

Getting *On Boards* with Modern Marketing and Publicity:

A case study on creating a bestselling author

by

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Abstract

This project report is an in-depth case study into how Appetite by Random House acquired a first-time author with small social media following and collaborated with her to create one of 2019's top 10 bestselling cookbooks in Canada. This report provides an extensive look into the editorial process, creative direction, and marketing campaign for *On Boards* by Lisa Dawn Bolton. It also refers to articles published by industry experts, with a goal of providing statistical research that describes industry standards and perspectives, especially in the cookbook industry.

The opening chapter provides information on Appetite, the cooking and lifestyle imprint of Penguin Random House Canada, documents my internship experience there, and introduces standard modern requirements for acquisitions. Chapter 2 provides background information on cookbooks as a genre in publishing. Chapter 3 explores how Appetite met Bolton and her non-traditional method of pitching her proposal, while also giving content on the movement of eating food on boards. Chapter 4 discusses the editorial and design process used in the creation of *On Boards*. Chapter 5 outlines the marketing and publicity plan for *On Boards*, including conversations I had with *On Boards*' publicist and ad campaign data from three major social platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Chapter 6 discusses the media coverage that *On Boards* achieved and analyzes sales, including data from BookNet Canada, SalesData, MyHouse (the proprietary internal data management and reporting platform of Penguin Random House), and The Canadian Book Market 2019 report. In the seventh and final chapter, I conclude with my reflections on additional marketing techniques Appetite could consider for publishing future cookbooks.

Keywords: Appetite by Random House, marketing, book publicity, social media, publishing, cookbooks, authors, BookNet Canada, SalesData

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List of Acronyms

CIRA	Canadian Internet Registration Authority
CTR	Click-Through Rate
FBC	Food Bloggers of Canada
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
IG	Instagram
MPub	Master of Publishing
PPC	Pay-Per-Click
PRHC	Penguin Random House Canada
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TI	Title Information

Glossary

Bestseller: For this report, a bestseller refers to BookNet Canada's definition: a title that sells several thousand copies across Canada in one week.

Click-Through Rate (CTR): The total number of clicks on an ad divided by the overall impressions.

High Alert Publicity: A term used to describe media outlets with a proven track record of being a significant sales driver for a book.

Impressions: The number of times content is shown to users.

MyHouse: Penguin Random House Canada's internal sales reporting system.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Marketing: A type of marketing where advertisers pay a fee each time one of their ads is clicked on. PPC marketing uses search engine advertising to generate traffic or actions to a targeted site, rather than earning clicks organically.

Pay to Reach: A model on most popular social media platforms that require users to employ paid advertising to reach a specific target audience.

Reach: The number of unique users who see a post.

SalesData: BookNet Canada's exclusive sales tracking tool that provides weekly point-of-sale data from over 2,000 retail outlets across Canada, covering an estimated 85% of the Canadian trade print book market. It can also help marketers investigate market trends, identify sales opportunities, plan print runs and book orders, and more.

Social Media Campaign: An organized marketing effort to assist with a business goal using one or more social media platforms.

Social Media Marketing: The use of social media platforms to connect an audience to a brand, increase sales, or drive site traffic.

Tip Sheet: An essential sales piece that provides potential sales outlets with information on why a book is worth selling. It typically includes a book title, a short pitch, comparison titles, blurbs/reviews, price and format, and key selling points. Also called a TI (Title Information) Sheet.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past decade, publishers have shown that using traditional book marketing techniques is not enough for books to survive the now digitized industry, transformed by the rise of ebooks and audiobooks, new reading habits, online shopping, piracy, and niche competition. Traditional publishers have constantly evolved their business models and adapted new marketing techniques to reach new audiences and avoid becoming obsolete.

More and more, publishers work to create author brands for the long-term benefit of both the author and the publisher. With the vast increase in access to technology seen over the last decade, many publishers now look at an author's digital platform before deciding on acquiring a potential project. This platform can provide statistical stability and validation from a large presence of people who would want to purchase the acquired book. A large following indicates a large number of potential readers. Some frequent considerations include:

- 1) The data statistics and analytics of an author's social media presence: blogs, email newsletters, social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, Pinterest boards, YouTube views, podcast listeners, or more.
- 2) The author's public-facing experience: whether they run classes, teach workshops, hold organizational leadership roles, or have any speaking commitments.
- 3) Any media experience: features from print articles, TV interviews, writing columns, etc.

- 4) Any collaborations or partnerships the author might have with name-brand companies or any influencers or prominent people within his/her network who might help promote the project.
- 5) Sales of past works, if any.

By gathering as much information as possible and considering these criteria, publishers can use measurable data to make informed decisions that will get them closer to publishing success. Following a consistent process of research, observation, analysis, and mapping trends helps identify acquisitions that are likely to reach a particular audience segment, as well as better recognize which audience segment does not have space for the particular author to thrive in. The techniques have changed over time, but the focus on the author has not. These days, publishers need to find innovative methods to reach wider audiences and build brand recognition within their lineup of acquired authors. There are exceptions to these instances, where publishers acquire an author who meets almost none of these considerations. Still, these criteria provide important considerations for social marketing, and meeting them increases an author's sales potential.

This report is about the exception to the rule, and illustrates the effectiveness of modern marketing strategies, proving in-person networking can be an effective method of finding authors that advance a book's market. This report will uncover how Appetite by Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House Canada, used modern marketing strategies to successfully support Lisa Dawn Bolton into a mediagenic author of one of

Appetite's most exciting and bestselling titles, *On Boards*. This report is a case study that will follow this book's incredible trajectory from pre-acquisition to post-publication.

This report will also include resources and data from SalesData, BookNet Canada, MyHouse, email and in-person conversations with Appetite employees, the *On Boards* marketing plan, *On Boards* ad campaign data, Appetite social media statistics, and other internal Appetite materials that have been approved by Lindsay Paterson, publishing manager at Appetite.

My Experience at Appetite

I started my 12-week internship at Appetite by Random House as an editorial intern in September 2019, and eventually extended my internship as a publishing intern for another six months, until June 2020. My role consisted of helping with numerous acquisition requests, supporting the office with administrative tasks, and drafting documents to prepare for acquisitions. Occasionally, I also helped the marketing and publicity team create Instagram content, build influencer lists, pitch to potential book reviewers, and assist with a variety of book launches and author events.

One of my predominant responsibilities was reading and reviewing book proposals. It was rare for me to write reader's reports; most of the proposals we got were very detailed and contained high-quality assets, such as sample recipes, sample writing, or pre-established tables of contents. I would summarize these proposals in acquisition requests, whose first objective was frequently to determine whether an author had a well-established social media following; if he/she did not, it would be a concern to flag.

I created acquisition packages that contained the following documents: an acquisition request form (a document with key points, suitable comp titles, projected sales, marketing strategies, and publishing history of the author); an acquisition cost form (a document prepared with the book's specifications for profit and loss statements); an offer letter (a formal letter sent to an author when his/her proposal is approved); a profit and loss statement (P&L) for the title; and any correspondence between the author and Appetite (mainly with Robert McCullough, publisher of Appetite).

The Imprint

In 2011, after 21 years at Whitecap Books, with the last 13 years being award-winning publisher of Whitecap Books, Robert McCullough left that small independent Vancouver firm to lead a new food and lifestyle boutique imprint of Random House Canada, Appetite by Random House.¹ Under his direction, four of Appetite's titles appeared on *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* bestsellers lists within Appetite's first year of operation.

In a *Publisher's Weekly* article, "Random House of Canada Launches New Lifestyle Imprint," McCullough shares that "[he and Paterson] choose the name [Appetite] because you can have an appetite for anything in life, and we were trying to find a name that wouldn't put us just into the food realm."² Appetite by Random House focuses on cookbooks, health, and lifestyle books. Its titles publish into Canada and the US as well as international markets. Some of Appetite's best-known authors include Yotam Ottolenghi, Anna Olson, Lidia Matticchio Bastianich, Nigella Lawson, and Ricardo Larrivée. Over the last five years, Appetite has acquired books by a variety of buzzworthy food influencers and food bloggers, including Jean-Philippe Cyr (of *The Buddhist Chef* blog, with over 3.5 million views per month), Mary Berg (MasterChef Canada winner), Sam Turnbull (YouTube sensation behind *It Doesn't Taste Like Chicken*, with over 61K followers), Karlynn Johnston (bestselling food blogger of *The Kitchen Magpie*).

¹ Referred to as Appetite hereafter

² Leigh Anne Williams, "Random House of Canada Launches New Lifestyle Imprint," *Publishers Weekly*, May 3, 2012, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/51748-random-house-of-canada-s-new-lifestyle-imprint-offers-view-from-the-west.html>.

Although the imprint only has a team of three employees in its Vancouver office — a publisher, a publishing manager, and an intern — it is supported by the editorial, production, design, marketing and publicity, and sales teams at the head office of Penguin Random House Canada in Toronto.

Appetite follows three publishing seasons: Spring, Summer, and Fall, averaging between 6 and 13 titles per season. At the time of writing, the 2020 year had a total of 26 titles.

Existing Acquisition Process

When McCullough founded Appetite, his core commitments was to accept unsolicited, unagented manuscripts. The idea was to give Appetite the freedom to discover new authors from multiple platforms, events, and word-of-mouth introductions, rather than solely relying on agents.

Although Appetite does have the traditional “slush pile” where book proposals can get mailed or emailed in, the majority of Appetite’s acquisitions come from solicited unagented proposals, word-of-mouth introductions, and networking at book events (launch parties, literary festivals, conferences, and so on).

Appetite also builds on its title lists by acquiring multi-book deals or serializing already successful titles.

Types of Cookbooks That Appetite Publishes

While Appetite publishes a variety of titles (food-related memoir or lifestyle non-fiction), I will be focusing on cookbooks, which tend to fall into these categories:

1. Celebrity Cookbooks
2. Blogger-Personality Cookbooks
3. Restaurant/Chef Cookbooks
4. Family/Child-Focused Cookbooks
5. Special Diet (e.g. Vegan/Vegetarian) Cookbooks
6. Single Subject (Ingredient-driven) Cookbooks

Title List

Appetite publishes an abundance of standalone front-list titles. According to the project report of fellow MPub alumni, Ariel Hudnall, “A Deeper Dive into the Cookbook Buyer: An Analysis of BookNet Canada Data and the Cookbook Industry,” “each book [on the Appetite list] must stand on its own and be worth the initial investment Appetite put into it.”³

In 2018, Appetite published eight titles in their spring season, three titles in summer, and seven titles in fall, one being *On Boards*.

Appetite’s Author Branding

In his *Forbes* article, “What No One’s Telling You About Writing That Book,” Mike Michalowicz explains that the point of writing a book is not to make money off it; the point is to build authority, and further readership in a way that will bring customers back for more.⁴

³ Hudnall, Ariel Breath. 2017. “A Deeper Dive into the Cookbook Buyer: An Analysis of BookNet Canada Data and the Cookbook Industry / by Ariel Breath Hudnall.” Simon Fraser University.

⁴ Silva, Pia. January 31, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/piasilva/2018/01/31/what-no-ones-telling-you-about-writing-that-book/#346fc5085e8a>.

Appetite's list is home to books by a number of celebrity chefs and bloggers who came into the imprint with an already developed and well-known brand. Examples include Yotam Ottolenghi, Deb Perelman, Rosie Daykin, Lidia Matticchio Bastianich, Ricardo Larrivé and Anna Olson. Their books helped reinforce their authors' clout in the industry, and bring in new fans.

Appetite's Existing Social Media Marketing Practices

Appetite uses the most popular social media platforms to market its books, including Facebook (with more than 8.6K followers), Instagram (with more than 7.5K followers), and occasionally Penguin Random House Canada's Pinterest (with over 10 million monthly views). Michelle Arbus, the Associate Director of Lifestyle Marketing at PRHC who is in charge of Appetite's marketing, shares that "Appetite can use social advertising [especially Instagram] because [its] books feature stunning visuals and can seamlessly integrate with 'lifestyle' imagery."⁵ One of Appetite's most effective strategies is that it sends books to influencers, but also tracks and documents the impact from those mailings.⁶ Data-driven analysis is used to make decisions about marketing strategies, and according to Arbus, this approach "gives Appetite an edge."⁷

⁵ Charlotte Nip, email message to Michelle Arbus, January 7, 2020.

⁶ Refer to Influencer Mailings section for further explanation

⁷ Ibid, 8

Chapter 2: Cookbooks as a Genre

To better understand the role of the cookbook in publishing, it is imperative to discuss its current state as a genre. In Hudnall's project report, she provides a comprehensive observation of where cookbooks belong within the publishing industry. In brief:

Unlike fiction and general non-fiction, cookbooks tend to have a much narrower subject matter, shorter shelf life due to fluctuating fads and new dietary information, and smaller print runs. While the standard of what makes a "bestseller" is fairly nebulous . . . cookbooks are considered successful closer to the 3,000 mark.

Cookbooks continue to be a successful genre because they have a specific target market. Despite years of doubt about the future of print books, and a variety of changes brought about by advances in technology, cookbooks continue to succeed in the market.

One of their most significant advantages is their suitability for gifting. People like giving and receiving tangible, aesthetically pleasing gifts, and cookbooks fit the bill perfectly. And as a gift, a cookbook is about more than just sharing recipes. Because anyone can view recipes online for free, cookbooks have another, totemic status; as HuffPost's Taste Senior Editor Julie R. Thomson puts it, "there is one thing that cookbooks have always offered — and will always offer . . . that is their permanence."⁸

They can be passed on from generation to generation, becoming mementos that preserve our culinary culture and history.

⁸ Julie R. Thomson, "Cookbooks Are More Relevant Than Ever. Here's Why." HuffPost Canada (HuffPost Canada, January 19, 2017), https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/best-new-cookbooks_n_587f768ee4b0c147f0bbff8b?guccounter=1.

Citing data collected by BookScan, *Publishers' Weekly* reports that sales of print cookbooks in 2018 increased 21% over 2017.⁹ Despite the rising numbers of innovative apps, food blogs, YouTube videos, recipe sites and other tools making it effortless to look up a recipe online, consumers like the physicality of a book. Even if they do not use it in the kitchen, they use it as a reference tool, for personal reading, or as an aesthetic object in their home design.

In “Cooking the books: the recipe for a successful cookbook,” Anke Klitzing says that “cookbooks are one of the most reliable sectors of the book publishing industry, something not even the internet with its countless recipes sites has been able to crush.”¹⁰ Cookbooks help readers build a personal brand; provide knowledge, pleasure, and nourishment; and bring readers a sense of accomplishment when they make something. While not everyone has time to devote to culinary experimentation or to create a nine-course meal for “fun,” readers still want to provide for themselves and their loved ones. Klitzing continues that there are different types of cookbooks, but one particular group helps shape the foundation of this paper: “books based on who wrote them.” She states that “the cookbook author often plays an important role” because consumers like to follow recipes from credible, famous people they feel they can trust. Authors like Yotam Ottolenghi or Nigella Lawson have spent years building a foundation that has got them to

⁹ Ed Nawotka, “Culinary Bookstores Feed Local Appetites,” *Publishers Weekly*, March 1, 2019, https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/79410-culinary-bookstores-feed-local-appetites.html?fbclid=IwAR2UhWRyM8pwOOgUY1f2YG1aT3u4Jrjs_hEhY8qqSmtWEzUy8au-b5nNPRY.

¹⁰ Anke Klitzing, “Cooking the Books: the Recipe for a Successful Cookbook,” *RTE*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/0214/1029622-cooking-the-books-the-recipe-for-a-successful-cookbook/>.

the point where each cookbook they publish is a bestseller. The cookbook's topic does not matter any longer; readers will buy almost any cookbook these authors publish because they believe in them.

Chapter 3: Discovering *On Boards*

Before the Proposal

Before Lisa Dawn Bolton wrote *On Boards*, her career was entirely different. An MBA-educated professional banker, she decided to leave that industry after becoming a mother, to dedicate herself to her family, and pursue her love of food. Despite a lack of formal training in the culinary world, she became a recipe developer, food stylist, and food writer, and within four years had established a food blog, **Food Well Said**, with over 10K unique sessions per month. She soon gained the media's attention and was featured on *Canadian Living*, The Queen Latifah Show (where she became an ongoing contributor), *Huffington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, *Redbook*, and more.

Food Bloggers of Canada

As Bolton began writing more, she became a regular media contributor. She wrote two columns for the Food Bloggers of Canada (FBC), a community of Canada's best food writers, recipe developers, food photographers, chefs, restaurant critics, bloggers/vloggers, and social media influencers. Her columns included "On Board in 20," focused on 20-minute meals for families, and "Food Styling 101," where she taught readers how to plate food to make it look aesthetically pleasing on camera.

Founded in 2011, FBC is a way for Canadian food content creators to network and share resources. From coast to coast, FBC strives to showcase the best Canadian food collectively. The organization was founded by Melissa Hartfiel, Ethan Adeland, and Mardi Michels, all renowned food bloggers. They combined their expert backgrounds in

food, marketing, event management, teaching, photography, and design to bring together the best food bloggers across Canada. According to their website, their goal is to “promote and foster the Canadian food blogging niche to the rest of the country and the world. [They] are an inclusive organization that recognizes the tremendous diversity in Canada and how that is reflected in Canadian food.”¹¹

FBC offers a membership subscription, offering members access to “blogging resources . . . opportunities to work with national, local and international brands on their blog; access to freelance writing, photography and recipe development opportunities, opportunities to be a content contributor to the FBC site . . . and multiple avenues to connect and network with over 2,400 other Canadian food bloggers.”¹²

Food Bloggers of Canada Conference

One of FBC’s most significant events is its annual Food Bloggers of Canada Conference, a three-day affair offering opportunities for food professionals to meet and connect with publishing leaders for partnership opportunities. FBC hosted their first conference in Southern Ontario in 2013; it was sold out, and they have hosted four more conferences since, in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. In 2018, they reworked the model into a cross-country Canadian road trip, comprising three food photography workshops, three mini-conferences, two long-table dinners, and a one-week retreat to visit Canadian farms and talented Canadian chefs along the way. They announced they would be taking

¹¹ Ethan Adeland, ed., “About FBC,” Food Bloggers of Canada, accessed June 20, 2020, <https://www.foodbloggersofcanada.com/about-fbc/>.

¹² Ibid, 11

a hiatus from the larger conferences in 2019 to instead focus on creating smaller blogging workshops throughout the year.

Appetite publisher Robert McCullough had met Bolton a couple of times at FBC networking events. He attended the 2016 conference as an industry guest and fully met Bolton at the conference's networking session, a sort of speed-dating event allowing prospective bloggers to network with reputable publishers. McCullough was a publishing sponsor, so each blogger had eight minutes to pitch an idea or chat further about topics from previous conference events. Bolton was one of his last appointments and according to McCullough, he was sold on the idea instantly. McCullough met up with CEO Kristin Cochrane to share this idea and she was very excited about it as she's an avid fan of board-building. McCullough returned to Vancouver to share the idea with Paterson. The proposal was then put through the acquisitions process for the acquisitions board to determine its fate.

Meeting the Proposal

On January 24, 2017, Bolton sent Appetite her proposal, which was one of the most thorough, thoughtful, and exciting Appetite have received to date. Titled "On Board: A collection of bountiful cheese, meat & entertaining boards for any occasion," her pitch is excerpted in part below:

In this remarkably approachable modern cookbook, *On Board* offers a collection of stunning and imaginative entertaining boards for all seasons and occasions. Cured meats, tangy cheeses and assortments of fruits, vegetables, preserves & condiments are all arranged in perfectly imperfect harmony on everyday wooden boards. The book will not only inspire the everyday home entertainer to exercise creativity in a new and innovative way, but it will also feature simple and accessible ingredients

for readers to try themselves. *On Board* will inspire and show the everyday home entertainer how to create stunning boards for an impromptu happy hour or a seasonal celebration. Because a memorable evening with friends is about time spent with each other, not time spent in the kitchen.

According to the proposal, the cookbook would be divided into two parts. The first would feature 50 entertaining boards designed for different seasons, diets (e.g. vegetarian, vegan, kid-friendly), cuisines, and popular holiday occasions (Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Thanksgiving, the Superbowl, and Awards Nights). The second part would include 50 recipes for condiments (mustards, relishes, jams & chutneys, dips & spreads, pickles & brines, salts and butters) and desserts.

Bolton summarized that her book idea expands into a “lifestyle space beyond traditional cookbooks,” fitting perfectly into Appetite’s mission and title list. She conducted extensive research on her competition for the proposal, concluding that “the composition of content in *On Board* would be significantly distinct from what is currently available on the market. While there are several successful books with similarities to *On Board* . . . its brand is enough in scope to include beyond cheese but narrow in focus by keeping the discussion on board creation & accoutrement recipes. It will be the only book of its kind currently available in the marketplace.”

Author’s Social Media Stats

For the purposes of the acquisition request form, Bolton provided social media statistics to help Appetite understand who her audience was, how big it was, and where it primarily resided. At the time of acquiring *On Boards*, Bolton’s blog, *Food Well Said*, had 10K

unique monthly visitors; her Facebook had 828 likes; her Twitter had 545 followers; her Instagram had 1.9K Followers; and her Pinterest had 833 Followers.

According to Hubspot, a micro-influencer is any individual who has between 1,000 and 10,000 followers on social media and is “typically well-known in their particular area of interest and have very high rates of engagement from their audiences.”¹³ Micro-influencers are social media users who have a specialty. For Bolton, her status as a micro-influencer helped get her proposal considered seriously; her clear aesthetic, and focus on food styling and food photography appealed to a specific target audience. She was also very vocal and consistent in promoting her content. Bolton was well on her way to becoming an influential author; her social media following was slightly on the low side for now, but there would be many opportunities to grow and develop her platform pre-publication if her proposal was accepted.

Acquisitions Process

Penguin Random House Canada runs one or two acquisitions meetings each week.

Attendees include CEO Kristin Cochrane, vice presidents in a variety of departments, and the editors presenting titles for acquisition. During the discussion of *On Boards'* proposal, one or two people on the acquisitions board did not see the market for it.¹⁴ The rest of the acquisitions board continued the discussion. Eventually, the majority agreed that one of the most interesting points about this proposal was that there was no book like it on the market.

¹³ Sophia Bernazzani, “Micro-Influencer Marketing: A Comprehensive Guide,” HubSpot Blog, July 15, 2019, <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/micro-influencer-marketing>.

¹⁴ Charlotte Nip, personal communication with Robert McCullough, April 28, 2020

Although many comp titles covered cheese plates, charcuterie, or entertaining dinner parties, there were no books on the market that encompassed all three themes. McCullough and Paterson also thought that this would be a timely cookbook. It took the “how to arrange a cheese board” concept, which was widely published on online publications, magazines, and blogs, to a new level. Third, they thought this cookbook would be perfect for special sales, specifically home goods retailers like Crate & Barrel, Pottery Barn, Home Sense, and more. Lastly, they thought Bolton would be a mediagenic and well-rounded author. After many years as a banker, she had developed crucial marketing and people skills that would propel her book.

Bolton was indeed the total package. In addition to being a professional food stylist and food writer, she was also a recipe developer with sophisticated food industry knowledge, and an incredible photographer, who would be able to shoot her own photography for the book. Paterson and McCullough saw all of these qualities as advantages while looking at her work online and her proposal. After this acquisitions discussion, *On Boards* was approved and an offer was presented to Bolton.

What is a Board?

When we hear the word “board” within the context of cooking, the most common association is cutting boards. However, in Bolton’s cookbook, “board” can mean many objects. In this report, a “board” is the short term for food boards, that is, different foods placed on a serving board. When it comes to food boards, presentation is everything. Many people continue to use natural wood serving boards as a base, but for an upscale look, slate or marble platters are also popular.

Another commonly used reference term is the charcuterie board, where charcuterie is “the art of preparing and assembling cured meats and other meat products . . . paired with different accompaniments, such as toast, fruit, cheese, and sauces.”¹⁵

Charcuterie is frequently served as an appetizer, a light meal, a centrepiece for social gatherings, or finger food for parties. The perk of charcuterie is its versatility; these days, a person can put nearly any combination of foods on a board and call it charcuterie. The fundamental goal for charcuterie is to provide opportunities to mix and match flavours. According to a *Food & Wine* article, “How to Build a First-Class Charcuterie Board,” the five critical components to a charcuterie board are 1) something pre-sliced, containing thin cured meats that bring savoury saltiness; 2) something you slice, containing cheeses and hard meats that add chewy textures; 3) something spreadable, including meat patés or vegetarian equivalents that provide a smooth richness; 4) accents, containing veggie-based spreads, soft cheeses, jams, sauces, preserves, fruits, pickles, bread, and seasonal

¹⁵ <https://www.webstaurantstore.com/blog/2318/what-is-charcuterie.html>

items; 5) beverages, including any wine, beer, or non-alcoholic drinks that help reset the palate or complement the food.¹⁶

While charcuterie boards have become a staple item for social gatherings, parties, and even work conferences, Bolton was one of the first trendsetters to expand the idea and functionality of charcuterie boards into a more seasonally appealing item. She believed that a food board could fit any occasion or location, and could be served as the opening act (small appetizer board before a big meal), the ensemble (heartier than a small appetizer), or the star (the main course). She created boards to fit different themes, such as everyday boards (Winter Fondue, Vegan Vibes, No Grown-Up Allowed), holiday and special occasion boards (Christmas Dinner on a Board, Valentine's Day In), and around the world boards (Oh Canada! or Sushi and Sake).¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://www.foodandwine.com/appetizers/how-build-first-class-charcuterie-board>

¹⁷ <https://www.foodbloggersofcanada.com/cookbook-review-on-boards-by-lisa-bolton/>

Chapter 4: Editorial and Design

Bolton produced a full manuscript within six months of signing her contract. As the in-house editor for *On Boards*, Paterson was confident she could bring the book's theme to life through guiding the design and editing of the manuscript. Paterson and McCullough worked with designer Jennifer Griffith (based in PRHC's Toronto head office) to bring the book to life through Griffith's modern, elegant design, and was keen on distinguishing the aesthetic of *On Boards* from the beginning. Paterson wanted the narrative in the text to be straightforward and easy to comprehend for the everyday reader. With Bolton's experience in blog writing, the editing process was smooth. The following are some of the most critical moments in the editing and design process of *On Boards*.

Title

The original title from the book proposal was *On Board*. During the acquisitions meeting, several people did not understand this title and thought it was too nautical. McCullough and Paterson chatted about alternative titles, but it was Bolton who suggested adding an "s" to differentiate it. McCullough and Paterson loved the simplicity of the title, and the book officially became *On Boards*.

Photography

Per Appetite's standard offer letter and contract terms, it is the author's responsibility to provide all necessary text and photography for the book. Bolton shot her own photography, but while working to refine the page design, Paterson realized that the photography would benefit from a human element to feel more relatable. It did not have

to be an explicit shot with Bolton's face, but subtle hints of people, such as Bolton's hands holding a board or preparing a spread. Paterson arranged for Janis Nicolay, a world-renowned food stylist and photographer from Vancouver, to spend a day with Bolton shooting, so that Bolton could be captured in the shots.¹⁸

Indigo Connection

From early on, *On Boards* had support and interest from Indigo, Canada's only major bookstore chain. According to Paterson, after several different discussions, Indigo provided merchandise to integrate into the photography for the book and especially the cover shot. As a result, a handful of the plates and boards featured in the book are Indigo products strategically included to help develop the book's design and general aesthetic. By having Indigo merchandise represented throughout the book, including on the cover, *On Boards* would have a greater appeal and easier integration into Indigo's merchandising, both online and in-store.

How Did This Contribute to Marketing Plans to Come?

Securing an Indigo connection was one of the first steps of thinking about *On Boards*' marketing plan. Working with Indigo would bring many effective marketing partnership opportunities, such as in-store events, partnered giveaway contests, bigger in-store product placements, or just using Indigo's unique yet massive platform to reach wider audiences. Part of the appeal for Indigo was that *On Boards* included very marketable content, particularly photography that could be widely reshared on social media

¹⁸ Charlotte Nip, personal communication with Lindsay Paterson, April 22, 2020

platforms during the marketing process to come. Bolton's gorgeous photography felt meaningfully crafted. The resulting book had a minimalistic, accessible design and layout. It didn't matter at this point that Bolton had a smaller social media presence; she had created a book that would change that.

Chapter 5: Marketing & Publicity Process

Once the final pages of a manuscript are edited and laid out, Paterson organized an initial meeting with Bolton and Appetite’s marketing manager, Michelle Arbus, to discuss Bolton’s online brand and how it can evolve to be in-line with *On Boards*. Bolton’s brand was naturally evolving from less food writing and more food styling and photography; thus, Paterson and Arbus felt that Bolton was outgrowing her old username, “Food Well Said”. Ultimately, the three decided to pivot from “Food Well Said” to “Lisa Dawn Bolton” and continue building out social content that would match the focus of the book (e.g Bolton changed her Instagram username to @lisadawnbolton and started creating and posting more food boards).

Next, Appetite runs a crucial meeting that includes the author, the editor, the publisher, the publicist, and the marketing manager. Known in-house as a “kick-off call,” the meeting is a discussion about strategies to use that would effectively market the book, one of the most critical tasks in publishing. Marketing techniques need to continually evolve to keep up with the newest technologies and trends. Arbus, shares that “as media, technology, advertising, social [media] evolves, [Appetite needs] to stay agile.”¹⁹

For *On Boards*, attendees of this meeting recognized that in addition to traditional publicity strategies such as pitching to media outlets for features and reviews, modern social media strategies would play an integral part in this book’s marketing plan. Strategies like outreach to diverse social media influencers, creating social media ads, and

¹⁹ Charlotte Nip, personal communication with Michelle Arbus, Jan 7, 2020.

analyzing social media data would all help the book reach bigger audiences — and hopefully, generate sales.

Social Media Marketing

In social media marketing, marketers typically create content promoted as ads on different media platforms to reach target audiences. Marketers regularly promote their brands or specific items through the social channels that are dominantly used within its target audience.

According to the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), the most popular social media networks of 2019 in Canada were: 1. Facebook, used by 77% of the Canadian population; 2. LinkedIn, 35%; and 3. Instagram, also used by 35% of the population.²⁰ According to StatCounter, “a web analytics service that analyzes every page view referred by a social media site,” users between May 2018 and May 2019 were on Facebook 52.29% of the year, on Pinterest 32.78% of the year, and on Instagram 1.75% of the year. A 2019 Simplii report shows that women were 75% more likely to use social media daily than men, and 68% of users re-share content on Instagram instead of clicking through to purchase something from the posts.²¹

According to Arbus, “social media is constantly evolving, but it is no longer a platform we can consider organic/free, to maximize the impact we need to pay to play,

²⁰ Melody McKinnon, “2019 Report: Social Media Use in Canada,” Online Business Canada, June 30, 2019, <https://canadiansinternet.com/2019-report-social-media-use-canada/>.

²¹ “Deep Dive on Digital Trends in Canada” (Simplii Financial, 2019), https://mma.prnewswire.com/media/945745/Simplii_Financial_Are_Canadians_doubling_down_on_digital_or_in_n.pdf?p=pdf.

especially with Facebook and increasingly Instagram.”²² She adds that “social [media] continues to be an important part of any strategy since it is increasingly where people spend most of their time: many of us spend more time on Facebook or Instagram than we do watching TV or reading the news. Metrics are a key part of measuring success, but [Appetite has] moved away from follower growth as a key metric, towards engagement, since the pay-to-reach model²³ means that even if you have 100k followers, you are lucky to reach 20% of them.”²⁴ Without paid advertising, it’s extremely hard to receive any post engagements in today’s clustered social media platforms. Paying for social media advertising helps level the playing field and easily secure any responses from the targeted audience. Recently, Appetite employed this mindset into its social media campaigns to strengthen author content through increased reader engagement.

What is a Social Media Campaign?

Hootsuite defines a social media campaign as a “coordinated marketing effort on behalf of a business that’s designed to reinforce information and sentiments (about a product, service, or overall brand) through at least one social media platform.” Social media campaigns are consequently very strategic and have measurable goals and outcomes, with the primary objective of influencing social media followers to feel or act a certain way when they see a post (whether it is organic marketing or paid advertising).

²² According to Wikipedia, “pay to play” is a phrase used for a variety of situations in which money is exchanged for services or the privilege to engage in certain activities. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_to_play

²³ Refer to Glossary of terms. According to Christine Diem from BreezyHill Marketing, Facebook introduced paid advertising in 2012 as a part of their algorithm into user’s feeds, where soon other popular social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube followed suit. <https://blog.breezyhillmarketing.com/pay-to-play-social-media>

²⁴ Ibid, 19

One of the main reasons that social media advertising is so effective is because it helps reach the target audience for a product or brand as fast as possible. Many popular social media networks offer advertising options, but it is essential to use the platform(s) that is/are most popular with your specific target audience. For Appetite, its platforms with the most engagement are Instagram (including Instagram stories) and Facebook.

Target Audience and Key Selling Points

Before getting into *On Boards'* social media campaigns and data, it is crucial to identify the target audience for *On Boards*, and establish the key selling points that grounded the marketing plan.

The target audience for *On Boards* is people looking for solutions to simple entertaining, Instagram foodies who love aesthetically pleasing lifestyle/home decor/food feeds, and home cooks of all skill levels.

With this target audience in mind, Paterson created some key selling points for the tip sheet (TI) that the publicist, marketer, and sales reps would later refer to while promoting this book:

1. PERFECT PACKAGE- The book is designed for retailer merchandising (Indigo), because it showcases different boards with trendy items from major kitchen design/ homeware stores.
2. INSTAGRAMABLE CONTENT- The photography in the book is very Instagram-worthy. It uses aesthetically pleasing overhead photography that would look perfect on any Instagram feed, especially photos with coffee tables or bedside stands.

3. EXTREMELY ACCESSIBLE AND EFFORTLESS- The recipes in this book are straightforward to follow and do not contain tedious instructions or materials required. This cookbook is perfect for millennials trying to host parties because it takes the pressure off planning a complex, multi-step meal.
4. WELL-CONNECTED AUTHOR- Bolton is already featured on many major publications, including Queen Latifah's platforms, *Buzzfeed*, *Huffington Post*, *Canadian Living*, *Redbook Magazine*, BC Fresh's website and Food Bloggers of Canada. She had essential media contacts at these publications that would help print and television publicity for this book.

Instagram Marketing

The majority of Appetite's followers are most active on Instagram, and are highly engaged with posts about upcoming books or local author events. Instagram would be the primary space to market *On Boards*, as the book's content, photography and general aesthetic fit the visibility that Instagram's platform would provide. Before publication, Appetite worked with Bolton to build her social media following, specifically her Instagram and the branding of her website.

Influencer Mailings

To start, Appetite partnered with Indigo to mail influencers a copy of *On Boards* and a charcuterie board, creating a "buy in" effect on the book where the Indigo team viewed this opportunity as a joint campaign. Appetite subsequently reached out to their existing list of bloggers and Instagram influencers to generate promotable Instagram content and interest for *On Boards*. In an "Influencer wrap-up" presentation that Arbus created, she

noted that 28 influencers and bloggers, including a mix of contacts from Bolton and Appetite’s existing contacts, were contacted and mailed a physical copy of the finished book and a marble board generously donated by Indigo. Seven of the influencers were American. Within these influencers, 92.85% were unpaid advertisements, and 7.14% were paid advertisements.

Influencer Actions

Here are some examples of ads from influencers that promoted *On Boards* by using Instagram’s photo posts:



Figure 1: Select Influencer IG Post

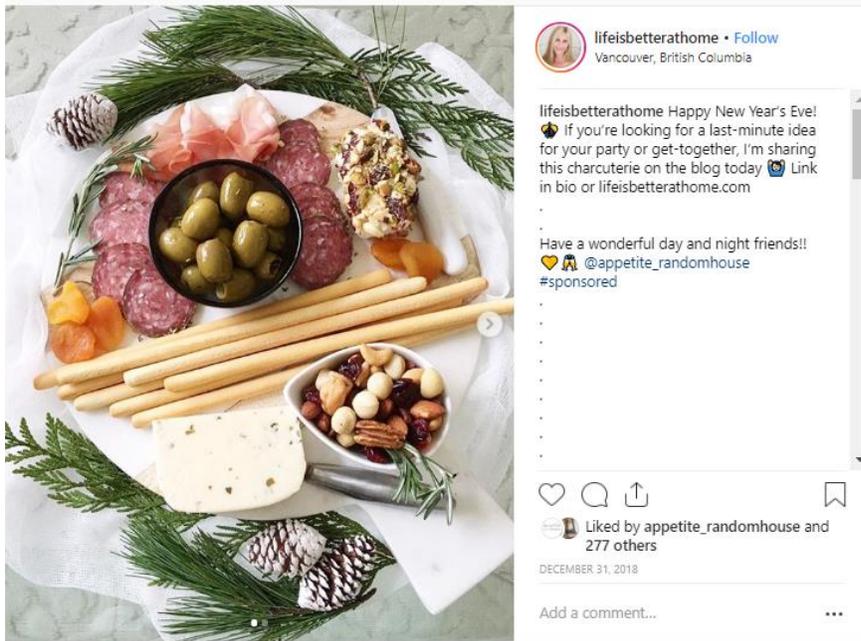


Figure 2: Select Influencer IG Post

Instagram Stories are also an excellent way of promoting content for quick awareness. Photos or and videos up to 120 seconds long can be posted with customizable options and interactive elements like clickable buttons or GIFs. Here are some examples of Instagram story promotions from select influencers:



Figure 3: Select Influencer IG Story



Figure 4: Select Influencer IG Story



Figure 5: Select Influencer IG Story

Instagram Contest

Another useful tool for generating buzz on Instagram is running contests to increase visibility and attract bigger audiences, helping them get to know *On Boards* via virtual word of mouth. Instagram contests are one of the most common promotional ideas. The simpler they are, the better they run. Even if the goal is not to sell more books, Instagram contests can generate a lot of engagement and circulation of content.

Appetite partnered with Indigo in an Instagram contest that asked followers to share a photo of their interpretation of a beautiful board for the holiday season, using the hashtag #OnBoardsContest. The contest ran from Dec 10, 2018, to January 3rd, 2019, and was open to residents of Canada and the USA (excluding Quebec). Winners would win a stunning marble board from Indigo and a signed copy of *On Boards*.

This contest generated a lot of enthusiasm and user-generated content, creating better publicity than most in-house paid advertisements. The initial contest post had over 174 likes. Appetite ultimately received 111 entries, and it was promoted on Bolton's Instagram, Appetite's Instagram, and an Instagram story takeover that Bolton did on Indigo's Instagram channel.

This contest worked effectively because simple rules were established, and users did not have to complete a long set of tasks to enter. Inspiring users to create and post their holiday boards outsourced most of the work required to generate media buzz. This form of word-of-mouth, user-generated content spreads naturally across Instagram's social platform, without needing a disingenuous-feeling push. When users shared their holiday boards posts, it helped them capture attention from their own followers and

hopefully also attracted a new audience (perhaps friends and family members who are not keen foodies and/or did not already follow Bolton). When people who were not familiar with *On Boards* saw its popularity as more and more people posted about it, this helped build credibility.

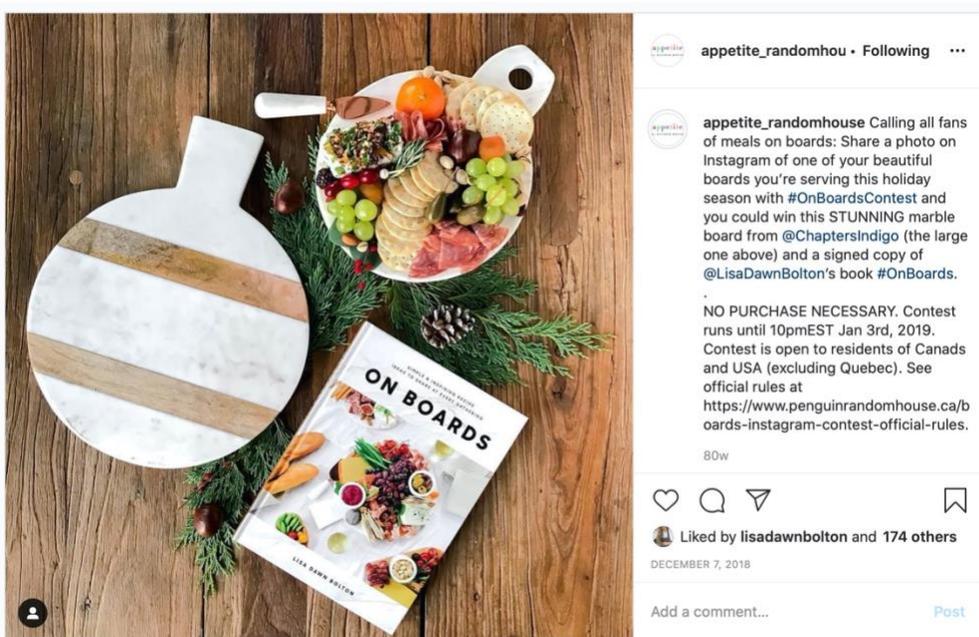


Figure 6: Appetite Instagram Contest Post

Advertising and Pay-Per-Click Marketing

Most social media spaces require users to pay to boost audience engagement.²⁵ Appetite also uses Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing for advertising each book on social media. PPC marketing promotes your content on a specific platform and charges you for specific actions made from the ad, including clicks, video views, impressions, and more.

²⁵ Ibid, 23

The biggest platforms that use PPC are Google Ads and Facebook Ads. However, this report focuses on Instagram Ads, Facebook Ads, and Pinterest Ads, which are the platforms most used by Appetite, especially for *On Boards*.

Instagram Ads

Since Facebook owns Instagram, Instagram uses similar metrics to Facebook when measuring the success of ads: awareness, consideration, and conversion.

Instagram ads appear in two locations: the main Instagram feed, where posts can stay permanently visible unless deleted, and Instagram Stories, a place for people to share content that is viewable for only 24 hours.

Within the main Instagram feed, there are multiple ad types: photo ads, video ads between 3 to 60 seconds, carousel ads incorporating up to six photos in one post to flip through, and collection ads, which include links for the user to directly purchase the items he/she sees on the post.

In 2018, Appetite ran one Instagram post ad and one Instagram story ad for *On Boards*. The post ad's specific objective was to get more link clicks, whereas the story ad's objective was to get more landing page views. Both ads performed well above Penguin Random House Canada's benchmark click-through-rate (CTR) of 0.5%: the post ads exceeded it by 92%, and the story ads by 46%.

These two ads had the highest reach of all the ads Appetite created for *On Boards*. In 2018, the post ad held 32% of the total reach from all ad campaigns; Instagram story ad 1 accounted for 35% of the total reach from all campaigns. In terms of impressions, the post ad accounted for 28.99% of the total impressions from all post ad campaigns.

Similarly, Instagram story ad 1 accounted for 40% of the total impressions from all story ad campaigns. All ads ran for a month, spending the majority of the total advertising budget for *On Boards*, but generating significant buzz for the book.

In 2019, Appetite ran one more Instagram story ad for *On Boards*, with the same objectives as the previous story ad. It ran for half the month, just in time for the Christmas holidays. This ad tripled the PRHC average benchmarks with a 172% increase, accounting for 32% of total reach among all Instagram ad campaigns and 31% of total impressions.

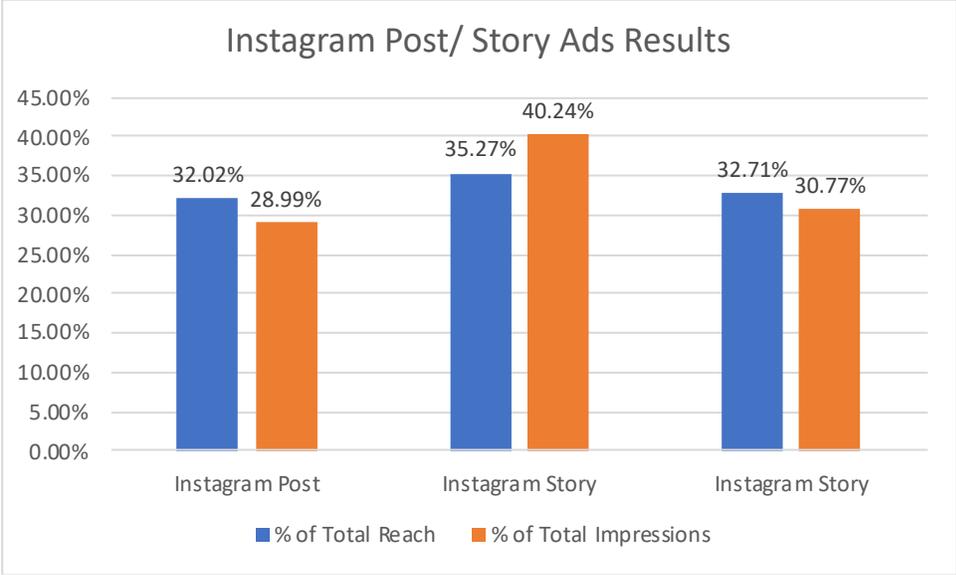


Figure 7: Total Reach and Impressions of All On Boards Instagram Ads

Facebook Ads

Facebook Ads are one of the biggest platforms that use PPC marketing, and offer an advantage over other ad platforms in that they allow users to customize the target audience for each product or post and to retarget audiences based on segmented marketing, including some audiences that might not have found the ad through belonging to the original target audience.

Facebook ads offer three main campaign objectives to choose from: awareness, which focuses on building brand recognition and achieving greater reach; consideration, which sends traffic to a specific website or source and gets people to perform a specific action, like increasing engagement (whether views or reactions) by tracking post likes, comments, or tags; and conversion, which connects online traffic to offline stores and focuses on making actual sales.

For *On Boards*, Appetite created four Facebook Canada ads and two Facebook USA ads. One of the six ads focused on creating post engagement (a mix of awareness and consideration) whereas the other five focused on getting people to click on the link in the ad (consideration).

Two of the Facebook ads were boosted posts, while the other two were ads targeted toward the holidays. The PRHC average CTR benchmark for Facebook ads is 1.11%, a metric the Facebook Canada ads exceeded by 1057.66 %, and the Facebook USA exceeded by 609.91%. Here is a chart of the reach and impressions for four Canadian ads and two American ads:

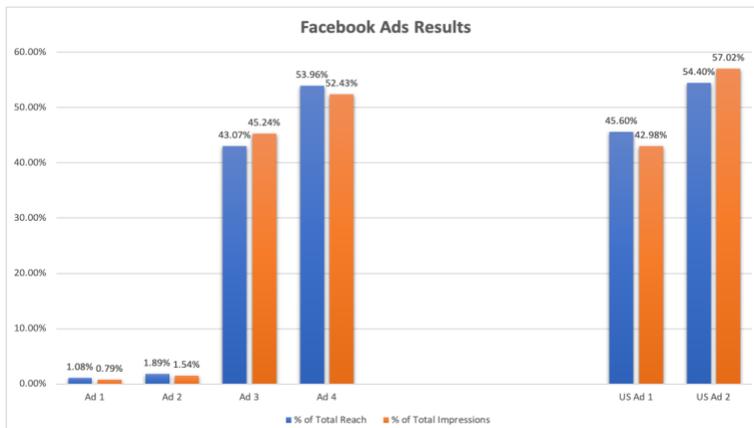


Figure 8: Total Reach and Impressions of All On Boards Facebook Ads

It's interesting seeing the impact of these Canadian ads based on the timing of their promotion. When ads 3 and 4 were targeted towards the holiday season, the giftability factor of the book helped generate almost 40-50% more reach and impressions than when the original ads (1 and 2) boosted. The marketing message also could have contributed to this increase in engagement; if users were already looking for holiday gifts, the ad blurb and gorgeous photography could have given the extra push to attract consumers, given that the content from the book is well suited to the holidays.

Pinterest Ads

According to Pinterest Business, Pinterest’s “innovative ad formats help people find useful, relevant ideas”²⁶ with a wide range of business objectives to fit every consumer’s needs. The six types of business goals include building brand awareness, driving traffic to a targeted site, driving app installs, driving traffic to specific products, encouraging specific actions on a targeted site, and driving video views.

According to a study conducted by Pew Research Centre between January 8 and February 7, 2019, 42% of American women use Pinterest, compared to just 15% of men.

Pinterest ads are called “Promoted Pins,” where content gets promoted and seen by a wider audience. Similar to Instagram, photos can be pins, videos, or a carousel of up to five images.

Appetite only created two ads on Pinterest, which ran for 26 days between November and December 2018. One ad featured a Christmas board and the other was a Barcelona board. Both ads had objectives to gain ad clicks.

The PRHC Pinterest CTR benchmark is 0.63%, a metric the Christmas board ad beat by 24%, and the Barcelona board ad beat by 15.87%. The Christmas board ad received 43% of the total link clicks from the Pinterest ads, whereas the Barcelona board ad received 56%. In terms of impressions, the Christmas board ad received 41% and the Barcelona ad received 48%.

²⁶ Pinterest, accessed June 20, 2020, <https://business.pinterest.com/>.

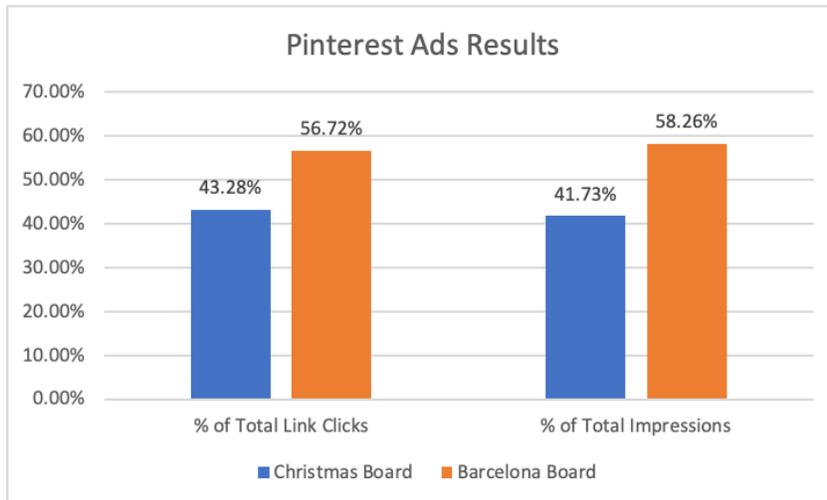


Figure 9: Pinterest Ad Results

PPC Marketing Results

PPC marketing takes time, and PPC marketing campaigns usually see growth in the long term rather than right away. An accurate measurement of a campaign's success can only be obtained after some time has passed.

By comparing the results of these campaigns to the average parent company (PRHC) benchmarks, we can determine the amount by which the campaigns exceeded expectations. By focusing on the CTR, Appetite can understand how many people actually clicked on the *On Boards* ads versus just seeing them and not taking action. A high CTR percentage is a critical indicator that the ad is resonating with Appetite's target audience and its followers, that the people seeing the ads find them relevant, useful, and entertaining. All of the data indicated that Appetite's ads had targeted the right audience, where more than the average percentage of users are clicking into or interested in the ads. The more people click into the ads, the more likely they will learn about and

familiarize themselves with Appetite’s cookbooks, and consequently, the more likely they are to make a purchase.

By looking at the data on reach, impressions, and clicks for each ad, Appetite can learn how frequently the ads were shown on each media platform, and the number of times people performed the desired action. With all ads exceeding PRHC’s average benchmarks, *On Boards*’ ads exceeded well over Appetite’s expectations.

Marketing Reflections

All of PRHC’s marketing strategies were integral to expanding Bolton’s author brand and readership after the publication of *On Boards*. Although there are no guarantees that an ad will generate book sales, a hybrid approach of organic marketing and paid advertising is a potent strategy to reach the largest possible audience. Organic marketing fosters closer, tight-knit relationships between publishers, authors, and readers through virtual word-of-mouth features or reviews. Paid advertising increases visibility and reaches readers that may not have found the book otherwise. Two years after the publication of *On Boards*, Bolton’s Instagram, [@lisadawnbolton](https://www.instagram.com/lisadawnbolton), now has over 7.5K followers, almost seven times the number she had before her book was acquired.

Publicity

While social media advertising was going on, Penguin Random House Canada was also publicizing *On Boards*. The firm's senior publicist, Dan French, was assigned as the publicist of *On Boards*. He called working with Bolton "an exceptionally positive experience." Although Bolton was a first-time author, she understood what the publicity process was going to be and had a great attitude about what was to come.²⁷

One of the key objectives during the publicity planning process was to position Bolton as a critical voice and expert in the easy entertaining, board-building space, with the idea she could create a positive relationship with media and hopefully be welcomed back to media outlets outside the book publicity's window. Since *On Boards* offered suggestions for multiple seasons and holidays, it could be marketed all year long. Ideally, Bolton would be invited back for future tapings and interview features. French was able to meet this objective; Bolton was invited back to many popular outlets like CTV's *The Social* and CTV's *Your Morning* for second (and even third) media pushes. It is quite rare for authors to be invited back months after a book is published, so for Bolton to be invited back multiple times was an outstanding achievement.

Appetite wanted to target print media, including Postmedia newspapers such as the *National Post* the *Vancouver Sun*, for national promotion. They also believed that women's magazines would be a good fit for reaching Bolton's target audience, so Appetite pitched to many popular outlets, including *Chatelaine*, *Elle Canada*, and *Canadian Living*.

²⁷ Charlotte Nip, email conversations with publicist Dan French, May 8, 2020

High-Alert Publicity

High-Alert Publicity is a term used to describe media outlets that French states have “a proven track record of being a significant sales driver for a book.” In Canada, key outlets include CBC Radio’s *The Current*, CTV’s *The Social*, CTV’s *Marilyn Denis Show*, the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail* and Postmedia brands such as *Vancouver Sun*. These outlets reach across the nation, bringing awareness to Canadian readers from coast to coast. Mentions in any of them help build an author’s profile, and according to PRHC, are likely to result in increased book sales.

Some high alert publicity *On Boards* was able to gain include: CTV’s *The Social*, where Bolton had an interview and demo segment called “Four food boards that look too pretty to eat”; a print article titled “Spare yourself work in the kitchen this holiday season by prepping party platters” in the *Globe and Mail*; a print article titled “If you love charcuterie boards, you are going to want to read this new book,” in the *Vancouver Sun*; a print interview article titled “How to build the ultimate cheese board for festive holiday gatherings,” in *Chatelaine*; a video segment inclusion as part of CTV’s “10 days of giveaways” on the *Marilyn Denis Show*, in addition to later taped segments with Marilyn Denis; and another appearance on *The Social*.

Obstacles During Publicity

One of the biggest obstacles for *On Boards*’ publicity was that Bolton had limited TV experience for reference when pitching to high alert publicity outlets. Bolton had done a media interview before, but it was when she was working in finance, and the media outlet was no longer relevant or available to be credited. CTV’s *The Social* and CTV’s *Marilyn*

Denis Show are considered two favoured national broadcast hits, especially for lifestyle books and cookbooks, two categories *On Boards* embodied. *On Boards* needed to be booked on at least one of the shows, so French and Appetite had to quickly find a way to resolve this issue and pitch Bolton to TV networks before the book's publication date.

Fortunately, Bolton was in Toronto during this planning process, so Appetite used this as an opportunity to host her in-office and broadcast a live board-building event on Appetite's Facebook Live, hosted by Arbus. Bolton also revealed her cookbook cover for the first time during this Live. French was able to use footage of this successful event as proof of Bolton's interview presence. As a result, Appetite was able to "cement attention with CTV's *Your Morning*, Global's *The Morning Show*, and CTV's *The Social*."²⁸

The Book Tour

The *On Boards* book tour was very smooth. Bolton attended a total of eight events in Vancouver and Toronto, the locations that contributed the most to making the book a perennial bestseller, and where the most media coverage took place.

Some critical factors considered when choosing cities for a book tour include: How many media opportunities are there? What is the likelihood of an author travelling there? What social presence does the author have in that city? Does she have any well-known connections? Is there an appealing event happening to attract an audience there? Does it fit the pre-determined publicity budget?

For Bolton, Toronto was a must-stop spot, since it is home to many of the country's essential national media outlets. French notes that by including Toronto,

²⁸ Ibid, 34

Appetite was able to “service the media in markets outside those that were included in Lisa’s tour, with her interviews being aired in cities like Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal, and more.” Bolton hosted a public-facing board-building demo at St. Lawrence Market in partnership with Ben McNally Books. This event was moderately successful; several books were sold even though attendance was not high. Being the fantastic promotable author that she is, Bolton returned to Toronto for secondary media. This time, she took part in an influencer event partnership with Toronto-based company Branding & Buzzing; the opportunity was secured due in part to her increased profile from all the high alert publicity hits. The event required a guaranteed book purchase by attendees. This successful event was one of a number of excellent publicity opportunities during the second Toronto portion of the tour.

Vancouver was another must-stop location, as it is Bolton’s hometown. On November 10, 2018, Bolton hosted a board demo and book signing launch event at Indigo Grandview Corners in Surrey, her favourite neighbourhood bookstore. It was a sold-out event, including a good turnout from her family and friends in the area. On November 29, 2018, she held an event at the Gourmet Warehouse in Vancouver, where she taught a class on building boards. She also held a number of book-signing events in Langley in stores like Well Seasoned Gourmet Foods and Indigo Langley. The grand opening of Indigo’s flagship store in Vancouver, on Robson Street, took place on November 2, 2018; Bolton was not only present, she was invited to be the very first author to sign books in the new store.²⁹

²⁹ For the event information: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpryhgMAnu4/>

Measuring the Success of Launch Events

According to French, the measurement of a successful publicity event depends on the type of event (whether book launch or promotional event) and who the author is (with their existing networks in mind). Ultimately, the goal is to sell books. These sales rely heavily on the attendees, be they the author's friends, family, network or strangers who purchase copies of the book on-site (the ideal situation). The incentive to purchase at the event is that the author is there to sign the book or take photographs in a meet-and-greet process. In other cases, a launch might "serve as a platform for social engagement, spreading word about a book through attendees who may have large followings."³⁰ The best scenario would serve both.

From an author's perspective, it is essential not to lose sight of the human aspect of these events. Many Appetite authors work eagerly to secure a strong relationship with their readers, to ensure that their experiences are genuine, meaningful connections. Maintaining this relationship creates significant value in the sales and marketing buzz that the publisher gains for the author's future publications.

For *On Boards*, Appetite strategically chose locations that Bolton had well-established connections in, an example being the Grandview Corners in Surrey, Bolton's hometown. Having a board-making demo as a component of the *On Boards* launch attracted consumers' attention and allowed them to participate and interact with Bolton in a personal, educational way.

³⁰ Ibid, 46

In-Person Book Events

On December 5, 2019, I joined Bolton on her second round of book promotion, an in-store event at Coles Bentall Centre in downtown Vancouver. She was holding a signing and meet-and-greet booth within the store. I arrived early to help set up, but much to my surprise, Bolton was already set up and ready to go almost half an hour before the event. The Coles staff created an in-store raffle to win a basket filled with Coles merchandise, including a signed copy of the book and a gorgeous marble board. There was also an in-store sales promotion for the book, a price of \$20 instead of the list price of \$25. *On Boards* was placed on a caddy (see figure 14) in front of the store in hopes of attracting more customers' attention.

While Coles used a lot of in-store selling tactics to help sell this book, I had learned from my experience working as an Indigo employee from 2015 to 2017 that in-store events depend on the location and branding of an author. This experience was more or less what I expected given the location: the first half-hour consisted of me making small talk with Bolton and us getting to know each other: her asking me about my role at Appetite, me asking her how this book came to be. Eventually, a customer came in who was a longtime fan of Bolton's. It was a slow and steady hour, where gradually a few more people came in, including a mix of fans who had heard about the event and Bolton's friends and colleagues. The event also drew in a number of customers in the store for other reasons, who circled our table, examining the table display and its array of items (books, raffle stickers, and raffle prize). One memorable moment occurred when Bolton proactively approached an older woman who was casually shopping in the store, asking if

she needed help with anything. They ended up chatting, and we learned that this customer was looking for presents to send back to her family in the United States. She ended up buying 12 copies of *On Boards*, and Bolton signed all of them. The joy that sparked in the customer is something I will remember forever. Bolton has such a charismatic personality; she is captivating, friendly, and kind. She sold her books without having to sell hard. She genuinely connected with people and somehow worked her book into conversations; she is the perfect party host.



Figure 10: Bolton with a fan



Figure 11: Table display at Coles On Boards event

Chapter 6: Reviews and Sales

Media and Reviews

On Boards received several early reviews from high-alert Canadian publications, starting with print features and mentions in *The Globe and Mail*, including this from author and writer Julie Van Rosendaal: “Food stylist Lisa Dawn Bolton revolutionizes party nibbles for the culinarily uninclined (and those who do not want to be tied to the kitchen) with a book of food arrangements that can be set out with minimum effort and have maximum impact.”³¹

Next, a number of publications made the most of the book’s beautiful photography by featuring recipes. For example, Bolton received a fantastic feature with recipe excerpts in the *Vancouver Sun* from journalist Kasey Wilson, who said: “Bolton has put together 50 approachable ideas for boards (wood, slate or marble) that are perfect for effortless entertaining over the holidays. For anyone who loves to entertain, it’s a gift to have Bolton’s secrets of transforming foods onto a beautiful board.”³² As well, writer Lucy Lau from *Western Living* featured a breakfast board recipe and called *On Boards* “so genius... [where] each [meal idea is] presented beautifully on a serving board for maximum impact.”³³

³¹ Julie Van Rosendaal, “Spare Yourself Work in the Kitchen this Holiday Season by Prepping,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/food-and-wine/recipes/article-spare-yourself-work-in-the-kitchen-this-holiday-season-by-prepping/>.

³² Kasey Wilson, “Everyone’s On Boards with Bagels on Christmas Morning,” *Vancouver Sun*, December 12, 2018, <https://vancouversun.com/life/food/recipes/kasey-wilson-everyones-on-board-with-bagels-on-christmas-morning>.

³³ Lucy Lau, “A Breakfast Spread that Makes Mornings Easy Peasy,” *Western Living*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.westernliving.ca/recipe-a-breakfast-spread-that-makes-mornings-easy-peasy>.

On Boards received subsequent media coverage in regional publications like *Vancouver Sun*, where Vancouver-based multimedia journalist Aleesha Harris wrote: “If you’re convinced that charcuterie boards are little more than basic assemblages of cheeses, meats and assorted jams and jellies — you clearly haven’t met Lisa Dawn Bolton.”³⁴

Ratings and Bestsellers List

Following all the media and social media buzz, *On Boards* was the #1 Best Seller in Amazon’s Appetizers cookbook list. It earned a 4.7/5 average from over 301 customer ratings and reviews by August 2020. One reviewer called it “very inspirational [with] very excellent suggestions for pairing of ingredients, simple recipes and serving suggestions.” Another reviewer shared that she’d “never seen such gorgeous, original food presentation on boards.”

On Boards reached #10 on *The Globe and Mail’s* cooking bestseller list on September 14, 2019, and #8 on the *Toronto Star’s* bestsellers list in the cooking category. It remained on *The Globe and Mail’s* bestseller list until November 23, 2019, and on the *Toronto Star’s* bestsellers list until Sept 18, 2019.

Sales and Readership

How do we determine the success of a book? More often than not, we measure sales within the first week or year, but numbers fluctuate depending on the type of audience

³⁴Aleesha Harris, “If You Love Charcuterie Boards, You’re Going to Want to Read This New Book,” *Vancouver Sun*, November 16, 2018, <https://vancouversun.com/entertainment/books/if-you-love-charcuterie-boards-youre-going-to-want-to-read-this-new-book>.

being sold to and the type of book, as well as a variety of other factors. In the P&L created during the acquisition process of *On Boards*, McCullough projected sales of between 5,000-10,000 copies in Canada and the US. Ultimately, the book sold more than five times that number.

According to BookNet Canada, there are many ways to measure a bestseller. However, by only referring to national and regional bestseller lists in Canada and print book sales in the English-language Canadian trade market, “a book typically has to sell a few thousand copies in a week to be among the top-selling books in Canada.”³⁵ The exact number varies significantly for different times of the year and different genres.

Publishers Weekly states that the traditional measure of success is the number of print books sold and whether a book makes it onto *The New York Times*’s bestsellers list. Authors have historically measured success by the size of their advance, or if there are additional bonuses within the payout. However, there seems to be a new measure of success, where authors write to influence their readers — to develop a broader, more loyal following in hopes of being signed for future works, which applies to *On Boards*.

On Boards success was gradual. According to Salesdata, it sold steadily at first, then soared 12 months after publication, on the back of Bolton’s continuous media visits and interviews. She continued promoting the book as if the finishing line was not 12 months, an admirable effort that not many authors provide. Most authors begin new projects after seeing some sales success, typically 12 to 18 months after publication, but

³⁵ Ainsley Sparkes, “What Makes a Book a Bestseller?,” BookNet Canada (BookNet Canada, November 12, 2018), <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2018/11/12/what-makes-a-book-a-bestseller>.

Bolton is still promoting actively on her social media platforms, which helped *On Boards* maintain its place in many major cooking bestseller lists.

According to MyHouse data, the majority of Canadian sales for *On Boards* came from Indigo (54%), Canadian Retail (21.3%), and Amazon Canada (17.39%). According to SalesData, the most contributing sales channels were the bookstore chains (Indigo and Black Bond Books) and Amazon.

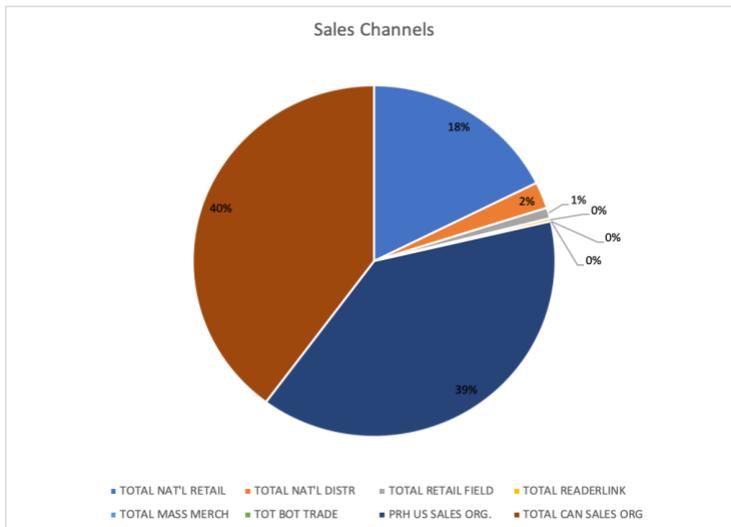


Figure 12: Sales Channels Breakdown of *On Boards* (SalesData)

The Canadian Book Market

The Canadian Book Market is a yearly report published by BookNet Canada that outlines comparative data from over 30 subject categories from national retailers across 2,200 store locations in Canada based on their physical book sales reported (global chains, independent retailers, newsstands, general retailers, online retailers, and library wholesalers). Focusing only on English trade book sales, the report allows publishers to compare data across multiple imprints or publishing companies across provinces,

providing a useful opportunity to understand the sales of *On Boards* and its position within the Canadian market.

Subject Analysis-Cooking

According to the report, the cooking category represents 3.02% of all unit sales. From 2018 to 2019, there was an 11.11% increase in sales in all stores. For 2019, Appetite was the publisher with the second greatest volume sold, shortly behind Penguin Canada, which holds the #1 spot. *On Boards* was included on the Top 10 Hardcover list (in ninth place), for most volumes sold in 2019. Within that list, it accounted for 6.71% of the volumes sold.

Price Point

The list price for *On Boards* is \$25.00 CAD, a strategic move on the part of McCullough. He intentionally aimed for a lower price point than most hardcover books, with the goal of making the book accessible for wider audiences and making it an especially attractive gift purchase given the high-quality production and hardcover format. According to The Canadian Book Market 2019 report, the average trade hardcover price for 2018 was \$35.99, with an average list price of \$37.64. A price of \$25 would put *On Boards* at an advantage, making it even more appealing.

Amazon

There can be different objectives and strategies for promoting and selling a book on Amazon. One of the strategies used for *On Boards* was creating Amazon billboard placements³⁶ and campaigns that focused on targeting these categories: Holiday

³⁶ Amazon Advertising, "Billboard Below The Fold (BTF)," Amazon, 1997, <https://advertising.amazon.com/resources/ad-specs/custom-media/billboard-btf>.

Entertaining, Summer Cooking, Easy Entertaining, and Gifts for Wine Lovers. It was even featured as one of the top products on 2019's Amazon Prime Day (July 15-16), where the book was discounted 50-60% off, which drove an impressive number of sales. With the help of this powerful promotion, sales of *On Boards* during the week of Amazon Prime Day saw an increase of 406% over the previous week, according to SalesData.

Chapter 7: Reflection/ Recommendations

Appetite will continue to find new strategies to bring books to wider markets and audiences, and to create non-traditional spaces for these cookbooks to dominate. Modern book marketers can take inspiration from the tactics used by Arbus, gathering resources and data to optimize social media promotion and identify the best platforms to use for a given book. Arbus's dedication to finding new strategies to market each book as a unique product, based on its unique needs, is an inspiration. No book is ever the same, even if there are similar markets being targeted. Arbus searches for objective data as a way to gauge success, one of the most useful skills a marketer can have. Nevertheless, as media, technology, advertising, and social platforms evolve, Appetite needs to stay agile. This report suggests several ideas Appetite could consider to capture modern readers' attention.

Social Media Flexibility

One of Appetite's most significant advantages is that it knows who its target audiences are, and has built a growing, relevant, loyal, niche social media following. The biggest takeaway is that while Appetite continues to post gorgeous marketing content, it needs better engagement, more significant viewership, and to inspire more actions in those who view its content.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which began during the writing of this report, many marketing and publicity strategies had to shift into thinking about virtual accessibility. According to BookNet Canada's *The State of Publishing in Canada 2019*, an anonymous publisher noted that "live social media events seem to translate into sales, as

do pop-up stores hosted by the author.”³⁷ During the pandemic, most authors launched their books via virtual events on Zoom or Instagram Live. It is worth considering whether to include these types of events in post-pandemic marketing plans as well. Hosting more virtual events has the advantage of being able to include far more attendees, since the followers are already more available online than in person. Social media apps make it possible for followers to connect with their favourite authors at the click of a button from anywhere in the world, without the hassle of going to an in-person event. Increasing the frequency of virtual events is an inexpensive, accessible way to help readers gain access to authors. Whether it is an author reading, an author Q&A with another popular literary organization or retailer, or a workshop event on Instagram Live, these events are simple yet engaging add-ons to a standard publicity tour plan.

Content Variety

Appetite has a thorough Instagram feed, mainly due to an organized social media calendar that is filled with important national days or monthly trending topics. However, looking at a variety of Appetite’s recent posts, the average number of comments is usually under five, excluding contest posts where people are required to comment to enter. There is huge room for improvement here, as comments are one crucial factor to show post engagement.

It seems that sticking to high-resolution food and lifestyle photography, some carousel, and some video posts do not help increase engagement. Instead, Appetite

³⁷ Canada, BookNet. Rep. *The State of Publishing in Canada 2019*. Toronto, ON: BookNet Canada, 2020.

should experiment with using different content formats to see if they result in increased engagement. What would it look like to show a quick graphic like a 30-second food demo from an Appetite author? A text post with a favourite quote from an upcoming book? A quick GIF from an author revealing an upcoming book cover? How can Appetite produce more interactive content that followers will want to engage with?

According to the Instagram Engagement Report by HubSpot and Mention, video posts tend to get twice as many comments as other types of posts. The report also recommends “creating more permanent videos, Instagram Stories, and leveraging the Highlights section of your profile.”³⁸ Appetite does post videos. However, increasing the variety of their content will help differentiate Appetite’s content from other publishers and attract higher engagement. If a lot of successful parent company publishers can generate responses in each post, it is a goal Appetite should continuously strive for.

Thinking Onwards

While there is no precise formula for publishing a successful book, this report suggests that Appetite’s ongoing success stem from the team’s dynamic, flexible approach. It may not be useful every time, but it is fascinating seeing McCullough and Paterson work around this central motto: always open the door for submissions wherever they can be found. That means not necessarily working with agents to acquire manuscripts, but instead meeting with a variety of chefs, food writers, food critics, food bloggers, and anyone in the food or culture industry with an open mind and eager interest in any

³⁸ “Instagram Engagement Report” (HubSpot, Mention, 2020), <https://whatsnewinpublishing.com/the-rise-and-rise-of-instagram-what-publishers-need-to-know/>.

publishing opportunity. Bolton did not have a huge followership to start with, but Appetite took a chance on her. While Appetite has high standards for the books they acquire, they never reject an opportunity to meet someone new within the industry, whether for book publishing opportunities or even just building new friendships.

This report has explored the journey Appetite undertook with the publication of *On Boards*, from acquisition to marketing and publicity. From the acquisitions process to modern marketing and publicity strategies, Appetite's focus on building Bolton's audience and followership led to strong sales. Her followership grew beyond her pre-existing audiences as she participated in both in-person and online media appearances, and she connected with her target audience and gained sales by promoting her content on a variety of social media platforms. What sets Appetite apart from other popular imprints is its ability to evolve and change, improving its techniques for acquisitions, marketing, and publicity. While there will always be new social media apps coming out, Appetite is a receptive and adaptive publishing imprint. Using a combination of data-driven marketing goals and an openness to working with unknown authors if the situation is right, Appetite finds themselves in the enviable position of publishing bestsellers like *On Boards*.

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