

US Marketing and Distribution of
Regional Independent Canadian Publisher

Harbour Publishing

By

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Abstract

This report describes the relationship between a well-established independent Canadian publisher, Harbour Publishing, with the greater North American publishing industry, through an exploration of the processes of distributing regional books to a broader audience. This report begins with an introduction to Harbour Publishing and a brief summary of its foundation and expansion, with a focus on the acquisition of Douglas & McIntyre in 2013, and an examination of the regional demographics of the audience of both publishers. This is followed by a discussion of current marketing practices and the unique considerations and challenges of marketing regional titles to a US audience. The second section of this report describes the specific challenges brought about by the sudden change in the US distributor for Harbour Publishing, from Partners Publishing Group to Midpoint Trade Books, in 2016, and explores opportunities for stronger and more successful expansion of Harbour's titles into the US.

Keywords: Publishing; distribution; regional marketing; niche marketing; publicity; US marketing

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US Marketing and Distribution of Regional Independent Canadian Publisher Harbour Publishing

Introduction

In 1974, Harbour Publishing was established in the remote fishing community of Pender Harbour, nestled on the stunning Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. Since its inception, Harbour Publishing has served this community by telling its stories and the stories of British Columbia, originally through the essential West Coast anthologies, *Raincoast Chronicles*, which released its 40th Anniversary edition in the spring of 2015, and later accompanied by volumes of local fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. With an extensive backlist, Harbour continues to honour the vast and important talent, history, and culture of this region.

In the 1990 documentary *Books & Water: The Story of Harbour Publishing*, founder Howard White shares the humble beginnings of the publishing house.¹ Like many who make their way into the publishing industry, White was a writer and passionate consumer of literature, who sought to tell stories that he believed were being overlooked in the Canadian literary landscape. “I would hope,” White states in the short video, “that Harbour Publishing has succeeded in giving voice to the coastal region of BC. I think I’ve

¹ Paul McIsaac, “Books & Water: The Story of Harbour Publishing,” Simon Fraser University, 1990, <http://bcbooklook.com/2014/03/18/videos-films-book-trailers/>.

been successful to a degree that I never really expected.”² Anyone familiar with Harbour’s presence in the Canadian publishing landscape would agree that this statement still rings true for the small independent publishing house.

Today, Harbour Publishing continues to grow, expanding on its original purpose of creating a platform for the stories of British Columbia—and in some cases Canada—through the many essential forms of creative expression that contribute to our national cultural identity. As Harbour’s list of titles—from poetry to art collections to cookbooks—continues to expand, so too does its audience. Without sacrificing its mission, the team at Harbour works to publish books that will appeal not only to local readers with a passion and interest in preserving the culture of their community, but also to an audience beyond British Columbia.

To expand beyond one’s niche is never a simple feat; it takes dedication and skill to broaden the scope of titles that may at first appear only at home on the shelves of West Coast residents and visitors. It is essential that the book must first speak for itself as a product. This is in the hands of the publisher, who must seek out the stories, and package and present the book in such a way as to appeal to its reader. The marketing department serves as the deliverer of the product, selling more than a stack of paper, but a collection of ideas designed with care. Today, Harbour Publishing presents a unique example of a publishing house with stories to share both near and far.

² Paul McIsaac, “Books & Water: The Story of Harbour Publishing,” Simon Fraser University, 1990, <http://bcbooklook.com/2014/03/18/videos-films-book-trailers/>.

To provide context for exploring the relationship between Harbour and the regions in which it distributes its stories, this report will begin by reviewing the history of Harbour Publishing, with a focus on the union with Douglas & McIntyre in 2013, and the importance of regional identity to both publishing houses. It will then outline Harbour's current practices of marketing regional titles in the US, and consider the various factors that drive the success of books in an international market. The second section of this report will describe Harbour's sudden transition to a new US distributor, Midpoint Trade Books, in 2016, in order to closely examine the processes and considerations of marketing books internationally, and, specifically, marketing regional books to a broader audience. Through examination of these elements of the publishing, marketing, and distribution processes, this report will address the relationship between the regional identity of a publishing house and its place within the broader North American publishing landscape.

1 The History of Harbour Publishing and Douglas & McIntyre

1.1 40 Years in Publishing

In 2011, Vancouver-based publisher Douglas & McIntyre celebrated its 40-year anniversary with a line-up of events over four months.³ Appearing to have adapted well to the changing world of publishing in an increasingly digital environment, the publisher launched a microsite—fortyyears.ca—in honour of the celebration. The microsite, an offshoot of Douglas & McIntyre’s primary site as well as those of the other publishing houses under the umbrella of D&M Publishers Inc.—Greystone Books and New Society Publishing—was designed as the hub for the plentiful celebrations of this milestone, and featured video content, contests, and event details. The site, which no longer exists, featured exclusive content accessed via QR codes, a technology that in 2011 was becoming increasingly used by publishers in marketing campaigns, as smartphones capable of scanning barcodes were beginning to dominate the cellular phone market.⁴

Such a milestone is worthy of note, and the founders of Douglas & McIntyre, Jim Douglas and Scott McIntyre, had every reason to celebrate. Since publishing its first titles in the fall of 1971, Douglas & McIntyre had grown into a significant player on the Canadian publishing scene. In 1980, McIntyre took over as President, CEO, and majority shareholder following Douglas’ retirement that year. That same year marked the

³ Douglas & McIntyre, “D&M Publishers launches four months of celebrations to mark 40 years in book publishing”, September 2011, <http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com/event/293>.

⁴ Gabe Habash, “Publishers find more uses for QR Codes,” *Publisher’s Weekly*, October 28, 2011, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publishing-and-marketing/article/49317-publishers-find-more-uses-for-qr-codes.html>.

formation of an alliance with leading Canadian children’s book publisher Greenwood Books, which was later sold to House of Anansi in 2005. In 1993, the Greystone Books imprint was established to focus on books with environmental themes. The company continued to build assets on the West Coast by acquiring New Society Publishers, a Gabriola Island-based press, in mid-2008. Later that year, the publishing group rebranded as D&M Publishers Inc., creating the umbrella under which the three imprints—Douglas & McIntyre, Greystone Books, and New Society Publishers—would function.⁵ Heading into a new decade, Douglas & McIntyre seemed to be adapting to this evolution of the Canadian publishing industry successfully, maintaining growth and financial stability while earning recognition as one of Canada’s most successful publishing houses.⁶

However, in what the *Quill & Quire* called “a case of bittersweet timing,” McIntyre filed for creditor protection just over a year after the elaborate celebration of 40 successful years in the industry and one day before receiving the inaugural Ivy Award from the International Visitors Program.⁷ The award, presented annually at the International Festival of Authors in Toronto, was designed to recognize individuals who have made “a substantial contribution to Canadian publishing.”⁸ McIntyre, unable to collect the award in person, released a statement expressing his gratitude for being selected by his peers,

⁵ Douglas & McIntyre, “Douglas & McIntyre,” accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com/history>.

⁶ Jason McBride, “It’s alive! Canadian book publishing stirs.” *Canadian Business*, August 30, 2013. <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/companies-and-industries/its-alive-canadian-book-publishing-stirs/>.

⁷ Sue Carter, “D&M Publishers founder Scott McIntyre receives inaugural Ivy award,” *Quill & Quire*, October 23, 2012. <http://www.quillandquire.com/awards/2012/10/23/dm-publishers-founder-scott-mcintyre-receives-inaugural-ivy-award/>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

and commending the committee for recognizing and celebrating the key players in Canadian publishing.⁹

While what led to the demise of D&M Publishers Inc. is not the focus of this report, it's worth examining the circumstances surrounding the breakdown of an arguably successful enterprise¹⁰ to fully understand the current environment in which Harbour Publishing and Douglas & McIntyre exist as Canadian publishing houses. Rowland Lorimer, founding director of the Master of Publishing program and the Canadian Institute for Studies in Publishing at Simon Fraser University, suggests that perhaps it was the seemingly successful pattern of growth that led to D&M Publishers Inc.'s downfall. Lorimer states "that if you get to a certain size you absolutely can't survive in competition with the foreign-owned firms."¹¹ In this way, it's better to stay small and retain a limited regional market share, thus avoiding what Lorimer refers to as a "little-brother industry"¹² in which national businesses cannot compete with their internationally-owned counterparts.

Large Canadian publishing houses are faced with the challenge of going head-to-head with foreign-owned publishing houses for a share of the international market. When staying afloat in the vast industry becomes unsustainable, Canadian publishers are at risk of being absorbed by these competitors. Such economic factors arguably influence the focus

⁹ Sue Carter, "D&M Publishers founder Scott McIntyre receives inaugural Ivy award," *Quill & Quire*, October 23, 2012. <http://www.quillandquiere.com/awards/2012/10/23/dm-publishers-founder-scott-mcintyre-receives-inaugural-ivy-award/>.

¹⁰ Jason McBride, "It's alive! Canadian book publishing stirs." *Canadian Business*, August 30, 2013. <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/companies-and-industries/its-alive-canadian-book-publishing-stirs/>.

¹¹ John Barber, "Say goodbye to Douglas & MacIntyre and a 40-year publishing dream," *The Globe & Mail*, October 23, 2012, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/say-goodbye-to-douglas-macintyre-and-a-40-year-publishing-dream/article4632781/>.

¹² Ibid.

of a publishing house, and the importance of upholding Canada's place in the international market may suffer. Those who champion a national identity and the importance of independent Canadian industries, like Lorimer, fear that these changes to the industry will alter the "role [Canadian publishing] normally plays" in representing Canadian culture internationally, and "the whole nature of the country."¹³ While McIntyre was the first to receive the Ivy Award for his achievements in the field of publishing, his is certainly not the only publishing house recognized for its devotion to Canada's national identity. Nor is it the only publisher who has faced the struggle of forfeiting this identity in order to survive.

The failure of D&M Publishers Inc. made the state of Canadian publishing seem dire. The company appeared to be following in the footsteps of Stoddard Publishing and Key Porter Books. Those like Lorimer, who had been working in the changing industry for years, thought that absorption by large, foreign-based publishing houses was the fate of even the most successful of Canadian independent publishers. However, this would not be the end for D&M Publishers Inc. First, a group made up of Heritage House Publishing and former D&M Publishers Inc. executive Rob Sanders acquired the Greystone Books imprint, rebranding it as Greystone Books Ltd., just as creditors protection was set to expire.¹⁴ Second, New Society Publishers was bought by three of the original key players in the

¹³ John Barber, "Say goodbye to Douglas & MacIntyre and a 40-year publishing dream," *The Globe & Mail*, October 23, 2012, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/say-goodbye-to-douglas-macintyre-and-a-40-year-publishing-dream/article4632781/>.

¹⁴ Andrea Woo, "Heritage House buys assets of Greystone Books from D&M Publishers," *The Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/heritage-house-buys-assets-of-greystone-books-from-dm-publishers/article8102552/>.

publishing house, Chris and Judith Plant and Carol Newell.¹⁵ And third, in February of 2013, Harbour owners and founders Howard and Mary White purchased the remaining imprint of the D&M Publishers Inc., Douglas & McIntyre. While this may seem an ambitious undertaking for a small, if well-established publisher, the Whites were reluctant to give up on Douglas & McIntyre's substantial backlist and its well-respected publishing program, and felt it was worth trying to save. McIntyre expressed approval at the outcome: "The successful conclusion of first the Greystone and now the Douglas & McIntyre asset sales confirms that the quality imprints of D&M [Publishers Inc.] are on a solid new path for the future," said McIntyre. "I am particularly pleased that both imprints will go forward under new British Columbia ownership with energetic ongoing publishing programs."¹⁶ And thus, Douglas & McIntyre became Douglas & McIntyre (2013) Ltd., and Howard White remains committed to maintaining an ongoing national publishing program under the new Douglas & McIntyre (D&M)¹⁷ as well as preserving the continuity of its backlist,¹⁸ staying true to the core values of the founders of the publishing house.

Harbour has always found its strength in being a primarily regional publisher since 1974.

Based out of Pender Harbour on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia, Harbour is the

¹⁵ New Society Publishers, "Our History," accessed October 23, 2016, <https://www.newsociety.com/Our-History>.

¹⁶ Leigh Ann Williams, "D&M Publishers Finds Buyer for Douglas & McIntyre Imprint," *Publishers Weekly*, February 7, 2013, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/55845-d-m-publishers-finds-buyer-for-douglas-mcintyre-.imprint.html>.

¹⁷ From this point on, the present version of Douglas & McIntyre under the ownership of the Whites will be referred to as D&M in this report.

¹⁸ Leigh Ann Williams, "D&M Publishers Finds Buyer for Douglas & McIntyre Imprint," *Publishers Weekly*, February 7, 2013, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/55845-d-m-publishers-finds-buyer-for-douglas-mcintyre-.imprint.html>.

prime example of a regional publisher, focusing its list on local history and culture, encyclopaedias of natural history, and other resources for those with an interest in exploring the West Coast. In 1991, Harbour became the distributor for Nightwood Editions, a small independent publisher currently based in Gibsons, also on the Sunshine Coast. In 2001, Harbour launched KnowBC.com, a subscription-based resource for libraries and learning institutions offering digital versions of its comprehensive print publication *The Encyclopedia of British Columbia*, as well as a number of other reference titles published by Harbour.¹⁹ Harbour expanded its presence to the north in 2004 with the acquisition of Lost Moose Publishing, a 15-year-old Yukon press.²⁰ Harbour adopted the backlist of Lost Moose and continues to publish Northern Canadian titles, including fiction, history, photojournalism and cookbooks, under the Lost Moose imprint.

Alongside these endeavors, Harbour has maintained its mission of preserving and sharing the stories and culture of the West Coast of British Columbia for over forty years. In recognizing that it is appealing to a limited audience, Harbour works within that consumer demographic, producing and marketing content on a narrow scale. Alternatively, D&M's market is the general Canadian public—its titles include modern Canadian classics like Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*—and therefore it must market books more broadly. This widens both the breadth of potential submissions that could be sourced and the audience to which these books are marketed. Essentially, D&M, as a

¹⁹ KnowBC, "About KnowBC," Harbour Publishing, accessed December 23, 2016, <http://knowbc.com/knowbc/About-KnowBC>.

²⁰ Harbour Publishing, "Harbour Buys Lost Moose," Harbour Publishing, October 1, 2004, <http://www.harbourpublishing.com/news/106>.

company with a national focus, requires the publisher, editors, and marketing team to do what Harbour has been doing with its regional titles, just on a much larger scale.

This issue of marketing products to a particular group is, of course, nothing new to publishers. In order to expand their readership and avoid diluting or obscuring their original brand, publishers often create or acquire separate imprints or companies.²¹ The importance of maintaining a brand is critical to its sustainability, as it not only sharpens and clarifies the focus of directives that will inspire better business management, but it also allows an audience to identify the brand easily, thus increasing customer loyalty. Just as an avid reader knows to identify the author they prefer, customers will learn to recognize that they can assume a certain level of quality or type of product from a particular imprint.

The distinct mandates of Harbour and D&M present both strengths and weaknesses. While the regional focus is arguably the core strength of Harbour, president Howard White admits that such a concentrated scope in the vast market is in some ways limiting. Part of the decision to purchase D&M, a house with a nationally-focused vision and a backlist of authors from across Canada, was driven by the potential to eliminate this limitation without jeopardizing the brand of Harbour. White acknowledges that the “B.C. brand”²² is at the heart of Harbour, and that this focus does not translate to the rest of the country,

²¹ Joel Friedlander, “A Quick Lesson About Publishers, Imprints, Createspace and Bowker,” *The Book Designer*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2015/02/a-quick-lesson-about-publishers-imprints-createspace-andbowker/>.

²² Rod Mickleburgh, “Harbour Publishing buys Douglas & McIntyre,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 6, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/harbour-publishing-buys-douglas-mcintyre/article8323969/>.

thus limiting both the market and the kind of content that Harbour is willing or able to publish. White lamented that prior to the acquisition of D&M, Harbour was forced to forgo publishing many of the promising submissions deemed “too national” to fit in with the rest of its list.²³ The reach of D&M broadens the scope of what is publishable without altering Harbour’s business model as a regional publisher. The D&M brand proves resilient in spite of the deconstruction of the Canadian publishing powerhouse, and rather than including D&M under the Harbour umbrella, White runs the house as a company separate from Harbour. And so, with the acquisition of D&M, a publisher esteemed and recognized for its longevity and national identity, two long-standing publishing houses, and the books that make them what they are, continue to survive and prosper in Canadian publishing.

1.2 Breaking Ground

With over four decades in the industry under its belt, Harbour knows what its customers want and, more importantly, how to reach them. Of course, this is simplifying a system that is in fact elaborate; each title is uniquely packaged and presented for a clearly defined audience, with distribution playing a vital role in accessing this audience. Throughout this process, a number of unpredictable or uncontrollable elements can enter the equation. For Harbour, and for publishing houses in general, these unpredictable elements are part of the dynamic nature of the industry that publishers must accept.

²³ Rod Mickleburgh, “Harbour Publishing buys Douglas & McIntyre,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 6, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/harbour-publishing-buys-douglas-mcintyre/article8323969/>.

Adaptability is essential as the publishing industry sees the continued occurrence of changes, like the dissolution of D&M Publishers Inc., become ever more frequent.

One such unforeseeable yet unavoidable change for the newly re-established D&M occurred in the late fall of 2014. HarperCollins Canada, the long-time distributor of D&M and many other independent Canadian publishers, closed its Canadian warehouse and outsourced the warehousing and distribution of those under the HarperCollins Canada imprint to R.R. Donnelly in Indiana. Recognizing that HarperCollins Canada was the most prominent distributor of independent presses, Howard White noted that this development “reconfigure[d] the face of Canadian publishing,”²⁴ indicating a troubling trend for Canadian publishing as a whole. White made it clear that every transition in the publishing industry that results in less Canadians working in publishing subsequently reduces Canada’s presence in the universal publishing industry. Following Penguin Random House, HarperCollins Canada was the second major national company to move its distribution out of Canada. White saw this move as a negative trend²⁵: “It represents a devaluation of the importance of the Canadian market,”²⁶ he stated. This devaluation trickles throughout the industry; publishing is a precarious business, and such a shift can throw an already struggling independent publishing house off balance, so much so that they cannot regain their footing. It also erodes a sense of fellowship and homegrown pride that permeates Canadian publishing. Without a network in which publishers and

²⁴ Mark Medley, “HarperCollins Canada closes Toronto Warehouse,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 4, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/harpercollins-canada-closes-toronto-warehouse/article21450745/>.

²⁵ Howard White (President, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.

²⁶ Mark Medley, “HarperCollins Canada closes Toronto Warehouse,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 4, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/harpercollins-canada-closes-toronto-warehouse/article21450745/>.

their affiliates support each other, the Canadian publishing industry is faced with the fact that it is a small player in the international market, and will thus be overshadowed and potentially squeezed out by the large, foreign publishing groups.

The closure of the HarperCollins Canada warehouse in the Scarborough suburb of Toronto meant quickly seeking out a new distributor for D&M. In the spring of 2015, the publishing house announced that it would establish a relationship with University of Toronto Press (UTP), another Canadian company that stood the test of time. UTP opened its distribution stream to independent publishers in 1975, and this longevity in the business, along with a “reputation of passionate commitment to the Canadian publishing industry,”²⁷ is what led to the mutually satisfactory relationship. As UTP took on the increased volume of clients brought about by the elimination of the HarperCollins Canada warehouse, the resettled D&M made yet another transition, entrusting a new Canadian distributor with its new and old titles.

Within less than two years, the Harbour and D&M offices faced the same problem once again. In the spring of 2016, the US distributor of Harbour titles, Partners Publishers Group (PPG), announced it would cease the delivery of orders through its wholesaler, Partners West, on April 1. This development came as a shock to the industry and especially to many of its small publisher clients.²⁸ On March 30, *Publishers Weekly* publicly announced that the 32-year-old business was forced to close its wholesale

²⁷ Douglas & McIntyre, “Douglas & McIntyre and University of Toronto Press form distribution agreement,” March 3, 2015, <http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com/event/455>.

²⁸ Judith Rosen, “Partners Book Distributing to Close,” *Publishers Weekly*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/69801-partners-book-distributing-to-close.html>.

operations due to circumstances in which, as the company indicated in a statement, “the numbers are no longer working.”²⁹ Unfortunately, not only did many of PPG’s clients learn of the closure just one day before their stock would cease shipping, but they were informed through the publishing magazine rather than from PPG representatives, indicating the abrupt nature of this news.³⁰ To make matters worse for Harbour, its Fall 2016 catalogues had just returned from the printers, listing all of PPG’s ordering information.

As marketing manager and an employee at Harbour for over twenty years, Marisa Alps has seen the marketing department through three separate US distributors. Before Partners folded unexpectedly, Alps reflects that the company was a good fit for Harbour because of the strong presence established in the Pacific Northwest by the wholesale sector of the company, Partners West.³¹ With a warehouse in Renton, just outside of Seattle, Washington, Partners West provided quick and reasonably priced shipments to bookstores up and down the West Coast of the United States, ensuring that Harbour’s books were reaching its western US audience effectively.

As publishers prepared to relocate their stock from the PPG warehouse by May 30, 2016,³² many were forced to make a hasty decision as to where to take their US distribution

²⁹ Mick Dolinski, “Closing Announcement,” Partners Book Blog, April 1, 2016, <http://partnersbookblog.blogspot.ca/>.

³⁰ Angela Bole, “Statement from Partners Book Distributing Regarding Closure,” *Independent Book Publishers Association*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.ibpa-online.org/news/310537/Statement-from-Partners-Book-Distributing-Regarding-Closure.htm>.

³¹ Marisa Alps (Marketing Manager, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, November 5, 2016.

³² Howard White (President, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.

business. As a solution, PPG encouraged its clients to take their business to Midpoint Trade Books, a distribution and sales company based in New York and warehoused in Tennessee. To ease the financial burden of the transition, Midpoint and PPG offered to ship publishers' books from PPG's warehouses to Midpoint's by May 30 at no charge to the publisher. While the details of the arrangement are not clear, one can assume that in the wake of PPG's dissolution, Midpoint saw the opportunity to take on a substantial client base, even though many were small independent publishers, and believed the cost of shipping was worth the investment. Whatever the motivation behind the deal, this offer appealed to many of PPG's clients, many of whom would have been heavily burdened by the substantial costs of moving their entire US stock.

While Harbour's primary market is Canada, the maintenance of its presence in the US is valuable to the company's commercial growth; in 2015, Harbour's US sales constituted over 12% of its total sales.³³ To avoid abandoning the US market and losing all sales for the coming season, a decision had to be made quickly. While Midpoint offered to reduce the financial challenge of moving stock across the country, this did not necessarily make them the leading choice. Despite the time-sensitive nature of making a decision, as Harbour was eager to avoid a substantial delay in releasing its titles in the US and causing a loss in sales that had already been anticipated, White and the rest of the Harbour management team were sure to weigh their options.

³³ Harbour Publishing, "Livres Canada Books: Foreign Rights Marketing Assistance Program," March 29, 2017.

While this placed Harbour in a difficult position, it was one it had found itself in before. Prior to PPG, Harbour had been with the now long-defunct Oregon-based Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, which filed for bankruptcy in 2006 and was then absorbed in 2007 by Ingram Publisher Services, Inc. (IPS), the publisher distribution division of Ingram Content Group, based in La Vergne, Tennessee.³⁴ IPS offers a full range of publishing services, from printing to digital content creation and metadata management, to sales and distribution support.³⁵ Despite the substantial size of the company and the range of services available, IPS was not a suitable option. Alps notes that the move initially seemed promising and Harbour received encouragement from Graphics Arts to the potential success of the new relationship.³⁶ However, after only a year, Harbour severed ties with IPS, a decision that was based on reduced sales and a constant struggle to access information. Thus, when the time came again to select a US distributor that best suited Harbour's needs, previous experience led Harbour away from IPS. This preference is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, as IPS continues to absorb the few remaining independent book distributors, such as Perseus-PGW in the spring of 2016.³⁷

Alternatively, there was also a familiar choice. Since acquiring D&M, which had used Publishers Group West (PGW) as its US distributor prior to the dissolution of the publishing group, the Harbour staff, both in-house and remote, were familiar with the

³⁴ Authorlink, "Troubled Graphic Arts Publishing Gets Boost From Ingram," *Authorlink*, October 26, 2006, <http://authorlink.com/news/troubled-graphic-arts-publishing-gets-boost-from-ingram-2/>.

³⁵ Ingram, Ingram Book Group LLC, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.ingramcontent.com/publishers>.

³⁶ Marisa Alps (Marketing Manager, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, November 5, 2016.

³⁷ Ingram Book Group LLC, "Ingram Content Group Enters Into Agreement to Purchase Perseus' Services Business," March 3, 2016, <http://www.ingramcontent.com/news/ingram-enters-into-agreement-to-purchase-perseus>.

practices of the company. While satisfied with PGW as a distributor, the sales team found it difficult to adhere to the schedule, and the demand for advanced information required D&M to delay the release of its titles in the US by a full season. In contrast, Midpoint's practice of continual, year-round sales, rather than a schedule based on a seasonal structure, offered a positive alternative to PGW's scheduling³⁸ as it suggested a greater flexibility with regard to publication dates. Harbour opted to go with Midpoint, with the hope that its services would best suit Harbour's titles.

1.3 Finding the Audience

Over the years, these many changes caused temporary upset for Harbour and D&M, but more generally reflect the ever-evolving nature of the Canadian publishing industry. The industry continues to see the disappearance or absorption of independent, domestic companies by larger international companies, resulting in a shift of the majority of sales in Canada from Canadian-owned to foreign-owned companies between 2012 and 2014.³⁹ Simultaneously, the network for publishers that continue to survive shrinks, as smaller distributors are absorbed by their larger domestic counterparts. Business options become fewer, and although existing within a monopoly can offer benefits for small independent publishers,⁴⁰ limited variability makes meeting the needs of a company challenging. For both Harbour and D&M, representing their communities is essential to their identity as publishers. Upholding this identity, while also expanding the reach of their books, makes

³⁸ Howard White (President, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.

³⁹ Statistics Canada, "Book publishing industry, 2014," May 19, 2016, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/160519/dq160519e-eng.htm>.

⁴⁰ Laura Godfrey, "UTP Is the Winner In the New Canadian Distribution Landscape," *Publishers Weekly*, September 21, 2015.

distribution into the US a matter of balancing integrity with adaptability, strategy and a greater understanding of a new market.

Harbour's primary market is in English-speaking Canada, with its audience located largely on the West Coast, but assigns North American or world rights to its books when available, with few exceptions. Thus nearly all of its books are available for sale in the US. In the US, as in any market, trends fluctuate across demographics and seasons, but the vast and diverse population of the US seems to enhance the fickle nature of this changing marketplace.⁴¹ It's already challenging enough to predict the desires of an audience to which the publisher has direct channels, and the marketing department at Harbour and D&M rely on the US sales representatives of their respective distribution companies to provide insight on market trends when marketing books to US audiences. Such information is most regularly conveyed during conference calls between the Harbour marketing team, sales manager, and the representatives from the distribution company. During these calls, the sales manager presents each title, and, in addition to gathering projected order numbers, receives feedback from the sales representatives, both explicitly in their advice and implicitly in their personal and professional interest in each title.⁴² Often, it's not difficult to predict which titles will suit international audiences and which will not, but occasionally surprises arise, and elements of a title that could be considered marginal may be the key selling point to a US demographic. For example, a unique local cookbook may find a substantial audience in New York, as gluten-free options are

⁴¹ Thomas Woll, Ani Chamichian, and Carla Ruff, "Penetrating the US Market: A Guide for Canadian Publishers, 3rd Edition," (Ottawa: Livres Canada Books, 2013), 3.

⁴² Publishers Group West sales representatives (US distribution service), in discussion with the author, August 30, 2016.

becoming sought after in that market, while Canadian audiences may consider the gluten-free factor to be unfashionable and are more concerned with the sugar content of the recipes. Insight into the needs of audiences that are beyond the scope of Harbour's in-house marketing team is valuable and allows the marketing department to package the products in such a way as to appeal to these broader markets.

Unfortunately, how adjustable these packages are can be limited. The fact that Harbour and D&M books are complete entities by the time marketing in the US begins, while beneficial in some regards, also means that the form of the book cannot be altered. Instances arise where the wording of the copy, the subtitle or title, or the look of the cover image could be altered to appeal much more strongly to a US audience. Repackaging a book to cater to the US audience is often not economically feasible unless the book is reprinted, and it is unreasonable to create two covers for every book. The publisher must weigh the advantages of publishing a book that has a specific regional focus, thus enhancing its market appeal in a certain area or Canada in general, against the potential benefit of generalizing a title to broaden the audience.

Along with the difficulties of identifying trends in the US market is the simple matter of being less familiar with the audience and industry details of another country. Publishers are stronger members of the literary community of which they are physically associated with and immersed in. This close association makes it much easier to predict where the suitable audience for a title can be reached. A title that sells well in a small seaside boutique store won't find an audience in the middle of Idaho without a lot of research; it is easier to focus the concentrated media push to the niche areas—in Harbour's case, this

niche is primarily geographical—that will be receptive to a particular kind of title based on prior knowledge and sales history.

Just as Harbour is less aware of the US market, the US market is less aware of Harbour. The name Harbour Publishing, similar to Douglas & McIntyre, carries weight in Canada, and with that recognition, as well as the companies' longevity, comes a familiarity with the product. Both publishers have cultivated a brand identity that regional and national consumers and media recognize, but this recognition does not necessarily extend beyond Canada to the same degree. This lack of recognition in the US market creates an added layer of effort for the buyer and serves as an impediment to publicists. Publicists must work harder to present a book or an author to media and bookstores that have no preconceived notion of the kind of product a Harbour book is.

For publicists, reaching an audience is commonly achieved through events, an element of marketing and publicity that is affected—and sometimes limited—by the location of the author. Budget aside, which at Harbour rarely includes funds for US touring, another variable in planning events is determining which bookstores are interested in doing events, and what kind they are willing to host. Harbour's established relationships with local bookstores in BC and connections across the country sets a precedent for which bookstores will host events, making pitching and organizing simple and effective in Canada.

Presenting Harbour's regional titles to a broader audience can be challenging in itself. In 2016, Harbour sought to join the adult colouring book craze with *Colour the British*

Columbia Coast. In Canada, Harbour uses this regional focus to its advantage. A book that fits into the description of a Pacific Northwest title can still be marketed using a local angle, either through the subject or the author as a hook, a strategy that Harbour and D&M publicist Sam Markham often uses to draw media attention to her books: “other than national media or cookbook media, subject media, that sort of thing, we have a much better shot getting media with a local angle and with an author touring.”⁴³ Markham compares this to the challenging task of marketing a book in the US, which she notes is restricted due to the usual lack of being able to utilize an author’s location or a title’s regional focus as an angle with which to appeal to media.⁴⁴

A final consideration in Harbour’s US marketing is the specific repercussions concerning the lack of a physical presence in the US market. Unfortunately, Harbour and D&M are rarely able to send authors or representatives to literary events that would help increase recognition of the presses outside of Canada. Were Harbour authors or staff able to attend more book fairs, literary festivals, or bookstore events in the US, a relationship with the literary community would be cultivated, as is the case closer to home in Vancouver and throughout the rest of the country.⁴⁵ Aside from the more commercial events, it would also be beneficial in the long run to increase bookstore visits, in order to build a stronger relationship and identification with those who do carry Harbour’s books, particularly the smaller, independent bookstores. By enhancing that relationship through personal connection, future business endeavours, like organizing events, would be much more

⁴³ Sam Markham (Publicist, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marisa Alps (Marketing Manager, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, November 5, 2016.

likely. While government funding to supplement publishers' participation in book fairs and other trade events in the US is available,⁴⁶ it is up to each individual publisher to consider how much time and resources they can allocate to traveling outside of the country in order to increase their physical presence in the United States.

In the US, the challenges brought about by the lack of an established relationship and name recognition persist in other areas of media. Publicists are unable to monitor the US media as closely as Canadian media, and find it challenging to establish a relationship with print, broadcast, and online media sources. Because Harbour's media contacts in the US are limited to the larger general interest publications, focussed media campaigns based on the specifics of the content or author of a book receive fewer hits.⁴⁷ Lacking the experience to target media pitches in the vast US market, there is very little precedent set for what works and where to find specific audiences for each genre in which Harbour publishes.

For Harbour titles that have such a regional focus and an established presence on the West Coast, it is easier to build a physical presence among the audience. It seems unlikely that the time spent in pushing the books in the US will yield a strong enough financial return to warrant spending the same amount of time on publicity as would be done locally. Alternatively, the challenge arises for those books that have an audience in the US, as some of Harbour's titles do throughout the Pacific Northwest, with the additional time

⁴⁶ Livres Canada Books, "Foreign Rights Marketing Assistance Program," accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.livrescanadabooks.com/en/funding/frmap> funding/grants/arts-abroad/travel.

⁴⁷ Sam Markham (Publicist, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

that must now be dedicated to publicity. A book that is released in October in Canada will be supported by a full marketing plan, which, besides requiring the time and efforts of the publicists, will generally depend upon a substantial time commitment from the author. Of course, this is all part of the process, but then, unfortunately, this process must be adapted and performed all over again, as marketing teams move their focus to the next season. US marketing plans don't get the same level of effort; publicists cannot afford the time.

Targeting media outlets and cultivating buzz around a title is a joint effort that often requires collaboration between various levels of in-house marketing staff and the publicists, many of whom work remotely. In addition to the publicist, the marketing manager, sales representatives, social media coordinator, and sometimes even designers are involved in the effort to get a book noticed by buyers and consumers through a variety of channels including print, radio, television, and social media platforms. While the publicity for each book is primarily in the hands of the publicist, the overlap of responsibilities requires a constant level of communication to achieve the best results possible across all potential marketing channels.

Because the marketing and publicity departments do not occupy one office, and staff members are in fact spread across the country, communication is essential in working to attain the most effective level of publicity for a title. While communication is easily achieved and information is tracked and dispersed through a variety of means electronically, the fact that employees do not work in a shared space creates a challenge in maintaining continuous clarity. Harbour keeps up-to-date records of all promotional

news for each title, which are stored on a server and accessible to the entire marketing and publicity departments. These records include information regarding upcoming and confirmed print, broadcast, and online media hits and advertisements that can then be disseminated through social media to customers and through weekly and monthly newsletters to buyers and sales representatives. Information must be contributed to these records as soon as it is available in order for everyone to have the details on hand and to avoid missing an opportunity to expand the reach of any promotional news.

All of those in marketing are responsible for updating and maintaining the information listed on Harbour and D&M's US distribution databases when necessary, but it is up to the US marketing coordinator to monitor and ensure that long-lead review copies are sent out up to four months in advance of the US publication date. Because the US publication dates are approximately six months following the Canadian release, long-lead mailings often take place within two months after the Canadian post-release media has begun. An additional mailing is done to coincide with the US publication date for media outlets that require less lead time. Review copies must be accompanied by media letters and press releases, which have been adapted from the original Canadian versions, and must be tailored to a US reader. These alterations must include all relevant information regarding US pricing, publication date, and distributor contact information, as well as details regarding the content of the text. When possible, catalogue copy and media letter content must be adjusted to emphasize any US-relevant content, or even minimize content that posits the book as only for Canadian audiences. This can often be challenging, and should be done tactfully in order to highlight the potential alternate audience without misrepresenting the book. The US review copy mailing is much smaller than the Canadian

one,⁴⁸ is rarely targeted to smaller media outlets, and is influenced by the limited information on the US market available to Harbour. With additional market research, Harbour's US presence could be improved.

Adding to these broader challenges of marketing books in a country other than where the publisher is established are the specific issues that arise when aligning one's publishing process with the different business practices of a new distribution partner. This new relationship with Midpoint brings a number of circumstances to which Harbour is still adjusting. As demonstrated by the press's last four decades in the Canadian publishing industry, Harbour's flexibility has been a strength that will continue to see to the survival of the publishing house and provide a foundation for the expansion of Harbour's audience.

⁴⁸ The US review copy mailing is approximately ¼ of the size of the Canadian review copy mailing, depending on the title's print run.

2 The Transition to Midpoint

2.1 A New Timeline

On May 1, 2016, Harbour's business relationship with Midpoint began; books were transferred to Midpoint's warehouse and distribution was initiated by the end of the month. While the conversion was initially straightforward, this new partnership came with its own set of conditions to which Harbour must adapt. With the initial conference call with Midpoint Trade Books, Harbour's new distribution service, in June 2016, the most obvious challenge to this new partnership quickly became apparent. Midpoint representatives wanted details about each title, including a cover or mock cover as a placeholder, six months before each book was scheduled to be released. This was essential for scheduled meetings with substantial buyers that would represent a large portion of Harbour's distribution into the United States. Most notable among these channels is one of the few large remaining brick-and-mortar book retail chains south of the border, Barnes & Noble. According to a recent sales conference call with the representatives for D&M's US distributor PGW, Barnes & Noble represented between 18% and 23% of estimated sales for lead titles.⁴⁹ While there is not yet enough sales information accumulated through Midpoint to conclude that these numbers are comparable to Barnes & Noble's buying habits for Harbour books in the US, it is reasonable to use these numbers as representational of potential market share. Thus, considering that Barnes &

⁴⁹ Publishers Group West sales representatives (US Distribution Service), in discussion with the author, September 30, 2016.

Noble is approximately one-fifth of the US market for Harbour titles and holds 25% of the market in the US,⁵⁰ providing the retailer with the required information is crucial.

Ideally, Harbour would have complete information and produce all necessary materials for titles six months in advance of the publication date to allow for a simultaneous release in both countries, but this is easier said than done. Books often evolve as they move through the editing process; they may become shorter or longer, or include more or fewer images than originally pitched. In extreme cases, they may be postponed or dropped entirely if a relationship goes sour, the manuscript arrives late or in an unpublishable state, or, less dramatically, the publisher simply decides to delay the release by a season as a marketing strategy. In addition to editorial changes, drop-in titles can also complicate the production process. All such potential circumstances make it difficult to produce comprehensive promotional materials for a complete list six months prior to the intended publication dates.

Harbour has, at the time of writing, chosen a solution to deal with this challenging timeline that is the most manageable for a team of its size with the resources available: delay publication in the US by four to six months. Unfortunately, this timing essentially shifts lists by one season, a practice that Harbour had hoped to avoid in its choice of Midpoint over PGW, based on the experience with D&M. While Midpoint does not work within a seasonally-based schedule and sells continuously throughout the year, because of the structure of Harbour's production and promotional schedules—and those of the

⁵⁰ Thomas Woll, Ani Chamichian, and Carla Ruff, "Penetrating the US Market: A Guide for Canadian Publishers, 3rd Edition," (Ottawa: Livres Canada Books, 2013), 9.

Canadian buyers—this biannual system is consequently carried throughout all distribution channels. Shifting lists by one season is practical and efficient in some ways, as it allows for the marketing team to consider one market individually⁵¹ with regards to the more significant media push in either country, while meeting the requirements of both the Canadian and US distributors. Review copies can be sent out at around the same time, as the large US market book reviewers like *Booklist*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Library Journal* require books to be submitted as early as 15 weeks prior to publication, while Canadian publications can receive books much closer to the publication date. This timing allows for the book to build media attention and garner reviews leading up to and in time with the release of the book in both Canada and the US.

This staggered schedule of marketing books later in the US can be helpful for marketing the book in Canada as well. Any attention from US media can be used to publicize a book in Canada well after its initial release. (This effect does not work in both directions, as US sales representatives and buyers have no interest in any media outside of their domestic market.) With this timing, Harbour’s marketing staff can utilize advance reading copies for long-lead mailings and establish a presence in the United States without sacrificing attention dedicated to the current Canadian list. By focusing on one list, the number of copies of any particular book on hand can be practically managed. This strategy makes it easier to consider marketing one list at a time for each publicist. Adversely, to accommodate the long lead time required by US publications, if the books were marketed in Canada and the US simultaneously, Harbour would need to send review copies to the

⁵¹ While I suggest that this is a simple process, it is rarely so cut and dry, as publicists are often met with overlapping seasons as authors continue to tour or receive media attention months or years after the release of their book.

US publications approximately 16 weeks prior to sending out books in Canada. This would create the added challenge of considering and marketing one list half a year prior to when marketing the titles would begin in Canada, thus overlapping with the previous list in Harbour's primary market.

While this practice of shifting seasons for distribution seems to be a practical solution for Harbour and D&M to meet the demands of the US distributors, it does present a number of challenges. Most notably, it is often not ideal to release books in a different season than that for which the title is intended. Because Harbour cannot meet the deadlines of the new distributor, books are unable to appear on the shelves of US booksellers until four to five weeks after they arrive in the US warehouse⁵², which further enhances the delay. Thus, fall releases appear as winter or spring titles in the US, and vice versa. This can be a potential limitation on sales in the US, as books that have a clear seasonal focus are timed strategically for Canadian release. Both Harbour⁵³ and D&M⁵⁴ publish successful gardening themed books, which are best received when released early in the year. This is a specifically seasonal product, and thus its potential marketability suffers when it must be sold as a fall book. In cases such as this, where it is clear that the seasonal release of the book will negatively affect sales, Harbour is faced with two options: condense the production schedule of the book and prioritize its development in editorial, or delay the release to coincide with the next appropriate season. This decision relies on the state of

⁵² Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 2.

⁵³ BookNet Canada, *BNC Research: The Canadian Book Market 2013*, (Toronto, ON: BookNet Canada), 66.

⁵⁴ BookNet Canada, *BNC Research: The Canadian Book Market 2014*, (Toronto, ON: BookNet Canada), 63.

the product at acquisition and how much work is required to produce a book into a ready-for-market product.

One advantage to this staggered timeline is that the books are guaranteed to actually be printed, and thus fully conceived of, at the pitching and selling stage. When pitching titles at the Canadian Sales Conference, many of the books are still in various stages of production, and may have a ways to go before becoming tangible and packaged products. In specific cases where timing is an important contributing factor to the potential of a title in the US market, Harbour and D&M work to publish books simultaneously in Canada and the US. One such instance occurred in 2016 with the D&M title *The National Parks of the United States: A Photographic Journey*. As 2016 was the centennial celebration of the American National Parks Service, it was simply impossible to delay the release of this book; waiting a season would cost the opportunity to capitalize on the favourable timing. In a similar scenario, Harbour and D&M have had success with a number of gardening/cooking hybrid books, which, as mentioned before, are released in the spring. This year, two such books were released by D&M, one centred on designing one's garden in such a way as to support the dwindling bee population, and another on the health benefits and ethical considerations of growing one's own pulses or legumes. Because both books were acquired far in advance of the proposed editorial and production timeline, they could be prepared quickly, and, more importantly, be announced to sales representatives in Canada and the US a season earlier than usual.

The greatest disadvantage to a schedule that requires promoting a list across multiple seasons is the additional time required, as well as the potential drawbacks associated

with postponing any events or media. While publication dates were always delayed in the US, this inconvenience was strongly felt immediately following the changeover because publication dates for books in the US had already been declared and communicated to authors,⁵⁵ and meant rescheduling all pre-arranged media associated with the original publication date. Marketing a book twice also means twice as much work, and is what Harbour and D&M publicist Sam Markham describes as “the most inconvenient thing about marketing in the States.”⁵⁶ This remains true even though it is rarely the case that the effort devoted to the release of books in the US is equivalent to that of the Canadian release. As previously discussed, US promotion is not given nearly as much attention as Canadian promotion, since resources are more effectively utilized within Harbour’s primary market.

2.2 Exchanging Information

While timing is a factor that must be considered with both US distributors, Midpoint’s system presents additional issues that Harbour must now address. When comparing Midpoint to Harbour’s previous US distributor, the most problematic difference is described by marketing manager Marisa Alps as the “fact that [Midpoint is] not as self-sufficient as Partners was.”⁵⁷ This sense of self-sufficiency is the distributor’s ability to carry on its role and the various tasks involved in this role with less monitoring on behalf of the publisher. Not only does a lack of self-sufficiency in the distributor mean that

⁵⁵ Sam Markham (Publicist, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

⁵⁶ Sam Markham (Publicist, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

⁵⁷ Marisa Alps (Marketing Manager, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, November 5, 2016.

Harbour is required to exert more effort at the beginning of the partnership as well as with each new list of titles, but it also means continuously monitoring the activity of the distributor.

Unlike the previous distributor, Midpoint does not provide digital tracking of stock levels to automatically notify Harbour when stock numbers drop or deplete and must be replenished. Thus, the responsibility falls directly on Harbour's sales manager to manually check inventory levels regularly, and indirectly on the rest of the marketing and production team who must rely on a single person to monitor the US stock levels. Prior to the transition to Midpoint, the onus was on the distributor to watch inventory levels and convey information regarding when and how many books were required. These calculations were based on what each sales representative believed would sell in a particular territory. Partners would notify Harbour when stock levels were reaching a point where they would need to be replenished, and by how much. This relationship was very much reciprocal. Harbour's sales and marketing staff would directly notify Partners' representatives when they had any information that pertained to a specific territory, such as the appearance of an author in a particular community that would likely increase the demand for his or her book. The ease of this two-way communication of information built a sense of confidence in Harbour that its products were being monitored closely and that the best interests for its books were important to Partners.

While Partners ordered books based on its own predictions of what their sales representatives could sell in a given territory, Midpoint opts to leave these sales decisions to the sales and marketing departments of its publisher clients. This requires Harbour to

create a sales forecast for each title in the US, a prediction drawing on information from prior international sales, audience demographics, sales of comparable titles, and some educated guess-work; it is a process that, as will be addressed later, can be challenging and is never an exact formula.

In addition to the added efforts required for predicting sales and inventory management, Midpoint's database requires much more work at the initial release of each new title. The amount of input at the beginning of the partnership was much more substantial than it will be with each new season; Harbour is a new client and was required to enter its complete backlist into the database in addition to the newest titles. The learning curve of using a new inventory management system also increases the time spent on inputting data. Even with these factors in mind, compared to the previous distributor, the amount of labour required on the part of Harbour's staff is much greater than it was with Partners, whose process was very different from that of Midpoint's.

With Partners, communicating each season's list was a much simpler process. Harbour would send Partners the catalogue, and the sales representatives would work from the material in the catalogue and other sales materials, like excerpts and title information sheets.⁵⁸ Additionally, Partners did not require a formal publication date in advance—sales representatives would begin selling the books as soon as they were available to them. The US publication date was not determined based on a strict schedule, and was assigned more for listing in book reviews in *Publishers Weekly* and other US publications than as a

⁵⁸ Marisa Alps (Marketing Manager, Harbour Publishing) in discussion with the author, November 5, 2016.

date to commence sales of the book. This allowed Harbour to be more flexible with publication dates, which could be adjusted according to the perceived potential for a title in the US.⁵⁹

With Midpoint, the process begins with entering all information online up to seven months ahead of each title's publication date,⁶⁰ thus contributing to Harbour's decision to delay titles in the US. Much of this information must be entered manually for each title, because, while Midpoint is capable of receiving Harbour's title information via an ONIX (online information exchange) feed, information like sales points and comparable titles are not included in the normal metadata for titles and are only included in Harbour's title information sheets. Midpoint then creates its own "tip sheets"⁶¹ from this online catalogue, and distributes them to the regional sales representatives.

Upon learning in the initial introduction to Midpoint that its online platform will accept an ONIX 2.1 feed, those involved in inputting information about each title into the Harbour website were relieved at the efficiency that this would provide. With the understanding that Midpoint would draw from the information in the Harbour database via the ONIX feed on a weekly basis,⁶² Harbour's technical support staff assumed that this would result in a self-sufficient mode of updated information. Unfortunately, due to the nature of Harbour's ONIX feed and Midpoint's online database, the ONIX feed could not be transmitted weekly as intended, and in fact, at the time of this report's publication, had

⁵⁹ Although publication dates are described here as being assigned arbitrarily, once set, a publication date is difficult to adjust and done only under unavoidable circumstances.

⁶⁰ Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 4.

⁶¹ Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 2.

⁶² Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 2.

not been refreshed since the initial upload, resulting in the information in Midpoint's database remaining stagnant despite updates to the Harbour database. While the feed can be sent manually, and new titles can be added using a one-time limited transmission, it is in the interest of Harbour to cease the automatic communication between its database and Midpoint's system, as this may bring about unintended erasures or reversions to the information that has been edited manually, particularly publication dates.

In 2009, ONIX for Books Release 3.0 was launched, intending to replace Release 2.1, which had been in use since 2003.⁶³ The transition was never intended to be immediate. ONIX 2.1 had served users well, requiring minor revisions every few years in order to accommodate the needs of particular nations as it continued to be adopted internationally as the standard for transmitting book data and product information electronically. Users of 2.1 were encouraged to adopt 3.0 by the 'sunset date' of December 31, 2014, at which point support would cease for the previous release. As the website for EDItEUR, the group behind the metadata standard, suggests, "The three year notice period ensured that adequate time was available for planning, budgeting and development of updated systems."⁶⁴ January 1, 2015 did not bring about the end of ONIX 2.1—the system continues to work, but ONIX no longer provides support for that iteration of its system. Despite the advisement of EDItEUR, the industry neglected to move ahead with the transition to 3.0, at least in accordance with the suggested deadline.

⁶³ Editeur, "Release History," Editeur.org, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.editeur.org/15/Archived-Previous-Releases/>.

⁶⁴ Editeur, " 'Sunset Date' – 31st December, 2014," Editeur.org, accessed November 28, 2016, [http://www.editeur.org/15/Previous-Releases/#2.1 Sunset date](http://www.editeur.org/15/Previous-Releases/#2.1%20Sunset%20date).

Harbour continues to rely on 2.1, and, while no information on which release is currently used by each independent Canadian publisher exists publicly, it is reasonable to assume that Harbour is not the only publisher who hasn't yet made the switch to 3.0. It would be a major undertaking, and since there is little incentive to upgrade from 2.1, which still functions, the motivation isn't strong enough to overcome the expectation that the work involved would be a drain on the already limited resources of time and manpower. This would be a substantial job as 3.0 is the first iteration since 2001 that is not backwards compatible with previous versions.⁶⁵ It would be a big change that could bring about a lot of extra work and a learning curve, and there is no ideal time to take on a project like this. Presumably, distributors like Midpoint have also remained reluctant to commit to the transition for the same reasons. Whatever the motivation, this lack of momentum has led to little progress in achieving this universal standard for the sake of compatibility. Publishers don't want to make the change if distributors haven't yet done so, and vice versa. Publishers and those who are on the receiving end of the information, such as distributors and sales platforms, are at a stalemate.

Despite the imposing amount of work involved in changing from ONIX Release 2.1 to 3.0, it could serve as a solution to Harbour's issues in transmitting to Midpoint. As it stands, Harbour's website currently lists only one publication date for titles. Prior to adopting Midpoint, there was little need to indicate any publication date other than the Canadian one in the ONIX feed. US publication dates were, as mentioned before, somewhat flexible and used primarily for advance media opportunities, and were not necessary to confirm

⁶⁵ Editeur, "Release History," Editeur.org, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.editeur.org/15/Archived-Previous-Releases/>.

online, nor was the metadata required. Since Partners received information about titles directly from the catalogue, as opposed to an ONIX feed, information regarding US publication dates was communicated directly in print, which Partners then input digitally in its own database. Midpoint's reliance on the ONIX feed for information creates an issue regarding different publication dates for different regions.

To resolve this seems like a simple matter of adding US publication dates to the metadata of each title in order to provide Midpoint with the information it requires. Unfortunately, the Harbour website runs on an outdated program, and any manipulation of the metadata and what is being fed into the ONIX feed, aside from what is currently programmed, could be problematic.⁶⁶ However, the current ONIX feed does contain alternative fields for listing dates other than the publication date, under listings for supply details and market representation,⁶⁷ but, unfortunately, these are not fields of information from which Midpoint draws. Alternatively, Harbour could consider updating its ONIX feed to the newest release, which provides the capacity to list multiple sources of availability for unique territories,⁶⁸ but Midpoint is not set up to receive a transmission of ONIX 3.0. The risk that the publication date will be regularly reverted back to the Canadian publication date listed on the Harbour website, should the ONIX feed resume automatic weekly transmission, is also a concern. Therefore, while time consuming and vulnerable to human error, the simplest temporary solution is to submit a unique feed for any new

⁶⁶ Richard Currie (Harbour Publishing Technical Support), in discussion with the author, November 28, 2016.

⁶⁷ Editeur, *ONIX for Books: Product Information Message Product Record Format*, Issue 27, April 2011.

⁶⁸ Editeur, *ONIX for Books: How to specify markets and suppliers in ONIX 3*, August 12, 2010, <http://www.editeur.org/files/ONIX%203/ONIX%20for%20Books%20Territories%20and%20Markets%20II.pdf>.

titles and change the publication date in Midpoint's system manually for each title. The solution, while sufficient, is inconvenient as well as inefficient, and is not ideal as a long-term method of adding and updating information in the database. This added inconvenience enhances the urgency of updating and improving the structure of Harbour's website, a task that, while time consuming, is quite possible. Additional work in the present will inevitably result in less work for the marketing staff in the future, over time.

The lack of regular transmission between Harbour's website and Midpoint's database only became apparent when some of the titles listed on Midpoint were missing covers that had been available on Harbour's website for weeks. Missing covers—a pretty discernible oversight—was an important issue for Midpoint, as any delay in obtaining the cover image would influence Midpoint's ability to present a book to buyers. Midpoint stresses that in order for a title to be entered completely, a cover image must be included.⁶⁹ This creates a dilemma for Harbour, because often covers are only finalized close to press time. In a conference call with Harbour's Midpoint contact, this issue was raised, and the suggested solution on behalf of Midpoint was to use a mock cover in lieu of the final cover. While this seems like a reasonable solution, it is not ideal, as it creates the risk of the mock cover appearing online and results in confusion when the book is later released with a different cover. When Harbour and D&M create catalogues, covers are usually not finalized, and images from the book or author photos are substituted, but Midpoint representatives are not interested in substituting sample images for covers, because they use covers as a selling tool. Midpoint's requirements are also dictated by the timeline of its clients, many of which, especially the large customers like Barnes & Noble, ask for

⁶⁹ Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 4.

covers six months in advance of the publication date.⁷⁰ As previously mentioned, Harbour's inability to supply the requested material in accordance with Midpoint's timeline is the deciding factor in the decision to delay titles in the US.

Midpoint requires a comprehensive amount of information about each title. Much of this is intended to be transmitted through the ONIX feed, but each title must be carefully reviewed in order to ensure that the correct information has been received. This includes information on the physical specs of each book, as well as the description of the content. When a title is searched in Harbour's online Midpoint catalogue, the first category of information that appears on the main page includes the full summary, contributors or authors, edition number and type, and physical format. Additional necessary specs, such as dimensions and price and the subject of the book, including BISAC codes and audience information, are also listed in the catalogue.

This information encompasses the metadata of each title and, were the ONIX feed to successfully pull this information from the database, very little alterations should be required. For example, Harbour rarely sets different prices for Canadian and American markets, and only lowers the price of a title in the US at the recommendation of the sales representatives. Similarly, Harbour does not change the format of a book for the US—it would be highly impractical and expensive to alter the covers or specifications of a title for US distribution. However, regular meetings with US sales representatives allow for an exchange of ideas regarding the more adjustable features of this information. For instance, the BISAC codes selected with Canadian audiences in mind may not translate to

⁷⁰ Helen Sargent (Midpoint Publisher Liaison) in discussion with the author, June 21, 2016.

a US audience. BISAC codes are used to categorize the subject matter of a book in order to make it easier for booksellers, at both the wholesale and retail levels, to describe the book to customers or buyers, or to position the book on the shelf, as well as for customers to search for the book in a database.⁷¹

BISAC codes are used and recognized throughout North America. While the national market interprets these codes consistently, instances occur in which certain qualities of the book would be better highlighted based on different sectors of the market. For example, a book that would succeed well in Canada with a BISAC identification of “NATURE / Essays” due to its environmental content may be better received in the US as “SPORTS & RECREATION / Outdoor Skills” due to its emphasis on spending time exploring the outdoors. Generally, it is preferred to include any relevant aspects of the book using the BISAC codes, in order to cover all bases and make the book reach many different audience demographics, without generalizing the title so much as to make it unclear what the book is really about. Being specific without limiting the title is ideal; how a book will be represented across a broad North American audience must be considered when determining codes.

Separate from the metadata of the title is the information regarding the particulars about sales and publicity. Midpoint compartmentalizes this information for the purpose of creating for account buyers a resource detailing marketing initiatives performed by the publisher. Because of Harbour’s delayed schedule, marketing activities are already

⁷¹ BISG, “BISAC Subject Codes FAQ,” Book Industry Study Group, accessed November 21, 2016, <http://bisg.org/page/BISACFAQ>.

underway in Canada at the time of US publication. This allows Harbour's marketing department to provide detailed information about the publicity efforts and any media attention the book has already received in Canada. Specifically, Harbour is responsible for communicating any relevant publicity to a Midpoint liaison on a weekly basis, to make them aware of any US publicity that can be shared directly with the sales representatives. This information must also be entered into the Midpoint database, including any links or images that would be useful to sales representatives, in order to communicate any presence a book has achieved in the US.

In addition to marketing and sales points, the publisher can provide Midpoint representatives with comparable titles and any awards received by the book. This content is intentionally focused to US-specific awards or media attention when applicable, in order to give sales representatives the most relevant information, as well as demonstrate which titles will succeed in the US market. Often, it can be challenging to communicate the international potential of a title when the media is localized to a particular geographical location, but national press coverage can demonstrate the broader appeal of a book, and the more information that is communicated to the sales representatives, the easier the process of identifying the appropriate audience and sales channels through which to reach them.

Once a title has been entered into Midpoint's online system, including the cover, selling points, and all other relevant information, and has been approved, a sell sheet is created. This sell sheet is distributed to Midpoint's sales representatives who then present it to

various buyers and accounts. Finally, the information for each title is entered into Midpoint's order processing and warehousing systems.⁷²

Through Midpoint's online platform, the sales and marketing departments are able to access reports generated using the information from Harbour's account. These reports detail information regarding inventory, sales, and the status of any customer orders. The inventory summary outlines detailed information for each title, allowing marketing and sales departments to assess the success of a title through various forms of data, including net sales, gross sales, pending orders, returns, and inventory levels. Audience demographics can be explored by viewing which cities have ordered particular titles, and this information can prove useful in targeting US outreach.⁷³

While the capacity to create reports analyzing this data exists and can be easily navigated in Midpoint's system, a substantial pool of sales data from which to draw useful conclusions has not yet been accumulated at the time of this report's analysis. Books may appear to be successful, but this does not take into account future returns that may alter the net sales, or the sales of books that may not have found their niche yet. Six months, or one season, is not enough time to accumulate the amount of data that would allow the marketing team to get a sense of which books are moving well in the US. Until enough information has been gathered by Midpoint, Harbour can analyse records of previous sales through former distributors and draw conclusions as to which titles have found

⁷² Midpoint Trade Books, *Midpoint Essentials*, (New York City, NY: Midpoint Trade Books), 4.

⁷³ This data is very limited, however, as many of Harbour's US book sales are through online retailers like Amazon, providing no demographic information.

success in the US and where specifically, and make educated predictions in sales forecasts and marketing pitches as to which new titles will have similar results.

2.3 Looking Ahead

With each new acquisition and partnership, Harbour intentionally broadened the range and reach of the books it would produce; it was also pushed, although not unwillingly, into new areas of the industry with which it was less familiar. While Harbour always maintained a presence in certain areas of the US, D&M's national scope inspired the need for a broader and stronger approach to US marketing. With D&M books, Harbour was able to reach new areas of the literary market, in Canada and also internationally, and this inspired the need for a better understanding of these new markets. As demonstrated in this report, this is far easier said than done, and requires a substantial amount of additional time and resources on Harbour's behalf. The challenges of finding an audience for regional titles in an area as vast—geographically and demographically—as the US, dictated by equally expansive and unique trends and media, all while adjusting to the particulars of a new distributor, are substantial. However, improvements to more practical problems, such as the issues with ONIX compatibility, are within Harbour's abilities, but also require effort, time, resources, and communication with Midpoint. It is up to Harbour to determine whether the potential benefits are worth expending the effort and resources to overcome these challenges.

Currently, Harbour does not have a staff member specifically dedicated to marketing in the US; this responsibility falls on the Canadian publicists. Were Harbour to invest in US marketing by allocating more time and resources to this initiative, its books could be further integrated into the US market through well-researched and focused marketing plans using Midpoint's data and reports. Presently, it is difficult to determine at what point Midpoint's sales data will produce useful information, or precisely how Harbour will effectively utilize this information. However, the accessibility of the data allows for new avenues of research and marketing plans to be explored. The information that Midpoint collects, and the ways in which this information can be filtered and assessed, provides insight into the sales of Harbour's books that was not previously directly accessible to Harbour's marketing department. For example, sales of any title can be compared monthly, and Harbour's marketing and sales staff can draw informed conclusions regarding when a similar title may be most marketable. Thus, over time, analysis of these reports may reveal seasonal trends that will influence decisions regarding publication dates. As mentioned earlier, this information is currently limited to a six-month span of time, and therefore does not allow for valid patterns to emerge. Once a greater pool of information has been gathered, this could be used to create US sales forecasts more accurately, as well as draw conclusions about which future titles will succeed in the US. Midpoint's sales information provides the potential for stronger and more specified US marketing plans for future titles and, with the aforementioned adjustments, Harbour is poised to take advantage of this.

Forced to make a hasty decision, Harbour chose Midpoint Trade Books as its new US distributor because it believed that Midpoint would provide the best fit for Harbour's

titles. Regardless of the financial incentive, it was the continuous sales model that proved to be the deciding factor for placing Harbour's books with Midpoint. In order to utilize the aspect of Midpoint's sales structure that appealed to the publisher and staff in the first place, Harbour will continue to adjust to the requirements and scheduling of Midpoint. With time, these adjustments will become less jarring and burdensome to staff, and—with acknowledgement of the unpredictable nature of publishing—US distribution of Harbour books will settle into its place within the overall process of how Harbour functions.

Conclusion

Harbour Publishing has proven itself to be an essential component of the Canadian literary landscape due to its ability to find its niche, its loyalty to its original mandate and its longevity. However, the parallels shown with Douglas & McIntyre, a company that also remained true to its publishing focus and boasted a loyal readership and respect from its peers indicate that the publishing world can be challenging to navigate at the best of times. Because of D&M's reputation and the continuation of its publishing program through Harbour, it cannot be said that D&M failed. Both publishers, alongside the rest of the independent Canadian publishing houses, must strive to stay afloat in a constantly evolving environment, against a churning tide of challenges.

In the spring of 2016, Harbour met with a new challenge in the unexpected and abrupt closure of its US distributor, Partners Publishers Group. This in turn presented an array of issues. First, Harbour was forced to make a quick decision as to which company would distribute its books in the US, and, driven by financial factors, time constraints, and other limitations, Midpoint Trade Books was selected. Following this, adapting to a new system drained staff time and energy, compounded by the difficulties of conforming to a new timeline and the compatibility issues with information exchange. Finally, alongside adjusting to these changes, there were the ongoing difficulties of marketing regional Canadian titles to a US audience, as publicists continued to work to locate media, source information, and identify trends in a market outside of their established network.

At the time of this report, the relationship between Harbour Publishing and Midpoint Trade Books is still new. At this stage, it is difficult to ascertain whether the challenges that have arisen in the first six months of this partnership are merely transitional growing pains, or whether they will continue to have long term impact on the process of marketing titles in the US. It seems more likely, however, that because of the evolving nature of publishing and the adaptability required for survival in the industry, with resolution and flexibility on behalf of Harbour's sales and marketing team, the current issues that have arisen in the process may resolve over time and contribute to increased efficiency. Additionally, the resources available to Harbour through Midpoint, especially the detailed sales data, will prove useful and valuable as more information accumulates. By examining the challenges in place that are not directly related to the particulars of Midpoint, it is apparent that Harbour's US marketing process contains aspects that could be improved upon and that would require a commitment to a greater understanding of the nature of the US audience.

With the acquisition of the national publishing program of Douglas & McIntyre in 2013, the owners and staff of Harbour secured the opportunity to produce works for a broader Canadian market, finding audiences across the country that Harbour titles could not. Additionally, through dedicated distribution in the US, Harbour hopes to further expand its audience and share the stories that White and the rest of the Harbour team perceive as valuable contributions to Canada's national identity and the global publishing industry as a whole. While there is room to expand the contents of its list, Harbour does not limit itself by focusing on niche publishing; it is arguably this strategy and the publisher's dedication to telling important stories of British Columbia that has contributed to the

company reaching its milestone anniversary of 40 years in 2014 and continuing to have a strong publishing program. This balance between Harbour Publishing and Douglas & McIntyre—of the regional and national, respectively—augments the preservation of Harbour’s purpose: to share the essential stories of Canada’s West Coast.

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