



Interview with Peter Goodman, host, *Inside Independent Publishing* podcast

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KENNEALLY: A world where every independent publisher has the tools and knowledge needed to engage professionally in all aspects of the publishing industry. That's the vision of the Independent Book Publishers Association, a not-for-profit membership organization with over 3,000 members, making it the largest publishing trade association in the US. Now, IBPA is making its voice heard in a new podcast series that takes listeners inside independent publishing.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Inside Independent Publishing features opinion leaders and innovators from all aspects of the publishing industry. Host Peter Goodman can hold his own on a range of topics, from printing to marketing, given his background as the publisher and founder of Stone Bridge Press and his longtime service as board chair of the Independent Book Publishers Association. Peter Goodman joins me now from Berkeley, California. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Peter.

GOODMAN: Oh, thanks very much for having me, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to chatting with you. Welcome to the ranks of the podcasting community. Today, we want to share highlights from several recent episodes of Inside Independent Publishing, and we want to encourage listeners with an interest in the subject to subscribe on iTunes. A dozen episodes have been released so far in the biweekly series, Peter, that you launched in April back at IBPA's annual Publishing University conference. What's it been like sitting behind the microphone?

GOODMAN: Well, it actually beats sitting at my desk and staring at manuscripts all day long. Actually, it's very energizing and invigorating to talk to people with different points of view. I think all of us who are working in small-scale environments sometimes get a little – our ideas perhaps get a little shopworn, being recycled through the same filters time and time again. So being able to speak with people from different parts of the industry who have different perspective on things is very invigorating.

KENNEALLY: Do you find doing a podcast, though, changes the conversations at all? The medium itself is kind of a filter. It shapes the way you speak with someone



else. This isn't just professionals sitting around having lunch. You're trying to involve the listener, as well. What are you thinking about when you're doing that?

GOODMAN: Well, I'm very cognizant of the fact that it is not, as you say, a normal conversation. I'm interviewing someone, and I'm trying to elicit from them their coherent thoughts on a particular subject. One thing I'm very aware that I have to do is kind of keep my own ego in check. I have opinions about many of the things that they are talking about, but it's not necessarily my place when they're presenting their exposition for me to disagree or take them off in a different direction the way that normal conversations might run.

KENNEALLY: We thought we'd give listeners to Beyond the Book a chance to hear a few samples of the conversations that you've had so far. We'd like to start with Ian Lamont, who is an award-winning technology journalist, author, and publisher. He's the founder of i30 Media Corporation, publishers of the series In 30 Minutes. Those are guides that they call quick guides for a complex world, covering topics in business, software, medicine, and many others. He discusses with you strategies for using Amazon Marketing Services to make an indie book pop to the top in Amazon searches. I would imagine before we hear from Ian, Peter, that Amazon is really a critical go-to for indie publishers today.

GOODMAN: Yeah, that's an understatement. Without Amazon, probably a lot of independent publishers wouldn't even dream of publishing. It is the single place that most people think of first when they think about publishing – how am I going to get this on Amazon? If I get it on Amazon, is that enough? Do I need anything else? It is crucial to everyone's success, and for that reason, it's both loved and hated by almost everyone in the industry.

KENNEALLY: Right. But getting on is only the first step. Ian goes into the various other ways of approaching the kind of strategies that independent publishers can take. In this particular quote, he gives an idea of how best to use keywords. Let's hear him say that now.

(start of recorded clip)

LAMONT: That's a combination of several factors. One of them is how much you're willing to spend or how much you're willing to bid on a particular keyword. For instance, if I'm bidding for MBA and then Wiley Publishing is bidding for MBA, if they're providing a higher-level bid range – that is, maybe they're paying up to \$1 for somebody to click on their particular ad, and I'm only bidding 50 cents, their advertisements are more likely to show up. So that's one consideration.



But the other consideration is, of course, what the book is. So if your book is very professionally made, has a kind of catchy cover, maybe a really killer title to it, that might perform better, too. Because sometimes these advertisements, they show up side by side.

GOODMAN: So what you say might perform better is – were you suggesting that Amazon is somehow looking at the cover and saying, oh, that's a better cover than this one, we're going to show it first? Or is it all –

LAMONT: Yeah, so Amazon's artificial intelligence isn't that good yet. (laughter) It's not making those types of decisions. Although that wouldn't surprise me someday that algorithms have some ability to qualitatively assess something like the effectiveness of a cover or a headline.

(end of recorded clip)

KENNEALLY: So really the advice there, Peter, is that there are ways of maximizing results on Amazon. It's not quite gaming the system, but understanding the system and using it to your advantage.

GOODMAN: Right, and Ian makes a very good point, that they have different types of ads that they offer, and the takeaway advice, I think, is to read the instructions very, very carefully and understand what you're getting into.

KENNEALLY: Here's another example of doing just that, Peter. When you say read the instructions, make sure you consult the manual, there are ways to spend money on Amazon, just as there are ways to spend money on other online services, including Google AdWords, and there are also ways to lose a lot of money. Here's a tip from Ian Lamont on how not to do that.

(start of recorded clip)

LAMONT: For people that have never done this before, there's some really tricky things about using these self-serve ad platforms which can result in inexperienced people losing a lot of money quickly. One of them, for example, is you can set a daily budget, and then by default, Amazon will just keep the ad running forever. So if you're not paying attention to that, and you have a daily budget of \$10 and you're spending \$10 and it's using up the budget every day, at the end of the year, that can be a really significant cost.

(end of recorded clip)



KENNEALLY: Peter, have you heard from other members of IBPA and the other indie publishers that you talk with that there's a lot to understand, and sometimes it can get pretty confusing when it comes to Amazon?

GOODMAN: Yeah, I think everyone feels that way. There's just all sorts of issues that come up with metadata being incorrect, with weird pricing. For example, just today we had a book that I'm proud to say we got a review in the *New York Times* Sunday book review, and I looked on Amazon, and suddenly Amazon was out of stock, so it was being priced at over its retail price, because that's the way the algorithms work. And I thought, oh, that's going to put customers off. There's just all these things that are constantly popping up.

Plus, I would say that Amazon is always working on its strategies and on its algorithms, so what's true this week might not be true next week. You really have to stay on top of what its offerings are in order to use it most effectively.

KENNEALLY: Pretty fascinating there. I guess the point you're making is one I hadn't given any thought to, that there really is a moving target here.

GOODMAN: Yeah, and one other thing that Ian mentioned was that as more and more people are using this, the competition for words is growing, and therefore the cost of a meaningful bid is growing. So you really have to look at what your return is versus what it's costing you, and you may find out that in many cases, it's just not worth it.

KENNEALLY: Right. Of course, the Amazon marketplace is an online marketplace for obtaining print copies, but a lot of the time, it's to help promote ebooks. One of your other recent interviews featured Robin Cutler, who is director of IngramSpark. IngramSpark was founded in 2013, and it offers a variety of print on demand, digital publishing, wholesale, and distribution services to indie publishers through its own parent company, Ingram Content Group. Robin spoke with you about print on demand. It's not ebooks that are only important to independent publishers. They're also concerned with the real print copy – the analog copy, if you will. She tells us here about the beauty of print on demand.

(start of recorded clip)

CUTLER: The beauty of print on demand is that we can print a book when we get an order, like from a Barnes & Noble, from Amazon, from an independent bookstore, and also one at a time. We're able to do that. But say the author is going to an event where they need 50, 100, 300 copies. We can fulfill those orders, as well. So print on demand's not limited. Yeah, the minimum order's one copy, which is kind of astounding when you think of it. But we can also service thousands of copies.



GOODMAN: And when the books are printed, they're made available to regular book distribution routes, so they can get into independent bookstores as well as other wholesalers?

CUTLER: Yeah. So when someone is working in our system and they turn on – they upload their title. They make their book available for Ingram distribution. The book actually goes into the Ingram catalog, where then booksellers, libraries can find the book and can order it from Ingram. It solves a problem for a bookstore to be able to purchase directly from an author that they don't tend to want to do. So as an author, if your book's just listed in the Ingram catalog, that's a huge bonus for your book.

(end of recorded clip)

KENNEALLY: So picking up on that point, Peter, would you say that independent publishers are as enamored of print as their Big Five competitors seem to be?

GOODMAN: You know, it's funny. I think when people think of books, they always think of a print book first. That's what they visualize, is a physical object. So in their minds, I think most independent publishers are thinking in terms of the physical book. But when they start studying the reality of publishing, they realize that getting a physical book out into the marketplace and sold to readers is a very, very different thing from simply having a bunch of electrons available for instant download. So even if people are more enamored of the physical book just in terms of its bookiness, if you will, they're more likely to spend their initial time in publishing in the digital publishing world.

KENNEALLY: There's a bit of an overlap between getting your book out on ebook and print format when you want to reach a global audience, and that's where IngramSpark does come in, because it has a global network through the Ingram Content Group. Let's hear Robin explain just how that works for the indie authors and publishers.

(start of recorded clip)

CUTLER: The author or the owner of the IngramSpark account can decide where they want to place an order, right? Even those booksellers in those markets can order directly from those local facilities, yes.

GOODMAN: And the author doesn't have to understand all the logistics of how that works, right? The booksellers are in touch with Ingram, say, in the UK, in Australia, and all that stuff happens without the author having to lift a finger, really.



CUTLER: It's sort of magical when you think about it. (laughter)

GOODMAN: It's magic, yes. I knew it was magic.

CUTLER: Yeah. And you know, Ingram has offered this to traditional, to indie publishers for years. What's now available to an indie author – it is kind of magical that they have the same capability now that a large publisher has.

(end of recorded clip)

KENNEALLY: Peter, do the indie publishers that you speak with really hope to reach an audience in the UK, in Australia, in other countries? Or are they still primarily focused on their own home markets?

GOODMAN: I think everyone would, of course, like to be read as far and wide as possible, but realistically, most people, they are concentrated on their home market. The American market is huge – certainly big enough to serve most publishers. That's where the media that they read are. That's how it's easier for them to get in touch with people. I don't think most small publishers are thinking so globally. Even though it's possible to work with IngramSpark to get your book overseas, most people aren't doing it.

KENNEALLY: I suppose, too, that some research would be worthwhile, because if you found out that there was a community interested in your particular topic – happened to be a particularly important community in Australia or in some other country, it'd be worth making that effort and at least making the book available there.

GOODMAN: Oh, for sure. If you're in a particular community and you know that there is a great locus of those readers in, say, South Africa, India, UK, Australia, or other places where English-language books are sold, then it certainly makes sense to try and figure out how to get there. But even working with IngramSpark, the logistics are a little bit different, and the return may not be worth it for a lot of people.

KENNEALLY: One thing that is worth it for independent publishers is to think about the marketing of their works. That's important. The writing – you start with that, but the marketing is what happens when you put the pen down. You spoke with Judy Baker, who is managing partner of Book Marketing Mentor, which provides strategic marketing, branding, and organizing expertise for author/publishers. Judy draws on her background as a graphic designer and book designer in this effort. She speaks about the book as a starting place. It's not just a book you're working on, but possibly something much grander than that. Let's hear her.



(start of recorded clip)

BAKER: I look at the book as a starting place. Can it be turned into other types of ways to deliver the material? Could it become a course? Could it become a workbook? Could it become a podcast? Could it become a series of – could you take a bigger book and break it up into smaller books? Because as most of us know in the industry, series sell. People try you and then they want the next one and the next one. James Patterson is an expert in that. Since he had an advertising background, he recognized that from the very first day.

GOODMAN: And his name is always bigger than the title of the book.

BAKER: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

GOODMAN: I mean, who cares what the title of the book is?

BAKER: Yeah. James Patterson? OK, I'm going to buy that. But when you're a new author, your name isn't going to be the biggest thing on there. They want to find out about what you have to do for them. If you're entertaining them, then authors need to be able to succinctly say, here's my one sentence that tells you why you should read this book.

(end of recorded clip)

KENNEALLY: How do you feel about that, Peter? Is it a walk/crawl/run thing for authors? In other words, if they have success with the book, they can then begin to think about extending it further into other lines? Or should they be thinking about that extension right at the beginning?

GOODMAN: I think it depends on the authors and what their motivations are for getting into publishing and writing in the first place. For many authors, it is kind of a one-and-done situation. The whole idea was to get their book out there, and once that's done, they've kind of accomplished their item on their bucket list, and then their task is simply to build on that book.

But other people, I think they're changing careers. They're getting into publishing thinking of it in terms of a business – much more strategically and long term. In that case, yeah, you start with one thing and you build on it as a foundation, which means really kind of keeping your focus and thinking strategically when you're doing one book, if I do another book like this, how is that going to – in other words, what sort of format do I need to be thinking of that's going to let me extend the life of this into one, two, or three volumes? Should I be thinking in terms of a common title, a common theme, some sort of format that will work in different ways? Also,



how can I repackage it, as Judy might say, into a series or a bunch of webinars or things like that? Or to serve simply as your brand – to represent you as a calling card. Maybe you're a consultant, and your book is really the sign that you're an expert, and that's what it's designed to do.

KENNEALLY: So it's about the book, but it's also about the career. And one way of thinking about the career is the book as a platform. Here, Judy Baker explains just what we mean by that bit of business school terminology – the platform.

(start of recorded clip)

BAKER: A platform really is that, that you start with a foundation. You don't try to put up the foundation and the walls and the roof all at the same time. You start with one thing, and you get that working, and then you build another thing, and you build another thing so that the skills are transferable, rather than saying, oh, yeah, from day one, you've got to be on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram – we can go on and on with that. That will make you totally crazy.

(end of recorded clip)

KENNEALLY: Have you seen platforms successfully built? Any tips of your own, Peter, as far as building one? You've got something of a platform there at Stone Bridge Press. Is there a way to be successful about this and avoid some of the pitfalls, I'm sure, that are out there?

GOODMAN: I do think that keeping a focus on what you're doing – we're all excited by new ideas, and we're curious people and we go off in new directions. But when it comes to thinking about your book, it's really good to just think in terms of what this particular book is, what it represents, what's the community of readers.

And once you've got that established, it's very dangerous as a small press to wander too far out of your area of expertise and too far from your community. I remember when I was starting out in publishing, one of the big mistakes we editors would make at our submission meetings would be telling the salespeople that the book would appeal to a general audience. That's the last thing that a salesperson wants to hear. They want to hear what specific audience? Where are they? How many people are there in it? How do I reach them? Once you have developed that body of knowledge, when you're doing your second volume, you already have that in the can, so to speak, and it's really easy to then dip into that and not only promote your new book, but promote the old one at the same time. So I think keeping focus is the most successful way that most of the small publishers work.



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KENNEALLY: Yeah. Well, as you say, Peter, some good advice is to stick with what you know. But I wonder if you've broken your own rule here by going into podcasting and whether or not maybe you've proven that stepping outside of your comfort zone is also a good idea.

GOODMAN: Yeah, I think on a personal level, stepping outside your comfort zone is always a good idea. Challenge yourself. As I say, get out of your little box of shopworn ideas and explore the world and find out what other new and interesting things are out there. The publishing marketing place, however, is a lot less forgiving of experimentation unless you're willing to take the risks. Maybe do something really innovative 10 times, and two times it works, eight times it doesn't. If you can afford it, that's great.

KENNEALLY: Outside of your comfort zone and into the podcast zone. We hope you find some success there. We've been chatting today with Peter Goodman. He is the founder of Stone Bridge Press and a former chair of the Independent Book Publishers Association and now host of the podcast series Inside Independent Publishing. Peter Goodman, thanks so much for joining us on Beyond the Book.

GOODMAN: Thank you very much. Been great talking to you, Chris.

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Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening, and join us again soon on Beyond the Book.

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