

Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—January 12, 2021

About 46 Participating on Zoom

All About Audiobooks

Speakers:



(1) Marshall Davis
[Davis Sound](#)



(2) Jonathan Hurley
[Hindenburg](#)



(3) Will Dages
[Findaway Voices](#)

The meeting began with MiPA President Suzzanne Kelly welcoming the participants from all over the Midwest, and Executive Director Jennifer Baum introducing the speakers.

Part 1: Marshall Davis, "The Economics of Audiobooks and When does it make economic sense to produce an audiobook?" Marshall is a nationally known, Audible approved producer with more than 130 audiobook titles.

1. When does it make economic sense to produce an audiobook?
 - Audiobooks sell about 10-20 percent of print and e-books, so you should be selling about 100 books per month for audio to make sense.
 - Audiobooks are the fastest growing segment.
 - Doing a return on-investment calculation is difficult because they are sold in so many different prices and formats: non-subscription Audible, subscription Audible, Whispersync, mp3 files, non-Audible distribution, and promotional audio books.
 - Audiobooks target different audiences, so it adds to sales.
 - Sometimes it makes sense for a targeted audience, like a business promotion where the goal is just to get the word out.
 - Top genre for audiobooks are romance fiction and thriller fiction. One of the least favorable genres is memoirs (unless you are famous).
 - It depends on how active your marketing efforts are.
 - Contact him for more at: marshal@davisound.net.

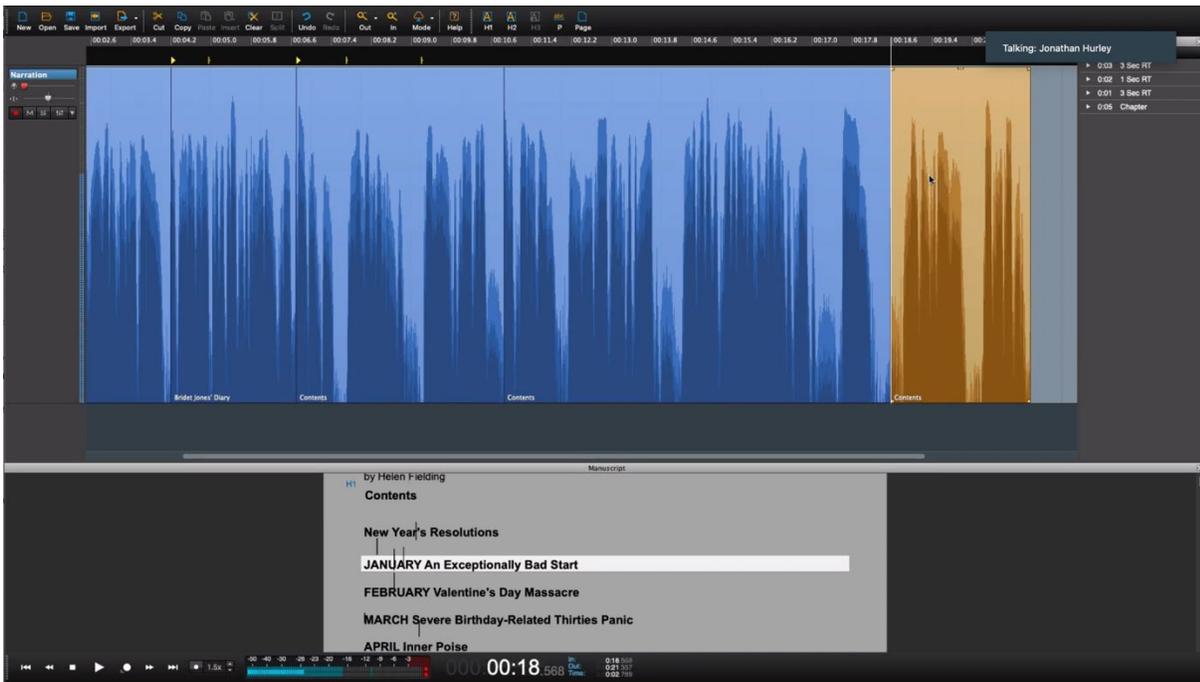
2. What are the advantages of the royalty-share vs pay-for-production approaches?
 - Pay-for-production has costs up front but author then owns 100% of rights.
 - Royalty-share has no up-front costs but author then shares any profit, typically 50% to 50% for the production house.
 - Audio producers are often reluctant to share royalty when there is little prospect for large sales.

3. How to choose a narrator and when should authors narrate their own books?
 - Audible has an audition process.
 - When using a producer like Davis Sound, the best candidates are auditioned.
 - Voice acting agencies are expensive, but good.
 - So audition people!
 - The type of book matters. Fiction books generally require a professional voice actor, they can tell the story best.
 - For non-fiction, business, academic, histories, etc. voice actors are best.
 - For memoirs or personal stories, your own voice may be best. It makes the story more real.
 - Generally professionals will be better than authors. Less editing, time to complete, Costs are similar if the author has to go to a studio.
 - Sometimes authors don't like their own voice when they hear it.
 - Authors sometimes set up their own recording systems, which can be cheaper in the long run. Acoustics and microphone are key.

4. What to expect when working with a production studio?
 - Contracts are important for up-front clarity.
 - For authors doing the narration don't expect to do an 8-hour book in 8 hours. Professionals and you should take breaks after about two to three hours.
 - File management is important—storage, review, where edited, etc.
 - You should have a regular feedback loop between author and producer. Don't wait too long before checking.
 - It's done when the author is happy and the contract is fulfilled.

Part 2: Jonathan Hurley: "Producing Audiobooks in House." Johnathan has worked in recording for over 10 years. Hindenburg Systems makes do-it-yourself software (SW) for recording podcasts and audiobooks.

- Studio recording of audiobooks can be expensive, so Hindenburg SW is an alternative.
- ACX is where many people go today. ACX is part of Audible.com, an Amazon.com subsidiary and a leading provider of audio content and entertainment.
- Jonathan did a demo of how the Hindenburg SW works. Here is a screen shot:



- The SW makes the recording process as simple as possible by: doing auto-leveling, allowing for corrections without overwriting good material, and linking to the book structure to the audio files (see bottom part of screen).
- Sending files to ACX requires meeting their standards (like length of pauses) which can be easily fixed with the Hindenburg SW.
- Microphones come in many levels of quality and cost, which is a whole big subject.
- Download either a 60-day Hindenburg Journalist PRO trial, a 60-day Hindenburg Audiobook Creator trial, or both at <https://hindenbureg.com/MIPA>
- Love to have everyone join the Hindenburg Community Facebook Group. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/hindenburegcommunity>

Part 3: Will Dages: "Understanding Marketing and Distribution." Will is the head of Findaway Voices a platform that for sixteen years has helped authors create and distribute audiobooks all over the world.

1. Will began with a little history of Findaway Voices.

- Findaway has been doing audio book its entire life. They began with a single product called Playawy (see below).



Playaway is a brand of portable, self-contained, media players designed for circulation in libraries. It is currently available in over 25,000 schools, conventional libraries, and military libraries. It is a radical alternative to CDs requiring no player or power source.

- With this first product they developed relationships with all of the biggest publishers and a huge catalog of audiobooks.
- Findaway then opened an API (Application Programming Interface) which gave producers an alternative to Audible. Any company which wants to compete with Audible can go to Findaway for their catalog and the technology to drive the listening. They now have over 40 partners who focus on the marketing to their segments, like Apple, Google, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, Storytel, Scribd, . . .
- They then opened a self-service portal (like Draft2Digital) where audio book profits are split between the author (80%) and Findaway (20%).
- Audible is 40 to 55% of the audio book market, and they are growing, but everyone around them is growing faster. For this reason It is better to not give Audible/Amazon exclusive rights. If you go through ACX, the standard contract is exclusive for seven years. You can get a non-exclusive contract, but the royalty rate in then only 25%

2. An overview of how audiobook distribution is growing.

- The audiobook market for libraries has exploded in 2020, due to the pandemic. More and more people are trying the audiobook format when prompted by their librarian.
- Apple Books has gone crazy with audiobooks. Findaway has secured 15 individual promotions with them and when Apple sends out a notification, the book ads show up. This is also good for indie authors.
- The third development is with Chirp, the audio spin off of Bookbub. Bookbub is a book discovery service that was created to help readers find new books and authors. The company features free and discounted e-books selected by its editorial team. Their discounted audiobooks are exploding. You can pay \$2,000 for a Bookbub, but a Chirp featured deal can be free (for now), and they have over a million subscribers. You can also get many more reviews through them.
- You are far more likely to get a Chirp deal than a Bookbub, because the market is less competitive.

3. How do library sales work, and how do you get into libraries?

- Libraries have two modes, one we call "traditional à la carte," where they look at magazines, reviews, and patron recommendations. If you connect with them, you can sell a book for two to three times the usual price, because they can use the book many times for just that one price. The same goes for audiobooks, they can sell for two to three times the normal price.
- The second model, "cost per checkout" works better for indie authors. People can get the book for free from the library, but the author is paid a small amount for each checkout. This method is seeing incredible growth. Hoopla, Overdrive, Biblioteca are the big three, but Baker and Taylor has just opened to this model as well.

Part 4: Questions and Answers

- Q—Will, tell us about Findaway. A—We have about six different business lines: very high-end studio production (for celebrities, Apple, etc.), Findaway Voices does production and distribution for authors and narrators, Playaway, and a publishing imprint.
- Q—What is the difference between Findaway and Authors Republic? A—We are similar but the difference is fee structure. They ask for 30% and we ask for

20%. Authors Republic uses Findaway for distribution, so they have to ask for more.

- Q—Jonathan, how much does the Hindenburg SW cost? A—For ABC, the Cadillac version, it's \$500. There are different versions, starting at zero and there are tutorials and online trainings.
- Q—Will, I am very happy with your service although I am having some trouble now with Audible due to slow uploads. But tell us about Authors Direct, where authors can set up a storefront, and where that app is going. A—Findaway can set up a storefront on Authors Direct for you and it has a 70% royalty rate. This works best when an author has a large mailing list. Findaway will take care of customer service, tech, taxes, etc. but it won't lead to organic traffic.
- Q—I'm excited by your words about Chirp. Is it possible to get them to accept a book written in 2013. A—Yes, a lot of backlist books do make it, but not all.
- Q—Will, what is the process? Do I just send a book to you? A—If you work with Marshall or do it yourself with the Hindenburg SW, and pass the ACX specs, you can just upload it to us at Findaway and we will just charge the 20% fee on all sales. We sell them all, unless they are illegal. We also have production services. We can hand hold you through the whole process. For example we have a team that finds the best narrators for you. Narrators charge on the number of hours times the cost per hour. Typically you might pay \$150-300 for finished hours.
- Q—Any thoughts on Book Funnel getting into the audio game? A—Their audiobook delivery is already out there. For the mid-level cost, the audio is included for the app.
- Q—Jonathan, what is the difference between Hindenburg and Audacity? (Audacity is a free and open-source digital audio editor and recording application SW). A—Hindenburg is designed to speed up the process. It's easier.
- Q—My book has lots of pictures. How does that affect the viability of an audio book? A—If there are a lot of pictures or graphs, it is best to point them to a website where the pictures or diagrams can be accessed as the book is read. That is also a way to show them other content you would like them to see.
- If you are considering narrating your own book, do a self-audition and compare it to a professional. Ask others for their opinions about the results.
- Q—Marshall, what are some key considerations for production? A—Get good equipment! Some libraries have excellent equipment that you can use. Editing as you go vs editing at the end, the costs are about the same. Make sure the producer meets the ACX or equivalent specs. The SW doesn't really matter.

- Joan Verba enthusiastically described her recent success with Amazon Ads and provided this link to a free course: <https://bryancohen.lpages.co/jan21> . Here is the link for the paid course: <https://bryancohen.lpages.co/speedpass21>. This subject will be the focus of our **March MiPA general meeting**.
- Jennifer mentioned the subject for **MiPA's February meeting** will be a discussion about advancing your publishing with Katherine Pickett author of *Perfect Bound, How to Navigate the Book Publishing Process*.