Self-Published Authors and the

Production and Distribution of Audiobooks

by

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ABSTRACT

The lack of clarity on the audiobook publishing processes for self-published authors leaves a potential gap in the Canadian market for the creation of a new independent audiobook production service. Due to the rising popularity of audiobooks, there is a wealth of online resources available, but they offer conflicting advice and highly variable pricing information, leaving self-published authors unsure of where to start. This research presents possible audiobook production solutions for indie authors. Self-published authors were surveyed and interviewed, in order to uncover their thoughts about audiobooks as well as their priorities involved with creating an audiobook of their own. This research is analyzed alongside a literature review of current audiobook production and market trends. The audiobook production solutions proposed in this report focus on the service offerings of a specific company called TSPA The Self Publishing Agency Inc. for whom this research was initiated. This research also aims to benefit the wider publishing industry in Canada, to help foster a healthy and prosperous audiobook market.

KEY WORDS: audiobooks, audiobook production, indie audiobooks, indie authors, self publishing, self-published authors

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report embarks on both primary and secondary research initiatives to try to determine what an audiobook production program should look like in order to support self-published authors. More specifically, what features, processes and services should be included in the publishing of an independent audiobook and how should those services be conducted to best suit these authors. This report is the result of both a professional internship placement at TSPA The Self Publishing Agency Inc. (TSPA) where the researcher was tasked with assisting in the creation of an audiobook service offering, and the additional research that was conducted once the placement was completed.

With an evolving industry that is still in its infancy (not taking into account the long history of audio to CD or floppy disc, but rather the current state of digital downloads) there is a lot of room to grow. This report does not intend to provide a conclusive solution or guide to follow for companies who want to sell audiobook production services. This is an overview of potential opportunities to support self-published authors in their audiobook publishing endeavors.

Part A of this report outlines the key findings from a literature review, which includes stats about the industry, information about production and distribution, as well as a dive into Amazon's dominance in the self publishing services industry. Primary research was also conducted through a survey and series of interviews with indie authors. Clients of TSPA were approached by email to participate in the survey and interview. Additional survey participants were sourced through recruitment messages posted in literary and business based Facebook Groups like YVR Authors and Girl Gang. The primary research asked questions of self-published authors that uncovered their perceptions about creating an audiobook, what they know about the process, as well as the various barriers that stand in their way. Part B then discusses the new model that is put forth by TSPA along with additional production solutions and recommendations. These solutions are based on the research outlined in this report, as well as discussions that took place during the professional placement with TSPA. The terms self-published author and indie author are

used interchangeably in this report to represent any author who has published their book independently without receiving an advance or support from a traditional publishing house.

1.1 What is The Self Publishing Agency

The Self Publishing Agency (TSPA) is a Vancouver-based company that works with self-published authors around the world, offering a variety of publishing related support services. Authors purchase TSPA's services while maintaining the copyright to their work. The agency aims to be a one-stop-shop for authors who are looking to professionally publish by making the whole process as seamless, accessible and transparent as possible. This includes coaching and project management, teaming authors up with professional editors and book designers, working with print vendors and consulting on media, marketing and launch strategies. As is stated on TSPA's website, "We connect writers with vetted professional book designers, editors and marketers to make your book the best version of itself."[1] These professionals work with TSPA on a project by project basis. As TSPA is the only publishing agency in Canada where authors select their editors and designers based on style, preference and budget, these professionals are hired as contractors via the agency.

Hiring TSPA ensures that the author has an industry professional on their side to help clarify industry jargon and navigate the process from beginning to end, ensuring the author has a personalized publishing experience. TSPA produces printed books and ebook editions for their authors, but with the rising popularity of audiobooks, authors have started to ask TSPA about opportunities for publishing their print books in audio form.

I worked at TSPA as an intern for my professional placement from May 2019 to December 2019. I was part of a number of exciting initiatives with the company during that period, one of which was helping determine how TSPA would operate the new audiobook production component of their business. This required researching how audiobooks are made, figuring out how to build the capacity within the team, and testing the model on a

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1 "About Us," The Self Publishing Agency, August 20, 2019, https://theselfpublishingagency.com/about/.

live audiobook project. The primary and secondary research within this report was done in addition to that initial exploration, after the placement concluded.

PART A

2.0 THE CURRENT AUDIOBOOK LANDSCAPE – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Audiobooks are one of the latest publishing trends that are being watched closely. Many critics predicted the end of print books when ebooks first came around, but it soon became clear that not all readers would jump ship to the new digital mode of reading. Though ereaders became widely adopted, the sales of ebooks have no overtaken the sales of print books. The industry has learned from the past and that same misjudgement has not been made with audiobooks. Like ebooks, audiobooks are simply another format for readers to use depending on their needs and preferences. Introducing another format takes some overall market share from other formats, but it also expands the market and reaches new areas that ebooks and print books haven't addressed yet. Think of all the new use cases of audiobooks; they can help reach many audiences including the elderly, people with perceptual disabilities, and those who aren't readers in the traditional sense, but now find themselves reading more books than ever by listening. The ability to multitask while reading is also connecting books to a new audience who didn't think they had time to read. As a publishing agency, it's important to keep up with industry trends in order to help authors produce books that serve these emerging markets.

2.1 Audiobook Stats

Audiobooks are a publishing format that can't be ignored. While audiobooks have been around for a long time on tape and CD, the wide adoption of smartphones including the iPhone in 2007, has made audiobooks more accessible than ever, fuelling their continued

growth.[2] By 2008 the growth was already at 8-10% year over year for four years straight, which is far faster than the growth seen by the book publishing industry as a whole.[3] Audiobooks however, don't have very high unit sales in Canada, with most titles remaining under 2,000 copies sold as reported in 2008.[4] As of the first half of 2020, audiobooks sit at around 5% of the total book units purchased in Canada.[5] Because of this, it can be hard for small trade presses to see a return on their investment in making audiobook editions of their titles. Publishing an audiobook is an expensive endeavour, yet the growth in this area is still appealing to publishers, making it hard to ignore the opportunity to creating audio for their readers.[6] Having a print book or ebook that has risen in the bestseller charts can really drive audiobook sales of the same title.[7] This can help publishers decide which titles may be worth turning into audiobooks.

This section will focus on the findings from two BookNet Canada surveys on the audiobook market. The first in 2015, is a survey of Canadian readers and their attitudes towards audiobooks and their usage habits to determine who listens to audiobooks, while the 2018 study specifically surveyed 449 adult Canadians who have listened to an audiobook in the past year. According to BookNet Canada, "As of mid-2018, audiobooks account for 4% of all book sales, which is up 2% from the same time [the previous] year."[8] Despite this low percentage, in the 2018 survey, 37% of respondents reported they are listening to audiobooks "one to several" times a week.[9] Growth is happening more quickly in the United States,

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2 Adam Sockel, "The Statistics behind Audiobooks' Continued Growth," Perspectives on Reading, June 2018, https://perspectivesonreading.com/the-statistics-behind-audiobooks-continued-growth/.

3 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," *Library and Archives Canada* (2008): 3, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/219810

4 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 15.

5 Noah Genner, "2020 Canadian Book Market Half-Year Review," (BookNet Canada, August 27, 2020), https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/8/27/2020-canadian-book-market-half-year-review?utm_source=BookNet+Canada+eNews.

6 Ryan Porter, "Can the audiobook go indie?: Small press leads charge to get independent Canadian publishers a piece of the audiobook boom," *Toronto Star* (Toronto, ON), Jul. 2, 2016.

7 Ryan Joe, "The State of Indie Audiobooks," *Publishers Weekly*, June 24, 2016, https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/70745-the-state-of-indie-audiobooks.html.

8 "Readers Are Listening: Audiobook Use in Canada 2018" (BookNet Canada, 2018), https://www.booknetcanada.ca/readers-are-listening?, 8.

9 "Readers Are Listening," 11.

which is made clear by the fact that audiobooks are now out-earning the mass-market paperback category.[10]

Audiobooks are an important format that is helping reach an underserved audience. Jessica Albert, the audiobook manager at ECW Press, believes the format may be helping bring a new audience of Canadians into the book market by offering a way to read on the go while they are multitasking, a group of people who may have felt that they didn't have time to read.[11] In the 2018 BookNet survey, most respondents choose to listen to audiobooks so they can multitask or to pass the time while driving, while others choose the format so they can consume more books or because they enjoy when someone reads to them.[12] More than 50% of audiobook listeners, "listen only" without doing any other activity, while others listen while doing housework or cleaning or to help them fall asleep.[13] General reasons for use aren't shifting much as seen between the 2015 and 2018 reports by BookNet, but a notable change that is happening is with the devices that readers use to consume audio. Almost half of participants now use their phones to listen to audiobooks which has sky-rocketed past tablet usage in previous years.[14] Thirty-six percent of audiobook listeners in 2015 said they listen to the audiobooks of books that they have already read.[15] This is an interesting insight for companies like TSPA who could help their clients create both audio and print books and bundle them together.

The way in which audiobooks are getting discovered is also changing; people are no longer just relying on their friends for recommendations.[16] Canadians are finding it easier to find the titles they're looking for in audio through online retailers as well as bestseller

10 Ryan Porter, "How Canadian Voice Actors Are Cracking the Booming Audiobook Market," *The Globe and Mail*, July 12, 2018, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-how-canadian-voice-actors-are-cracking-the-booming-audio book-market/.

11 Lynn Desjardins, "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada," Radio Canada International, August 7, 2018, https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2018/08/07/digital-recordings-books-canadian/.

12 "Readers Are Listening," 13.

13 "Readers Are Listening," 13-14.

14 "Readers Are Listening," 15.

15 "Listen Up: Audiobook Use in Canada 2015" (BookNet Canada, March 2015), https://www.booknetcanada.ca/listen-up, 9.

16 "Readers Are Listening," 23-25.

lists, likely due to new lists like The New York Times Audio bestseller lists.[17] In terms of acquisition, more and more Canadians are buying their audiobooks from online retailers versus downloading and streaming them for free.[18] Of those who listen to audiobooks, a quarter have reported using subscription services.[19] Audiobooks downloaded from the Public Library OverDrive system are also on a steady rise.[20] The top channel is Amazon, followed by YouTube, Audible, Indigo, iTunes/Apple iBooks, Google Play and Kobo, and listeners are paying more money for audio than they were previously.[21]

When it comes to genres, fiction (especially fantasy/sci-Fi) was the most popular for audiobooks, followed by mystery and detective, action (which includes thrillers), then romance, and historical fiction.[22] These also tend to be popular self published genres. This is verified by author Edward E. Robertson who did his own analysis of the top 100 bestselling books within each Amazon fiction category. The results are for print books only, but they provide an indication of the popularity of self published titles by showing the percentages of self-published authors in each category of bestsellers. Robertson found that 49% of romance titles were self published along with 56% in sci-fi and 49% in fantasy.[23] Biography and autobiography tops the non-fiction sector,[24] which is great news for TSPA since many of their authors have already published print books and ebooks in this category, and may be interested in turing their stories into the audio format. Penguin Random House Canada (PRHC) is going to start the audio production of some poetry as well as picture books in the near future, two categories that are seemingly more difficult to transition to an audio

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17 "Readers Are Listening," 23-25.

18 "Readers Are Listening," 28-29.

19 "Readers Are Listening," 29.

20 "Readers Are Listening," 28-29.

21 "Readers Are Listening," 30-31.

22 "Listen Up," 19.

23 Edward W Robertson, "Self-Publishing's Share of the Kindle Market by Genre," Edward W. Robertson, 2014, http://edwardwrobertson.com/self-publishing/self-publishings-share-of-the-kindle-market-by-genre/.

24 "Readers Are Listening," 19.

format. When asked how it will unfold, Ann Jansen, Director of Audiobook Production responded with, "We'll figure it out!"[25]

BookNet Canada's data on the features most commonly used with audiobooks is essential for understanding how Canadians are listening to audiobooks. 34% say they use the sample feature before acquiring an audiobook, 28% use bookmarks, 19% use smart rewinding, 14% use sleep timers, and another 14% listen at a faster speed. Many participants also expressed interest in background sounds or music added to their audiobooks. It is also clear that the narrator choice is very important to the success of an audiobook with 32% of respondents agreeing that they would stop listening to an audiobook if they didn't like the narrator and that they prefer emotional voices over monotone ones.[26]

2.2 Audiobook Production

Services for publishing and producing an audiobook in Canada has been slow to take off with very few players in the market by 2015, despite the fact that audiobooks have been showing stead growth for close to a decade and the country has a wealth of voice over and editing talent to utilize.[27] Canadian owned publishers have not been producing as much digital content as their American counterparts or multinational competitors due to a lack of capital and staff support.[28] Of 1.1 million titles that were in BookNet Canada's BiblioShare records as of 2014, only 21,650 are recorded as audiobooks with less than 400 with Canadian contributors attributed to them, but that number has grown to 140,284 audiobooks by 2018, 1329 of which were authored by Canadians.[29,30] Canadians are apparently seeking Canadian-driven content that is produced, narrated and written by Canadians.[31] It is likely

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25 "Case Study: Penguin Random House Canada's Audiobook Program - Tech Forum 2019," BookNet Canada, April 29, 2019, video, 42:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5DICJN8xhk&list=PLRthkZj3fAc3DXfR7-Zl3sguRhXU_xPqX &index=6.

26 "Readers Are Listening," 20-22.

27 Ryan Porter, "Can the audiobook go indie?"

28 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 4.

29 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 6.

30 "Readers Are Listening," 26.

31 Lynn Desjardins, "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada."

becasue of these low stats that small presses and large multinational houses alike are figuring out how to produce audiobooks as efficiently as they can. As of 2018, "61% of Canadian publishers are producing audiobooks, up from a mere 16% in 2015."[32]

The costs to produce an audiobook can vary greatly, from a full commercial production upwards of $10,000, down to $1,500 using volunteer voice over artists.[33] It is in part due to the large upfront costs of getting a studio set-up for audiobook production, that there hasn't been incredibly fast growth in the number of audiobooks that are getting produced every year.[34]

ECW Press was awarded funding from the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC) in 2016 to use Canadian voice talent from The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) to produce 100 audiobooks from a grouping of 21 small publishers.[35] This has made them one of the few players in the Canadian audiobook production industry. According to author Lesley Krueger who has published an audiobook through ECW, the grant has made it much more accessible for indie presses to produce audiobooks by offering $1500 for each book. The voice talent is then paid both in royalties from the audiobook sales, as well as $100 per every hour of finished audio.[36] The author then gets approximately 50% of the royalties depending on the contracts that they have signed, with the rest being used to offset the production costs.[37]

In September 2017, PRHC launched their Toronto-based in-house studio for their audiobook production program and as of July 2018 they had recorded 50 audiobooks, aiming to use as much Canadian voice talent as they could.[38],[39] They started with 17 titles and

32 "Readers Are Listening," BookNet Canada, October 15, 2018, https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2018/10/16/readers-are-listening.

33 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 15.

34 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 16.

35 Ryan Porter, "How Canadian Voice Actors Are Cracking the Booming Audiobook Market."

36 Lesley Krueger, "Calling All Writers to an Audio Book Project," Open Book, June 10, 2017, http://open-book.ca/Writer-in-Residence/Archives/Lesley-Krueger/Calling-All-Writers-to-an-Audio-Book-Project.

37 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada,"

38 Victoria Ahearn, "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada as Publishers Jump on the Trend," *National Post* (The Canadian Press, July 23, 2018), https://nationalpost.com/pmn/entertainment-pmn/books-entertainment-pmn/audiobooks-growing-in-popularity-in-canada-as-publishers-jump-on-the-trend.

39 Ryan Porter, "How Canadian Voice Actors Are Cracking the Booming Audiobook Market."

felt that there were many bestsellers in their backlist as well as new titles that would make a great fit for audio. Before launching their own studio, PRHC was using various private studios across the country to produce their audiobooks.[40]

During a panel at BookNet Canada's 2019 Tech Forum conference, PRHC's Deputy publisher Marion Garner and Ann Jansen, Director of Audiobook Production, discussed how they got their in-house audiobook production capabilities established. They noted how new the industry is in Canada and how many of the professionals that they began to hire were new to the format themselves. They all had to learn together, since very few people already had prior audiobook experience. They learned a lot about the long "marathon" of recording an audiobook and the number of days involved. Despite the steep learning curve, actors were getting excited about the potential of this new opportunity.[41]

The scale of production at PRHC is larger than what TSPA would be able to conduct, but it's interesting to note the large number of people involved in their process, such as audio engineers, audio directors and casting directors, to ensure they get the narrator and tone of voice for their books just right. They explain the importance of aiming to have audio released at the same time as the printed version of the book and how hard they are working to complete audiobooks within six to eight weeks. Despite everything that they have in place, PRHC still outsources most of the post production and editing of their audiobooks. It is also interesting that PRHC has no intention to sell audiobooks direct-to-consumer. Even a large company like PRHC sees no reason to compete with the existing distribution giants.[42]

The Canadian publishing industry is slowly starting to get into audiobook production, but it's too early on in its development to know how these investments will pan out. What is clear, is that since the market interest is rising overall, it's an important consideration for publishers big and small across the country to have titles made into audiobooks. There will be a portion of their audiences who will be looking for their books in the audio format.

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40 Sue Carter, "Penguin Random House Canada Launches Audiobook Program," *Quill and Quire*, September 13, 2017, https://quillandquire.com/omni/penguin-random-house-canada-launches-audiobook-program/.
41 "Case Study: Penguin Random House Canada's Audiobook Program."
42 "Case Study: Penguin Random House Canada's Audiobook Program."

The actual production of a simple audiobook itself, without a large cast of characters, is quite simple from a audio engineering perspective. Audio engineers and editors have the capability to piece together and refine simple audio files, with the odd laying in of music or sound effects if required. These are skills that are transferable from other existing industries, indicating that these professionals such as audio engineers do exist in Canada. There are many players in the production and editing market that will cast and narrate books for trade publishers and self-published authors alike such as Denyan Audio, Pro Audio Voices and Spoke in the US, but they are more difficult to find in Canada.

Voice talent choice and the time it takes to read and record an audiobook is an important aspect of production to navigate. Not all authors are suitable for recording their audiobook if they don't have the specific skills to maintain an engaging voice, properly enunciate words or read different voices, accents and genders.[43] PRHC will use authors for their books if they happen to have a great clear voice or if they are the best fit for their own memoir, but it's something that needs to be considered wholly.[44] They use members of ACTRA and other performance actors for their voice work and recognize that finding talent for this particular work in Canada is not as sophisticated as other markets like the US that have platforms like Ahab (Penguin Random House Audio's online audiobook narrator database) in place, where voice talent can easily post their auditions making the process for finding such talent a lot easier.[45] ACTRA has however started to support its members in learning more about audiobook production and getting them involved in the industry.[46] Canadian readers want Canadian content to be done right with the correct Canadian accents and pronunciations that American voice over artists may not get right.[47]

Author Brad Borkan is a self published audiobook success story. He started by trying to record his own voice but quickly realized that he was not the right voice for the job.[48]

43 "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada as Publishers Jump on the Trend."
44 "Case Study: Penguin Random House Canada's Audiobook Program."
45 "Case Study: Penguin Random House Canada's Audiobook Program."
46 "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada as Publishers Jump on the Trend."
47 Lynn Desjardins, "Audiobooks Growing in Popularity in Canada."
48 Brad Borkan, "Self-Publishing Success Story: Indie Audiobook Is Finalist for Voice Arts Award," Alliance of Independent Authors, December 2, 2018, https://selfpublishingadvice.org/voice-arts-indie-author/.

Borkan stated, "Reading text into a microphone takes tremendous skill – some of which you might be born with, but most of which you have to learn – how to control your breathing, pacing, etc. It also requires a high quality sound studio which can be quite expensive to rent." He then started to look around for a voice actor and put a lot of thought into the sound of the voice that would best represent his book *When your Life Depends On It, Extreme Decision Making Lessons from the Antarctic*. It was his dedication and the great talent and precision of his voice actor Dennis Kleinman that put the book on the finalist list for the Voice Arts Awards in 2018 alongside popular trade published works. Hiring a voice actor ensures a better experience for readers, leading to better reviews (and fewer complaints about issues with the narration), helping it compete with audiobooks that have been professionally produced by production companies and trade publishers. Though this is the case, the investment is high for trade publishers and self-published authors alike, when compared to the possible revenue generated by the audiobook sales.[49]

2.3 Audiobook Distribution

Readers are consuming audiobooks in a myriad of ways, complicating the distribution options for self-published authors. In terms of where authors are currently acquiring audiobooks, BookNet Canada's 2018 audiobook survey indicates that almost half of audiobook listeners buy from a retailer, while 36% download them for free from online or in an app, 32% download from the public library, while others rent or subscribe to a service or download them for free from file sharing sites.[50] Self-published authors need to ensure their books are making it into these retailers and platforms in order for their books to be found.

There are authors, such as Joanna Penn of the popular blog *The Creative Penn* who advocate for selling audiobooks without the use of a company like Audiobook Creation Exchange (Amazon's audiobook self publishing arm, ACX, which will be discussed in more detail in

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49 Brad Borkan, "Self-Publishing Success Story."
50 "Readers Are Listening" 29.

section 2.4 below) for distribution.[51] No matter where an audiobook is sold, self-published authors with limited marketing budgets will struggle to sell their audiobooks unless their print book or ebook has sold in high numbers, or perhaps if they are marketing aficionados or Amazon strategy and algorithm experts. Choosing to go it alone with distribution means competing with Amazon's Audible which launched with a staggering 300,000 titles.[52] While discoverability of a new title amongst the millions of other titles on Amazon is challenging, it's also incredibly hard to reach wide audiences without being on such a large distributors app.

Libraries are still a major discovery channel for finding out about new audiobooks and shouldn't be ignored in a distribution plan.[53] If using Amazon's ACX exclusive agreement to distribute (these agreements are discussed in more detail in section 2.4 below), it is important to note that authors wouldn't be able to get their audiobooks into OverDrive, the public library borrowing service for ebooks and audiobooks. As mentioned, as of 2018, 32% of audiobook listeners downloaded their audiobooks for free from the public library.[54]

So what options do self-published authors have to produce and distribute their audiobooks? Without a trade publishing house to foot the bill and produce the audiobook for them, self-published authors are likely to turn to a service provider to help them with one aspect or the whole process. There are many different routes to take when looking for production and distribution support as a self-published author, but how does one choose? There seems to be a market opportunity for a new service that cuts through the clutter to help authors navigate this confusing vortex of information and get their audiobook made and sold in a clear and straightforward manner.

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51 Joanna Penn, "How To Read Your Own AudioBook And Sell Direct To Customers," The Creative Penn, October 10, 2014, https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2014/10/10/read-your-own-audiobook/.

52 Sue Carter, "Audible Opens Canadian e-Store with Handmaids; Announces New Sponsorship for Giller Prize," *Quill and Quire*, September 13, 2017, https://quillandquire.com/omni/audible-opens-canadian-e-store-with-handmaids-announces-new-sponsorship-for-giller-prize/.

53 Sue Carter, "How Audiobooks Took over the Industry," *Quill and Quire*, April 18, 2016, https://quillandquire.com/omni/audio-killed-the-ebook-star-how-audiobooks-took-over-the-industry/.

54 "Readers Are Listening" 29.

2.4 Amazon's Market Share (Audible and ACX)

This report looks at Amazon in great detail since it is currently the primary channel that TSPA uses to distribute their authors print books and ebooks and will likely play a large role in their new audiobook service. Amazon owns two companies that are involved with audiobook services, Audible and ACX. Audible is an online retailer and producer of audio content, primarily in the format of audiobooks, owned by Amazon. Audible is also an app that can be downloaded on various devices for readers to listen to audio content purchased through the retailer. Books can be purchased outright at full retail price, or readers can subscribe to a membership for $14.95 Canadian per month which grants members one credit to use for purchasing any audiobook in their online store, regardless of retail price. Additional credits can be purchased if desired. ACX is Amazon's audiobook publishing service, where anyone can upload their own audio files for distribution into Audible and iTunes. ACX can also be used to connect with narrators and producers to create audiobooks from start to finish.

An article written by the Author Marketing Institute in 2015 concluded that although there are other ways to distribute audiobooks, "Currently, there aren't many choices that top what you can get from ACX. You can try to cobble things together using some of the other services, but the best deal still lies with the 900-pound gorilla in the room."[55] Though this was five years ago and many more companies have opened since then, Amazon has remained one of the biggest players in this market.

The headline on Amazon's general self publishing landing page states, "Take Control with Self-Publishing," before it goes on to explain the three service offerings they have under their umbrella including Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) for print books and ebooks and Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX) for audiobooks.[56] It's easy to see why, coupled

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55 "How to Distribute Non-ACX Audiobooks," Author Marketing Institute, June 18, 2015, https://authormarketing institute.com/how-to-distribute-non-acx-audiobooks/

56 "Take Control with Self-Publishing." Amazon. Accessed June 22, 2020. https://www.amazon.com/gp/seller-account/mm-summary-page.html/ref=footer_publishing?ld=AZFooterSelfPublish.

with Amazon's massive distribution reach, ACX has started to corner the self publishing audiobook market.

"ACX is a marketplace where authors, literary agents, publishers, and other Rights Holders can connect with narrators, engineers, recording studios, and other Producers capable of producing a finished audiobook."[57] In other words, the site is for both authors and producers to use. Authors who already have created an audiobook can use ACX's services to distribute their audiobooks or they can start from scratch on the platform, audition a narrator and find a producer. Traditional publishers and presses can use ACX's services as well if they don't have in-house teams or don't want to go through the trouble of hiring a studio.

In five years, ACX has been used to produce 58,000 audiobooks and has led to the creation of various support services to help authors use the platform and produce their own audiobooks.[58] The more self published titles enter the market, the more services surrounding their production are seizing the opportunity. With more and more articles being written about the process, there is increasing knowledge in the self publishing community about how to produce good quality audio content.[59]

ACX's royalty structure for distribution has two options, both serving a seven year licensing term.[60] Option one is an exclusive agreement which means that authors can only sell their audiobooks on Amazon, Audible and iTunes and will not be able to take them to other retailers. This option gives authors a 40% royalty on sales.[61] Option two is non-exclusive, allowing authors to sell their audiobooks outside of the Audible network, but this option only provides a 25% royalty.[62] This royalty is low for an author who has potentially paid a substantial sum to produce their audiobook, and would mean that it would like quite a while before they will recoup their financial investment.

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57 "About ACX," ACX, accessed June 22, 2020, https://www.acx.com/help/about-acx/200484860.

58 Ryan Joe, "The State of Indie Audiobooks."

59 Ryan Joe, "The State of Indie Audiobooks."

60 "Production Earnings and Costs," ACX, accessed June 22, 2020, https://www.acx.com/help/what-s-the-deal/200497690.

61 "Production Earnings and Costs."

62 "Production Earnings and Costs."

ACX allows self-published authors to handle both production and distribution with one of the world's largest audiobook retailers, all with one service. ACX provides guidelines for producing an audiobook for audio engineers to follow. These guidelines will also ensure that a book that is produced outside of ACX, will still meet industry standards, to be accepted into Amazon, Audible and iTunes. Some of these production requirements include: the separating of chapters, a 1-5 minute sample, a pause at the beginning and end of each section, the reading aloud of section or chapter names, ensuring each chapter does not exceed 120 minutes and ensuring the audio keeps within a certain volume range.[63] Despite all of this information, reviewing the website is quite cumbersome and overwhelming. There is a seemingly endless trail of links to more and more pages. The information is available, but thqat doesn't mean that these resources are accessible and the ACX website may actually be a barrier to entry for some self-published authors.

One major drawback to the service aside from the exclusive royalty structure and confusing volume of information as outlined above, is that authors cannot add companion content to their audiobook.[64] This is absolutely essential for the sales of some books especially non-fiction categories like business, finance, and self-help where supplemental material can really enhance the experience. When listening to the book *Beautiful Money*: *The 4-Week Total Wealth Makeover* by Leanne Jacobs on Audible for example, there are many lists and references to exercises that sounded like they would have been visualised in the print edition of the text, but since the book was audio only, it was nearly impossible to follow along while listening. A short PDF download or worksheet of the exercises discussed in the audiobook would have been a great addition to the overall satisfaction with that book in the audio format. Self-published authors are burdened with weighing these pros and cons of producing and distributing their audiobooks with one of the world's largest retailers.

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63 "ACX Audio Submission Requirements," ACX, accessed June 22, 2020, https://www.acx.com/help/acx-audio-submission-requirements/201456300.

64 Laura Myers, "10 Best Options to Sell And Deliver Audio Courses And Programs," Soundwise, September 7, 2018, https://mysoundwise.com/blog/post/10-best-options-to-sell-and-deliver-audio-content.

As of February 2018, Audible's share of the US audiobook market was already 41% and growing.[65] Until Audible officially launched in Canada in September of 2017, it was very hard for Canadian voice actors to work with ACX unless they were part of the American Actors' Union, but now through ACTRA they are being hired by Audible Canada to record books.[66] Audible's venture into Canada has meant the production of many new Canadian titles read by Canadian authors.[67] The promise upon opening the Canadian site included more Canadian voice talent work and a $12 million investment from Audible into Canadian books and programming.[68] Audible's founder Don Katz has been building excitement for the program, stating early on in the launch, "I just finished telling publishers here that if 60, 70, 80 percent of their lists are not covered in 18 months, we will come back up and make that happen."[69]

Audible's move into Canada meant the snapping up of audio rights. They purchased them from authors whose publishers didn't bother buying the audio rights, or from publishers who don't have the audiobook production capabilities themselves. They went after rights aggressively aiming to claim as much of the Canadian audiobook market share as possible. Traditional publishers are starting to ensure that they buy audio rights with ebook and print rights as a whole package to better serve their authors, but Audible is not just picking up existing audio rights, they are also bidding on new work to be audio first then selling off the print and ebook rights to other publishers to produce.[70] Audible even went so far as to release an audiobook before the print release of the Shaun White memoir *The Weight of*

65 Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg, "Amazon Already Disrupted the Sale of Print Titles. Up Next: Audiobooks," *The Wall Street Journal,* February 5, 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/readers-listen-up-amazon-wants-to-extend-its-dominance-in -audiobooks-1517832000.

66 Ryan Porter, "How Canadian Voice Actors Are Cracking the Booming Audiobook Market."

67 Salimah Shivji, "Audiobook Boom Is Good News for Canadian Actors and Listeners," *CBC*, November 26, 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/audiobook-canada-actors-voice-1.4416845.

68 Brian Bethune, "The Founder and CEO of Audible Reveals His Ambitious Plans for Canada." *Maclean's*, September 13, 2017. https://www.macleans.ca/culture/books/the-founder-and-ceo-of-audible-reveals-his-ambitious-plans-for-canada/.

69 Brian Bethune, "CEO of Audible Reveals His Ambitious Plans."

70 Brian Bethune, "CEO of Audible Reveals His Ambitious Plans."

Gold: Winning Is Only the Beginning.[71] They are willing to outbid on rights to stay at the top of the audiobook market.[72]

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71 Brian Bethune, "CEO of Audible Reveals His Ambitious Plans."

72 John Bonazzo, "Amazon's Audiobook Strategy Could Become the New Normal in Publishing," *Observer*, February 6, 2018, https://observer.com/2018/02/amazon-audible-audiobooks-changes-book-publishing/.

3.0 INDIE AUTHORS AND AUDIOBOOKS TODAY

Many of the statistics presented in this report are from the trade published audiobook market rather than self published audiobooks. Before jumping into a discussion with self-published authors, this report takes a quick look at a few secondary sources to see what self-published authors are saying about their experiences with audiobook publishing.

Many of the benefits of producing an audiobook are similar for both indie authors and traditional publishing houses. Audiobooks can reach an audience that their ebooks and printed books simply aren't reaching. The blog *Writer's Edit* also suggests that self-published authors may consider producing an audiobook to inject some refreshed excitement into their stories and build credibility as an indie author. Audiobooks can also help diversify a self-published author's revenue stream, and if they are able to market successfully, they can tap into a slightly less saturated market than the self published ebook market.[73]

The *Book Baby Blog* however, notes that audiobooks may be a bad investment for most self-published authors, because they still represent a small portion of the overall book publishing market and they are costly to produce. *Book Baby* offers audiobook services for indie authors but stresses the importance of authors focusing on producing quality writing before venturing into producing more formats.[74]

Many indie authors pour so much time, money and energy into writing and editing their work, then more money into the design of a book and ebook, but by the time their book is published, they typically have thought very little about how they will sell their book. How will people discover it amongst the hundreds of thousands of books that are published each year? Success stories of authors who make a living from their books are few and far between and many self published books sell in very small numbers. Amazon keeps a tight hold on the statistics of their KDP sales, but a few blog articles note that on aver-

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73 Claire Bradshaw, "5 Key Benefits Of Publishing Audiobooks For Indie Authors," Writer's Edit, accessed June 22, 2020, https://writersedit.com/self-publishing/5-key-benefits-of-publishing-audiobooks-for-indie-authors/.

74 Steven Spatz, "Why Audiobooks Are A Bad Investment For Most Independent Authors," BookBaby Blog, January 4, 2019, https://blog.bookbaby.com/2019/01/audiobooks-are-a-bad-investment-for-independent-authors/.

age, about 250 copies will be sold of a self-published book.[75] Even a design investment of $1000 may not be recuperated, so to invest anything further on another format such as an audiobook should be carefully considered. Despite this, self-published authors still desire to produce audiobooks and are a driving force in pushing the production and distribution models forward within the audiobook industry. With this initial knowledge, the primary research discussed below aims to gain a deeper understanding of what indie authors think about audiobook publishing.

3.1 Primary Research Design

Alongside a review of what others have said about this topic, it's important to talk directly to the authors who would be the potential end users and customers of a self publishing audiobook production service. This primary research uncovers additional insights into what self-published authors actually need with such a service, ensuring that the proposed recommendations are more viable. The purpose of this research is to identify the constraints and considerations that self-published authors have when considering producing an audiobook. The research method included one survey and one round of interviews. Potential participants, primarily consisting of the TSPA's current engaged client base, were contacted to participate in the survey and/or interview. The survey was sent out simultaneously, while interviews were being conducted in the winter of 2020. Eight participants were interviewed for approximately 30-45 minutes over the phone and the survey received 12 responses. Due to the recruitment restrictions, this survey sample size is limited and inconclusive. As outlined in Section 5.4.2 *Improving Upon the Research,* a revised research design that would reach a wider participant base, would help improve the viability of these findings. For a complete list of survey and interview questions see Appendices B and C.

To participate, the authors needed to be independently published or working on self publishing a title and they needed to be aware of audiobooks in the marketplace. They

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75 "Publishing Numbers: The Cost, The Profits, And What Constitutes Good Book Sales," Self-Publishing Relief, October 24, 2018, https://selfpublishingrelief.com/self-publishing-numbers-the-cost-the-profits-and-what-constitutes-good-book-sales-self-publishing-relief/.

could be both interested or not interested in producing audiobooks of their titles, since the research aimed to get a holistic view of a variety of authors' thoughts about audiobooks. See Appendix A for more details on the survey and interview inclusion and exclusion criteria. A recruitment message also went out on social media to gather more survey participants in the hopes of having a larger sample size. A similar inclusion criteria was used, except potential participants did not need to be TSPA clients. Those who expressed interest via email or social media direct message were asked to sign a consent form. Once it was signed and sent back to the researcher, the survey link was sent out and interview times were scheduled for those who wished to be contacted.

All data collected has been anonymized and audio records of the interviews have been deleted to abide by all SFU ethics recommendations concerning the privacy and consent of all participants.

3.2 Survey and Interview Results[76]

3.2.1 SURVEY RESULTS

Participants were asked 10 questions about their thoughts towards audiobooks. The questions were primarily multiple choice, with space for comments for participants to provide further written explanation.

The importance of audiobooks to participants

The first question asked whether or not the participants think audiobooks are an important publishing format. 11 of the 12 participants felt that they are important and/or necessary. Many respondents felt that they are important simply because of their rise in popularity. One respondent cited their own use as a reason, saying, "I am an avid Audible reader/ listener. If it weren't for Audible I would probably only be able to read 1 or 2 books a year vs. 20-30+." Other reasons include their accessibility for those with a visual impairment

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76   The full transcripts and survey data have been deleted 2 years after the end of the research project, following Research Ethics Board requirements.

or someone who is unable to hold a physical book or ereader. Respondents also felt that they are important due to their hands-free nature, allowing users to listen while driving or doing other tasks. Someone also mentioned that audiobooks can be learning tools to teach listeners the proper pronunciations of words. A couple participants also stated that by not producing an audiobook, authors are potentially missing out on new audiences including those who prefer to listen over reading and those with accessibility concerns. Two respondents specifically noted that audiobooks are important because it's the way that the technology is moving. "...look at how all the big tech giants are investing in devices like Google Home, Amazon Echo etc - they are building the platform for people to build content on," said one respondent.

Would participants consider publishing an audiobook?

All respondents said that they are interested in producing an audiobook despite the fact that some voiced concerns about resources and not being sure if there's a market for their specific type of book. One author was not sure if their book is even long enough to be an audiobook. Another author noted that the target audience for their book is seniors and since they are aware of visual concerns for a print based book, they think an audiobook would be a good option. Another author noted that they have markets in various countries and reaching them with an audiobook seems easier than getting involved with shipping physical books. This relates to another respondent who feels that producing an audiobook will help them reach a wider audience. One author said that by producing an audiobook it would be, "Creating another experience between me and the reader, different than words on page but rather voice in ears... intonation, tone, personality can come through as I intend them."

How would participants publish an audiobook?

When asked how they would like to record their audiobook, three respondents said they would like to hire a professional voice actor, while seven said they would like to use their own voice. Two were undecided.

When asked about how they would distribute their audiobooks, four participants didn't know how they would go about it while others ended their explanation with a question mark, not sure of their answer. The rest of respondents cited companies like ACX, Audible, iTunes, Amazon, Chapters/Indigo, and Findaway Voices. Three respondents mentioned their personal websites and two added that they would use social media to help distribute.

When it comes to whether or not the participants would hire a company to produce and/or distribute their books, the answers were quite varied. Two respondents wanted a company to handle the audiobook from start to finish including audiobook production and distribution while four would want to produce it themselves and hire a company to help them distribute. Another four would want a company to produce it for them but they would distribute it themselves, and lastly two participants said they would want to do the whole process themselves.

Barriers to publishing an audiobook

The largest barriers participants cited for publishing an audiobook include high cost, lack of time, lack of information, and lack of knowledge about both the interest for their books in the audio format and how to judge the quality of the audio.

How much would participants invest to publish an audiobook?

When asked what they would be willing to invest, most respondents wanted to spend under $1000, while four would be willing to spend $1000 to $2500, and two would be willing to spend $2500 to $5000. This will be touched on again, but these numbers indicate that self-published authors understand that producing an audiobook is a substantial investment. What is likely less obvious to an author, is how hard it will be to sell enough audiobooks to make a return on that investment.

What services would be most helpful for a self-published author considering audiobook production?

The last survey question broadly asked respondents to describe any services that would make their lives easier when it comes to publishing an audiobook. Almost all aspects of publishing an audiobook came up in one form or another so it seems that these authors all

have different needs in terms of what they would specifically be interested in paying for. Many authors (six total) mentioned that marketing services would be important in order for their audiobook to reach their audiences. Help with production (recording and editing or sound design) and distribution also came up. Specifically, five respondents mentioned distribution, and six mention production. It's interesting to note that one author cited interest in voice lessons for authors who want to read their own books effectively, and specifically mentioned that they would be interested in having additional materials for the audiobook such as illustrations done by a publishing company. This author and another, also noted that they enjoy learning about the process themselves and would be interested in workshops about how to publish (produce and/or distribute) an audiobook on their own.

3.2.2 INTERVIEW RESULTS

The first eight TSPA clients to respond to the interview request email with expressed interest and signed consent forms were interviewed over the phone. The discussions involved a series of open-ended questions, alongside some probing questions if an author was unsure of how to respond. For example, one question asks, "How would you want your audiobook to be recorded? Would you use your own voice or hire a professional voice actor." In many cases, if authors responded with yes or no, a follow up question of "why" was offered to gain a deeper understanding. Similar questions were asked of the interview participants that were also in the survey, allowing the questions to be expanded with further explanation of the participants' answers.

The participants self publishing background
During the interviews, there were a number of background questions asked to get a sense of each author's experience with self publishing. In general, the authors did a lot of their own online research to find the information that they felt like they needed in order to self publish their books. Many of these authors didn't have a clear understanding of how the self publishing process worked from start to finish when they began the journey. One author noted, "I didn't know that I needed certain things right off the bat." They used

internet searches, social media, podcasts, YouTube videos and blogs by other authors to get their information about publishing and other authors went to workshops that TSPA ran. One author stated, "I went in wanting to learn more, already, but not realizing just how much the responsibility was on my own shoulders when it came to indie publishing." One author shared the same sentiment saying, "I was second guessing myself all the time and making decisions that were way over my head."

Two authors noted that they chose self publishing because they just wanted to get their work out there and self publishing seemed like the fastest and simplest way to do that with less barriers while another noted that the process was, "So much more work than I thought, but so much more rewarding." The speed of self publishing was brought up by another author as well who said, "I had content that was incomplete, and I could picture myself with a published book by the end of the year, which was pretty awesome." Another author said they went the self publishing route so that they could control the process.

Would participants consider publishing an audiobook?

When thinking about factors that would make the interviewees want to publish an audiobook, one author said that they would engage their community to see if there was enough interest once the print version of their book was out. Someone stated that the "knowledge gap" would stop them from publishing an audiobook right now. The time involved and cost also came up as factors. Another reason was simply just the overload of trying to figure out how to market the print and ebook version of their book, that figuring out how to market the audiobook as well would be too overwhelming.

Thoughts on production costs

It was very hard for the authors to try to estimate what it would cost to make an audiobook. They tried to sum up all of the recording and editing costs and many couldn't even come up with a general price range. Because of this, it is likely important that any pricing structure for self published audiobooks should be very clearly laid out so these authors know exactly what elements cost what amount. One author, despite not being able to put a number to it, mentioned that they see the publishing of their book, "as an investment in

their brand," rather than a means to profit. This is an important note since the motivations for publishing will alter how an author perceives the value of a service.

How would participants publish an audiobook?

When it comes to the questions about Audiobooks specifically, the interviewees echoed a lot of the same sentiments from the survey. For example, when asked how they would like to produce their audiobook, many stated that they would prefer to do the reading themselves in their own voice. The reasons they cited included the fact that they already do their own speaking engagements while others noted that with their genre of book such as a memoir, it would make sense for them to read their book due to the personal nature of the content. They want to tell their own story. A couple of authors also said that although they would like to read it themselves, they understand that their voice may not be the right fit.

One author who stated without question that they would use a voice actor, said, "I've learned that there are certain things for quality sake that you should just hire a professional [to do]." If any investment in the recording is being made, it should be done properly, just like with editing and book design, which they would also not want to handle on their own.

Many of the authors felt that they would produce their audiobooks on their own but get help with distribution. They did however note that they would hire editors to help them clean up the audio. One author said that since being an author isn't their day job, they would hire a company, but if they were at home writing, they would definitely learn how to do it on their own, knowing that going it alone would likely take much longer than hiring a company. Some authors want to be involved in the process while others would want everything to be handled for them.

In general, when asked how they thought audiobooks are made, the authors had a pretty good idea about recording and a few related it to recording a song or a podcast. What they struggled to describe was how audiobooks are distributed. In general some authors understand that there's a company that takes the final audio file and it gets uploaded onto the various platforms that would take a cut from the sales for doing so, but there is a lot of mystery as to how that's done. Others just assume Amazon handles everything, likely due to their familiarity with using Amazon to publish their print books and ebooks. Some

authors did have a more robust idea of how they would potentially try to get word out, but the avenues of creating promos and pushing the books on social media and through podcast appearances is part of marketing of the book, not the distribution. One author just said that they would distribute their audiobook with whatever the easiest method is, since being an author isn't their day job.

When discussing distribution options, one author, despite only knowing of Audible stated, "It's really hard to say that it wouldn't be worth it to [distribute] with Audible because the market is so wide." This is a fair assessment. When self publishing, it's hard to skirt around one of the biggest players in the market if the aim is to reach as many readers as possible.

What barriers to publishing an audiobook do they face?

It is likely because many of these authors want to read their own books, that they cited time as one of their largest barriers to making an audiobook. Cost came up as one of the biggest concerns as well. Another barrier related to cost is the return on investment. Will they be able to make their money back from selling their audiobooks and is the interest large enough? The lack of understanding about the whole process is also a big roadblock, alongs with having no contacts in the industry to find the right voice actor and no equipment.

What do participants want to know more about, and what's the most daunting part of the audiobook publishing process?

When asked about what they would like to learn more about when it comes to publishing audiobooks, one author responded, "Oh, there's lots I don't know, so I wouldn't even know what to ask right now." Copyright and ownership seems to be a fuzzy topic for some, as well as the general length of time that it would take to make an audiobook from start to finish. Clarity around costs and understanding distribution is also needed. One author wanted to know where to advertise their audiobooks while another was curious about what the working relationship between them and a producer or voice actor would be like.

When it comes to what is most daunting about the process, one author mentioned they were worried about the quality of the audio. Another author said that since they don't know

anything about the process, they would really have to put all their trust in whoever they chose to work with.. One author said that the whole process would be daunting to them if they didn't know about TSPA. They cited things that would worry them such as technical issues like accidentally deleting files or losing them in a computer crash. The thought of needing to have all of that together rather than have a company worry about it for you sounds very stressful to them.

What services would be most helpful for a self-published author considering audiobook production?

The last open question was meant to give authors the opportunity to share any further insights they have on what would make their lives easier when it comes to making an audiobook. This was a great question since many authors responded with what they would want to happen in a dream world, if the audiobook could be done their way with no restrictions and with any services available to them. Many of the answers centered around the theme of becoming properly educated on the processes. One author said a workshop where they could just sit down for a few hours and learn the most important parts of how to publish an audiobook as well as having a consultant that is with you throughout the process would be very valuable. An author thought that a PDF that outlined all of the steps would be nice, but would prefer to have a consultant to help them along the way as well. This is good news for TSPA, since they already offer consulting time for their print books to help authors manage the process. One author simply said that, "Having someone do everything for you and take a cut of it," would make their lives easier.

Some authors responded with their ideal solutions for specific aspects of the audiobook publishing process. One author stated that they want a platform to aggregate their audiobooks to all of the outlets without ruining their visibility on Audible. This is because Amazon prioritizes the visibility of books that have been produced and distributed exclusively through them. Another author mentioned that it would be really great if the recording service for their audiobook could come directly to them with all of the equipment so they could record at their office. Since time is such a huge barrier, the easier the recording process is, the easier they would be able to commit to investing in an audiobook.

Other authors were more concerned with quality control. An interesting point made by one of the authors was that they wanted a way of knowing if they've done the audiobook *well*, not just that they've gotten it done, stating "...when do you decide that it's good enough?" As an indie author, when working with various people like designers and editors, you are ultimately the one calling the shots, so there is a lot of trust involved. These authors want to know that their final product is up to industry standards. Luckily again for TSPA, they have an advantage here since they are not a brand new company and have already built a great relationship with their current base of authors.

PART B

4.0 THE INDIE AUDIOBOOK SOLUTION

It is clear from this research that authors are very different, and have different motivations for publishing, from making a profit or becoming a bestseller, to adding credibility to their brand. Customizable plans and a wide array of resources would perhaps lead to greater success in the audiobook industry for a company like TSPA, who provides services to the self-published authors interviewed in this report. Focusing business efforts on this growing area of need and hiring someone full time to project manage and promote that arm of the business would be important for TSPA in order to become a recognizable brand in the audiobook publishing market. This section outlines how TSPA got a beta audiobook service up and running and includes additional solutions and recommendations for how to develop this service offering.

4.1 Building Indie Audiobook Production Capabilities, Early Exploration

The goal of this research is to explore potential services to help self-published authors produce their own audiobooks in the most effective way for their specific needs. Based on the interview and survey results, it's clear that authors are interested in producing audiobooks, but the an audiobook service needs to take into consideration what seems like three main areas when it comes to production: the authors lack of time to complete the project, their budget and their desire to record their own voices. These three elements were used to create the model outlined below. Please note that the model discussed was written during the time of the researcher's professional placement in the summer of 2019. There may be further changes to the structure of TSPA's audiobook offering by the publishing date of this report.

In the self publishing sector of publishing, one of the best assets for a company like TSPA is the ability to move quickly and make immediate process changes. When an author followed up a few times with TSPA regarding the recording of her book, the decision to make an audiobook program and get it off the ground happened within a couple of short months. TSPA knew that they wanted to run a test first before putting out any information about the service or how it would work. The results of this test run allowed the agency to come up with the initial business model and pricing structure that represents the first phase of a self publishing audiobook program. Due to the agility of the agency, this service could be offered right away, and like many of their other services, it will continue to develop over time as more industry trends come to light and the capabilities of the contract-based TSPA team continue to grow. There will be future developments to continue to improve the offering, but getting the service out there was a top priority for authors who were ready to record right away.

In order to offer authors the best deal on the market, this audiobook program has been designed to give authors exactly what they need without any frivolous add-ons. Here is a simple description of this beta phase of the audiobook production program. The author will record their own audio in a studio setting coordinated by TSPA, with a TSPA hired "listener" to supervise. The listener isn't an audio engineer and is therefore more cost effective, given how long they will need to sit with the author. This is a key piece of the puzzle to keep costs down while also ensuring good quality files are provided to the editor, minimizing retakes and additional recording days. The listener does not need an extensive audio background and is trained by TSPA on how to conduct the recording sessions and what they should be listening for.

The files generated and saved during the recording sessions will then be passed to TSPA's freelance audio editor to prepare the files for final release. This includes editing, cleaning up the takes and creating the correct chapter files based on industry standards. Additional services such as purchasing website ecommerce integration or ACX upload support will be available for the author on a project by project basis. The file they recieve will then be ready

for upload to any channel they see fit and the author can choose to do whatever they want with it since the agency does not hold any rights to their work.

In the first phase of this program, no hired voice talent will be used, and authors will read their own books. The reasoning behind this choice is outlined in section 4.1.1 below in more detail, but the main reason is to reduce costs and as previously discussed in this research, it's a popular choice for self-published authors.

Early on in the process of creating this service, it was apparent that in order to keep with the mandate of making the publishing process as transparent as possible for their clients, there would need to be an explanatory document to help get authors set up and ready to record. See Figure 1 below for the client onboarding document that was written based on inputs from many websites as well as input from a TSPA editor who has audiobook experience and an audio editor. Blogs like *Become a Writer Today* by Bryan Collins, provided great tips for authors looking to record their own books.[77] Reading countless blogs like this also made it very apparent to us how long the process would take. Collins states, "I narrated a 40,000-word non-fiction book at a rate of two chapters a day. It took me about three weeks to finish narrating my book."[78] The TCK Publishing website also has a great blog with lots of details about recording. Something we hadn't thought of, was prepping a manuscript and turning it into a script ready for recording.[79] It's important to make sure that a reader listening to the book will completely understand the book without having the text visually displayed for them. This could mean describing figures and photos or stating something like, "See the supplemental materials in your audiobook download for details."[80]

The final document that was created helps TSPA ensure that the process goes as smoothly as possible by anticipating common questions and managing expectations of the authors, making them feel more confident and knowledgeable about the process as they head into recording.

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77 Bryan Collins, "How to Make an Audiobook and Self Publish on Audible Today," Become a Writer Today, Accessed June 22, 2020, https://becomeawritertoday.com/how-to-make-an-audiobook/.

78 Bryan Collins, "How to Make an Audiobook."

79 Jacob Mohr, "How to Record an Audiobook: Audiobook Self Publishing Explained," TCK Publishing, Accessed June 22, 2020, https://www.tckpublishing.com/how-to-record-an-audiobook/.

80 Jacob Mohr, "How to Record an Audiobook."

FIGURE 1. Client onboarding documents.

4.1.1 VOICE TALENT

There is a large pool of voice talent available, but from the interview and survey responses, it is clear that many self-published authors would like to read their own audiobooks. This fee can be the most expensive part of producing the audiobook since the longest time commitment involved in the whole process is simply reading the book itself. This is an area that TSPA will continue to develop in the future, but for this initial phase, having the authors

read their own books is most suitable and keeps costs lean. Self publishing is a very flexible process, and authors are free to alter the process to fit their needs, therefore if an author is particularly interested in voice over talent, they can be pointed in the right direction to potentially hire someone themselves, then provide the audio files to TSPA for editing.

4.1.2 EQUIPMENT AND RECORDING

TSPA doesn't have funding from a parent company or venture capital firm, so the investment into an audiobook program needs to be carefully considered. Though the author is footing the bill for the service itself, it is not expected that all of TSPA's clients will instantly want to pay to record an audiobook as soon as the program is launched and it is for that reason that TSPA will start with rented equipment and studio space rather than buying all the necessary equipment outright.

After sitting down as a team to really look into how audiobooks are made, TSPA established that the following things are needed for the day of recording:

- Quiet space to record
- "Listener" to ensure that audio recording goes smoothly
- Laptop
- Headphones
- Microphone
- Microphone stand
- Cables and adapters to connect microphone to laptop

FIGURE 2. Jazmin Welch reading for a character in the *I Don't Want To* children's book written by Megan Williams and Madison Reaveley.

The listener is a person who will sit with the author at their laptop with headphones on listening to the recording. They will hit stop and start

on the recording as needed for when the author needs to take a break or do another take. They are also listening for any inconsistencies in the volume or pitch and any mispronunciations of words that are not enunciated clearly. It is important to catch any errors at this stage and do another take on the spot, rather than finding errors in the editing stage and needing to set another date to re-record.

Authors can bring in their own laptops or they can use the laptop that is provided with the hourly recording fee (see section 4.1.4 Pricing Structure). If they use their own laptop, the onboarding document provided (see Figure 1) outlines that they will need to have Garageband or Audacity installed on their laptops in order to make the recording.

FIGURE 3. Principal at TSPA, Megan Williams (left) reading for a character in the *I Don't Want To* children's book written by herself and her step-daughter, Madison Reaveley. Madison (middle) holds the book for Megan to read. On the right, the sound engineer listens to the quality of the audio and stops and starts the recording when necessary for certain lines or sections to be re-read.

The quiet space that TSPA is testing for their recordings is a coworking space in downtown Vancouver that has private meeting rooms. The remote team members have meetings in the space, and TSPA founder Megan Williams is in the office once a week. The recording days will be booked on days in which a member of TSPA's team will be present in the main space, while the recording in a private room is taking place. Since TSPA is already a member of this workspace, they are able to book the rooms for a reasonable hourly rate. This solution is likely to be a short-term fix since coordinating the recording days with other customer bookings and various networking events in the space is not ideal, especially as more clients wish to make bookings. This is important to note because of how long it takes to record an audiobook and that it cannot be done in one booking.
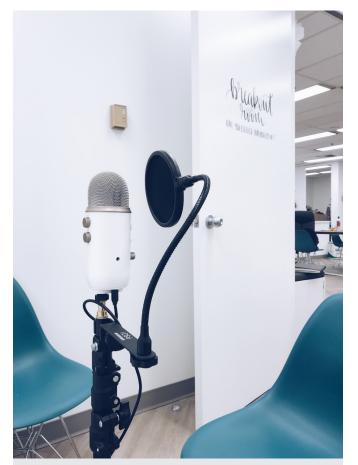
For every one hour of finished audio, it will take double the amount of time to record.[81] At an average speaking rate of 150 words per minute[82], the finished length of a book can be determined by dividing the word count by 150. That will provide the length of the book in minutes. Multiply that number by two and that is the total amount of time an author will need to book for their recording. Using this calculation for a 60,000 word book would equal approximately 13.4 hours.

13.4 hours is quite a long time to be talking for, but each author's stamina for how long they can speak and record in one day is different.

FIGURE 4. The recording space in the downtown Vancouver coworking space.

Some people feel that two hours is enough before they start to lose their voice[83] while narrating pros can make it up to 6 hours, but that doesn't include time for breaks.[84] This means that a 13.5 hour recording session may need to be recorded over 4-5 days. This calculation is outlined in the onboarding document so that authors can plan accordingly for the time they need to book in the studio.

81 "How Long Does It Usually Take Someone to Produce 1 Finished Hour of an Audiobook?" ACX Help Center, Accessed September 22, 2019, https://audible-acx.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/6646/~/how-long-does-it-usually-take -someone-to-produce-1-finished-hour-of-an.

82 Dom Barnard, "Average Speaking Rate and Words per Minute," VirtualSpeech, January 20, 2018, https://virtual speech.com/blog/average-speaking-rate-words-per-minute.

83 Bo Bennett, "How To Make An Audio Book: A Do-It-Yourself Guide," ebookIt!, July 13, 2016, https://www.ebookit. com/tools/bg/Bo/ebookIt/ucHgoPMz/How-To-Make-An-Audio-Book--A-Do-It-Yourself-Guide.

84 Thomas Ling, "Why Narrating an Audiobook Is a LOT Harder than You Think," RadioTimes, April 25, 2019, https:// www.radiotimes.com/news/radio/2019-04-23/why-narrating-an-audiobook-is-a-lot-harder-you-think/.

4.1.3 EDITING

TSPA sat down with an audio editor to determine the audio editing process and rates. They established three levels of audio quality that take different lengths of time to record such as a poor audio file with a lot of background noise. Since authors are recording their own voices, the audio quality cannot be guaranteed even with a listener present. One simple flat rate was determined to account for any quality of audio provided even if it is of the lowest level, ensuring that the editor is always well compensated for their time. The sample was necessary in order to test the capabilities of the audio editor. TSPA was able to watch the recording, see the listener process and receive a final, clean, high quality audiobook.

4.1.4 PRICING STRUCTURE

In order to be an attractive option for potential customers, TSPA needs competitive pricing. This is an important consideration for the business model, especially since many of the authors interviewed and surveyed had no idea what it should really cost to make an audiobook and listed cost as one of their major barriers to producing one. Since TSPA's offering requires that the authors read their own books, to justify the cost, they need to clearly communicate the value of working with a project manager who coordinates all of the moving pieces of recording, editing, and producing the final files, along with consulting and answering any questions along the way, thus saving the author time and frustration from doing it on their own. In 2015, *Publisher's Weekly* put a price tag of $3000-$4000 USD on a self published audiobook.[85] Editing and production comes in at around $75 USD/hour[86] but TSPA has found that the editing is not very challenging and has been able to work with a much lower hourly rate.

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85 Allison Schiff, "DIY: How to Self-Publish an Audiobook," *Publishers Weekly*, March 23, 2015. https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/65937-diy-self-publishing-audiobooks.html.

86 Allison Schiff, "DIY: How to Self-Publish an Audiobook."

The pricing structure needs to be clear and straight-forward with no hidden fees and it must match TSPA's mandate to be transparent about the publishing process. TSPA's fees consider how long the recording will take, what equipment needs to be rented, the editing hourly rate, how many team members would be involved as well as overhead project management and administrative time which is essential to run a successful and sustainable program. See Figure 5 below for the full client-facing pricing breakdown.

Built into the all-in hourly recording rate is an hourly fee that encompasses all of the following expenses: the "listener", the recording space rental, the equipment rental and project management time for TSPA to coordinate the bookings and get the author set up. They were able to secure the equipment for a very reasonable hourly rate making the complete recording booking a total of $50/hour.

The audio editor that TSPA will be working with, helped cost out the post production side of the process which is priced separately from the recording fee to ensure more flexibility for the authors. The flat-rate post production fee includes the editors hourly editing rate calculated into four word count segments, which also accounts time for the file export and admin fees for the post production. TSPA chose to cost various word count segments to keep the pricing structure simple, based on the most common book lengths that TSPA authors produce, including:

- 3,000 words and under to over the children's book category
- Up to 30,000 words
- Up to 50,000 words, and
- Up to 70,000 words

Authors pay the recording hourly rate based on the number of hours they need in the studio, in addition to the post production editing fee based on their word count. Using the example of the 13.5 hour book (or 60,000 words), the recording would cost the author $675. This would mean that recording time plus the fee for editing (post-production) the audiobook of 60,000 words from the numbers outlined above would be $1,964 Canadian, all in. This is suitable for some of the research participants who noted they would be willing

Pricing Breakdown

Incredibly cost effective audiobook production and recording, more cost effective than the industries top competitors.

Audiobook production and editing

3,000 words & under

$709

Up to 30,000 words

$849

Up to 50,000 words

$1069

Up to 70,000 words

$1289

Record your audiobook with us!

+$50/HOUR

Price includes

- studio & equipment rental (including laptop if necessary)
- TSPA rep to listen and conduct the recording

FIGURE 5. Current fall 2019 TSPA client-facing pricing model for audiobook production. The production and editing fee is separate from the hourly recording fee, which is based on the number of hours needed in the studio, calculated using the equation outlined above.

to spend under $2000 on an audiobook. TSPA will start with this pricing and see how it works out over a larger volume of audiobooks.

The pricing is a direct reflection of the team that TSPA has built around the program, and as things develop and the service becomes more robust, the fees are likely to rise, but for a starting price, it is both reasonable for authors and profitable for TSPA.

4.2 Indie Audiobook Distribution

The distribution aspect of an indie audiobook program is arguably one of the most important aspects and also the most difficult aspects to figure out. Many authors simply do not know what to do when it comes to the distribution of their books. When answering the research question of what features, processes and services should be included in the publishing of an independent audiobook and how should those services be conducted to best suit an independent author, it is clear that outlining an easy to comprehend plan of action for distribution is important to these authors. Including a straightforward plan for distribution would go a long way to build trust with indie authors who sign up to purchase an audiobook service since the research they do on their own can be inconclusive. Even though the initial phase of TSPA's program focuses on production, authors will still need to know what to do with their final files.

As a self publishing service provider where authors pay for their publishing services, there is a balance between giving authors control over the process and advising them on best-practices, guiding them in the right direction. The case of distribution for audio would likely be no different. TSPA will let their clients know the state of the industry based on the knowledge gained from the insights in this research, but ultimately it is the author's own choice for how they want to reach their readers.

If an author's goal is to try to reach a mass audience, they may want to go to ACX, relinquish some of their royalty potential and get into large online retailers. If a specific author is guided to take a lower royalty on ACX to have a non-exclusive agreement based on their specific needs, then there are many opportunities for them to distribute their

audio content in unique ways. They could use one of the many available aggregator services to distribute such as Author's Republic. Alternatively, they can sell direct mp3 downloads hosted on Google Drive or DropBox, or even physical CDs which may be suitable if the book is targeting an older demographic. Other services like Thinkific or Teachable would allow authors to turn their audio into online courses. Soundwise, may be a great fit for non-fiction and self-help authors since it functions like a course repository, but the way the audio files are put into albums or "soundcasts" are similar to the chapters in a book. It is a paid platform with monthly fees, so authors would have to consider if they are selling enough books to make it worthwhile, but the courses offered on the site can sell for a higher unit cost than an audiobook.[87]

So what will TSPA's recommendation be for authors and how involved with distribution will they be? The two distribution methods that TSPA can start offering are direct selling via ecommerce on authors' websites as well as helping their authors create ACX accounts and upload their audiobooks to be available on Amazon, iTunes and Audible. Using Amazon's ACX to distribute into Audible allows their authors who don't have their own followings, to access a mass audience. Through consultations with their authors, TSPA can share the pros and cons of using ACX, and chat with their authors about their goals and motivations for publishing an audiobook, then they can suggest the best plan of action. It will be important for TSPA to stay up to date with industry trends so they can make informed recommendations. Over time, TSPA can test some of the other distribution methods outlined above so that they can confidently make additional suggestions.

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87   Laura Myers, "10 Best Options to Sell And Deliver Audio."

5.0 THE FUTURE OF THE INDIE AUDIOBOOK PROGRAM

There is a lot of room for growth within an audiobook program in such an emerging market. As the program kicks off and produces more audiobooks, an assessment of the success of these findings will be necessary. In this section, the future of the program and testing the success of the model will be discussed alongside areas for further growth and research.

5.1 Differentiation and future proofing the model

Personal customer care is what separates TSPA's print and ebook service offering from other self publishing services. This is one of the differentiating factors of TSPA. Instead of working with a project manager throughout an automated process and filing out edits through forms like other self publishing services, authors actually get to work directly with their editors and designers. This is part of how they can differentiate their audiobook services as well.

Since each self-published author has varying needs it will be important to keep up to date and continue to expand the service offering to suit those needs. It would be a good idea for TSPA to run a simple yearly survey (or more often depending on how many authors are going through the audiobook program) to check in with their authors. This will be an important aspect of future proofing this model to adapt as the market continues to innovate and develop.

As mentioned, there is a suggested desire for Canadian content. Many publishers in Canada struggle financially and rely on government funding, so even though Canadians say they care about Canadian produced content, modest book and audiobook sales say otherwise. Perceptions are important however, so it could be helpful for TSPA to brand itself as a Canadian company who aims to help keep the Canadian publishing industry vibrant by providing an alternative to outsourcing audiobook production to other countries. There are not many audiobook production companies in Canada right now, so this could be a great selling point for the agency.

5.2 Other models and recommendations

5.2.1 TESTING THE MODEL

The first audiobook production test, as mentioned earlier, was conducted with a children's book since it's a shorter format where audio quality could be tested within the coworking space quickly along with different voices for each character. It also gave the audio editor a chance to properly cost out what they will be charging TSPA for their services, which allowed the team to confirm their overall pricing structure.

More audiobooks will need to be tested to ensure that the model is viable, and to ensure that authors who are expressing interest, see that the price is fair for the value that is offered. It will also be important to test full length novels so that the recording time involved, ability for the editor to do correct chaptering and how well the authors hold up during their long recording days can all be assessed.

There are a few areas that should be closely monitored based on the above research to ensure continued success. As discovered, not every author should read their own audiobook. If an author's voice isn't suitable and they can't afford a narrator, they've hit a bit of a roadblock. There is no current solution in place if an author's voice is not suitable for an audiobook and they don't have the budget for a narrator. The time involved in the recording process means that voice over will continue to be an expensive endeavor. Perhaps offering training sessions for authors would be an effective way to bridge this gap as one of the participants mentioned.

It has also been made clear how many distribution options there are, so the agency will have an opportunity to use this new program as a testing ground to try various models based on their authors needs, and discover which options work the best for them. There is a lot of research here to continue to refer back to as the program develops as there isn't one right answer when it comes to distribution in this constantly evolving market.

5.2.2 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

In some cases, self-published authors spend a lot of money getting their books into the market. The costs of coaching or consultation time, editing, designing and printing (if they choose to do a print run rather than use print-on-demand) really add up. From my own personal knowledge of the costs of each step, in general the minimum cost sits at around $1,000 and goes up to $10,000 and beyond depending on the author's budget. An important question to ask is whether or not using this service will be profitable for an author. It's unclear if many self-published authors who make the investment in publishing a book, understand how hard book sales are to predict or how many books (or audiobooks) they need to sell to turn a profit. It would be my assumption, from what I know about the industry, that only a small number of self-published authors actually do make their investments back and therefore paying the fees to create an audiobook may in many cases be a hard sell. Mary Jo-Putney, a popular romance author, stopped creating them because they simply weren't profitable.[88] But like many of TSPA's clients, authors are willing to put money down to turn their dreams into becoming a published author, a reality. It is important, however, to have honest discussions with the authors at the beginning of their publishing journey, to ensure that they know the state of the publishing industry as well as how audiobook sales and royalties work.

5.2.3 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Marketing services

Adding marketing services to an audiobook production service may be another very viable market opportunity given that many of the survey and interview participants mentioned that they would want assistance on how to get their audiobook into the hands of their readers. It's possible that authors are becoming more and more aware of how crowded the marketplace is, and don't know how to get noticed amidst all the audiobooks that are con-

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88 Anna Faktorovich, "Interview with Mary Jo Putney, Best-Selling Romance Author," *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* 7, no. 2 (Summer, 2015): 10-24,76, http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/docview/1705352472?accountid=13800.

tinuously published throughout the year. How will people find their book on Audible after the initial buzz and their friends and family members have already bought their book? Assisting with keyword strategies, search engine optimization, and general marketing campaigns would be of great value to these authors who know that their book won't simply be found by their target readers once it makes its way to the various audiobook platforms. Like with print books and ebooks, it can be easy for new authors to make a few sales within the first few days of publishing, but once their friends and family lists have been exhausted, they really need help promoting to a much wider range of readers. TSPA's business model does not include the collection of royalties from book sales like trade publishers and many other indie services, which means they have no direct stake in how each book sells in the market. To date, marketing hasn't been a big focus for the agency and maybe it is better suited for marketing specific agencies to handle, but it's something to think about. Authors who are hiring an agency are hoping to avoid becoming "general contractors" and it would be an enticing service to know that all aspects of audiobook publishing are happening under one roof.

Podcasting

Some publishers are getting into the podcast market in hopes that the free content will spur audiobook purchases[89] and since podcasts can be started fairly easily, this is something that TSPA is keen on exploring as a marketing tool as well and could be added to the agency in the future to help establish TSPA as a leader in the audiobook service industry.

Companion documents

Offering the production of audiobook companion documents would be a nice inclusion for authors who have additional items that may not translate well into the audio format.[90] This would be a nice service to add since TSPA already works with contracted graphic designers who work on their authors book designs.

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89 "Readers Are Listening," 35.
90 Jacob Mohr, "How to Record an Audiobook: Audiobook Self Publishing Explained."

DRM and Copyright Concerns

There are issues that surround Digital Rights Management (DRM) for authors (especially self-published authors) who, from person experience, tend to be more concerned about owning their own copyright and want to maintain control of their work, which can be a reason that they choose to self publish in the first place, rather than try to find a traditional publisher. Releasing a digital file into the wild of the internet can make authors nervous since it is hard to know how your book is being circulated once it's released. In a Library and Archives Canada audiobook and ebook report, it was stated that, "The goal is to limit piracy of copyrighted work, but these measures often also have the effect of locking content into a given sales channel." Consumer push-back has led some to give up DRM procedures entirely so that their content can be accessed more freely. Even back in 2008, before audiobooks had taken off in Canada and before Audible.ca launched, DRM concerns were leading some publishers to stop locking their files into specific channels.[91] Though publishers have always been concerned about copyright violations, having free access to distribute across multiple channels without restrictions can sometimes outweigh the downside of the potential illegal sharing of the work.[92] These same concerns apply to self-published authors and it is an important consideration that may require more research in order for TSPA to recommend secure distribution options.

5.2.4 IMPROVING UPON THE RESEARCH

There are ways in which the primary research within this report can be improved upon in the future. The interview questions were geared to indie authors who hadn't published an audiobook yet but it would be interesting to hear from self-published authors who have already produced one to gain insights from what they have learned and the types of services that they engaged with. There were also very few survey participants due to the ethics recruiting restrictions that were in place. With a revised research design, a larger sample size could be reached to get more definitive results.

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91 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 5.
92 Turner-Riggs, "Audiobook and ebook Publishing in Canada," 5, 21.

To really solve the research question at hand, a follow up series of interviews with any TSPA author who has used the new audiobook program would determine if the program is suiting their needs and if there are any refinements that could be made.

6.0 conclusion

Self-published authors have many difficult decisions to make. They are responsible for paying for every part of their printed books, ebooks and audiobooks, including production, distribution and marketing. An author may have many reasons for producing their book in audio format from adding credibility to their brands, reaching new market segments or following their dreams to try to become a bestseller against all the odds, but many self-published authors will not sell enough audiobooks to make a return on their investments.[93] When presented with the facts of the current audiobook landscape in Canada, many indie authors and publishers still choose to record their books, perhaps because they are swept up in the promise of a new and exciting industry that is still growing. With a slim chance of profit, authors need to identify their publishing goals and make realistic sales estimates before diving in. These authors are savvy, they know how to research and they are incredible at figuring out how to publish their work in unique ways, often pushing advances forward within in the industry themselves. For some authors though, the endless information available makes it difficult to get sound advice on how to begin. Understanding their desired end goals will help determine if producing an audiobook is a worthwhile investment, and subsequently, what distribution model would work best for them. It has been noted in this report that every self-published author is unique and has different needs. These discussions can take place through consultations with a company like TSPA, so authors have access to the right tools, a strategy for success and a realistic outlook on the audiobook market.

For authors who are unsure about publishing an audiobook, the barriers of cost and time are compounded by the overall mystique that still exists about the world of audiobooks. Those willing to pay for publishing services, want to be told how much it will cost,

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93 The numbers are inconclusive and there are many variables to consideer, but it has been said that self published books sell an average of 250 print copies throughout their lifetime (see https://selfpublishingrelief.com/self-publishing -numbers-the-cost-the-profits-and-what-constitutes-good-book-sales-self-publishing-relief/). If this is extrapolated to audiobooks and we assume a list price of $15, for which an author gets 40% royalties (only if they have signed an exclusivity agreement with Audible) the revenue on 250 copies would be around $1500, not including any additional fees. If the audiobook cost around $2000 to make, the author will not

how long it will take and what steps are involved, then they will be interested in getting the ball rolling and paying the associated fees. TSPA has always been about transparency and telling their authors exactly what goes on behind the scenes, which is why outlining a clear path for audiobook production is a great place to start and build upon as the program develops. Offering distilled down information will help authors make their difficult decisions. Issues such as voice over talent, and navigating complex distribution channels, are hurdles that this agile program can grapple with over time and find new ways to approach.

With the research presented in this report, TSPA is equipped to begin their audiobook publishing journey with excited authors who are ready to trust them with their stories. The recommendations and proposed solutions in this report are aimed at inspiring new ideas and service offerings within the Canadian market to further advance and bring clarity to the audiobook industry, specifically when it comes to options suited for self-published authors. Many opportunities lie ahead for companies interested in servicing the unique needs of these authors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW INCLUSION CRITERIA

SURVEY
INCLUSION
CRITERIA

- People who are on TSPA's email list (mainly consisting of current and past clients as well as potential clients who has expressed interest in TSPA's services)
- Authors or writers who are independently published or are currently working on publishing a title
- Authors or writers who are aware of audiobooks in the marketplace
- Authors or writers who are both interested in and not interested in producing an audiobook

SURVEY
EXCLUSION
CRITERIA

- Employees or family members of TSPA
- Authors or writers who have never heard of audiobooks

INTERVIEW
INCLUSION
CRITERIA

- People who are on TSPA's email list
- Authors or writers who are independently published or are currently publishing a title
- Authors or writers who are considering producing an audiobook

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSION
CRITERIA

- Employees or family members of TSPA
- Authors or writers who have never heard of audiobooks
- Authors or writers who have no interest in independently publishing their work

The following text is the exact text each participant of the survey received when clicking on the Survey Monkey link. Where participants were asked to explain a response, there was an open field for them to write a long format answer otherwise the bullet points represent check boxes.

Independent Audiobook Publishing Survey

Thank you for consenting to participate in this anonymous survey about independently published audiobooks. We appreciate your support in this research endeavour.

Please answer the following 10 questions with as much detail as possible.

If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please contact the principal investigator at […].

1. ARE YOU A PUBLISHED AUTHOR?

- I am a self-published author
- I am a published author with a traditional press/publishing house or hybrid publisher
- No, but I am currently working on self publishing my first book
- No, but I am currently working on my first book with a traditional publishing house or hybrid publisher
- No, I am not an author
- Other (please specify)

2. DO YOU THINK AUDIOBOOKS ARE AN IMPORTANT AND/OR NECESSARY PUBLISHING FORMAT? PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY OR WHY NOT.

- Yes
- No
- Please explain why

3. ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PUBLISHING YOUR OWN AUDIOBOOK? PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY OR WHY NOT.

- Yes

- No

- Please explain why

4. HOW WOULD YOU WANT TO RECORD YOUR AUDIOBOOK?

- With a professional voice actor

- I would like to record it using my own voice

- Other (please specify)

5. HOW WILL YOU DISTRIBUTE YOUR AUDIOBOOK TO YOUR INTENDED AUDIENCE? PLEASE LIST ALL PLACES, WEBSITES (INCLUDING PERSONAL WEBSITES), APPS, PLATFORMS AND RETAILERS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE YOUR AUDIOBOOK TO BE AVAILABLE ON.

6. WOULD YOU LOOK INTO HIRING A COMPANY TO PRODUCE YOUR AUDIOBOOK OR WOULD YOU TRY TO DO IT ON YOUR OWN? EXPLAIN THE REASONING BEHIND YOUR CHOICE BELOW.

- I would hire a company to produce my audiobook and handle the distribution of my audiobook. I want a company to handle it all from start to finish.

- I would produce the audiobook myself but hire a company to help me distribute my audiobook

- I would hire a company to produce my audiobook, but I would distribute it myself (such as through Amazon's ACX service)

- I would record, edit and distribute the audiobook myself. I want to do the whole process myself from start to finish.

- Please explain your reasoning

7. IS OWNING THE COPYRIGHT TO YOUR AUDIOBOOK IMPORTANT TO YOU? PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY OR WHY NOT.

- Yes
- No
- Please explain why

8. LIST YOUR LARGEST BARRIERS TO DECIDING TO PUBLISH AN AUDIOBOOK (WHAT MAKES PUBLISHING ONE DIFFICULT, IE COST, DIFFICULTY, LACK OF INFORMATION ETC.). BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE.

9. WHAT WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO INVEST TO PRODUCE YOUR AUDIOBOOK (INCLUDING RECORDING, THE HIRING OF ANY VOICE TALENT IF DESIRED, AND EDITING THE FINAL PRODUCT READY FOR DISTRIBUTION?

- $1000 or less
- $1000-$2500
- $2500-$5000
- $5000-$10000
- $10000 or more
- Other (please specify)

10. WHAT SERVICES WOULD YOU WANT TO HIRE A COMPANY TO COMPLETE, THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER WHEN IT COMES TO PUBLISHING AN AUDIOBOOK?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with the participants permission. The following interview questions were consistent across all eight interviewees with some variation depending on the authors responses.

- Are you a published author?
- Please describe what your experience has been like with publishing your book?
- Did you have all of the information you needed to publish?
- How did you find information about self publishing?
- Do you think audiobooks are a necessary publishing format?
- Have you thought about publishing an audiobook?
  - If no, can you explain why not?
  - If yes, please explain why you are interested in publishing an audiobook?
- Will you be looking to publish an audiobook within a year or two?
  - Are there any reasons that you can cite for not producing an audiobook right now?
- Is making an audiobook an important part of the process for you or was it something that you thought about after you published your print book or ebook?
- Do you think audiobooks are a necessary publishing format?
- If you were to record an audiobook how would you want it to be recorded:
  - With your own voice?
  - With a professional voice actor?
- Who do you intend to sell your audiobook to?
- How will you distribute your audiobook to that audience? Please list any other places you will look to sell your audiobook including Amazon.
- Would you want to sell it on a personal website?
- Have you looked into hiring a company to produce your audiobook or would you try to do it on your own?
  - If you plan to do it on your own, what are the reasons for this choice?

- What do you think an audiobook should cost to make including all of the production aspects from recording and editing to producing and uploading final files?
- List your largest barriers to deciding to publish an audiobook (what makes publishing one difficult, ie cost, difficulty, lack of information etc.). Be as specific as possible.
- In your own words, how do you think audiobooks are made?
- In your own words, how do you think audiobooks are distributed?
- Is there anything about audiobooks that you would like to know more about, or certain information that you haven't been able to find or understand?
- Are there any parts of the audiobook publishing process that seem more daunting to you than others?
- Is owning the copyright of the audiobook important to you?
  - Please explain why not owning, or owning your own copyright is important to you?
- What would make life easier for you when it comes to making an audiobook?