



Scott Flora at PUBWEST

Q: Welcome to Beyond the Book, my name is Chris Kenneally, I'm Director of Author and Creator Relations for the nonprofit Copyright Clearance Center, and your host for this regular podcast series about the business of writing and publishing. I am attending this weekend – here in Portland, Oregon – the annual conference of the Publisher's Association of the West, better known as PubWest to everyone. But joining me is Scott Flora, who's the executive director of the Small Publishers Association of North America, which is online at spannet.org. And Scott, tell me about the relationship that you've established with PubWest for this conference?

A: Well first of all, I'm very happy to be talking to you, Chris. And we are an industry partner with PubWest, and we started our conversations with PubWest last spring about how we can work together to help them boost the attendance of their conference, and also provide a great conference for SPAN members to come to. So the relationship that we have, and three other nonprofits have with them, is that our members get the PubWest member rate for coming to this conference.

Q: Well let me ask you about publishers in the west. You're based in Colorado, here we are in Portland, Oregon. It seems to be, judging by the attendance this morning at the keynote address by John Ingram, a well attended program. Is there something going on out here in the mountain states and the Pacific that is especially conducive to the publishing industry? Tell us – just fill in somebody from back east about why publishing isn't just about Manhattan.

A: Great question. Well I think that independent publishing more and more is becoming a niche industry. And so people can fill those niches from wherever they are. Part of it is to be living in a nice location. Statistics I've seen is that Colorado and California are the two largest states holding publishers outside of New York. So people can come out here to enjoy the west, and be able to publish their books.

Q: Sounds very attractive indeed. And I guess the point is that, as you say, as we move forward more into the digital age, location isn't so critical. You can partner with various people in the whole development chain, from manuscript to publication and beyond. But you don't need to be within four blocks of any particular part of New York City. And that seems like a wonderful opportunity, especially for people who probably – I would imagine the small publishing thing, publishing is a second career – is an opportunity to work in business. To put some

business skills together, but to put them together in a way that's adding to knowledge and creativity.

A: Well absolutely. And I think for one thing, there's a dichotomy between the people that are in New York and people that are not in New York, and both sides of it understand that. I think also with the second career – I talked to a lot of speakers here at the conference who are professional speakers, but also professional publishers. And that synergy between the two parts of their lives and their careers is very powerful.

Q: That's interesting. What we have heard in some of the surveys we've taken is that public speaking is a very important activity to people in this business, both authors and publishers. So that public speaking activity is a way to establish a reputation, I would think. Reputation for themselves, but also for the line of books they're publishing, or even the books they've written themselves.

A: And I would say conversely, having a book increases the credibility of the speakers. I think it's – boy, I don't know if this is an opinion or not. It's probably easier to be a publisher than to be a speaker. Speakers have to be that outgoing, the take charge personality. Publishers and authors tend to be a lot more introverted. So there's two different personalities going on with this industry.

Q: Well we have somebody coming into the office of the White House who's both a great speaker and a bestselling author. So maybe he'll set an example for us all. But let me turn, if I can, to what's happening for SPAN these days. Tell us about what your membership is coming to you for, what kind of help they're hoping to get from you. And just what's on their mind?

A: Well a lot of people, especially now that the election's over, are turning to the economy. And you only need to open up the papers or turn on the TV to see that the economy is – it was pretty bad during the summer, and has only gotten worse. So we are concentrating on letting our members know that – to not give up, and that marketing, marketing, marketing is what they need to do. They've got the books, they've got the products, but getting in there and working on that business development so that when the recession is over, they are just that much smaller, rather than contracting all those activities.

Q: For major publishers – indeed for so many businesses – the holiday season is absolutely critical to sales. How true is that for the small publisher? Do they rely upon what happens between Thanksgiving and New Years as much as the big players do? And any thoughts as to how they feel about the coming holiday season?

A: Well I think the coming holiday season is probably going to be mixed. And for some publishers, going to be bleak. I think independent publishers, the holiday season is still very important. Possibly not quite as important because there's so

much impulse buying for the big publishers out of the stores, and also buying the top sellers. But it's still very important for them.

Q: Is there one particular marketing tip or approach that you think is more successful than any other at a time like this?

A: Well what we work on with our publishers, and what I tell them, is that the marketing they do doesn't have to cost a lot of money. We hope that they all have Websites, newsletters – through the newsletters they're collecting email list, possibly having a blog. So we're finding and keeping those really active. And what we see, and especially in connection with the professional speakers, is that they niche, they have a community of fans and very likeminded souls that see them as an expert. And so to refine that and build that, so that when they come out of the recession – when we come out from the recession, that community that's built around that is even stronger.

Q: Absolutely. It seems that the point today for all business is about community. Indeed I must say I think what's been wonderful about the relationship that we've had is we've developed with Beyond the Books audience and your audience a community around some of these issues. We'll be returning to you from time to time over the next few months, and looking forward to talking more about it. But with the Web, you can build that community, as you say, without a tremendous amount of investment. You need to stay current, and you can't just let things sit there, because it requires updating a lot. But there are lots of formats that are pretty open to that. And if you're publishing, you've got lots of ideas. You wouldn't be in publishing if you didn't have ideas.

A: Well absolutely. And I think that with these communities, people want to know what's next. What is the next thing? A lot of these speakers are consultants helping other people. And they're teaching how to adapt to the economy, how to adapt to changes in the industry. And so I think that's critical, to stay up to date, and also provide information. Today we heard John Ingram talking about digital and digital publishing, digital distribution of information. And certainly Ingram and Lightning Source and all their different projects are on the edge of that, and I think that's fascinating, and very important for all of us to really pay attention to.

Q: And I also thought his point about the importance of partnerships in publishing is really critical. And that you need partners who have capabilities and credibilities in various parts of the whole spectrum, from producing the book, or for producing the book. And it seems to me that partnerships are critical. And I want to thank you, our partner SPAN – Small Publishers Association of North America. We've been speaking with Scott Flora, their executive director. Thank you again, Scott.

A: Well Chris, it was wonderful to talk to you. And it's great to be here in Portland, so thank you very much.

Q: Likewise. Thank you again, and please stay tuned for our other podcast in this series. We'll be recording further from the PubWest conference here in Portland. Thank you for listening to is. This is Chris Kenneally, we'll be back with you very soon.

END OF INTERVIEW