

**Report on MiPA General Meeting—October 12, 2021  
25 Participating on Zoom**

## **Working with Book Printers**



**Speaker Tom Frank** is a sales rep for [Versa Press, Inc.](#) who has thirty-four years of experience working in the industry.

Versa Press is a family-owned business located in East Peoria, Illinois. They are a leading manufacturer of trade, religious, educational, medical, university, and commercial publications. They are proud of their customer service, experienced staff, and superior printing craftsmanship. They ship about 150,000 books each day to about 600 publisher customers.

### **State of the Printing Industry**

**Good News:** According to polls, readership is up by 20 percent, probably due to the pandemic. There has been a big surge in printed book sales. In 2020 the sales increased by 10% even though schools and libraries were closed. Last fall there was a raft of new books; it was an explosion. Backlist and front list books were both selling. Printers were at max through the year end. Prices began to rise, especially in overseas printing.

#### **Bad News:**

Shipping delays started to grow. There weren't enough container ships or mechanisms for offloading the containers to trucks or trains. It used to be two weeks from port to port and they could schedule landing within 30 minutes accuracy. Now the ships are sitting at port for about 11 days without being able to off load. Ships, trains, and trucks were all short of personnel. Costs took off as well.

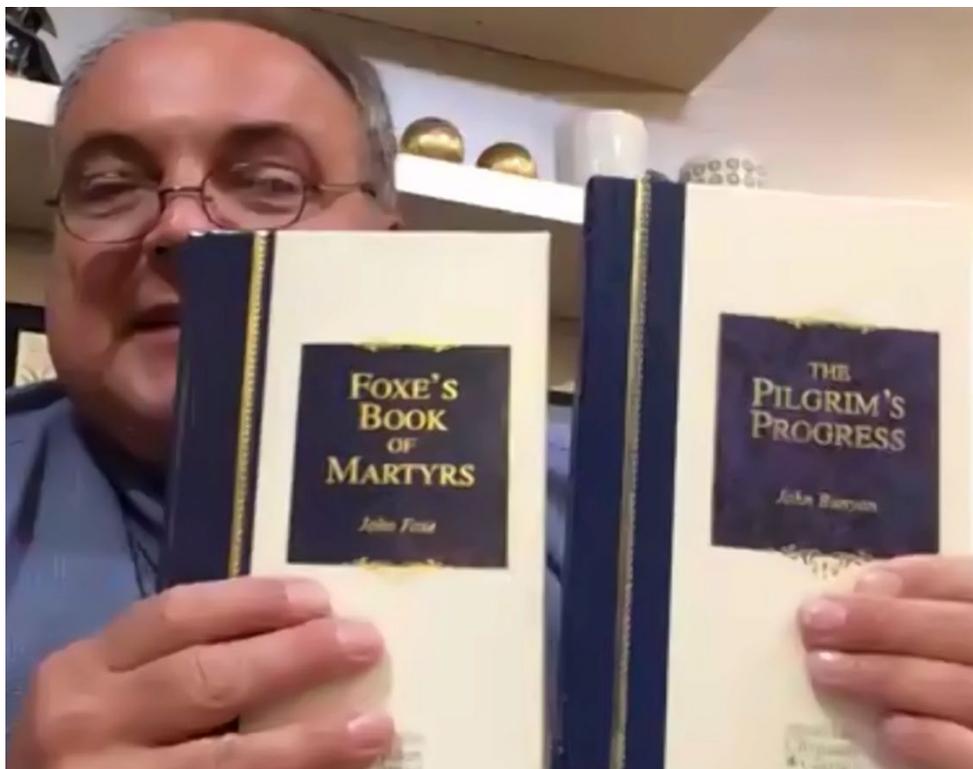
For these reasons, publishers are scrambling for domestic suppliers. Many tricky books are coming into Versa that normally would have gone overseas. Simple black-and-white books are now seeing 10- to 12-week delays and hard covers are even longer. Covers done overseas have even been delayed because of power outages there. Digital delivery times are 3 to 4 weeks now, far longer than the quick turnaround they used to have.

The printing businesses are having trouble hiring people to deal with the surge. Retailers like Walmart have increased wages and we have to match them. We run three shifts five days per week, and getting people to cover that schedule is difficult. Overtime only works for a while.

Now there are delays for paper, cardboard boxes, and other items. All the paper mills are working full out. Material allocations have happened. We have to order paper three months out, but deliveries are iffy. Other items, like plastic tubes used in the printing, are also in short supply.

Hardcover books are especially hard due to the cardboard sheets needed. They are 8 to 10 weeks out now. We have glue shortages as well. It is really important that the press be in sync with the publisher customers. Both our employees and machines are stressed. Sometimes price increases are a surprise to us. Problem solvers in these times are finally getting the respect they deserve. Many are going to great lengths to get books to events and to meet customer needs. Be sure to tell printers what your needs are both for timing and book requirements.

Use book sizes that are easier and other features like cover treatments or paper feel that are more available. Here is an example.



The book on the left used standard print techniques while the one on the right required production with a hand-laid foil bar and a raised title area. It's much more expensive. Talk to your printer early!

Q1. Jennifer has a cookbook that is hardcover, 9"x10", with a large picture that she wanted to use as an end piece. After talking with the printer, she found out that was very difficult now.

A1. I hope things will sort out during 2022.

Q2. What is current lead time for a hard cover picture book with jacket?

A2. Right now that would be twelve and a half weeks. Full color presses are very busy right now.

Q3. When is it best to print overseas vs. domestic?

A3. Anything that requires hand work is cheaper in China. For example, putting glue and sparkles on a book won't be done here.

Q4. Are publishers asking for larger runs to get a backlog of books on hand?

A4. We are seeing people increasing their order so they don't have to get back in line. But it is a risky approach.

Q5. Are some types of paper more available now?

A5. The text papers are pretty available. Cover materials are less available. For example, covers that simulate leather are difficult. Covers with a granola feel have an extended lead time. It's all changing quickly.

Q6. If an order arrived tomorrow how long would it take?

A6. For a simple book 10 weeks.

Q7. Will the long lead times continue?

A7. I don't see it changing for a while, at least until later in 2022.

Q8. Are you seeing more black-and-white printing?

A8. Color books had been trending last year, but now black-and-white demand is very strong.

Q9. Will prices keep increasing?

A9. I think so, not at our factory, but our sources. It will last at least 6 more months.

**Our meeting next month, November 9, will be on "How to start a Podcast."**

**Loose Ends:**

Jennifer, Ann, and Paul will be at the Twin Cities Book Festival this coming weekend, along with a couple of book award winners. If you are an award winner this year and want to sign up to show your book at the table use this link: [mipa.org/ninja-forms/8pkk9](https://mipa.org/ninja-forms/8pkk9)

MiPA is starting an electronic book catalog at [mipa.org/catalog](https://mipa.org/catalog). This will be free to book award winners and with a \$25 fee for others.