

Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—April 13, 2021
30 Participating on Zoom

Understanding Hybrid Publishing

Speaker: Maggie Langrick



[Maggie Langrick](#) is the founder and publisher of [Wonderwell](#), a hybrid publisher of nonfiction books that help, heal and inspire. The company's books have won numerous peer-reviewed awards. Maggie is also an IBPA Board Director, and a member of the Advocacy Committee that developed IBPA's criteria for hybrid publishers.

Overview:

Maggie's talk focused on what it means to be a Hybrid Publisher, what it is and what it isn't. In a nutshell, hybrid publishing is an author-subsidized form of publishing. They do everything a traditional publisher does but in a form that is akin to self-publishing. Wonderwell is a boutique operation that publishes five to ten books per year. She mentioned [Brook Warner](#) of She Writes Press and [Greenleaf Publishers](#) as ones who helped develop this hybrid model.

What Makes a Good Hybrid Publisher:

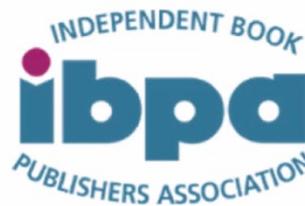
There are lots of differences among hybrid publishers and Maggie focused on what she and IBPA see, after months of work, as key criteria which are listed in Figure 1. Of course, unlike traditional publishers, hybrid publishers charge the author a fee for their work.

- 1. Define your publishing mission.** This is about being a specialist in a particular category, and defining it as your mission.
- 2. Vet Submissions.** Hybrids should be looking for books that can be successfully sold and find an audience. She mentioned that Wonderwell accepts only one of ten submittals.

- 3. Publish under its own imprint.** The hybrid publisher must maintain their reputation with distributors and the market in general.
- 4. Adhere to industry standards.** This is to distinguish yourself from rogue players like vanity presses who are more interested in the fee than the final book product.
- 5. Ensure quality.** The publisher must take responsibility for the book's quality, not the author.
- 6. Manage a range of rights.** A hybrid publisher should have experience with the full range of rights management as a traditional publisher.
- 7. Provide distribution.** This is a critical defining point for hybrid publisher, to be discussed more later.
- 8. Demonstrate respectable sales.** This is subjective, but the point is to have a strong track record. The hybrid publisher needs access to the appropriate markets and the ability to sell there.
- 9. Pay higher royalties than traditional.** Since the author is paying for the development of the book, they should get the majority of the proceeds, i.e., no less than 50 percent. Maggie's company in fact pays about 60 percent of net to the author.

Figure 1. The IBPA Criteria: A Hybrid Publisher Must...

1. Define its publishing mission
2. Vet submissions
3. Publish under its own imprint
4. Adhere to industry standards
5. Ensure quality
6. Manage a range of rights
7. Provide distribution
8. Demonstrate respectable sales
9. Pay higher royalties than traditional



Ways to Think of Hybrids:

It is like a creative agency that makes a book for you and then sells it. It's a professional alternative to self-publishing. It's like bootstrapping your own venture business as opposed to accepting venture capital and losing control. Even when an author helps by paying for say 1000 copies, he or she can be treated with less respect by a traditional publisher.

Two Types of Hybrids:

There are some businesses which sell both services and product, which are sometimes called hybrid businesses. The hybrid publisher does both, so it is a hybrid business. But it also employs author funding, which makes it a hybrid publisher. It is useful to keep those two ideas clear.

Editorial Design, Distribution, and Marketing Support. These are most important in the eyes of an author, and, if you are great in any, they become sales points with an author. Many of these can be purchased elsewhere by an author, but among them, distribution is most important.



Particularly today, book creation is largely a digital process. Books are produced, edited, printed, and sold digitally. People can get the impression that physical book distribution is no longer relevant, but that is just not true. Many books are still bought at bookstores, airport displays, and borrowed at libraries. Many authors think that once a book or e-book is online that it is on the market, even if no active selling is going on. A good hybrid publisher will be sure that all channels are covered, and that depends on having a good reputation with links to strong distributors. They depend on human beings who go out and sell books to those stores.

You Are Still a Gatekeeper. They are going out under your brand, so they need to be good to protect your reputation and to make the author successful.

Number one, make it a quality book, so it's one which we will be proud to sell. This may take advantage of the author's platform and her ability to help sell.

Number two, controlling the production process. We get some authors wanting to save cost by bringing their own editor or cover design. We need to firmly control those points.

Number three, relationship with the author is key. Don't let authors assume they have the final word. You need their help but it can be awkward. It's a fine balance.

How to Woo Authors. Authors are attracted to publishers who know their market and have similar values. The royalty model is important, of course, as well as the production and sales track record. The editing needs, and time-horizon of the author are also important to make the relationship just right. No one should ever take out a second mortgage to pay the fees. The hybrid publisher is best for someone who wants to be in the trade, and who has the resources and a book that can succeed. When all those criteria are met, the author will be better off financially with a hybrid publisher in the end.

Maggie really believes in this hybrid model and hopes more traditional publishers will add the approach to their scope. She also believes it is better for many authors. She has a personal goal for all sorts of peers to adapt this model, and believes it is here to stay. YAY, HYBRID PUBLISHING!

Questions and Answers.

Q1: Will hybrid publishers work with agents?

A1: We have worked with agents, but they aren't necessary, and there can be misalignment. For example, they can't get advances from hybrid publishers and in fact they need to pay a fee up front.

Q2: Is there a book on hybrid publishing that you would recommend?

A2: Brook Warner wrote a book called *Green-Light Your Book*, which covers all the options.

Q3: Is there a typical cost for the author?

A3: There is a really wide range. Some companies use set packages and prices, but most need to be considered separately.

Q4: Is there a free mentorship available from someone with a hybrid publisher or IBPA?

A4: Maggie is motivated to help others, and is happy to talk to people about becoming a hybrid publisher.

Q5: It is helpful for an author to come to you with a book that's been edited, proof read, and designed?

A5: I actually prefer a book with parts missing, so we can move the parts around. We don't want anyone thinking that the manuscript is finished and needs no change. We are good at making great books and that's easier with just the foundation.

Q6: Do you consider Ingram-Spark to be distribution?

A6: Ingram Spark is for print-on-demand and is not enough to get it into trade sellers. However, not every book needs to be in physical stores.

Q7: Generally do authors come to you or do you search out authors?

A7: Mostly they come to us. The heart is in the ideas. We don't give them ideas, but we look for people with great ideas.

Q8: Do authors get a say into the design of the book?

A8: Not much. Don't BYO designer. That is what we are great at. They don't get to choose which of our people will do the work.

Q9: What is the best way to manage expectations? And how much propriety info do you share with authors?

A9: We try to be as honest as possible. We talk about the realities of the market and what could affect it. We don't open up about our internal finances. But we are clear about fees and don't charge by the hour.

Q10: How many titles per year?

A10: About ten was the peak, but sometimes it is less.

Q11: What if an author just wants to hand over a manuscript to you?

A11: If the author is so disinterested, it probably won't sell well.

Q12: How do you determine how much to charge?

A12: My background is in business administration, so I did that at first when entering the hybrid publishing world. Now I just estimate hours, cost per hour, and build in a margin. But it is often too little. People underestimate the difficulty of what we do. I am trying to increase the understanding and rewards for all.

Q13: Who do you use for distribution?

A13: We use [PGW](#), and we have since the outset because they do a good job.

Q14: How do you calculate the royalties to the author?

A14: We calculate on the net based on publishers receipts, not on gross.

[Maggie](#) is happy to answer any additional questions.