



Beyond the Book®



GROMLING PODCAST

M: Welcome to a podcast of Beyond the Book, a presentation of the not-for-profit, Copyright Clearance Center. Copyright Clearance Center is the world's largest provider of copyright compliant solutions through a wide range of innovative licensing services and comprehensive educational programs for authors, publishers, and their audiences in academia, business, and research institutions. For more information about Beyond the Book and Copyright Clearance Center, please go to www.beyondthebook.com.

KENNEALLY: Welcome to Beyond the Book. My name is Chris Kenneally. I am the Director of Author Relations for the non-profit, Copyright Clearance Center and this is a regular program series we do that takes a look at the dynamic publishing industry from the perspective of authors, independent publishers, and really anyone involved in that industry that is growing but also facing some important challenges in coming years and joining me today is Frank Gromling who is a publisher himself with Ocean Publishing in Florida. We'll learn more about that in a moment but for the purposes of Beyond the Book, he is a board member and chair of the membership outreach campaign for IBPA, the Independent Book Publishers Association. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Frank.

GROMLING: Hi, Chris. It's good to be with you on the program today.

KENNEALLY: We're very happy to have you and look forward to discussing an important outreach campaign that you are about to launch for IBPA and I suppose the thing to do is to characterize IBPA for our audience who may know of you. They also know you by a previous name and we've been covering IBPA and following the story here indeed. I attended Publishing University last year and had a chance to speak with your president, Florrie Kichler, regarding the rebirth of PMA as IBPA but let's bring everybody in the audience up to speed. What is IBPA and who are your members?

GROMLING: Well, Chris, IBPA is the acronym for Independent Book Publishers Association and that is a renaming, not so much a rebirth but a renaming of an organization that started 25 years ago called Publishers Marketing Association and most people in the publishing world know it as PMA and it probably will always be known by PMA by those folks but we decided that we do much more than marketing for our association and members. It is an independent association of independent publishers that strives to educate, support, and otherwise benefit independent publishers across the country. We have some 3,600 members at this time.

KENNEALLY: I'm sorry. How many?



GROMLING: 3,600.

KENNEALLY: 3,600. I think that makes IBPA the largest organization of its kind in the country. Is that fair to say?

GROMLING: It does.

KENNEALLY: Right, and what we have learned in talking with folks like Michael Healy from the Book Industry Study Group is that the independent sector of the publishing industry is growing in size and in influence.

GROMLING: There's no question to that and Michael is right on top of that, given his role in BISG and that is exactly right. The independent sector is strong, it's very fast growing and that dynamic nature presents some challenges that we're working on at IBPA in order to stay right up there at the leading edge, providing education and support for these independent publishers.

KENNEALLY: Right, so that's going to really be what you're seeking to achieve with this outreach campaign which will take you through the spring and then return in a sort of second wave this fall and you have two prongs to the attack if you will. Tell us what they are.

GROMLING: Yeah. Chris, it's real simple for us. We have two major directions that we're following in our outreach. One is to our affiliates who are local or regional publishing associations. We have 25 affiliates and they represent independent publishers across the spectrum and across the country and so one of our major directions will be to work with those affiliates to help them gain additional membership while we simultaneously are reaching out to publishers to join IBPA. The second phase is what we call Member Get a Member whereby individual members, some 3,600 strong, are being asked to seek out new publishers whom they know in their particular networking areas and engage them in developing an interest in joining IBPA.

KENNEALLY: So there's a United We Stand approach to this whole thing and I think that's to be applauded really because the whole idea of a future for the book publishing industry seems really tied to growing the awareness and the importance or the value of all of these works among the booksellers and among the book reading audience.

GROMLING: Well, that's true and we recognize that some 50% of IBPA's membership consists of publishers who have less than five books in their inventory, five titles in their inventory and so we are recognizing that that type of small publisher has very,



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very, very specific needs in terms of education and marketing and outreach and networking. And so we are directing our attention towards them while at the same time realizing that a great deal of our membership also are larger or what we call mid-sized publishers. So we have to balance what we can offer or what we do offer through our membership.

KENNEALLY: Right, and whether small or mid-sized or even sort of large independent players, and there are some of those too, it's undeniable that we're going through easily the most severe economic downturn in just about anybody's memory. What does that really mean to an IBPA member? What are the things that they most need at a time like this?

GROMLING: Well, on a personal level and speaking for myself and some of the others with whom I've spoken across the country, these economic times really demand that publishers be smarter, work smarter, work more efficiently in terms of producing and marketing their titles and that's one of the major areas that IBPA serves best. Our educational programs, whether it be Publishing University or the Publishing University online format or articles in the Independent Magazine, our various marketing programs, all of these things are just absolutely essential for any publisher today, no matter the size and no matter how long one has been in this industry. These times are tough, challenging times.

KENNEALLY: And if I can just say and not just flattery but sincerely, there was an article in the most recent copy of the newsletter by Jonathan Hersh (sp?) speaking to the Google Book Search settlement, the proposed settlement if you will and a very thorough look at that which is a very complicated subject but extremely important to IBPA members I would think.

GROMLING: And that is a classic example of the type of thing from an advocacy standpoint, an educational standpoint, where IBPA serves its membership to the max and we believe it's one of the major attractions for those publishers who have not yet joined IBPA. The ability of getting straightforward, clear factual information about this industry.

KENNEALLY: Right. Now as a member, there are a host of benefits that IBPA delivers on and perhaps you can tell us about a few of those because not only do they provide the kind of resources that people are looking for but an opportunity to save a bit of money as well.

GROMLING: Well, absolutely and in fact the member benefits have been just revised and expanded and upgraded. There's opportunities for our members to save real money in terms of purchasing services from vendors across the country. IBPA's strength in its membership and the size of its membership allows us to negotiate



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with certain vendors to obtain discounts on a wide variety of programs, everything from shipping to marketing to advertising to what have you. That's just one area. The other thing is in terms of insurance or legal services or any of these types of areas, all of the services that an independent publisher needs and most likely doesn't have on an internal basis. It just doesn't have staff members sitting by waiting to help with these different things. We have just a strong benefit selection for our members and they save a bunch of money in utilizing those benefits.

KENNEALLY: Well, I have to say on behalf of Copyright Clearance Center that we're very happy to be a part of that new list, not the directly savings per se but an opportunity to participate in some of our services directly and to benefit from them because we certainly recognize that for rights holders of all size, particularly members of IBPA, having access to the kind of services that we provide and the kind of services you're talking about are really critical. As soon as all that money drops to the bottom line, this is keeping the business stronger than it might be otherwise.

GROMLING: Well, absolutely, and we appreciate your involvement in our programs and the offering of your services to our members because we value those services. We know the benefits of them and it's easy for us to recommend you and our other firms that have signed on with us to provide these services to our members. So one of the things I want to add, Chris, is that I know you talked about these economic times. They really are challenging. There's no question to it. In the 25 years of IBPA, we've not seen anything like this, to this level, and that really demands that publishers operate in what I will call an error free operational basis. You know I hate to think in terms of pure error free world but –

KENNEALLY: I was going to say boy, that would be pretty good itself but I know what you mean. I think you're saying that failure is not an option here.

GROMLING: We really have to eliminate, minimize the possibility of making dramatic errors that result in failures, failures of a title for example that if the error hadn't been made – and that error might be something simple. It might be the design of a book and everyone in this industry knows the value of the cover design. Well, there are publishers who just haven't figured that part out yet. One of the things that we really strive to accomplish in our education programs – get publishers to recognize the value of a proper cover and its role in the decision by a customer to buy that title and so this is one of the areas we put a lot of emphasis on is the design of a title, the design of a book, from the covers through the inside, to the flyers for its marketing purposes, etc. So what I'm terming error free operations, to reduce cost, save time to market, to make better products. These are all things that IBPA is really geared to help the independent publisher to accomplish and that's so critical today.



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KENNEALLY: Right, well, I can identify with that notion of error free. I'll tell you a quick story. Years ago as a freelance journalist I got a chance to interview a flight instructor for small single engine planes and his idea was that the principles involved in becoming a pilot and a successful one were very similar to the principles that entrepreneurs need to put in place in order to be successful and so when we started the conversation before we went up for a flight and I got a chance to hold the stick and all, I said to him, does this mean that pilots are risk takers the way we think of entrepreneurs being? And he said oh my God, no. You don't want to take any risks if you're a pilot and I thought that was absolutely true and therefore sort of not obvious when it comes to entrepreneurship. Nobody who's investing in their work the way that small publishers really do, they've got a lot of skin in the game, wants to take any risks with that.

GROMLING: Well, that's absolutely right. And if there is a risk, it's a planned risk. I mean I understand aviation and piloting and the analogy is strong. If you're going to take a risk which is something that would be involved in an aviation environment at some time or another, if you have a risky environment, you want to come through it as strong as possible and you have to be prepared for that. You have to know your aircraft, know its capabilities, understand all of the factors that go into keeping an aircraft airborne and that's exactly the same situation in the publishing world and today it's more so than ever before.

KENNEALLY: Well, Frank, you could even speak to that personally and we are talking with Frank Gromling who is the chair of the membership outreach campaign for the Independent Book Publishers Association and he's a publisher himself down in Florida for a company called Ocean Publishing and what sort of books are you publishing and how have you put into practice some of these principles yourself?

GROMLING: Well, Chris, Ocean Publishing is in a transformational stage right now. We're only six years old. We started out kind of investigating different genre and we did some children's picture books very well. We found that that was a highly competitive market. We did some other books. We have a wonderful fiction adventure fantasy trilogy that we will continue to market because it does well nationally. That Windrusher trilogy is a very strong series of books. However, going forward Ocean Publishing is going to more or less focus on its name, that is ocean, and we're going to do exclusively nonfiction titles that are in the marine life, nature, environment and conservation sectors and those are areas that I'm particularly interested in because one of the many things that I do is I'm a research assistant in a whale research project here in Florida.

KENNEALLY: Well, that sounds fascinating and I would think too that that work you're doing with the whale research project would kind of give you an early insight into



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some new topics and some things that are coming because of course with publishing, unless you can move really right off the dime, you have to look ahead to the next season or even sometimes the next year or two and anticipate the future rather than react to it.

GROMLING: Well, that's absolutely true and the point that's relevant for me personally is that when I got into this business, I didn't have any prior knowledge or significant experience in the publishing world. I had written a few books that had been published by the government. I had more or less kept up with what was happening in the industry just as a generalist but when I launched Ocean Publishing in 2003, it was without a lot of prior formal education or even having attended any seminars on publishing. So I did what I don't advise anyone to do. My learning curve has been a vertical line and until I went to Publishing University, until I started attending seminars and programs conducted by IBPA and others, I really didn't know what I was doing and that transformation, personal transformation has been huge and IBPA has been directly responsible for that.

KENNEALLY: Well, that's an honest answer, Frank, and I appreciate your honesty because I think it really does say to people don't do what I did.

GROMLING: Exactly.

KENNEALLY: Pay attention to your education in this very dynamic industry. We have been speaking with Frank Gromling who is a board member. He's completing his second two-year term with the Independent Book Publishers Association board. He's been on the board since 2005. He will be the chair of this just-to-launch membership outreach campaign and he is in fact a publisher as well at Ocean Publishing, which is online at www.ocean-publishing.com. Frank, thank you very much for joining us at Beyond the Book.

GROMLING: Chris, it's been my pleasure and I really wish you all good things. You've got a wonderful program and the services your company offers are very much appreciated by the IBPA.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you very much indeed and we look forward to working with you in the future. This is Chris Kenneally, Director of Author Relations for Copyright Clearance Center, thanking you for joining us today and looking forward to having you back with Beyond the Book very soon.

M: Beyond the Book is an educational presentation of the not-for-profit, Copyright Clearance Center, with conferences and seminars featuring leading authors and editors, publishing analysts and information technology specialists. Beyond the Book is the premiere source for knowledge on the latest business issues facing



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today's dynamic publishing industry, from initial research to final publication and beyond.

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