

FIRST BYTES FREE
How (and Why) to Create Effective
Digital Book Samples

by

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*Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of*

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A B S T R A C T

Brick-and-mortar bookstores have grown scarce over the preceding decade, while online retailers have prospered. This presents challenges and opportunities for small Canadian trade book publishers. Although it is harder to find any given book in a physical store, publishers have an abundance of online resources for book promotion, including the ability to emulate the in-store browsing experience by offering “digital samples.” There is evidence that providing digital samples can increase sales, but a survey of Canadian publishers’ online presence suggests that digital samples are a neglected aspect of trade book promotion. This paper analyzes the trend toward online book sales and the various available methods of sampling, and concludes with recommendations for how publishers can best use third-party sampling options (such as Google Books and Amazon’s “Look Inside”) and own-site HTML-based samples to increase the online appeal, discoverability, and sales of their titles.

To Olin Winter Leyne.
I look forward to sharing many happy hours with you in (real-life) bookstores,
just as soon as you stop eating books.

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L I S T O F A C R O N Y M S & A B B R E V I A T I O N S

TERMS	DEFINITIONS
AAP	Association of American Publishers
ABA	American Booksellers Association
ACP	Association of Canadian Publishers
BNC	BookNet Canada
CBA	Canadian Booksellers Association
CMS	content management system
CSS	cascading style sheets
HTML	hypertext markup language
ONIX	online information exchange
PDF	portable document format
SEO	search engine optimization
WYSIWYG	what-you-see-is-what-you-get

I N T R O D U C T I O N

On the evening of August 23, 2013, Rolf Maurer of New Star Books received the Pandora’s Collective award for Publisher of the Year. His acceptance remarks were simple yet poignant: by way of thanks, he rattled off a list of about sixty-five Vancouver bookstores that he had patronized or done with business with over the past thirty years—the vast majority of which are now closed. While there is a glimmer of hope for Vancouver patrons of independent bookstores with the August 2013 opening of Paper Hound, the recent closures of Vancouver institutions such as Book Warehouse and Duthie’s have left a sizable hole in the local book retail landscape. Exact figures for nation-wide booksellers are not available, but it is safe to say the phenomenon is not unique to Vancouver; as a recent *Globe and Mail* story lamented, “bookstore closings have become so common they often pass unremarked.”¹

Readers are of course still finding and buying books, but evidence presented below shows that increasingly it is happening online. This trend has implications beyond a mere change of retailer: a recent study in the United Kingdom found that online book shopping tends to be “a more linear process” compared to the “serendipity of browsing” in traditional bookshops, with 81 percent of online shoppers saying they visit an online store looking for a specific book.² If publishers hope to keep (and grow) their clientele in the virtual realm, they must adapt their marketing tactics to a very different environment.

New Star Books

The first incarnation of New Star Books emerged from a loosely knit literary collective that in 1969 began publishing short fiction and poetry in the “Georgia Straight Writing Series,” a literary supplement to the *Georgia Straight* (at that time a radical underground weekly newspaper). The group broke away from the *Straight* in 1971 and formed the Vancouver Community Press. In 1974 it was renamed New Star Books, and in 1990 Maurer became publisher. Today, New Star publishes about six to ten titles per year. The list is a mix of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, with an emphasis on politics, social issues, and local history and culture.³ Sales are generally steady but modest; as Maurer says, New Star is “mostly interested in books that are not particularly mainstream.”⁴

1 John Barber, “Farewell, Nicholas Hoare: Bibliophiles Mourn Shuttering of Toronto Bookstore,” April 1, 2013, *Globe and Mail*, theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/farewell-nicholas-hoare-bibliophiles-mourn-shuttering-of-toronto-bookstore/article10653530/.

2 Audrey Laing and Jo Royle, “Bookselling Online: An Examination of Consumer Behaviour Patterns,” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2013): 121, 117, link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs12109-013-9318-3.pdf.

3 “About,” New Star Books, accessed September 12, 2013, newstarbooks.com/about.php.

4 Rolf Maurer (publisher, New Star Books), interview by Michael Leyne, August 22, 2013, Vancouver.

For the two-and-a-half years up until May 2013 Maurer was the sole employee, and as of September 2013, he was again working solo. To manage the tremendous workload, he employs a number of freelance editors and designers on a book-to-book basis.

Like most presses of a similar size, New Star has a limited budget for marketing and promotion. The bulk of it is dedicated to sending out copies for review in various newspapers, magazines, and academic periodicals. New Star also runs print ads in *BC Bookworld*, and occasionally in niche publications such as *BC Studies*. Further marketing efforts include email newsletters (to roughly 1,800 subscribers), blog posts at NewStarBooks.com, readings and book launches, and attendance at events such as Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences and word Vancouver.

To spark further sales of certain titles (particularly those whose initial reception was not as robust as desired), New Star has in recent years posted PDFs of entire books for free download. They are not heavily promoted or easily found on the website, but if one navigates to the page for, e.g., *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada*, there is underneath the bibliographic information a small link titled “Download the PDF,” above a “Look Inside” icon. Ten books are currently available, but Maurer has not detected any noticeable sales impact, positive or negative.

New Star’s experimentation with offering PDFs free online was borne partly of a curiosity in the potentials of online promotion, and partly of a recognition that readers are not finding books like they used to: it is more difficult than ever just to find a bookstore (or a newspaper), let alone a specific title from a small press such as New Star.

As shelf space vanishes and the Internet approaches global ubiquity, it is now imperative for publishers to go beyond dabbling in online book marketing, and begin to develop robust online marketing initiatives. Major multi-national firms have spent untold millions of dollars building digital warehouses and proprietary sampling widgets (which will be discussed below), but there is a relatively simple and inexpensive way for small Canadian publishers to enhance the presence of their wares online: by providing online book excerpts, or “digital samples.”

What follows is an analysis of the rapidly changing book retail sector (Part One), a description of the online digital sampling landscape (Part Two), and a proposal for how small-to-medium trade publishers can develop HTML-based digital samples in the hopes of aiding book discovery and promotion (Part Three). Although many of the examples and circumstances discussed throughout are specific to New Star, the proposal is broadly applicable to most publishers. By ensuring all its titles are easily found and sampled online, a small press will be able to increase the visibility of and interest in its titles, and maintain its sales in a changing marketplace—if not increase them.

PART ONE
THE CHANGING RETAIL LANDSCAPE

Disappearing Bookstores

Maurer’s list of extinct bookstores is, while an admittedly unscientific survey, reflective of an acknowledged trend. Upon its closing in 2010, the owner of Sophia Books lamented “there is no room for independents [in Vancouver].”⁵ The subsequent closure in 2012 of four Book Warehouse locations certainly did not prove him wrong.⁶ As Kevin Williams, the publisher of Talon Books, has noted, “It’s really hard to have your books on the shelf anywhere in the city. If people want to buy our books, often they have to come to us.”⁷

With the rise of Chapters and Indigo and its consolidation into one entity (henceforth referred to as “Chapters/Indigo”) in the late 1990s–early 2000s, the ranks of independent bookstores in Canada were “decimated,”⁸ a development that has since, by all accounts, only worsened. A 2010 wire article noted the “rash of independent bookstore closings in recent months and years” across Canada, the result of increased pressure from Chapters/Indigo and online retailers;⁹ more recently, a *Globe and Mail* article noted the “enormous challenges” facing book retailers.¹⁰ In a *Publishers Weekly* article assessing the state of Canadian publishing in 2012, the president of the Canadian Booksellers Association (CBA; since absorbed into the Retail Council of Canada) called it a “really, scary dark season” for retailers; although he claimed membership in the CBA had not dropped off precipitously, the article noted further closures of prominent stores in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto, due to the familiar bugaboos of cost increases, price competition with online retailers, and the continued rise of ebooks.¹¹ As one publisher succinctly put it, “We have to work with the fact that there are fewer bookstores.”¹²

5 Miranda Nelson, “Sophia Books Becomes Latest Independent Vancouver Bookstore to Close,” Books (blog), *Straight.com*, April 26, 2010, straight.com/blogra/sophia-books-becomes-latest-independent-vancouver-bookstore-close.

6 Marsha Lederman, “Book Warehouse Closure Another Blow to Arts Scene,” *Globe and Mail*, March 15, 2012, theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/book-warehouse-closure-another-blow-to-arts-scene/article534048/.

7 John Mackie, “Downtown’s Cool New Store: A Bookshop,” *Vancouver Sun*, August 3, 2013, vancouver.sun.com/news/Weekend+Extra+Downtown+cool+store+bookshop/8742595/story.html.

8 Rowland Lorimer, *Ultra Libris: Policy, Technology, and the Creative Economy of Book Publishing in Canada* (Toronto: ECW / Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing, 2012), 209.

9 Melanie Patten, “Some Independent Bookstores Thrive, Others Barely Survive in Electronic World,” *Canadian Press*, July 31, 2010, search.proquest.com/docview/734530780?accountid=13800.

10 Marsha Lederman, “Munro’s Books Boasts a Shelf Life of 50 Years—and Counting,” *Globe and Mail*, August 30, 2013, theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/munros-books-boasts-a-shelf-life-of-50-years-and-counting/article14059164/.

11 Leigh Ann Williams, “Adapting to Conditions: Canadian Publishing 2012,” *Publishers Weekly*, September 21, 2012, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/international-book-news/article/54056-adapting-to-conditions.html.

12 Ibid.

In Canada, Chapters/Indigo dominates the diminished bookstore environment that remains—as of 2011 they accounted for about half of sales,¹³ and up to 70 percent of sales for some publishers.¹⁴ This is especially problematic for small presses like New Star: while the buying decisions of independent bookstores are often more content-driven and motivated by personal idiosyncrasies, large chains focus on sell-through rates, leading to an emphasis on mainstream titles¹⁵—titles for which New Star is largely unable to compete, due to a relative lack of resources.¹⁶ This was not such a problem when there were more, healthier independents; as Maurer explains, if you could sell a title into at least one independent store, you could then leverage that fact to sell into more stores—now, a rejection from Chapters/Indigo shuts off a vast swath of potential shelf space.¹⁷ As ECW Press co-publisher David Caron put it, “The hardest part is that [Chapters/Indigo will] pass on a title entirely. ... But for a lot of people, Indigo is the only game in town.”¹⁸

Their status as “the only game in town” results in Chapters/Indigo influencing not just the types of books that are produced and where they are available, but also the very conditions under which publishers are willing and able to sell their books. The favourable terms of sale that Chapters/Indigo extracts for itself then compel many publishers to impose more onerous terms on smaller retailers, as Maurer explains:

Publishers do compete on content ... but we also compete on terms. The mainstream of publishing, however, has decided to eschew that competition. They have conceded terms, effectively, to the dictates of the large retail sector. And they have compounded the problem by insisting on tougher terms with the independent sector, which pays ten to twenty percent more per book, and has to pay the supplier in (typically) half the time. This has exacerbated the “competitive advantage” of the chains, and more than anything else (rent; e-books; Amazon) has led to the destruction of the independent sector—to the cost of publishers and writers as well as readers/consumers.¹⁹

To make matters even worse, space in the large retailers is increasingly being given over to non-book items. As part of a recently developed strategy, Chapters/Indigo stores will shelve fewer books and more “designer gift and lifestyle products,” which CEO Heather Reisman hopes will increasingly be inspired by books—e.g., throw pillows embroidered with quotes from children’s books.²⁰ Reisman claims the

13 Marina Strauss, “Indigo’s Heather Reisman Faces Digital Reckoning,” *Globe and Mail*, April 8, 2011, theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/indigos-heather-reisman-faces-digital-reckoning/article577337/.

14 Lorimer, *Ultra Libris*, 224.

15 Ibid., 143, 207.

16 Rolf Maurer, email to author, November 19, 2013.

17 Maurer, interview.

18 Williams, “Canadian Publishing 2012.”

19 Maurer, email.

20 Ibid.

diversification will bring more potential book buyers into stores²¹; Lorimer, however, sees this as a sign of the beginning of the end for the company.²² In the first quarter of 2013, revenue of Indigo Books & Music fell 8.1 percent.²³

In the United States (which accounts for approximately 15 percent of New Star's sales²⁴), observers such as Mike Shatzkin and Joseph Esposito consider the demise of traditional bookstores a foregone conclusion.²⁵ It is not all doom and gloom though: in 2012, the American Booksellers Association (ABA) reported an 8 percent increase in sales from independent bookstores, and membership rose from a historical low of 1,401 members in 2009 to 1,632 members.²⁶ Much of this renewed vitality can likely be attributed to the demise of the national chain Borders (which closed in 2011), and the growing trend toward "buying local" undoubtedly played a part as well.²⁷ But it is too early to proclaim the unqualified resurgence of the indies: ABA membership is still down 30 percent over the past decade (from about 2,400 members in 2002), and many of the stores that remain are resorting to filling budget gaps through unorthodox measures such as online crowdfunding campaigns.²⁸

The Growth of Online Sales

The causes of the changing book retail landscape are debatable—most of the sources cited above attribute the decline to the rise of ebooks and online retailers and increased costs for commercial space, while Maurer's analysis focuses more on the consolidation of the retail sector.²⁹ But regardless of the causal link, an increasing proportion of books sold in North America are now purchased online.

21 Ibid.

22 Lorimer, *Ultra Libris*, 230-31.

23 Leigh Ann Williams, "Sales Fall, Losses Rise at Indigo," *Publishers Weekly*, August 8, 2013, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/58632-sales-fall-losses-rise-at-indigo.html.

24 Maurer, interview.

25 Mike Shatzkin, "Losing Bookstores is a Much Bigger Problem for Publishers Than it is for Readers," *Shatzkin Files* (blog), *Idea Logical Company*, August 14, 2013, idealog.com/blog/losing-bookstores-is-a-much-bigger-problem-for-publishers-than-it-is-for-readers/; Joseph Esposito, "An Industry Pining for Bookstores," *Scholarly Kitchen*, August 12, 2013, scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/08/12/an-industry-pining-for-bookstores/.

26 Judith Rose, "BEA 2013: Town Hall and Annual Meeting: The Bookstores Are Alright," *Publishers Weekly*, May 31, 2013, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/57581-bea-2013-the-bookstores-are-alright.html; Julie Bosman, "To Stay Afloat, Bookstores Turn to Web Donors," *New York Times*, August 11, 2013, nytimes.com/2013/08/12/business/bookstores-turn-to-web-donors-to-stall-the-end.html.

27 Yvonne Zipp, "The Novel Resurgence of Independent Bookstores," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 2013, csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2013/0317/The-novel-resurgence-of-independent-bookstores.

28 Bosman, "To Stay Afloat."

29 Maurer, interview.

In the United States, online sales represented 8 percent of books sold in 2001.³⁰ By last year, they accounted for 42 percent;³¹ if you consider dollars spent rather than units sold, the figure is 45 percent.³²

A report commissioned by Canadian Heritage found that online book sales accounted for just 4 percent of total book sales in Canada in 2004, with brick-and-mortar chains and independents combining for 64 percent.³³ The same report examined the sales of eleven literary presses (a category that would include New Star) from 2003 – 2006, and found that online sales increased from 2 percent of the total in 2003 to just over 6 percent three years later, while the proportion of sales via “chain bookstores” fell from about one-third to about one-fifth over the same period.³⁴ As of 2012, BookNet Canada reports online sales at 25 percent of the overall market, while the share of bookstores is down to 37 percent.³⁵

Challenges of Selling Online

Buying a book online is a fundamentally different experience than buying a book “in real life.” Wandering the aisles of a great bookstore is not just a romanticized notion—there is good reason to believe that nothing sells books quite as well as books: in the estimation of McCabe and Henry, “serendipity and discovery generate as much as two-thirds of UK general book sales.”³⁶

In Canada, a number of studies have established the vital role of bookstores, beyond mere vendors, as generators of sales and awareness of books. In a 1996 survey of readers exiting Canadian bookstores with Canadian books in hand, only 29 percent of respondents said they visited the store to purchase a specific book; 63 percent of purchase decisions were made in the store.³⁷ A survey the following year expanded the purview to purchasers of all books, not just Canadian ones, and found that while 72 percent of respondents “had intended to purchase a book” when they entered the store, 60 percent of them decided in the bookstore which title to

30 Thomas Woll, *Publishing for Profit: Successful Bottom-Line Management for Book Publishers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 11.

31 Milena Schmidt and Mina Park, “Trends in Consumer Book Buying (Infographic),” *Random Notes* (blog), Random House, June 3, 2013, randomnotes.randomhouse.com/trends-in-consumer-book-buying-infographic/.

32 “Online Retailers Gained, While Brick-and-Mortar Lost In Wake of Borders Exit,” Bowker press release, August 6, 2013, bowker.com/en-US/aboutus/press_room/2013/pr_08062013.shtml.

33 Turner-Riggs (firm), *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2007), under “Market Share by Sales Channel,” pch.gc.ca/eng/1290025541029/1290025541031.

34 *Ibid.*, under “Market Access for Canadian Titles.”

35 “Canadian Book Consumer 2012,” *BNC Blog*, BookNet Canada, May 21, 2013, booknetcanada.ca/blog/2013/5/21/canadian-book-consumer-2012.html.

36 Douglas McCabe and Jo Henry, “Why Bookshops Matter,” *Bookseller*, March 22, 2013, proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=86637278&site=bsi-live&scope=site.

37 Rowland Lorimer and Roger Barnes, “Book Reading, Purchasing, Marketing, and Title Production,” in *Book Publishing 1*, ed. Rowland Lorimer, Jillian Shoichet, and John Maxwell (Vancouver: CCSP Press, 2005), 228.

purchase.³⁸ A 2005 survey of Canadian book buyers suggests that impulse purchases account for 42 percent of Canadian book purchases.³⁹ More recently, the results of BookNet Canada's *The Canadian Book Consumer 2012: Annual Report* indicate that impulsive book-buying—whether it is “title-planned, timing-impulsive,” vice-versa, or a true “impulse purchase”—varies by retail channel, with the three categories of impulse purchase accounting for over 80 percent of book purchases at grocery stores and other “non-book retail outlets,” about 70 percent at chain bookstores, and about 60 percent of purchases online and at independent bookstores.⁴⁰

Closely related to the role of bookstores in generating impulse buys is their role in creating awareness of titles. In the 1996 study cited above, 39 percent of purchasers were unaware of the title they had just purchased before entering the store.⁴¹ By 2012, according to BookNet Canada, only 21 percent of buyers of print books became aware of books purchased through in-store displays.⁴² Online discovery was the chosen method for 21 percent of print-book buyers and 44 percent of ebook buyers.⁴³ When “awareness factors” are broken down by method of purchase, an obvious yet important distinction is revealed: the most popular awareness factor for buyers at brick-and-mortar outlets is, by far, “in-person” (which includes in-store displays and personal recommendations), while online buyers are almost twice as likely to become aware of a book online (about 55 percent) versus in-person (about 27 percent).⁴⁴ The most recent Bowker report also breaks discovery down by format: the most popular way to learn about print books is to stumble across them in a brick-and-mortar store (“in-store display / on-shelf / spinning rack”); for ebooks, “friend / relative recommendation” is number one, followed by “read excerpt / sample” online.⁴⁵

A crucial feature of the bookstore browsing experience, and one that is difficult to replicate online, is the simple act of picking up a book, examining its cover, and perhaps flipping through its contents. “The best way to sell books,” according to Jane Friedman (HarperCollins CEO from 1997 to 2008), “is to have the consumer be able to read some of that content.”⁴⁶ It is a simple but important observation, and is confirmed by a study in the UK that found “the opportunity to pick up and leaf through books are important qualities for consumers, and are absent from the online book buying experience.”⁴⁷

38 Ibid., 236.

39 Lorimer, *Ultra Libris*, 217.

40 BookNet Canada, *The Canadian Book Consumer 2012: Annual Report* (Toronto: BookNet Canada, 2013), 58.

41 Lorimer and Barnes, “Book Reading, Purchasing,” 228.

42 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Book Consumer 2012*, 54.

43 Ibid., 53.

44 Ibid., 55.

45 Schmidt and Park, “Consumer Book Buying.”

46 Gabe Habash, “HC Adapts App to Push Excerpts on Facebook,” *Publishers Weekly*, June 22, 2012, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/52701-hc-adapts-app-to-push-excerpts-on-facebook.html.

47 Laing and Royle, “Bookselling Online,” 122.

Despite the move to online sales, McCabe and Henry believe that “bookshop customers are far more likely to purchase a book they have seen displayed physically than those featured on an e-tailers’ website”—however, they go on to note that “they are also more likely to buy a book because they were able to look inside or read an extract.”⁴⁸ Bowker’s 2010 PubTrack Consumer Research Panel found that the second most popular reason a consumer chose a book (after “Cover/jacket description/ testimonial appeals to them”) was “Looked through book, and liked it.”⁴⁹ According to Laing and Royle, even many online shoppers end up purchasing a chosen title in a physical bookstore because of a “desire to check the book physically—to pick it up, leaf through, and check the contents.”⁵⁰

It should come as no great surprise to publishers that people want to look at a book before buying it. Unfortunately, in Canada there are now fewer opportunities for publishers to simply get a book into a store: independents are disappearing, and bookstore promotions are now “just as likely to feature blankets, teapots, [and] owl bottle openers” as books.⁵¹ Given the shrinking independent sector and Chapters/Indigo’s diversification into the throw-pillow market, it seems likely that online sales, and hence online discovery, will continue to grow. Much is lost in the online book-buying experience—a browser tab simply cannot recreate with high fidelity the joys of a bookstore. But if that is where people buy books now, then it is important for publishers to offer readers some means of digitally “browsing” a book. As author David Balzer says, “you have to somehow replicate that experience of stumbling upon a book in a bookstore.”⁵²

Benefits and Opportunities

It is tempting (and common) to predict disastrous implications for publishers with each freshly shuttered shop; McCabe and Henry argue that “the single most effective technique for dismantling the physical book sector would be to accelerate the closure of bookshops.”⁵³ Bookstores have long been a critical link in the publishing supply chain, serving as the primary customer of publishers and the primary retail venue for readers.

As suggested by Maurer’s analysis above, publishers seeking to bolster the independent sector could offer retailers better terms. A publisher acting independently would be required to suffer immediate short-term financial pain, in the hopes of

48 McCabe and Henry, “Why Bookshops Matter.”

49 “Enhanced Metadata,” Bowker, accessed September 22, 2013, bowker.com/assets/downloads/products/DataSubmissionGuide_enhanced.pdf.

50 Laing and Royle, “Bookselling Online,” 122.

51 Kate Carraway, “If E-Books are so Big, Why are they Marketed so Badly?,” *Globe and Mail*, May 25, 2012, last updated June 18, 2012, theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/if-e-books-are-so-big-why-are-they-marketed-so-badly/article4209810/.

52 Ibid.

53 McCabe and Henry, “Why Bookshops Matter.”

contributing to a more vibrant retail sector that will eventually return long-term gains to the publisher. However, since any single small publisher represents only a tiny percentage of a store's stock, this tactic would be most effective if small publishers acted in concert—but any collective action would likely attract accusations of collusion, as happened with the ebook price-fixing antitrust case in the United States. In an industry reliant on razor-thin margins, this is a challenging path.

Regardless, the shift to online sales need not be calamitous for publishers, and in fact offers some advantages. Publishers can continue to supply the remaining bookstores while recognizing and adapting to the increased role of online sales channels. At the very least, this means better promoting their books to the growing numbers of online shoppers; for the more ambitious publisher, the opportunity exists to sell directly to customers via the publisher's website.

Data Gathering

Selling online allows the collection of useful data about customers and their behaviour. For publishers selling through Amazon.ca, Business Reports allow the tracking of traffic to a publisher's various titles and the conversion rates of viewers,⁵⁴ data that would only be available from traditional retailers if they were to install surveillance cameras and closely watch the actions of browsing patrons. Publishers selling directly from their website can track the same data and more: using software such as Google Analytics, publishers can learn what devices buyers are using, how long they are spending on the site and what they are looking at, which other titles they have shown interest in, and where they are located; email addresses can be collected and, if permitted, added to the mailing list. All of this information can be used to tweak the website and marketing efforts, learn what readers respond to, and generate more sales.

Fewer Returns

Another benefit of selling online is the chance to bypass “one of the most difficult aspects of the publishing business”: returns.⁵⁵ The standard practice of essentially selling books on consignment is a major problem for publishers (and others in the book trade). According to Woll, the practice distracts publishers, reduces cash flow, inflates inventory levels, and adds cost to the entire publishing process, particularly in warehousing and fulfillment—while return rates for small presses are generally less than those of the bigger publishers, they still account for approximately 11–13 percent of books sold.⁵⁶ In the New Star office, significant floor space—already at a premium—is occupied by stacks of returned books, which are often dog-eared or

54 “Sales Success Using Business Reports,” Amazon.ca, accessed October 5, 2013, amazon.ca/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200989600.

55 Woll, *Publishing for Profit*, 337.

56 *Ibid.*, 338, 337.

scratched just enough that they can not be resold except at remainder-bin prices. Selling directly to the consumer means never fearing that in six months a retailer will return books en masse, potentially damaged and unsalable, for credit or a refund.

Reduced Costs

There are compelling motivations for publishers to undertake “the more aggressive use of the Internet as an online marketing and sales channel.”⁵⁷ The most enticing reason may be the increase in profit margins—as Woll explains, “If you sell directly to the consumer, without the need to involve middlemen, you don’t have to give away discount to those intermediaries. You can sell your book for full price and record all of the proceeds as your revenue.”⁵⁸ Given that the trade discount is generally around 50 percent, this can result in a significant increase in per-unit revenue. There are other costs involved, as Woll notes—notably shipping and direct marketing costs—but it is standard practice to charge buyers for shipping costs, and conducting the marketing online, where the buyers are already, is much cheaper than traditional print-based marketing efforts.⁵⁹ There are also costs associated with setting up an ecommerce-enabled website, but the majority of Canadian publishers (New Star included) have already done this.⁶⁰

Thompson’s Characteristics of New Technologies

John B. Thompson lists several characteristics of “new technologies” that allow publishers to “add real value to their content.”⁶¹ In the context of selling books online, these characteristics can enable publishers to not merely attempt to recreate the in-store browsing experience, but to enhance it.

EASE OF ACCESS: Online bookselling largely erases “certain spatial and temporal constraints.”⁶² Interested readers can buy books anytime from virtually anywhere, regardless of the location or business hours of retailers, or the number of physical copies of a book in a given store. As of 2010, 98 percent of Canadian households had broadband access,⁶³ and Maurer believes that New Star’s audience is particularly active online.⁶⁴

57 Turner-Riggs, *Book Retail Sector*, under “The Impacts of Technology on Established Publishing Models.”

58 Woll, *Publishing for Profit*, 269.

59 *Ibid.*, 269-71.

60 See “A Survey of Canadian Publishers,” page 18.

61 John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 333.

62 *Ibid.*, 334.

63 “Broadband Report,” Canadian Radio-television and Communications Commission, under “Table 2.1.1.,” November 2011, crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/broadband/bbreport1111.htm.

64 Maurer, interview.

UPDATABILITY: Compared to printed material, where changes to a text require another print run, online content can be modified “quickly, frequently, and relatively cheaply.”⁶⁵ Digital samples can be posted early in the book production process and then updated to their final published form, or a new excerpt may be selected for feature based on current events or the conversation generated by the excerpt.

SEARCHABILITY: It is possible to search inside a printed book using the table of contents and index (or simply leafing through the pages), but of course an online search engine is “infinitely quicker and more powerful ... and can be extended to much larger quantities of content.”⁶⁶

In the context of the wide-open internet this presents challenges to a publisher trying to stand out from the field, but it also enables readers to quickly find what they are looking for on a publisher’s website and even within the full text of a book, if a publisher partners with Google Books (which will be discussed in some detail below). McCabe argues that “consumer behaviour is highly directed online.”⁶⁷ When people are searching for a particular book or type of book, ensuring that a title’s promotional material is easily searchable is a critical step in directing that consumer behaviour to the desired location.

PORTABILITY: As Thompson notes, unless it is device-dependent, vast amounts of online content can be reproduced and transferred to or accessed on devices including personal computers, smart phones, tablet computers, ereaders, and so on.⁶⁸ Of course most print objects are highly portable as well, but internet-enabled devices can store vast numbers of books and access infinite amounts of online content—e.g., book excerpts—with little burden to the reader.

This portability also allows online excerpts to be easily shared with friends and family around the globe. In an article that notes the continued importance of “social discovery,” Andrew Rhomberg observes that “we are now able to send quotes, snippets or samples (first 10%) of an (electronic) book with ease to those to whom we are recommending our books, which we could not have done in the day of the printed book.”⁶⁹ His parenthetical qualifiers need not apply; by offering them online, publishers enable the sharing of digital excerpts of any length from ebooks and print books.

INTERTEXTUALITY: This refers to the ability to “give a dynamic character” to the “referential function of texts,” by providing hyperlinks to sources cited, other books, external resources of any kind, and online sales venues.⁷⁰

65 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 334.

66 *Ibid.*, 335.

67 McCabe and Henry, “Why Bookshops Matter.”

68 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 335-36.

69 Andrew Rhomberg, “Five Shades of Book Discovery,” *Digital Book World*, March 4, 2013, digitalbookworld.com/2013/five-shades-of-book-discovery/.

70 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 336.

MULTIMEDIA: The ability to offer multimedia features that can not be printed on a page “enable[s] content providers to add real value,” e.g., by adding more photos or streaming videos to supplement a book’s content.⁷¹

Interest & Sales

The two pioneers of digital sampling—Amazon and Google—have reported encouraging effects on sales. Amazon’s “Search Inside the Book” feature boosted sales for participating titles (and will be discussed further below), and early adopters of Google Book Search saw the sales of backlist titles increase.⁷² In touting the benefits of its book digitization projects, Google “emphasizes the marketing benefits to copyright holders,” arguing that the endeavour increases the visibility of backlist and “lightly marketed new titles”⁷³—which, it is safe to say, encompasses the entire catalogues of most small Canadian publishers.

Whether a publisher opts to sell online via Amazon or their own site, digital samples make books easier to find and peruse. Because “the content of the book is separable from the form,” publishers can “dissociate browsing from the turning of printed pages in a bricks-and-mortar bookstore.”⁷⁴ The separation of content and form takes on far greater profundity in the consideration of the eBook market, but it is germane to the online sale of print books as well: the content of a print book can be easily and accurately represented digitally—and even enhanced—in order to entice buyers. By embracing online book sales and digital sampling, small Canadian publishers can to some degree unshackle themselves from the turbulent, Chapters/Indigo-dominated realm of physical bookstores. The next section considers various book sampling practices, from Internet behemoths to tiny Canadian trade publishers.

71 Ibid.

72 Ari Okano, “Digitized Book Search Engines and Copyright Concerns,” *Shidler Journal of Law, Commerce, and Technology* 3, no. 4 (2007), para. 11, hdl.handle.net/1773.1/397.

73 Ibid.

74 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 329, 328.

PART TWO CURRENT SAMPLING PRACTICES

Third-Party Samples

Amazon

When Amazon launched the “Look Inside the Book” feature in 2001, one of the participating publishers said that “helping [Amazon’s] customers crack the spine is simply smart marketing.”⁷⁵ Two years later, Amazon launched an enhanced version of Look Inside called “Search Inside the Book,” which allows users to search within a certain book or across Amazon’s entire digital catalogue and then view a limited preview surrounding the results.⁷⁶ Publishers were “guardedly cooperative;” some feared the service would hamper book sales by offering free content, and the Authors Guild objected to titles being featured without the author’s explicit consent.⁷⁷

One week after the launch of Search Inside, CEO Jeff Bezos announced that the program was “driving increased sales”: sales growth for participating titles was 9 percent higher than growth for titles not participating.⁷⁸ After a full year, that number had dropped only slightly, to 7 percent.⁷⁹

The company has not released related sales figures since, but today the Search and Look Inside widget is a robust and prominent feature, easily identified by either a bright yellow arrow or a blue triangle and the words “Look Inside!” on the cover image of a book. After uploading a PDF that conforms to Amazon’s specifications, publishers are promised “Improved Search Results” and “Point-of-Sale Sampling” that will “help customers to discover and sell more of your books.”⁸⁰ Of the one hundred “Best Sellers of 2013” listed at Amazon.com on September 23, ninety included Search and Look Inside functionality.⁸¹ Interestingly, at Amazon.ca on the same day, only three of the top ten and fifty-six of the top one hundred had Search

75 “Amazon.com Works with Publishers to Make Millions of Book Pages Available for Customers to Flip Through, with Millions More to Follow,” Amazon Media Room, October 10, 2001, phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=502807&highlight=.

76 Lisa Guernsey, “In Amazon’s Text Search, a Field Day for Book Browsers,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2003, nytimes.com/2003/11/06/technology/in-amazon-s-text-search-a-field-day-for-book-browsers.html.

77 David D. Kirkpatrick, “Amazon Plan Would Allow Searching Texts of Many Books,” *New York Times*, July 21, 2003, nytimes.com/2003/07/21/business/amazon-plan-would-allow-searching-texts-of-many-books.html.

78 “Amazon.com Clarifies October 30 News Release,” Amazon Media Room, November 3, 2003, phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=502770&highlight=.

79 “Amazon.ca Launches ‘Search Inside!’ Enabling customers to Discover Books by Searching and Previewing the Text Inside,” Amazon Media Room, August 9, 2005, phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1123205&highlight=.

80 “Publishers and Authors: Join Our Search Inside the Book Program,” Amazon.ca, accessed September 23, 2013, amazon.ca/gp/help/customer/display.html?ie=UTF8&nodeId=200464640.

81 “Best Sellers of 2013,” Amazon.com, accessed September 23, 2013, amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/2013/books/ref=zg_bs_tab_t_bsar.

and Look Inside enabled⁸²—this may be a result of Canadian publishers lacking the resources or inclination to participate, or it may be simple chance.

Google

With the rollout of Google Print in 2003 (since renamed Google Books), Google's ambition to digitize and make accessible all the information in the world set its sights on the world's print books. Through its Partner Program and its (highly contentious) Library Project, Google digitizes and indexes books, so that if a searched term appears in a book it will be included in the results, with a several-page excerpt and links to online retailers.⁸³ Unless a publisher agrees to include more, the excerpts are limited to two pages before and after the search term, and displayed text cannot be copy-and-pasted, to help "ensure that a book's content isn't copied illegally."⁸⁴

Nevertheless, in 2005 both the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers (AAP) sued Google for copyright infringement. The AAP settled in 2012; *Publishers Weekly* observed that it became evident during the AAP proceedings that the publishers "never really disagreed about the potential benefit of Google's index," but wanted to retain greater control over the contents of the program; one expert on the case said that publishers "invested a ton of time and money fighting something that they realize now really isn't a problem."⁸⁵ A federal judge dismissed the Authors Guild case in November 2013. In deeming Google's digitization project to be "fair use," Judge Denny Chin said that it provides "significant public benefits" by giving books "new life," and "generates new audiences and creates new sources of income for authors and publishers."⁸⁶

Publishers can make their wares available through Google Books by joining the Partner Program and sending Google a physical or PDF copy of their book. Search results from the book will then display the book's title and author, and an excerpt highlighting the search terms. If users click on the book they will see a "limited preview ... just enough to give them a taste of the book, as if they were browsing in a bookstore or library." Printing and text and image copying functions are disabled in the preview. Sales links are clearly visible in a sidebar—if the publisher sells directly from their site that is the top link, followed by links to major retailers such as Amazon or Chapters/Indigo and, if an ebook is available, the Google Play book-

82 "Best Sellers," Amazon.ca, accessed September 23, 2013, amazon.ca/Bestsellers-Books/zgbs/books/ref=amb_link_382771902_4?pf_rd_m=A3DWYIK6Y9EEQB&pf_rd_s=merchandised-search-1&pf_rd_r=190ZXX035SV5S0DZ9GBD&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_p=1612731722&pf_rd_i=916520#1.

83 "Google Books Tour," Google Books, accessed September 24, 2013, google.ca/googlebooks/partners/tour.html;
"Google Books Library Project," Google Books, accessed September 24, 2013, books.google.com/intl/en/google-books/library/.

84 Jim Milliot and Steve Zeitchik, "Google Begins to Push Google Print Program," *Publishers Weekly*, October 8, 2004, publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20041011/38656-google-begins-to-push-google-print-program.html.

85 Andrew Albanese, "Publishers Settle Google Books Lawsuit," *Publishers Weekly*, October 5, 2012, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/54247-publishers-settle-google-books-lawsuit.html.

86 Julie Bosman and Claire Cain Miller, "U.S. Judge Sides with Google on Book Scanning Suit," *Globe and Mail*, November 14, 2013, theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/international-business/us-business/us-judge-sides-with-google-on-book-scanning-suit/article15442722/.

store. Partners can also embed the preview on their own website, and access detailed analytical reports about traffic to their books.⁸⁷

Google does not provide data on Google Books' impact on sales, and in the pitch to publishers to join they stop short of promising an increase in sales, instead promising, under the heading "Drive Book Sales," to "make it easy for users to go from browsing to buying."⁸⁸ They do, however, offer this (undated) quote from Kate Tentler of Simon & Schuster: "15.3% ... [of] web surfers who clicked on a Simon and Schuster book in Google Books either bought a book or went to the Simon and Schuster web site and, for example, subscribed to a newsletter. Conversion rates for other search engines languish around 1-3%."⁸⁹ Oxford University Press also claims that partnering with Google has increased traffic to their site and boosted backlist sales.⁹⁰ In a recent paper from Duke University, one author claims his sales ranking at Barnes & Noble improved by 85 percent after he partnered with Google Books, an experience the paper's authors claim is "typical for participants."⁹¹ In a 2006 analysis of Google Book Search, Travis notes that book sales in the United States were up "markedly" since the program began, and "thus far there is little evidence that any printed books have suffered lost sales because Google has made them searchable."⁹² On the contrary, Travis argues, "the service appears to have had a very positive effect on the sales of books it has included to date."⁹³

Book Discovery Services

There are a growing number of dedicated book discovery websites. The sites discussed below were chosen because of repeated references that appeared in the course of researching this report; while none of them have achieved the ubiquity of Amazon or Google, they are worth noting, as they speak to the increased perception of online book discovery as both a challenge and an opportunity for publishers.

GOODREADS: Their recent acquisition by Amazon has recently thrust Goodreads.com and its 20 million members into the spotlight.⁹⁴ The site was conceived as a marketing service for publishers, who have been using its "firm foundation" for that exact purpose "for some time."⁹⁵ Although it does not currently feature book

87 "Google Books Tour," Google Books..

88 Ibid.

89 "Thoughts & Opinions," Google Books, accessed September 24, 2013, google.ca/googlebooks/about/thoughts.html.

90 Ibid.

91 Eric Stromberg and Romeen Sheth, "Google Books: Liberating the World's Information, or Appropriating It?," *The Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University*, case study (2011): 5, kenan.ethics.duke.edu/multimedia-publications/case-studieswhitepapers/business-ethics/.

92 Hannibal Travis, "Google Book Search and Fair Use: iTunes for Authors, or Napster for Books?," *University of Miami Law Review* 61 (2006): 645-46, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=944048.

93 Ibid., 647.

94 "Goodreads Hits 20 Million Users," *Digital Book World*, July 23, 2013, digitalbookworld.com/2013/goodreads-hits-20-million-users/.

95 Mike Shatzkin, "Taking Book Marketing Where the Book Readers are Likely to Be," *Shatzkin Files* (blog), *Idea Logical Company*, July 8, 2013, idealogy.com/blog/taking-book-marketing-where-the-book-readers-are-likely-to-be/.

excerpts, it is not inconceivable that Amazon will integrate its Search or Look Inside the Book features into the site, further enhancing its marketing potential.

SCRIBD: Originally a place to make documents accessible to the public, Scribd.com now has a “vast treasure trove of documents,” sees 10 million unique visitors monthly, and is increasingly being used by trade publishers to promote books: in July 2013 “marketing activity” on Scribd was just “a gleam in the eye” of American publishers,⁹⁶ but on a recent visit (October 1, 2013), the twenty-five “documents” displayed on the homepage were all trade books (twenty-one of which were from HarperCollins). Each book offered excerpts, available to anyone, and for a monthly subscription of \$8.99 readers can access unlimited content on the site,⁹⁷ which could develop into an attractive marketing tool and revenue source for forward-thinking publishers.

BOOKISH: Bookish.com was developed by Penguin Group USA, Hachette Book Group, and Simon & Schuster, and launched in February of 2013 with the aim of “provid[ing] as many pathways to [book] discovery as possible.”⁹⁸ The cover images of the majority of titles on the homepage feature prominent “Read a Sample” icons, which open a widget (embeddable on other sites) that displays anywhere from one paragraph to a couple chapters of text in plain, uncopy-able html, and a large “Buy” button. Any publisher is welcome to submit titles for inclusion, with the proviso that all data be submitted via an Onix 2.1 data feed.⁹⁹

49THSHELF: Two Canadian sites deserve mention. Produced by the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP), 49thShelf.com “mak[es] it easier to discover Canadian books” by hosting editorial content and a searchable database of over 60,000 titles.¹⁰⁰ On a recent visit (September 24, 2013), none of the nine titles on the homepage offered excerpts, but it is possible to include them—all of the tiles on 49thShelf are drawn from BNC’s Biblioshare system,¹⁰¹ which supports including excerpts in the Onix metadata.

WATTPAD: Margaret Atwood’s high profile releases on Wattpad.com have increased its profile as of late.¹⁰² Although it is primarily a platform for self-published writers to share their work in serialized installments, American publishers are beginning to use it for marketing purposes.¹⁰³ Wattpad offers intriguing possibilities for small

96 Ibid.

97 “About,” Scribd, accessed October 1, 2013, scribd.com/about.

98 Jim Milliot, “Bookish Goes Live,” *Publishers Weekly*, February 3, 2013, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/55808-bookish-goes-live.html.

99 “Bookish for Publishers,” Bookish, accessed September 25, 2013, bookish.com/faq#books-publisher.

100 “About,” 49thShelf, accessed September 25, 2013, 49thshelf.com/About-49th-Shelf.

101 “Frequently Asked Questions,” 49th Shelf, accessed September 25, 2013, 49thshelf.com/Frequently-Asked-Questions.

102 Julie Baldassi, “Margaret Atwood Releases MaddAddam Essay on Wattpad,” *QuillBlog, Quill & Quire*, September 5, 2013, quillandquire.com/blog/index.php/book-news/margaret-atwood-releases-maddaddam-essay-on-wattpad/.

103 Shatzkin, “Marketing Where the Readers Are.”

publishers to develop online fanbases by serializing the digital release of titles, perhaps in advance of the print release, and gain potentially useful feedback about various aspects of a book.

Major Firms

As of 2004, foreign-owned publishers operating in Canada accounted for at least 59 percent of domestic sales.¹⁰⁴ Of the major firms identified by Lorimer,¹⁰⁵ excerpt practices of the four foreign trade publishers—and Harlequin, one of the largest Canadian firms—are discussed below.

HarperCollins

HarperCollins announced plans to create a vast digital catalogue in 2005, and by August of the following year had digitized 10,000 titles at a cost of several million dollars, with expected annual costs of at least a million dollars.¹⁰⁶ The most notable feature of the project was the new “Browse Inside” widget that, similar to Amazon’s “Search Inside” and Google Book Search, “allow[s] readers to replicate in cyberspace the experience of going to a bookstore and flipping through a few pages before buying a book,” includes supplementary marketing material such as interviews, tour schedules, photographs, and reading group guides, and can be embedded on other websites.¹⁰⁷

Initially Browse Inside was limited to the front matter and the first few pages of each chapter.¹⁰⁸ Access to most titles is still restricted, but there are now a limited number of “Full Access” titles that offer the entire contents of the book for preview.¹⁰⁹ While browsing, a reader can search inside the book; share links to the preview using almost 350 different social media tools; buy the book from Amazon, Indigo, or a list of independent retailers sorted by state or province; install the widget on their own website; and sign up for email notifications about the author’s promotional activity and new books.

Browse Inside is accessible by any visitor to the website, but the content of the preview cannot be downloaded, copied, or accessed by external search engines—as Friedman said upon the launch of the feature, “HarperCollins is taking a leader-

104 Turner-Riggs, *Book Retail Sector*, under “Share of Market for Canadian Firms and Titles.”

105 Lorimer, *Ultra Libris*, 260-61.

106 Motoko Rich, “HarperCollins Offers Excerpts of Books Online,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2006, nytimes.com/2006/08/03/technology/03iht-browse.2378976.html?_r=1&.

107 Bill Martin and Xuemei Tian, *Books, Bytes and Business: The Promise of Digital Publishing* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010): 126, site.ebrary.com/lib/sfu/docDetail.action?docID=10409273.

108 Ibid.

109 “Browse Inside,” HarperCollins, accessed September 23, 2013, browseinside.harpercollins.ca/browseinside-main.aspx.

ship role on the digital front ... while, first and foremost, protecting our authors' copyrights."¹¹⁰

Detailed sales figures are of course unavailable, but there is evidence that excerpts boost sales: in a presentation to the 2008 International Digital Publishing Forum, Leslie Hulse (Vice President of Digital Business Development) reported "print sales increases of 30% and 250% for specific titles using [HarperCollins'] Browse Inside functionality."¹¹¹

Random House

In 2007 Random House introduced "Insight," a search and sample widget and service that "enable[s] the indexing, searching and display of text" of books. The service is very similar to Browse Inside, allowing users to search the entire text of a book and view the results in context. It has since evolved into Insight Web Service, "a set of programming tools that allow internet applications to view and search digitized book content" and display the resulting pages as high-resolution images or fast-loading thumbnails. Insight can be set up on any blogger's, publisher's or retailers website, and the Insight widget can be customized for affiliate sales.¹¹²

RandomHouse.com and RandomHouse.ca both offer Insight-powered "Look Inside" widgets for many titles; in addition, RandomHouse.com features an "Excerpt" tab for most titles, which displays the selection in simple HTML-based text. During the autumn of 2013, RandomHouse.ca also added simple HTML excerpts, so that users can click a "Read Excerpt" button to launch a pop-up window with simple, copy/pastable HTML-based text. This feature is in lieu of the "Look Inside" widget for some titles (e.g., *Let Me Off at the Top!* by Ron Burgundy) and in addition to it for others (e.g., John Grisham's *Sycamore Row*).

Penguin

Penguin Books Canada (Penguin.ca) offers excerpts of most of its titles, but in varying formats and degrees: for Joseph Boyden's latest, *Orenda*, readers can download a PDF of the first twenty pages, while excerpts for some titles are simple HTML text

110 Erin Crum, "HarperCollins Publishers Launches 'Browse Inside,'" HarperCollins press release, August 3, 2006, harpercollins.com/footer/release.aspx?id=477&b=&year=2006.

111 Sameer Shariff, "Trends, Success Stories & Emerging eBook Business Models," Slideshare presentation, posted by "nzl," July 8, 2009, slideshare.net/nzl/trends-success-stories-emerging-ebook-business-models. (Note: Original source [www.idpf.org/events/presentations/digitalbook08/IHulse08.pdf] no longer available.)

112 "Insight Web Service," RandomHouse.biz, accessed September 24, 2013, randomhouse.biz/webservices/insight/.

in a box on the page—though they can run as long as 4,800 words, as is the case for Clive Cussler’s *The Mayan Secret*. Many titles feature video interviews or book trailers.

In the summer of 2013, Penguin launched its “First to Read” program. People must register for the program (or use their FaceBook accounts) to receive access to excerpts of forthcoming books, be able to post reviews, and request access to digital pre-publication copies of books.¹¹³

Simon & Schuster

For some titles Simon & Schuster’s Canadian website (SimonandSchuster.ca) uses the Google Books widget to allow browsing of substantial amounts of content within a book. Other titles have an HTML excerpt from the introduction or first chapter, and many of their recent and bestselling titles have embedded audio excerpts and video book trailers. All of this content is easily shareable via Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, or email.

Harlequin

Harlequin.com provides excerpts for seemingly the majority of titles in their vast catalogue. As well as multiple social media widgets and links to eight major book retailers, each title’s page features a red “Read an Excerpt” link that opens the HTML-based sample in a new tab or window. Selections are presented without context, and average about 2,500 words.

A Survey of Canadian Publishers

Table 1 presents the results of a survey of the availability of excerpts from Canadian trade publishers. Eighty-three publishers were selected from the membership directory of the ACP.¹¹⁴ Publishers of exclusively educational, scholarly, or children’s books were excluded, and in the wake of the bankruptcy of Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., the resulting independent firms—Douglas & McIntyre [2013] Ltd., Greystone Books Ltd., and New Society Publishers—were included. On each publisher’s website, the five most prominent titles (featured on homepage or “Featured” lists) were checked for availability of excerpts, and then titles were searched on Amazon (.ca and .com) and Google Books (books.google.com/). There are some limitations to the methodology: not all Canadian publishers are members of the

113 “Penguin Launches First to Read: NetGalley for Consumers,” *Digital Book World*, June 18, 2013, digitalbook-world.com/2013/penguin-launches-first-to-read-netgalley-for-consumers/.

114 “Membership Directory,” Association of Canadian Publishers, accessed September 25, 2013, publishers.ca/index.php/directory.

ACP (New Star, for one), and not every title on every site was checked. Nevertheless, the results offer a valuable sense of what Canadian publishers are doing to make their titles visible online.

Table 1: Digital Sampling Practices of Canadian Publishers

Publishers Surveyed	83 (100%)
<i>Samples available via:</i>	
Website	34 (41%)
Amazon	22 (27%)
Google Books (Preview or Snippet)	38 (46%)
At least 1 of own website, Google Books, or Amazon	53 (64%)
No Samples Available	30 (36%)

In contrast to the major firms discussed above, less than half of the Canadian publishers surveyed provide excerpts on their own website—despite the fact that the vast majority (89 percent) sell books from their websites, either directly (81 percent) or via links to third-party retailers (20 percent) such as Amazon or Chapters/Indigo.

The format, frequency, functionality, and length of the samples vary greatly. Of the thirty-four publishers that do host samples, nearly half (fifteen) use PDFs, eleven use plain HTML, and only seven publishers use embedded Google Books widgets. At a dozen presses, samples were found for only one or two of the five titles surveyed, while thirteen displayed samples for all five titles. Slightly less than half (fifteen) of the publishers enabled the sharing of the samples via some social media channel. The length of samples runs the gamut from a few sentences presented wholly out of context at Linda Leith Publishing, to Dundurn’s Google Books-integrated website, which allows viewers to search within their entire catalogue and view extensive selections from selected books in Google Preview directly from Dundurn.com.

Although excerpt availability does increase significantly when Google Books and Amazon are taken into account, the titles of about one third of publishers cannot be sampled online. The prevalence of direct sales seems to indicate that publishers appreciate the significance of the online market, but the relative lack of opportunities to easily peruse a title shows that this important aspect of online marketing is either unrecognized, or deemed unfeasible due to financial or technical constraints. The importance of sampling having been established above, the next section consists of considerations and recommendations for how to simply and effectively offer book samples online.

PART THREE ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The mere existence—often at great cost—of the various digital sampling widgets and websites speaks volumes to the efficacy of enabling readers to “try before they buy.” These services are a testament to the growing value of the online market, and the necessity of innovation in the absence of a healthy physical bookstore sector. A publisher with unlimited resources may wish to engage in all the available means above, but for a small Canadian press the time and effort of supplying Google, Amazon, and the various websites with PDFs and data feeds may cancel out any benefit accrued. The following sections consider the myriad options available for offering digital samples, and conclude with recommendations for how to provide effective HTML-based samples.

Book Discovery Websites

It remains to be seen if the latest book discovery sites will survive and flourish, and there is little indication as of yet that they can improve the visibility or sales of a title: a recent study concluded that even though “frequent readers” regularly visit sites such as Goodreads or Pinterest to look for books, “those visits fail to drive actual book purchases.”¹¹⁵ For a publisher like New Star, already faced with pressing demands on time and resources, it is not clear that devoting any considerable effort to developing a presence on these sites would return any tangible benefit—as some observers have noted, there is a glut of such services, indicative of the fact that discovery is a problem for publishers, not readers.¹¹⁶ It is worth keeping an eye on the continued evolution of sites like Scribd and Wattpad, but to achieve immediate results, publishers should focus their efforts on more proven methods.

Google and Amazon

The ease, ubiquity, and effectiveness of Search Inside and Google Books should make them very attractive to publishers. Titles from every publisher surveyed can already be found on Amazon.ca and Google Books, yet less than half have enabled Google Preview, and even fewer use Amazon’s preview functions. Google Books’ Partner Program in particular can be very useful for publishers, as it is effective beyond the confines of one particular website: readers searching via any search engine can find a Google Books page that includes retailer links, and the preview widget can be embedded on the publisher’s own website—as at least seven Canadian publishers know.

115 Laura Hazard Owen, “Why Online Book Discovery is Broken (And How to Fix it),” *paidContent*, January 17, 2013, paidcontent.org/2013/01/17/why-online-book-discovery-is-broken-and-how-to-fix-it/.

116 Edward Nawotka and Mark Piesing, “Is the Book Discoverability Bubble Ready to Pop?,” *Publishing Perspectives*, February 27, 2013, publishingperspectives.com/2013/02/is-the-book-discoverability-bubble-ready-to-pop/.

There are some limitations, however. Amazon samples are only accessible via Amazon.ca (or .com), and of course do not provide links to other retailers (although there is some evidence of reverse show-rooming behaviour, whereby people browse books online and then buy them in a physical store.¹¹⁷ Amazon requires a PDF free of registration- or crop-marks,¹¹⁸ which in New Star's case would mean producing a separate PDF, apart from the standard workflow. Compared to HTML, both Google and Amazon's widgets are somewhat cumbersome to use on smartphones, tablets, and other non-PC devices.

Notably, neither has a sharing function, and text cannot be copy/pasted from the widgets to manually share on social media venues. Whether it is in person or via online "social discovery," word-of-mouth is still a critically important component of book marketing.¹¹⁹ When readers were asked for a 2005 Canadian study to choose the variables that contribute to their awareness of books they read or purchased, "recommendation from a friend" was listed as "often used" by 40 percent of respondents, second in frequency only to "interest in topic" at 61 percent—but when asked which factors "helped the most" for buying and reading, recommendations were cited by over 30 percent of respondents, compared to 20 percent for "interest in a topic."¹²⁰ The more recent BNC report confirms the significance of word-of-mouth for book discovery, and notes that online discovery is increasing¹²¹: it seems clear that sharing and recommending books online is an important and growing factor in book discovery, and should be made as seamless as possible.

Even with these limitations they are tremendously useful. So why don't more publishers embrace them? Thompson addresses this in an interview with "Steve," the head of "Media Asset Development" at a large trade house in New York, who says his company wants to use the Amazon and Google services, but is not entirely comfortable giving their content to such powerful companies who may not have their best interests in mind: "Many publishers in this building just like elsewhere are still not totally comfortable about giving their files to Amazon and Google," explained one of Steve's colleagues. "Partly it's because we're unsure what they'll do with it."¹²² Before a New York judge dismissed the proposed Google Book Search settlement agreement (that required authors to opt out of having their books digitized) in 2011,¹²³ Canadian authors (among others) expressed their distinct disapproval of the deal, comparing it to thievery and "legalized, large-scale piracy."¹²⁴

117 Laing and Royle, "Bookselling Online," 122.

118 "Help: Search Inside!," Amazon.ca, accessed October 1, 2013, amazon.ca/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=14209881.

119 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 247.

120 Rowland Lorimer and Lindsay Lynch, "The Latest Canadian National Reading Study, 2005: Publishers Analysis," report commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing, Simon Fraser University (2005), 16-17.

121 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Book Consumer 2012*, 61.

122 *Ibid.*, 345, 355-56.

123 Benedicte Page, "New York Judge Rules Against Google Books Settlement," *Guardian*, March 23, 2011, the-guardian.com/books/2011/mar/23/google-books-settlement-ruling.

124 Zoe Whittall, "Canadian Authors Mount Last-Minute Opposition to Google Book Settlement," *Quill & Quire*, September 4, 2009, quillandquire.com/google/article.cfm?article_id=10849.

There are also practical concerns; Thompson explains that publishers are ceding control of the quality of the excerpts and the quantity available, and cannot easily change or update what is on offer.¹²⁵

In the case of the quantity excerpted, Amazon has since partially addressed this concern with the introduction of a “Flexible Percent Viewing Limit” feature that allows publishers to determine the percentage of the book that is viewable, in 10 percent increments between 10 and 80 percent.¹²⁶ The quality concern has been rendered moot by both Amazon’s and Google’s acceptance of PDF files rather than hard copies—the quality of the digitized book is what publishers make it. Concerns over quick updates are still valid, but not entirely reasonable for publishers of print books, who are not able to correct errors in their books once the ink is committed to paper without an expensive and unlikely reprint.

The trust issue is thornier. It is understandable that a small publisher would be wary of placing too much faith in multi-billion dollar corporations. Amazon particularly endures much criticism from all quarters for its impact on the publishing trade in general, and, as a purely profit-driven retailer, cannot be said to share any of the lofty literary, cultural, or political ideas that animate a press like New Star. Google’s mission to make the world’s knowledge accessible (and its famous slogan, “Don’t be evil”) seems to align them more closely with publishers, but also has a whiff of totalitarianism about it, and has of course resulted in numerous lawsuits alleging flagrant and systematic copyright violations. Still: all the publishers surveyed sell books on Amazon; in the absence of any evidence of malicious acts involving digitized books, it seems wise to allow them to present those books in the best possible light. And as Thompson goes on to mention, Google’s Partner Program is, “in effect, a free form of online marketing” that, in distinction to the Library project, “was not a source of concern for most publishers.”¹²⁷

Canadian Publishers

Most Canadian publishers use PDFs for excerpts. This results in an accurate representation of the printed page and allows the excerpt to be read offline, but there are many disadvantages that make PDFs an inferior choice compared to HTML. They are cumbersome to share, forcing the reader to download and attach them to an email, and can be slow to load, depending on the file size and bandwidth available. They are unreliable: different web browsers and operating systems treat them differently, sometimes downloading them and sometimes opening them in a new window or tab; the ability to view them at all depends on the reader’s software configuration and the settings used in generating the PDF; and if the reader is using a smartphone or tablet they are unwieldy at best, unreadable at worst.

125 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 356.

126 “Help: Search Inside!” Amazon.ca.

127 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 357.

Because PDFs are an essential part of a print-oriented production workflow, it is perhaps understandable that publishers would be biased toward their use. As Murray Tong of UBC Press explains, “I think the issue for many publishers (including us) is that the PDF is already there, so why not put it up? — with little thought [given] to searchability, copyability or other forms of access.”¹²⁸

Another reason for the tenacity of PDFs may be the perceived benefit of restricting a reader’s ability to copy text from them, out of fear of piracy or copyright violations. This restriction is an oft-touted feature of the excerpt methods of Google, Amazon, HarperCollins, and Random House. If the entire book is available for preview this restriction seems reasonable, but in the case of an incomplete excerpt it becomes less defensible. With the possible exception of poetry books, cookbooks, or instructional manuals, there is very little value in owning or reproducing a fraction of a greater work, except insofar as it impels one toward the source material. Rather than guard every scrap of content, publishers should encourage the free sharing and distribution of enticing morsels that enable “social discovery” (via social media) and “distributed discovery”¹²⁹ (when a book is mentioned or quoted in context in reviews, blogs, other books, or any number of venues).

Whatever inspires their proliferation, PDFs represent a case of persistent skeuomorphism. Imitating old media in new ones may be a necessary step to familiarize people with new technologies,¹³⁰ but people have had a long time to get used to reading on screens: as Joseph Esposito argues in a post that calls the PDF the “supreme skeuomorph,” the challenge for publishers is to consider “what are the properties of a new medium and what kind of new products or services can we come up with that seem at home in that new medium.... Rather than contrast and compare it to print, we could be thinking about digital media’s unique properties.”¹³¹

In the context of promoting books, these properties are wasted with PDFs. HTML can now achieve the same level of aesthetic design as PDFs destined for the printer, “and yet,” as John Maxwell says, “offers a whole world more in terms of dynamic, interactive reading experience.”¹³² There is a broader argument being made that publishers need to shift the bulk of their operations to a web-first workflow, as the web is now “the default platform for reaching audiences, developing content, and putting the pieces [of a book] together” —but for publishers hesitant to “re-orient their operations and start with the web,”¹³³ HTML-based samples are a less intimi-

128 Murray Tong (UBC Press), email to author, November 28, 2013.

129 Rhomberg, “Book Discovery.”

130 Tim Roes, “Skeuomorphism – A Thing of the Past,” *TimRoes.de*, September 20, 2013, timroes.de/2013/09/20/skeuomorphism-thing-of-the-past/.

131 Joseph Esposito, “Skeuomorphic Publishing – How to Fit a Square Peg Into a Round Hole,” *Scholarly Kitchen*, March 13, 2013, originally published April, 2012, scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/03/13/stick-to-your-ribs-skeuomorphic-publishing-how-to-fit-a-square-peg-into-a-round-hole/.

132 John Maxwell, email to author, November 28, 2013.

133 John Maxwell et al., “XML Production Workflows? Start with the Web,” *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 13, no. 1 (2010), under “Creating Ebook Files,” doi: [dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0013.106](https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0013.106).

dating place to start breaking the dependency on PDFs, and could potentially lay the foundations for a more fundamental change to workflows down the road.

Implementation Costs

It is difficult to gauge the dollar cost of creating online samples, given the myriad variables at play. While participation in the Google and Amazon sampling programs is free, overall costs will depend on the method or combination of methods employed; the number of titles for which samples are created; the structure of the publisher's website; and the extent of in-house programming knowledge. In the best-case scenario, the cost is limited to time. If the publisher already sells via Amazon, they must sign up for the sampling programs and enable them for each title. For Google, once the publisher is signed up they must submit PDFs for each title. The publisher's own website is potentially more expensive; a template for samples must be created, and the HTML-based samples of each title created. If the structure of the site allows it, this could be accomplished relatively quickly in-house; more complicate websites owned by publishers with little in-house programming knowledge could expect to pay for several hours of web programming to implement the sample program.

Recommendations for Effective Samples

Format

Based on the above, it is recommended that publishers participate in Amazon's Look and Search Inside the Book services and Google's Partner Program—the benefits are real and tangible, the perceived dangers largely a matter of fear and uncertainty.

It is also advisable for publishers to create HTML-based excerpts for display on publishers' own websites. If publishers can recognize that, for the purposes of online marketing at least, “the content of the book is separable from the form” and “the real value of the book lies in the content ... rather than in the physical form,”¹³⁴ they will be a step closer to abandoning PDF samples and taking full advantage of the characteristics of new technologies noted above. HTML-based samples overcome most of the limitations of PDFs and Google and Amazon samples: all browsers can render HTML, making it easily accessible to (very nearly) anyone with Internet access, whether via computer, tablet, or smartphone, and the excerpted text can be easily shared, linked to, and quoted elsewhere. This enhanced “sociability” of HTML over PDFs is a very significant advantage: samples can be easily and quickly spread through any and all social media channels via easily clickable links.

134 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 329, 330.

There are two potential drawbacks that merit consideration. The first is aesthetic: web pages are usually less attractive than reproductions of the printed page, which may make publishers somewhat reluctant to present books in what may be perceived as a “lesser” format. This can be overcome to some degree with CSS styling and the addition of images where appropriate, but more importantly, providing HTML-based samples should be seen as a strategic practice that, rather than competing with the physical books, aims to make those books readily shareable to as many people as possible in order to generate sales. In this context, aesthetic imperfection is an acceptable tradeoff for near-universal accessibility, and may even be preferable to high-fidelity page reproductions: as discussed below (under the section titled “Length”), publishers must be careful not to give away too much for free, lest readers feel that purchasing the actual book is unnecessary.

Secondly, depending on a publisher’s standard workflow, creating HTML-based samples rather than PDFs may take more time: instead of simply removing the printer’s marks from the print-ready PDF, the text must be copied and pasted from the source file into either a WYSIWYG content management system (CMS) such as WordPress (the best-case scenario), or a text editor for the creation of HTML code (a slightly more onerous route). In the former case, creating the sample is no more time-consuming than creating a web-ready PDF. In the latter, creating an HTML template into which text can be pasted and marked up will ease the burden somewhat. Forward-thinking publishers wishing to entirely erase this burden (and many others) should consider *beginning* their workflow in a web-based CMS; as Maxwell has argued, one of the many advantages of such a strategy is that “online marketing copy or excerpts for the web” become “extremely easy to generate.”¹³⁵

Despite these potential drawbacks, HTML is the superior choice for hosting digital samples, and is well worth the interruption to an established workflow. Its content is indexed and searchable by Google and other search engines—a considerable benefit if “Google is your discovery method”¹³⁶ and “search is the new storefront.”¹³⁷ Hyperlinks within the excerpt and the publishers website and to external sites can be easily added and used. It enables the addition of audio and video. And a reader’s behaviour and interaction with an HTML excerpt can be tracked and quantified using Google Analytics.

There is another compelling reason to host excerpts on a publisher’s own site, one that is hinted at by the time and care Maurer devotes to maintaining New Star’s blog and email subscriber list: building a relationship with a press’s audience. Excerpts are an incentive to spend time on a publisher’s website, where they can potentially read blog posts, subscribe to newsletters, peruse all the press has to offer, and generally develop an affinity for the publisher. Many observers have recently emphasized

135 Maxwell et al., “XML Production Workflows?”

136 Roger Tagholm, “The Art of Discovery,” *Bookseller*, December 2, 2011, proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=70289976&site=bsi-live&scope=site.

137 Calvin Reid, “Inkling Turns Web Searches into New Storefront for Digital Books,” *Publishers Weekly*, January 16, 2013, publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/55519-inkling-turns-web-searches-into-new-storefront-for-digital-books.html.

the importance of this sort of relationship: “Since publishers can’t physically enter people’s living rooms, turn off their TVs and shove books into their hands, they may instead have to focus on retail and ... work on their direct relationships with readers,”¹³⁸ because “nothing will ever replace building authentic, two-way relationships with customers and readers.”¹³⁹ As Gonzales says, “The publishers who have a direct relationship with their readers—not necessarily via direct sales, but via direct engagement—are the ones who will not simply survive the ‘digital shift,’ but will thrive, being less prone to the whims of Amazon, Apple, Google....”¹⁴⁰

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Although it is likely already on the radar of many publishers, SEO is critically important, specifically for digital sampling—as Thompson notes, if a site is not “friendly for the Google crawler” and therefore does not perform well in search result rankings, “then your content is, for all practical purposes, invisible.”¹⁴¹ SEO is a vast and at-times complex field in itself, but a few simple steps—such as creating unique, accurate page titles, and URLs with descriptive words rather than strings of numbers—can greatly enhance a sample page’s (and therefore a book’s) discoverability.¹⁴²

For non-fiction titles, SEO considerations can also guide the choice of what book content to sample. By consulting the suggested terms listed by Google’s Autocomplete feature (which terms are “a reflection of the search activity of users and the content of web pages indexed by Google”¹⁴³), publishers can get a sense of which subjects within a book are most searched-for. For example, querying “Svend Robinson” in Google produces a list of the ten most popular terms queried with “Svend Robinson,” three of which (i.e., “Max Riveron,” “theft,” and “Sue Rodriguez”) point to topics covered in the New Star biography that would be suitable for excerpting.¹⁴⁴ Using Google Trends (www.google.ca/trends/), the popularity of these terms can then be compared over time and within regions to aid in choosing what to sample, and fine-tuning keywords to use in optimizing and promoting the samples.

138 Laura Hazard Owen, “Here’s the Problem with Book Publishers’ Discovery Problem,” *paidContent*, February 15, 2013, paidcontent.org/2013/02/15/heres-the-problem-with-publishers-book-discovery-problem/.

139 Brett Sandusky, “Is ‘Discoverability’ Even a Problem?,” *Brett Sandusky*, February 12, 2013, brettsandusky.com/2013/02/12/is-discoverability-even-a-problem/.

140 Guy LeCharles Gonzales, “Discovery is Publishers’ Problem; Readers are Doing Just Fine,” *Loudpoet.com*, February 11, 2013, loudpoet.com/2013/02/11/discovery-is-only-a-problem-for-publishers-not-readers/.

141 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 254.

142 “Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide,” Google Webmaster Tools, 2010, accessed September 24, 2013, static.googleusercontent.com/external_content/untrusted_dlcp/www.google.com/en//webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf.

143 “Autocomplete,” Google Search Help, accessed November 27, 2013, support.google.com/websearch/answer/106230?hl=en.

144 It should be noted that Autocomplete results may vary based on whether a user is signed in to a Google account and has “Web History” enabled (See *Ibid.*); for more objective results, sign out of Google and/or disable the history.

Length

The next consideration is how much to excerpt—Amazon’s default is 20 percent; excerpts surveyed above ranged from a few sentences to dozens of pages; and, as noted, New Star has experimented with offering the entire book—a strategy that has proven successful for some authors,¹⁴⁵ and is worth further exploration. Generally though, as Thompson notes, “you want to allow the reader to get a clear sense of the content ... but you don’t want them to be able to read so much of the text that the decision to purchase becomes redundant.”¹⁴⁶ The nature of the book is another important factor—for fiction the preferred method is to offer the beginning chapters, while “episodic sampling” is often the best approach for non-fiction works.¹⁴⁷ Checking various topics from the book in Google Trends could offer insight into what topics are currently popular and will be more likely to attract readers to the excerpt. Publishers must be careful, however, to not give away for free the most sought-after section of the book: in an article questioning the value of book excerpts in print publications, a publicity executive at Knopf claimed that an excerpt of a Jessica Lynch biography in *Time* “gave away too much — I think people felt they’d had their fill.”¹⁴⁸ Ultimately it is a matter of editorial judgment, but the guiding principle should be to entice, not satiate the reader.

Hyperlinks

A “buy” button is the most obvious link to include, but publishers can take advantage of the potential “intertextuality” of digital samples by including hyperlinks in the content of the excerpt. For a research-heavy non-fiction title such *Svend Robinson*, an excerpt could feature links directly to available online sources referenced in the text, allowing the reader to engage with the source material in an exponentially easier way than if they were reading it in a bookstore, which would require either flipping to the end of the book to find the endnote, or going online to search for the cited article.

Hyperlinks can also enrich the reader’s experience of the excerpted material, and provide context precluded by the limitations of the print version. With fiction and poetry, samples are a chance for authors or publishers to embellish and expand upon the original text. A recent New Star poetry book acknowledges a long list of bands, writers, “commercials, films, and more” that are obliquely referenced or appear in the text as “phrases and rhythms, sometimes skewed, [that] float in and out of *sybil unrest*.”¹⁴⁹ With only slight visual alteration of the text, these references could be elucidated or expanded upon, offering the authors another layer of expression and the reader a deeper understanding of the references and ideas at play.

145 John Hilton III and David Wiley, “The Short-Term Influence of Free Digital Versions of Books on Print Sales,” *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 13, no. 1 (2010), doi:dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0013.101.

146 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 329.

147 Ibid.

148 Joanne Kaufman, “A Publishing Quandary: Do Excerpts Help Sales?,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2007, nytimes.com/2007/06/11/business/media/11excerpt.html.

149 Larissa Lai and Rita Wong, *sybil unrest* (Vancouver: New Star, 2013): 124.

The savvy excerpter could also include links to favourable reviews of the work, or at the end of the sample, to excerpts from the author's other works, and similar works by other authors (offered by the same publisher).

Multimedia

The multimedia capacity of digital samples allows further enrichment of the text. In the case of New Star's recent titles, this could entail "bonus" photos, e.g., photos that were considered but not included in *Svend Robinson* or *Seize the Time: Vancouver Photographed 1967 – 1974*; including promotional videos in a sample, e.g. the promotional video for *After Desire*; embedding videos related to a book's topic, e.g., *Seize the Time* contains two photos of Janis Joplin in performance, and a number of videos of those same performances are available on YouTube; or including audio recordings of readings, e.g., Peter Culley's (author of *Parkway*) recent reading at the Western Front or George Stanley's (*After Desire*) at WORD Vancouver.

Promotion

Promotion of samples can and should take place through extant channels, such as a publisher's website, email newsletters, social media, and even books. It is a common practice to list other books by an author in the front matter of a print book, but if a publisher sells ebooks, these lists could be hyperlinks to samples of the book. Widgets displaying the "Most Read" samples could be installed on the homepage of the website, similar to what most online newspapers and magazines do.

Including social media widgets on the sample's page allows readers to quickly share them, and these channels can be very effective: "Traditional advertising did nothing for us ... absolutely zilch," according to Emily Gould of EmilyBooks, an independent ebook retailer, "but when I tweet a line from the book or we post a three-paragraph excerpt on our Tumblr, people buy the books just because they want to read more, immediately."¹⁵⁰ The chances are very high that any given member of a book's potential audience is using at least one social media platform.¹⁵¹ Engaging them with them in these media and linking to samples helps them get read, increases the SEO ranking of the site, and provides useful data about the readers.¹⁵²

Digital samples can also be easily distributed to specific influential bloggers or reviewers, as part of a concerted "online outreach" effort—the online marketing manager of a large American publisher said, "we outreach to bloggers, and that's a big part of what we do because it just gets the conversation going."¹⁵³ A book like *Svend Robinson* lends itself well to promotion in a variety of realms beyond book-review sites; members of the LGBT community, provincial and federal NDP

150 Carraway, "If E-Books are so Big."

151 Peter McCarthy, "Five Reasons Social Media Will Always Sell More Books..." *Digital Book World*, July 31, 2013, digitalbookworld.com/2013/five-reasons-social-media-will-always-sell-more-books/.

152 Ibid.

153 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 252.

members, and political pundits could all be expected to show an interest in reading and discussing online an excerpt from the book. Advanced search options in Twitter and Google allow a publisher to find people that are already engaged with the topic of the book, follow their conversations, and offer them valuable content.¹⁵⁴ Proactive distribution of digital samples costs only time, and can help spark a discussion around the book, bringing more visitors to the publisher's website.

Metadata

In 2011, the president of Booknet Canada recommended that all publishers include excerpts in their metadata feeds.¹⁵⁵ Excerpts are considered “enhanced” (i.e., non-compulsory) metadata, but can be included for those retailers or websites that do display them, e.g., 49th Shelf, which draws all its title information from the ONIX files submitted to BNC's BiblioShare.¹⁵⁶ Enhanced metadata is proven to increase sales, and the effect is even stronger for online sales.¹⁵⁷ The Book Industry Study Group's most recent guide to metadata best practices claims “excerpts can make titles stand out in a list of possible relevant purchases and encourage longer engagement with the product listing for these titles.”¹⁵⁸ In *The Metadata Handbook*, “excerpts, previews, and sample chapters” top the list of enhanced metadata “that make a difference.”¹⁵⁹ The authors note that providing rich metadata to retailers will also improve a title's SEO performance in Google and other search engines; while they caution that rich metadata will not guarantee the success of a book, “the absence of metadata will definitely guarantee its obscurity.”¹⁶⁰

Rich Snippets

Using Google's “rich snippets,” publishers can help Google parse the content on a page to provide important information about the book in the “snippet,” i.e., the lines of text that appear below a search result.¹⁶¹ Installing rich snippets requires small modifications to the code of a webpage according to Google's specifications, but greatly enhance the results that people searching for a title will see. Rich snippets for products allow the inclusion of the book title, cover image, publisher,

154 Crissy Campbell, “How to Find Your Audience on Twitter,” Boxcar Marketing, September 13, 2012, boxcar-marketing.com/how-to-find-your-audience-on-twitter.

155 Hannah Johnson, “How to Sell More Books with Metadata,” *Publishing Perspectives*, January 27, 2011, publishingperspectives.com/2011/01/sell-more-books-with-metadata/.

156 “Frequently Asked Questions,” 49th Shelf.

157 Andre Breedt and David Walter, “White Paper: The Link Between Metadata and Sales,” Nielsen, January 25, 2013: 6, [isbn.nielsenbook.co.uk/uploads/3971_Nielsen_Metadata_white_paper_A4\(3\).pdf](http://isbn.nielsenbook.co.uk/uploads/3971_Nielsen_Metadata_white_paper_A4(3).pdf).

158 Book Industry Study Group and BookNet Canada, *Best Practices for Product Metadata* (September 16, 2013): 116-17, booknetcanada.ca/storage/BestPracticesforProductMetadata_Sept2013.pdf.

159 Renée Register and Thad McIlroy, *The Metadata Handbook: A Book Publisher's Guide to Creating and Distributing Metadata for Print and Ebooks* (Vancouver: Future of Publishing, 2012): 49, site.ebrary.com/lib/sfu/docDetail.action?docID=10640176.

160 *Ibid.*, 48.

161 “About Rich Snippets and Structured Data,” Webmaster Tools Help, accessed September 30, 2013, support.google.com/webmasters/answer/99170?hl=en&ref_topic=21997.

category, ISBN, price, and availability,¹⁶² enabling an interested reader to learn of not just the existence of a book, but many salient details that will aid their discovery of it, all with a glance at the search results.

Analytics

Finally, readers' interaction with HTML-based digital samples on a publisher's own site can be tracked with Google Analytics, enabling a publisher to tweak the samples and the site for maximum efficacy. There is a wealth of data available, including geographical location, frequency of visits, device and browsers used, links followed to arrive at the site, the popularity of specific pages, navigation paths within the site, and the completion rates of customizable goals.¹⁶³ This allows a publisher to track how well digital samples are engaging readers and leading to sales, and can help them modify the samples (and the site at large) to respond to readers' behaviour.

Analytics results cannot tell a publisher *how* to improve results, but allows them to methodically refine the site and receive quantified feedback at each step. This process can be sped up by using A/B testing: there are a variety of services that enable A/B testing, and have taught website proprietors that modifications as simple as changing the colour of a call-to-action button can significantly improve its effectiveness.¹⁶⁴ Publishers can offer different excerpts from the same book, with varying cover images, photographs, blurbs, etc., track which versions garner the better response, and use the resulting data to inform the marketing of the book (or even the book itself). These online tools allow for a process of trial-and-error that would be prohibitively expensive in print-based marketing efforts, and far more difficult to measure.

This process is fundamental to online book promotion: as Mike Shatzkin argues, "The key to successful digital marketing is to do the research that finds the right messages and targets, test the messages to the targets looking for a defined result, measure the impact, and then adjust the messaging and targeting."¹⁶⁵ By experimenting with different excerpts and their design and marketing copy, digital samples can act as a low-cost testing ground, enriching a publisher's understanding of their audience and ultimately improving a title's chances of success both online and in physical bookstores.

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C O N C L U S I O N

The decline of brick-and-mortar bookstores in Canada is a serious problem for publishers, particularly small publishers, who benefit greatly from a healthy independent bookstore sector providing a greater diversity of sales channels. A greater number of readers are purchasing books online, where the opportunity to sample a book can increase the likelihood of purchase. Although digital sampling via Google Books and Amazon has been around for nearly a decade, it has a relatively low adoption rate for Canadian publishers, and only a fraction have placed excerpts in easily searchable, universally accessible HTML-based formats. Digital sampling on publishers' own websites is often half-hearted and haphazardly applied. Offering HTML-based samples on their own website ensures that a potential customer can find a publisher's title and quickly determine its attractiveness. Embarking upon the above recommendations will greatly improve the online visibility and appeal of a publisher's books, and likely result in increased sales.

For small presses like New Star, where limited resources must be carefully allocated, digital samples are an easy and effective way to supplement their marketing efforts. Maurer believes "the best thing for New Star would be to have a catastrophic collapse of Indigo/Chapters,"¹⁶⁶ but in the meantime, New Star can boost the online visibility of its titles by adding the creation of digital samples to the workflow of new books, and beginning the process of creating samples for backlist titles. For the own-site samples, eye-catching "Read a Sample" links should be added to a title's page; while a book is being printed, the final text could be dropped into a ready-made HTML template. Once the backend modifications are in place and the template created, it would be a matter of minutes to create a sample, or at most a couple of hours to include various hyperlinks, cross-references, and multimedia extras. To further enhance visibility and increase third-party sales, Amazon should be provided with the necessary files to enable Look Inside, and New Star should consider partnering with Google Books to enable Google Preview and links to NewStarbooks.com on Google Books pages. Samples could be easily promoted via the existing means, though it would be wise to ramp up the social media efforts— New Star's Facebook and Twitter accounts have been dormant since 2011; at a minimum, tweeting and posting links to new samples as they become available would help generate awareness of them and draw traffic to the website. New Star already has Google Analytics enabled; to determine to what extent any of this affects sales, "goal funnels" could be set up to measure how many people click on the samples, and how many of those proceed to buy the book or click on the Amazon or Chapters/Indigo links.

Despite all of the above, publishers should not wholly abandon the physical retail sector. Traditional bookstores still play a very important role in book discovery, and there is a case to be made that publishers should be devoting more energy to sup-

166 Maurer, interview.

porting vibrant bookstores.¹⁶⁷ However, publishers need not focus on online sales to the total exclusion of all others, and strong online book promotion can drive sales in retail stores: as noted, some people find books online and then purchase them in a physical store, and even people who purchase books exclusively at brick-and-mortar bookstores likely spend some time online—as the online marketing manager at one imprint told Thompson, one of the goals of online marketing is for these people “to be in the bookstore and recognize the book either because they saw an ad or they something else that we did online.”¹⁶⁸

A final caveat: if these means of online promotion are universally adopted, then “the playing field is once again leveled” and publishers will live or die solely on the merits of their books.¹⁶⁹ But until that unlikely day arrives, small Canadian publishers can gain an advantage on their competitors and increase their share of the growing online book market by ensuring readers can find and sample their books online, in the most enriched and unencumbered manner possible.

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