

Beyond the Book

A Podcast Series on the Business of Writing and Publishing

Interview with Angela James, [Carina Press](#)

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KENNEALLY: At the Tools of Change Conference in New York City, February 2011, we're going digital and having a look at the launch of a digital-first business from within a traditional publisher. We'll hear about what makes that digital-first business different from the traditional publisher, and it's a very interesting publisher for all of this, too. Joining me is Angela James, executive editor of Carina Press. Angela, welcome to *Beyond the Book*.

JAMES: Hi, Chris. Thank you so much for having me.

KENNEALLY: It's a pleasure to have you join us because we've met at a couple of these conferences and you start to see some of the same people over and over and you learn who are the ones that are really saying things and doing things that are of interest. You did a workshop here on Monday – that I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to see – with your colleague at Harlequin Enterprises, Jenny Bullough, and it was talking about the launch of Carina Press.

And Carina is an imprint, if we could call it that. It's a virtual imprint of Harlequin. For the people who are listening who might associate Harlequin with something and wonder what it is that's different with Carina, distinguish the two brands for us.

JAMES: Well, Harlequin always has always had a very specific brand promise for its readers, especially within its category lines, so when we started Carina Press, one of the things that we knew was going to be different, outside of the actually fiction genres, was that it was going to be digital-first print, maybe. So we're digital first. Our books go to production digitally before they do anything else.

And then also, we do have different brand promises within the genres. For instance, the most specific example that we give is we do male-male romance and male-male fiction within Carina Press. But there's other things. We do more mysteries, thrillers, steampunk, science fiction and fantasy, as well as all of the traditional romance.

KENNEALLY: What you do different and what really made the conversation yesterday, I'm sure, appealing for people was the notion of a digital startup within the traditional publisher, and this is going to take up resources and it's going to require some staffing. Talk about some of the decisions you made, some of the lessons you learned, that you'd pass on to other publishers considering the same thing.



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JAMES: Well, one of the things that we talked about yesterday in the workshop was the importance of the team that you put behind the digital-first imprint. At Harlequin, we're fortunate because we have a digital team that concentrates on Harlequin's digital business. I think there's just over 20 people. And we were able to utilize a good portion of that team to help start the Carina Press digital first imprint.

But the reason it's so important is because the success of the imprint is not just within the quality of the books, but also within the time and resources of the people involved. If the people involved are committed, if they're enthusiastic, you're going to have more commitment to the project and they're going to drive that forward and help make that imprint successful.

KENNEALLY: And that team spirit, I'm sure, would help to drive the identity of the imprint. You need something distinct. You talk about the different brand promises, but it's got to be lived every day in the office by all those people.

JAMES: Right. That's absolutely correct. So as a team, we form the brand of Carina. We drive what's being acquired.

But I should also say that the reason that the team that you choose is important is because it's the knowledge of the people. If all you know is a print world, it's going to be very difficult to enter the digital-first world because digital first does work differently than the print model.

KENNEALLY: Well, let's get specific about that. And tell me first, though, what was it that drove Harlequin to want to do this in the first place? Why a digital-first, and then, what did you learn was so different from the traditional side?

JAMES: Harlequin has always been greatly into the digital market. They have a digital team, they've been producing digital backlists and frontlists for several years, have been taking digital rights. And so in the past few years, they've actually been experimenting with digital first a little bit in the terms of imprints of Nocturne Bites, Harlequin and (inaudible) and Spice Briefs.

So it was on a much smaller scale, so it seemed like watching the industry, watching small presses like Ellora's Cave, Samhain, Liquid Silver, those types of presses who were doing digital first, that seemed like the natural next step to be able to meet consumer needs and experiment within the market.

KENNEALLY: And this is an audience you knew going into it that was going to be at least open to this, right, because they've already received the whole idea of the digital book as

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something they just latched onto. In fact, it's an open secret that Harlequin is one of the most successful publishers in e-books just because they've got a special audience that has to have the next book and that they can get it by downloading it on the Kindle or whatever their e-reader is. That's what they'll do.

JAMES: Right. Well, Harlequin has always known that the romance reader, especially, is a voracious reader who's willing to read in any format necessary to get her – I wouldn't want to say get her desires met, but get her reading desires met. And so that's been really excellent for the digital community because romance readers have been some of the first to embrace this.

And Harlequin's promise has always been that they'll meet the consumer and give her what she wants, or now him what he wants, where they want it, when they want it and in format how they want it. So that's just another promise of the digital brand.

KENNEALLY: When did you begin all of this and again, for our listeners who wonder about what's ahead for them if they take on this same challenge, some five things to avoid and maybe some five things to be sure you don't forget to do.

JAMES: Oh, five things to avoid. How about if I tell you the challenges, some of the challenges that you're sure to face? One is going to be getting buy-in from people within your company, believing that it's a legitimate business and not just a sideline or a hobby. So it's important if we want to talk about things to avoid is to avoid thinking about it like that. Think of it as a legitimate business that you're going to grow.

Avoid thinking of it as immediate return. Yes, it's digital. Things happen much more quickly. But you still have to have a solid business plan and be in it for the long haul. Some of what we were talking about yesterday – we were joking we speak in clichés, but they're really very apt, because you have to be committed to this because you need a business plan.

Avoid trying to take shortcuts because after you do that, you're going to find going back that you wish you would have taken more time to do that, whether in terms of metadata, whether in terms of quality control or production. So really plan out what you're going to do and know what you're going to do and how you're going to do it.

Avoid trying to do it with only existing personnel. And I know that sound painful because now we're talking about more money, but you want to do it also with people who are really invested in the digital community, understand how digital works, and most importantly, somebody who can help you think outside the box.

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And what that means is, for instance, for Harlequin, that means me, because my career has always been in digital first. So what they did is they brought me on board because I could think outside the traditional print model and I am often able to say, well, what if we do it like this because this isn't how we normally do it but we could do it this way. So we've actually been blending the two worlds together, the Harlequin and the digital-first model.

And then I think the last thing I would say is avoid getting frustrated when you make mistakes or the wrong decision, because you are going to make mistakes or the wrong decision. But that's OK. Just learn from them and then keep looking forward. How can I fix this and how can I use it to grow my business.

KENNEALLY: What about the to-dos? What are some things that are just sort of must-haves? You mentioned a team that draws from inside resources but also outside, learn to fail and fail quickly and it's a good thing to do. Perhaps there are some others out there.

And finally, as you think about that, the feedback that must be involved here, because while Harlequin decided to sort of throw this off not as a hobby but as a real venture, it's got to have had some impact on the mother ship, if you will.

JAMES: Well, we're very fortunate because the executives at Harlequin are very supportive of this and very enthusiastic about it. They see it as something that's going to be very successful. So I think it's important when you do do this is to have people who will support you not just within your team.

One of the examples I gave was our legal department. We've had really excellent support from them. Now, when we started, they didn't realize that this was going to mean that contracts were going to have to move more quickly and we were going to have a higher volume of contracts. So you need to find your allies in other departments, not just within your team but maybe in PR or legal or on the print side, because maybe eventually you'll want to take some of these to print. So, find your allies.

KENNEALLY: Great. And you mentioned contracts. I'm at Copyright Clearance Center. This is what we live and breathe is contracts. What's changing in the contract world? I was at some other presentations here at Tools of Change. Richard Nash is talking about a three-year renewable contract, not this sort of perpetual copyright acquisition. Lots of people are sitting down and thinking, well, maybe it's not just the old business models that have to get thrown out, but the old legal models, too. Is that something that you realized when you were working on this?

JAMES: Well, remembering that for our particular brand of digital first, we were already entering a competitive space. There were already people in the space who had created a new business model and new contracts. That might not be applicable to some of the

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people listening if they're going nonfiction or academic or other things. They might not have competitive space so they might be able to get to play around with their contracts a little bit more.

So we looked at some of our competition's contracts and what they were offering and knew that we were going to have to offer some of the similar things within that model. So, yes, we have changed the contracts somewhat. They're still very recognizable because they still have some of the very same legal things, but for instance, no advances. We don't offer advance. We offer a higher royalty price based on cover price.

We do ask for the copyright of the book, but it has a seven-year – there's no technological term for this yet – out-of-print reversion. We still call it out-of-print even though it's not print. This isn't part of the contract, but I like to mention it. We don't use DRM. And we don't take an option, for the most part. So those things are a little bit different.

KENNEALLY: A lot of lessons to learn, and I think what I hear you say is there is no wrong way. It's just kind of learn as you go.

JAMES: Yes, that's exactly right. And in fact, I have said that I think that we're somewhat lucky because we did have – we were entering into a competitive market so we can learn from what people did for us before.

I think in some ways, it's very difficult for those people who are looking at digital first and don't have competition, because they have to be the trailblazers and decide what's right for the contracts, and somebody coming along can then take advantage of what they've done and what they've built.

So we're very fortunate, but yes, just keep trying.

KENNEALLY: We've been taking some lessons in going digital with Angela James, who's the executive editor of Carina Press, the digital-first imprint of Harlequin Books. Angela, thank you for joining us on *Beyond the Book*.

JAMES: Thank you so much, Chris. I'm very pleased to be talking about digital first and I hope I'll see a lot more imprints popping up out there.

KENNEALLY: Well, I have a feeling you will see more of those. I think that's almost the one thing we can say that's certain here.

Thank you again, Angela. For all of us at Copyright Clearance Center, this is Chris Kenneally wishing you a great day.



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