trio of activity sheets — a colour page, a word search, and a “create your own ship” drawing page — based on the book’s art. A total of 150 copies were sent out to 78 individual locations. All stores across Canada received their material in time for children to be invited to Indigo stores, to join Finn on his adventure, and to let their imagination and creativity loose.

In addition, the video team of Simon & Schuster also built an animated short
video of the cover. Over nine seconds, the elements on the cover have motion attributes that add life to the whimsical world. The video was shared across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. While the cover is captivating in person, this design step took advantage of online marketing and helped the title with more visibility and reach. It is worthwhile to note that such innovative and creative marketing choices require a good grasp of design software and the skills associated with them. With digital design skills, there are many options open to publishers

![Image of two sample spreads from Ocean Meets Sky by Terry & Eric Fan]

*Fig. 8 — Two sample spreads from Ocean Meets Sky by Terry & Eric Fan*

_N.B. Do go see the rest at [http://www.simonandschuster.ca/books/Ocean-Meets-Sky/Terry-Fan/9781481470377](http://www.simonandschuster.ca/books/Ocean-Meets-Sky/Terry-Fan/9781481470377) or better yet, find an Indigo near you and examine a hard copy*
for how they can advertise their titles online, including the advantage of motion graphics that this video featured.

Over the summer months, thanks to S&S Ca’s marketing efforts in promoting it, *Ocean Meets Sky* garnered great praise from the Winnipeg Free Press, the School Library Journal and the New York Times, amongst others. The publishing house used the book’s artistic illustrations as the basis of an image-heavy marketing campaign. The authors’ work as Canadian illustrators and now writers proved a great asset for S&S Ca, and on October 3rd, their hard work was well rewarded, as well, when it was announced that they were short-listed for the 2018 Governor General’s Award in the category of “Young people’s literature, illustrated.”

Given this children title’s marketing potential, S&S Ca dedicated specific attention to a tailored marketing campaign, which required multiple digital assets, in multiple formats necessary for all social media channels. Not only did they prepare marketing items to promote the title, but they also organized a cross-Canada marketing campaign in partnership with Indigo stores to feature and highlight the authors’ artistic design. The central focus of each digital design item was the book cover, which ensured high recognition and positive response across social media platforms, but each promotional item needed to be crafted and calibrated to maintain a uniform high quality across the board.

32 - Jessica Scott, Email message to author, October 10th, 2018
3.2 Canadian adult title’s case study: *Come From Away* by Genevieve Graham

An equally valuable Canadian voice, Genevieve Graham was born in Toronto, but at the age of 27 she relocated to Alberta where she built a family with her loving partner. Then in 2008, the couple wanted a slower, calmer lifestyle, and because Graham had done a lot of reading and research on Scotland for her first three novels, she suggested they settle their lives in Nova Scotia. This move challenged her to ask herself, “Why is it that we know so much about American history and European history, but we don’t know our own?,” and she made it a personal mission to switch her historical fiction writing to a Canadian focus. Her following three books, *Promises to Keep*, *Tides of Honour*, and *Come from Away*, are all centred around Canadian events, such as the expulsion of Acadians in 1755 or the Halifax explosion in December 1917. *Come from Away* was inspired by local stories about German U-boats skulking around Halifax during the Second World War years. What is fascinating about this story, and what sets it apart, is that the whole novel is a development of a local tale that was told to Graham by multiple descendants in the Halifax community.

To position the books in the market, S&S Ca chose to unify Graham’s books’ look (see Figure 9 on next page). By doing this, the covers conveyed that they belonged to the same author and the same genre. The same S&S Ca designer prepared all three covers, employing the same colour palette and the same typeface, thus ensuring a consistency in production value. For the print production files, the designer included two extra layers for the lettering treatment used for the title: the first established the typeface, the second signalled embossing to the print

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34 - *Id.*
house, and the third layer signalled gloss varnish. As of April 2019, a fourth title, with the same production features, will hit stores, and all four books will offer the same feel and texture to new and loyal readers. This marketing strategy was pre-planned so that a reader picking up any one title would easily recognize Graham’s other titles and consider them for purchase, too.

There are also few elements on the cover: a picture for background, a title that stands out, the author name and a selling tag line. Compared to romance novels on the market, these books stand apart as more serious in content. With this simple elegance, S&S Ca targeted a Canadian reader that is looking, perhaps, for more than just a typical love story; perhaps a reader thirsting for something more classy and more intellectually-rewarding in nature. In fact, as part of the marketing package of the novel, a Reading Group Guide that offers further information and challenges readers to discuss different topics in the book was created with this target audience in mind. The guide is available several ways: at the end of the

Fig. 9 — Genevieve Graham’s covers designed by Elizabeth Whitehead at Simon & Schuster Canada
hardcopy book, at the end of the e-book, as well as for free on S&S Ca’s title page.  

As for the digital marketing campaign component, advanced reader copies (commonly known as ARCs) were sent out as early as January to encourage social media conversation, and the title’s page on the website offered quotes, blurbs, as well as both an author picture and a book picture in high-resolution, available for download by any book reviewer. These elements helped reviewers build their own digital assets for the title’s promotion.

S&S Ca also built the author her own custom landing page, in addition to her pre-existing author website. The marketing and design teams also prepared digital assets for Graham, including different format banners tailored for each social media channel release. All of these maintained the visual thematic of the covers for easy recognition and “brand image” unity. And with Graham very active on her own social media channels (she has an author page on Facebook, as well as a Twitter and Instagram page), there was increased engagement with readers.

Additionally, assets were built and released in support of several marketing campaigns: the book was included in the Mother’s Day promo, in the KOBO Romance promo, and as a one-day KOBO deal, priced at $2.99 (versus regular list price of $22). Come from Away was also featured prominently in newsletters and Kobo’s The Bright Side (a romantic titles’ dedicated page with books and articles). KOBO ads have their own specific pixel dimension that the design team followed.

Furthermore, the marketing team prepared the correct ad size and arranged for both Facebook and Twitter paid advertising between April 24th–May 4th. And for the period April 16th–May 4th, they had a digital banner advertising Graham’s Timeless tour that was organized in conjunction with author Susanna Kearsley.

The two authors travelled together to Moncton, Halifax, Whitby, Winnipeg, and

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35 - Here is the full Reading Guide for those with piqued interests: http://www.simonandschuster.ca/books/Come-from-Away/Genevieve-Graham/9781501142895/reading_group_guide

N.B.: Better yet, consider discovering more about Canadian history by reading her books.

36 - Her website can be visited at www.genevievegraham.com.
Calgary to promote their books (they had been released on the same day). To support this, digital advertising was built for Graham’s appearance at the annual two-day Lunenberg Literary Festival (she spoke on September 29th in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia).

All of these marketing appearances, in-person for the festival and digitally for all the fitting marketing campaigns, helped S&S Ca and Genevieve Graham grow the title’s visibility and online reach. The digital design assets, fashioned in the same style, helped readers develop familiarity and recognition, and over the summer months, the book received both paid and organic online advertising. Both S&S Ca and Genevieve Graham accorded much attention to the quality of the design assets that helped tie all campaigns together in a uniform “simple but elegant” look.
3.3 Meeting the growing need for digital skills

As seen in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, to support a nationwide campaign for a (or any) title, a publishing house must prepare a multitude of design assets, either for online promotion or for print production. Having digital design skills goes hand in hand with digital marketing savvy. Not to mention that year by year, online audiences are gradually growing, so publishing houses have to maintain a fluid, flexible attitude in response to their demographics. To meet the growing need for digital skills, several resources will become essential to publishing hopefuls or publishing staff. For those looking to learn the skill inside out, the most professional tools are the Adobe Creative Suite: Photoshop for image manipulation, Illustrator for vectors and illustrations, and InDesign for putting images, illustrations, and text together in a final product. For those unable to afford the high fees associated with subscription, there are free or low-cost resources that have become available online in just the last year. The most popular are: Canva, Crello, Easil, Stencil, and they all respond to design needs in a similar fashion: free templates pre-sized to each social media channel pixel dimension requirement, or for a low cost (typically $1-5), access to a larger selection of design assets. In addition, there are templates created for customization, and a user with less experience can easily navigate the steps necessary for image and text upload. There are some risks associated with the use of such resources, such as relying on the same material and losing originality and design diversity in time, as well as doubling content against another brand, or in the worst case, doubling content against a brand that does not have a good reputation. For these reasons, it is always better, whenever possible, to create images in-house, or at least to pay the correct copyright fee and purchase resources to customize.

37 - Googling these resources and learning opportunities will show at least thirty more options, and similar online businesses continue to crop up in this fast-paced digital landscape.
Conclusion

Simon and Schuster Canada approached the goals for the 2018 summer campaign with a clear strategy in mind. Whereas the previous year, they relied on a local partnership that spanned across Ontario only, the marketing team had to increase their efforts and responsibilities to meet the demands for a nationwide campaign. Most importantly, digital design skills were essential to building a successful, unified visual theme for their campaign. For example, the author of this report used her design skills to analyze, interpret and create several creative directions for “the look” the team wanted. She recommended a bright colour palette, a specific font dedicated to the campaign, and the purchase of an image that fit their vision (and budget). These initial steps were relevant because after deliberation and feedback, the final approved versions set the tone for the rest of the summer, i.e. these digital assets became central to the campaign. Once posted, the marketing team began collecting and recording impression and click rates, numbers that can be used as benchmark for the 2019 summer campaign.

Similarly, creating quality digital design assets helped promote S&S Ca individual titles, as well. Whether for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or in support of the InstaStory initiative that was kicked off in June, the team needed more than 30 mock-up designs built for the promotion of their summer releases. These digital assets benefited both S&S Ca efforts, as well as the authors themselves, as they, too, are active participants in the digital communication and promotion of titles.

For S&S Ca marketing campaigns to succeed in growing their reach and visibility, adopting better digital design skills was a very important step forward. For publishing houses across Canada, the same stands true. For publishing students entering the field, the same stands true. In this day and age, digital design skills in the publishing field are as important as writing, editing and accounting skills.
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