



## D.C. Spotlight: An Eclectic Publishing Region

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The Washington, D.C. publishing community is unique. It includes not only independent publishers but scores of university presses, think tanks, and government agencies. Below is a roundup of what some of the area's most prominent players have been up to since the start of the pandemic.

### AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Rose Sokol, publisher of journals and books at the American Psychological Association, says that one of the positive changes she's seen amid the global pandemic is the rise of different distribution platforms. "For example," she says, "our children's books distributed on Epic! not only reach students in new ways but we can see what they are choosing to read, versus what their parents or somebody else is buying for them. And the titles are not the same. It's really fun to see. A title called *Peanut Butter and Jelly* is often chosen, about jealousy between friends and how to work through it. These are things kids deal with at school that parents sometimes don't even know about."

As an association publisher, the APA appreciates being in Washington, D.C. "We really have the capability of reflecting on and being part of the discipline and the field that we're shaping, in this region," Sokol says. "You have all these associations working and networking together, sharing ideas and generating standards for publishing, too." That includes working with libraries through partnerships and increasing access to content discovery. "Another unique part of D.C. publishing? You have a lot of databases!" she adds, laughing.

Some databases, or at least information aggregators, come in print form, too, like the *APA Publication Manual*, now in its seventh edition. "We've sold over a million copies of the *Manual* at this point," Sokol says. "In this edition, there's a new chapter on inclusive and bias-free language, which is really important for students."

Under the Imagination Press imprint, the APA's What to Do series, which helps younger kids figure out challenges, is now being published in Spanish for the first time. The Kid Confident imprint for teens has titles about social power and how to manage mood changes. The adult trade imprint, Life Tools, has a general-public focus centered on evidence-based psychology covering

such topics as parenting grief, lying, and breastfeeding; one of its best sellers is *Imperfect Parenting: How to Build A Relationship with Your Child to Weather Any Storm* by Dona Matthews. One last series for librarians to consider is Essential Qualitative Methods, 12 books that allow people to “learn a lot, quickly” about qualitative methodology, Sokol says.

## **ARC MANOR**

“Just minutes ago I received an outstanding review for one of our titles from *Publishers Weekly*,” says Shahid Khan, publisher of Arc Manor and its imprints Caezik, Phoenix Pick, and Galaxies’s Edge, speaking via Zoom with a background image of Earth as seen from outer space—fitting for the Rockville, Md.–based science fiction publisher.

That review is for a “nail-biting thriller” by Alan Smale titled *Hot Moon*. “Smale is actually a NASA scientist who uses his expertise to create an alternate history, set in the 1970s, where the Apollo space program never ends,” Khan says. Khan and his team love the book so much they’ve already entered into contract for the sequel, “which takes place at a time when Apollo 32 is landing on the moon.”

Now that the pandemic has eased, Khan says his company will continue to focus on its print books, but the surprise for the company has been that e-book sales have enhanced paper book sales. “I think what happens is that people go in to a bookstore and browse, come home and buy an e-book, and then want to read everything else by the author. I was not expecting that. The book almost advertises itself through being on a store shelf.” Khan notes that he’s mainly speculating on this, but it’s a notable trend.

An important source of revenue for ARC Manor is reprinting titles for the Robert A. Heinlein estate, which is part of what Khan means when he says that his company is “run by the fans of its authors.” He adds, “I’m very lucky in that I get to do what I’m passionate about. I grew up reading science fiction, and I think that gives me a certain connection to our titles. I’m really very proud of the fact that we don’t lose authors. Nearly every author who’s come with us has stayed with us.” Even though ARC Manor can’t pay as much as some of the biggest imprints, they have successes. “One author, one of the biggest sellers, came to me and said shyly, ‘You haven’t published a book of mine.’ I told him I can’t afford to give him an advance! He said, ‘Tell me what you can afford,’ and he told his agent to accept that. We have a very personal relationship with our authors.”

## **ASSOCIATION FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT**

Kay Hechler, senior manager for publications and content at the Association for Talent Development in Alexandria, Va., says that her team’s “communication and connections were so close already” that they didn’t struggle with the new conditions during the pandemic—but they did feel the supply chain shortages that so many of their D.C. counterparts experienced. “Everyone had to shift schedules and hope that everyone, including authors, would be understanding,” she says. “We did figure out some alternatives. For instance, when a book that was supposed to be a trade hardcover would have been delayed too long, we got creative and did a trade paperback with French flaps.”

Since ATD is an association publisher in a niche space, ideas for books weren't a problem. Instead, "the folks we were approaching, who have deep expertise, were suddenly inundated with requests from clients," Hechler says. "Some of them shifted on a dime and embraced the change. All of them needed to understand that they have to put themselves out there a lot more to market their books."

One of ATD's current big sellers is *Diversity Equity and Inclusion for Trainers: Fostering DEI in the Workplace* by Maria Morukian. "It's the first book ever on how trainers should incorporate DEI into training," Hechler notes, "and the author has taken a sensitive subject and handled it beautifully." She emphasizes that ATD "seeks out thought leadership in talent management and talent development," and that there's no other organization doing the same. "Our commitment to this field and its mission to publish books by important voices in the field makes ATD unique."

## **THE CATO INSTITUTE**

A big change for the publications team at the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute is that *The Cato Handbook for Policy Makers*

(once called *The Cato Handbook for Congress*), published in eight editions so far, has gone "primarily online," says distinguished senior fellow David Boaz. "We'll still print copies, but our real deadline will be getting it up on the web in time for a new president or a new Congress. We will still distribute printed copies to congressional offices and others, but we're assuming that members of congressional staffs and journalists are really going to access it online."

Beyond book publishing, the Cato Institute has been experimenting with new ways of presenting studies online. Boaz notes that, instead of including "the occasional chart and figure," his team will now think of studies as "online products, complete with charts, figures, photographs, video links, and other relevant material."

What makes D.C. special for librarians and other publishing professionals is "how many public intellectuals we have here who are skilled at putting their work into written form," Boaz says. "So our books are pretty wonkish, but that's what we do, and sometimes they address the present moment perfectly, like last year's *Frederick Douglass: Self-Made Man* by Timothy Sandefur," which now has 9,000 copies in print.

## **DIAMOND BOOK DISTRIBUTORS**

"Before the pandemic even created supply chain challenges, we've been looking at wider environmental concerns for our business," says Tony Lutkus, president of Diamond Book Distributors in Hunt Valley, Md. "We knew we had to start thinking about how to become greener, and that meant changing how we supply and how we create books." The "big, big thing," he adds, was to learn how to plan as early as possible.

In this time of disruption, Lutkus says Diamond is working even closer with its publishers. "We are working with our client publishers to investigate POD options and address their concerns

about the quality of POD printing for graphic novels and manga,” he notes. “Readers have set a high bar, and they demand quality paper, printing, and binding for these kinds of books.”

At the same time, Diamond found that the increase in book sales has been “phenomenal,” Lutkus says, adding, “It spoke to me about the resilience of books during troubled times. I still think books have been and will continue to be something that people go to when times are difficult. It’s an escape, but we also go to books to learn about our culture, to learn what other people think and understand and communicate.”

Lutkus brings up an important topic: “Right now, libraries are being picketed, and we’re concerned about these protests, especially around ALA, because books are more than images. They’re about ideas. And the places where we keep books need to remain safe spaces—places where we can look at things that are interesting to use without being monitored or watched.”

Diamond’s art-rich titles also, Lutkus says, reach reluctant readers in new ways, and “librarians have always been great at supporting reluctant readers,” not to mention being supporters of graphic novels as “a serious art form that has its own literary merits.”

Not only does Diamond have its *Bookshelf* newsletter, which is widely read by librarians, but it provides regular virtual presentations for many library-centric audiences. It even has a TikTok channel. “It’s a natural for us because it integrates the written with the graphic,” Lutkus says.

## **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY PRESS**

“One of the reasons I took this job,” says Al Bertrand, director of Georgetown University Press, “is because we are the preeminent scholarly publisher in the nation’s capital.” In that role, Bertrand and his team have intensified efforts to publish books about D.C.’s history and culture, with the aim of doing five to six titles on the subjects annually.

Bertrand says that though D.C. may be well known as a seat of government, its different cultures and their histories haven’t been well-enough explored. One of Georgetown’s recent titles, *Indigenous DC*, highlights traces of Native American groups all over the city.

“We see part of our mission to be publishing things about D.C., things that help people understand their own community,” Bertrand says. Last year, the press’s *Georgetown’s History* included an important section on the Maryland Jesuits and their unfortunate history of owning enslaved people.

Other aspects of local history that Bertrand wants to cultivate are music—“We have a book under contract on go-go music,” he says—and sports, with Maurice Jackson, who teaches at Georgetown and is affiliated professor of music at the university, working on a proposal for a history of sports in D.C. But Georgetown University Press also publishes many other titles on many other subjects. “I think university presses can really help to further the mission of their universities, and we’re trying to deepen our relationship with Georgetown faculty,” Bertrand says. “We also want to deepen our relationship with our city.”

## INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Because the pandemic has been “very disruptive” to regular International Monetary Fund publishing operations, “we made a big plunge into fully digital versions, and we were pushed to really beef up some of our in-progress changes and make even more,” says Linda Kean Griffin, division chief of publishing at the IMF. “I think people quickly got accustomed to holding up the image of a book cover on a tablet instead of holding the actual book.”

Hosting virtual events was a very positive pivot for IMF publishing. “Our meetings can have tens of thousands of participants,” Kean Griffin says, “and now, people in different locations and time zones can still participate. In that sense, we broadened our outreach and our conversations around publications.”

The IMF coupled digital meetings with a commitment to faster publication, too. “We quickly moved from longer lead times and bigger volumes to really short, faster-produced analysis and policy advice,” Kean Griffin says. “Getting information out to our member countries when the pandemic struck was important. We now realize there is a need for these sort of quick takes. Even if they become outdated, they give people information in an actionable time frame—and they can be updated.”

Virtual events and digital outreach result in “a lot more impact and real-time usage data,” Kean Griffin notes. “We get a lot more feedback. We’re learning more about how different audiences use our content and we’re going to try and probe that to really meet their needs.” She adds that some regions might need print content, some might need more metadata, and others might prefer a title that collects a series of other material.

IMF publishing is institutional, and also educational. “We want and need to broaden our outreach, and that means more work for us,” Kean Griffin says. “So the question is what can make our work more efficient? We want to stay digital.” As an example of what this might mean for libraries, the IMF’s e-library platform is now without a paywall, opening a big resource to all librarians.

Kean Griffin’s colleague, communications officer Patricia Loo, explains that IMF “collects a lot of guides for librarians to help them put together our materials by topic and keywords to use in their searches.” She adds, “Before the pandemic, we often had open house meetings with our D.C.-area institutional library colleagues. Now, in a virtual world, maybe those can go beyond this region.”

Some of the key topics that the IMF will release publications on in the near future include FinTech, digital money, high debt levels, gender and income equality, and governance and corruption. Since the IMF press is a “nonprofit, institutional publisher,” Kean Griffin notes, “we want to focus on making the best use of all of our resources, focusing on the impact of ideas and materials to make our publications as robust as possible. Washington, D.C. is the home of policy-oriented publishing, which is exciting, as it’s a small community that allows us to be more agile and flexible because we’re not held to the bottom line.”

## ISLAND PRESS

Island Press remains committed to sustainability, and thus committed to publishing things in shorter forms as well as books, says president David Miller. “We had a major funder who challenged us, asking, how can you take somebody who has a really important idea and get it out there sooner?” Miller says. The answer was to begin a “short-form program” that focuses on “anything less than book length, including white papers, op-eds, guest columns, and more.”

Island works with authors, but also “any thought leader who’s doing interesting work,” Miller notes. Along with a dedicated program editor, the press has a communications lead who focuses on placing short pieces in the media, “everywhere from the *Washington Post* to a newspaper in South Dakota about the drought,” Miller says, noting that over 500 pieces have found a home over the past seven years.

Not only have those people gained credibility but several of them have moved “from being relatively unknown to writing a book for Island Press,” Miller says. “It’s become an important source of building intellectual capital for us, the kind that every publishing house wants.”

The press has also found important ways to work with its partners. “Last year, we countered information that came out from the previous administration’s offices about the environment by working with the Environmental Protection Network, a group of people who left the EPA due to disagreements with administration policies,” Miller says. “We did 52 pieces with them last year, one of which landed at the *Washington Post* and was read at a committee on Capitol Hill.”

As Island Press moves to use robust content outside of traditional books, it also continues to publish those traditional books in meaningful ways. “We’re not simply publishing academic and technical works,” Miller says. “We have a very active and successful list of trade books.”

One trade title that librarians may want to take note of is a biography of urban planner William White by journalist Richard Ryan; another is Dan Chapman’s new book about environmentalist John Muir’s journey through the American South. There’s also a fun title about sustainable spirits, with cocktail recipes.

## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BOOKS

National Geographic Books saw “a huge surge in sales” during the pandemic, says publisher and editorial director Lisa Thomas. “In fact, we had a national bestseller called *Fifty States, 5,000 Ideas*. I think we’re at 400,000 copies sold now, but the important thing to note is that it was originally published in 2017. So many people wanted to get outside during these long years of isolation that another book we originally published in 2008, *Journeys of a Lifetime*, and its associated titles did well, I think because people were sort of dreaming about what they would do when they could travel again.”

Thomas adds, “The start of the pandemic coincided with spring migration, and all of a sudden we saw interest in our bird books, which has been delightful for us.” She and her team experienced a migration of sorts themselves when, in 2020, Disney Worldwide Publishing acquired National

Geographic Books. While that's a big change at the corporate level, "We've always seen DC as a sort of base camp for our business as well as our explorers," Thomas says. "We have scientists and storytellers and authors and explorers coming in from everywhere in the world, but everybody crisscrosses through D.C. I feel this is a very international city that has a global perspective, and Disney encourages us to think on a global basis as a publisher in a supercharged way."

Librarians and research are at the heart of National Geographic and its mission, and National Geographic Books is eager to serve the ALA community, especially by hearing what's important to librarians during the upcoming conference. Reference books, including 2023's *Great Outdoors USA* (which details 1,000 outdoor adventures, 20 for each state), remain at the heart of National Geographic's frontlist and backlist. One book that librarians may be particularly interested in checking out is the fall title *Stargazers' Atlas*, which Thomas says will be a great resource for those interested in the night sky as well as a complement to the other National Geographic atlases.

Thomas is particularly excited to present *The Catch Me If You Can: One Woman's Journey to Visit Every Country on Earth* by Jessica Nabongo. "She is the first Black woman to visit all 195 countries on the earth," Thomas says. "When she decided on this goal, around 2014, she had visited 30 countries, so she created a blog and a network of friends all over the globe. One person might let her know of a friend in Pakistan whose couch she could stay on. She goes out into the world at a time of terrible racial unrest in the United States, when her own country is a scary place, and finds the kindness of strangers everywhere she goes. When she loaded a plane with 30 friends and touched down on the Seychelles, her final destination, everyone applauded."

## **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC KIDS**

"As publishers, so much of our work is behind the scenes," says Becky Baines, v-p and editorial director of National Geographic Kids Books. "We don't always get to see the audience that it touches. We love and respect our librarian audiences, and we've really missed seeing them. They don't hesitate to give us feedback, and that's important."

Like National Geographic Books, NG Kids is part of Disney Worldwide Publishing, but Baines says the only thing that's changed since the acquisition is "enthusiasm for the product," adding, "We've always been a kids' content engine at a company that focused on adult content, but with Disney, there's been a renewed passion for what we do."

Disney's "story-driven" business has also helped NG Kids "craft a narrative we can apply to the nonfiction business," Baines notes. "We've even spread our wings over the past couple of years and developed a program we call 'fact-based fiction,' the kinds of stories kids want that still have roots in nonfiction." The inspiration for these books came from close to home, the annual National Geographic Explorers Academy festival, "which is a week of events and activities where our explorers from around the globe come back to home base, essentially." For example, the fact-based fiction program shows off some of the tools and gadgets that the explorers use in the field, like a helmet designed to help communicate with whales.

“We decided to build a world around exploration and give kids a really dynamic story that drives them through it,” Baines says. “It can seem fantastical and super sci-fi, but it is all rooted in fact and reality and things that are actually happening.” The books include relatable and diverse characters along with puzzles and ciphers embedded in the narrative to solve. Next year NG Kids will publish the seventh book in the series, and it has also announced a second story arc in the same Explorer Academy universe, this one with a main character from New Zealand named Sailor York.

Another series in the fact-based fiction realm is Zeus the Mighty, about a group of animals that live in a pet-rescue facility. By day, they’re hoping to be adopted; by night, they think they’re Greek gods and goddesses. “It’s like *The Secret Life of Pets* combined with *D’Aulaire’s Greek Myths*” Baines says, adding that the podcast that goes with it, *Greeking Out*, is one of the most popular podcasts for kids.

Also in the fact-based fiction camp is Izzy Newton and the Smart Squad, which follows a group of girls, each of whom is named after a famous inventor, who solve mysteries using science. “These books are written by Valerie Tripp, of *American Girls* fame, and she’s in tune with what kids want,” Baines notes.

## **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES**

The National Endowment for the Humanities isn’t technically a publisher, except in the realm of magazines: its quarterly *Humanities* features long-form articles on projects the organization funds, think pieces on trends and historical periods, and often excerpts from books it has helped fund through its vital and dynamic grants.

Books can be funded through NEH’s public scholars, fellowships, and awards for faculty programs, the latter being divided into categories according to institution type, including historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges, and Hispanic-serving places of higher education.

The fellowship awards each fund scholarly research in a specific area with the intention of creating a book, as is the case with the awards for faculty. The public scholars program, slightly newer than the other two, provides a path for serious humanities research to be written for a more general audience, often published by trade presses. “The authors might be academics, but they can also be journalists, writers, or independent scholars who want to take an in-depth look at a topic, using serious scholarship to write a book that reaches a broad readership,” says Paula Wasley, NEH office of communications deputy director.

The grants awarded by the NEH provide authors with some funding, and can also draw the attention of publishers to particular projects. “We’ve been extremely busy as an agency throughout the pandemic, awarding even more funding than usual because of special Cares Act and the American Rescue Plan appropriations,” Wasley says. “Between those two we’ve distributed about \$210 million in pandemic relief to humanities organizations and institutions, which has been helping educational and cultural institutions maintain their programs and staff during two years of closures and revenue loss.”



A few of the recent titles the NEH will be highlighting at the ALA conference include *The Doctors Blackwell: How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women and Women to Medicine* by Janice P. Nimura, which was funded by an NEH public scholars grant, and *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake* by Tiya Miles, also funded by a public scholars grant. "There's a lot of important and fascinating research being done in all areas of the humanities," Wasley says. "Too often that stays within the boundaries of academia. The public scholars grants allow independent researchers more attention for their subjects."

One result of the higher funding is that many grant recipients have developed more online programming. "A Zoom session with an archivist may not be the same thing as being in the room with a particular object but on the other hand, it can reach a broader audience," Wasley says. "You can go to a talk in Minnesota even if you're sitting in your living room in Maine."

Since the NEH works closely with the National Book Festival, which has been online for the past two years, Wasley's reference is apt, and reinforces how important NEH is to institutions, including libraries, across the country.

## NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS

"Being the United States Naval Institute, most—not all, but most—of our books are printed in the U.S.," says Robin Noonan, director of public relations and marketing at the Naval Institute Press. "Even so, these days we are finding ourselves in contortions to make deadlines for our print runs. There's not a lot of cushion."

Noonan adds that she and her colleagues, including NIP sales director Jack Russell and Gary Thompson, director of the Dead Reckoning graphic novel imprint, can no longer plan events "even a day earlier than publication date—there's no wiggle room." She notes, "Now we're planning more post-publication events, sometimes printing signable book plates just in case, and we're using more global print-on-demand, too, especially for books that have big audiences on other continents."

As one might expect, many of the press's titles have to do with naval topics, but not all of them do—its lists comprise military history and contemporary topics, and with the addition of Dead Reckoning, graphic novels. Various backlist titles also help boost sales, including coffee-table books. "I think people indulged in books during the pandemic because they couldn't go out," Russell says.

Yet new audiences have also expanded NIP's reach, including a younger market for graphic novels like *The Night Witches*. This year, Dead Reckoning graphic novels include *The Lions of Leningrad*, about World War II, and *Stretcher Bearers*, about the "psychological trudge" of young American Expeditionary Force members during World War I's deadly Battle of the Meuse-Argonne.

Other trade titles the press will highlight during the upcoming ALA conference include *Russian Information Warfare: Assault on Democracies in the Cyber Wild West* by Bilyana Lilly; *Blood*

*Money: How Criminals, Militias, Rebels, and Warlords Finance Violence* by Margaret D. Sankey; and *The Journey of Marcel Grob* by Phillipe Colline and Sebastian Goethals, which follows an Alsatian teenager who is conscripted by the Waffen SS, tackling the dilemma of whether one can remain a good person in the service of a bad government.

## **RBMEDIA**

When it comes to listening, consumers have spoken: “*Bridgerton* was a unique phenomenon for us in 2021,” says Troy Juliar, chief content officer of RBmedia, a Landover, Md.–based audiobook publisher and distributor. “It just hit all the right notes for a time when people were stuck at home and needed to escape. And the second season has just come out, so we’re still seeing a lot of activity around the series.”

Juliar adds, “Storytelling is just in kind of a golden era right now, with all of the streaming services, television and cable options. There are so many great books that have been transformed into films or series. We have so many film and TV tie-ins on our list right now. I mentioned *Bridgerton*, but I also have to mention Amazon’s *The Rings of Power*, launching in September, which is their adaptation of Tolkien’s books.”

Adaptations like Amazon’s and others “reinvigorate properties for a new generation,” notes Juliar, who says that with Tolkien the company has a kind of “New Coke, Classic Coke” strategy, with the books recorded by Rob English and now, again, by Andy Serkis (who played Gollum in the Peter Jackson film adaptations).

Juliar is also high on titles appearing in the graphic audio format. “A couple of years ago,” he explains, “we bought a company in D.C. called Graphic Audio, and what they do, and do very well, is audio dramatizations, almost like old-fashioned radio dramas, but with very high production levels and layers, with scene-setting, music and other sound effects. It’s a very different experience from the single-voiced audiobook narration.”

Juliar says RBmedia has almost doubled Graphic Audio’s production. “We pick our titles for it very carefully, including *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah Moss. Moss was very happy and involved with the production of her novel, and when she tweeted about it, her fans just swarmed to it. We believe it’s a one plus one equals three kind of thing, where the fan base will listen to both, enjoy them both, and discuss them both.”

RBmedia is also paying attention to how its English-language market is maturing. “It’s still growing, and it’s growing rapidly, but it’s just a law of large numbers that growth will not necessarily be as large as it has been historically,” Juliar says. Right now it has Spanish and German audiobook companies under its umbrella and is “aggressively funding” more acquisitions in European languages, especially for “authors who cross all international boundaries like Brandon Anderson or Robin Carr.” It also plans to partner with its top authors to do new titles in other languages.

## **ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD/NATIONAL BOOK NETWORK**

Rowman & Littlefield and National Book Network are affiliated companies headquartered in Lanham, Md. R&L is a publisher of professional, academic, and trade books, and NBN is a distributor.

“The craziest story of our 2020 is the immense popularity of our *Weird Al* book,” says R&L senior v-p and publisher Julie Kirsch, discussing *Weird Al: Seriously* by Lily E. Hirsch, noting that sales of the title remain “very strong” due to the upcoming film adaptation starring Daniel Radcliffe. “When we decided to publish that book, we knew it would do well, but somehow it hit a nerve. People needed something light and fun, and it helped that *Weird Al* himself tweeted about it!”

Kirsch says that it’s great to have a light and fun success story to mention, since the pandemic affected many of the publisher’s imprints. “It didn’t hurt that we had some reduced expenses in terms of conferences,” she adds, “but what hurts more than poor sales in some cases is books that can’t be finished because authors weren’t able to travel and complete their research. Or they were ill, or busy caring for loved ones, or had any of a thousand different challenges.”

One example of such a book is *The Opium Queen: The Untold Story of the Rebel Who Ruled the Golden Triangle* by Gabrielle Paluch, which will be on the early 2023 frontlist for the company’s flagship imprint. “We had to bump that book more than once because the author simply couldn’t get to some archives that she needed,” Kirsch says. “Even if she’d been willing to travel, those archives were closed. Her research was what made that book special, so we quite willingly granted her an extension, rather than insisting she finish the book in a manner that would be unsatisfactory to her.”

Kirsch adds that she believes “the fact that people were also, in many cases, willing to admit that they were experiencing mental health challenges tells me that we’re seeing more openness around the country about these things. Which makes me glad that, during times of isolation, we have tools like Zoom. Zoom is great. It’s allowed us to hire remotely, which we were already doing, but we’re doing so more than ever, because I think our workforce is going to be even more distributed geographically than it ever was in this industry.” One 2023 title from R&L, *The Brain Friendly Workplace* by Friederike Fabritius, seeks to find its audience as many industries looking to support neurodiverse employees.

Hiring remotely can also mean cherry picking, however, which is what happened recently when the company hired Richard Brown to boost its religion publishing program. “He’ll allow us to revive and reinvigorate a list that we’d let go a bit,” Kirsch says, “so you can expect to see many more titles from us soon in the areas of religion and spirituality.”

Still, with all the difficulties, Kirsch says, “when we came out of those first few months after shutdown, we ended up having a phenomenal 2020.” And it wasn’t all due to *Weird Al*: “We saw a real surge in e-book sales in June or July of that year, as libraries were moving to purchase more digital titles, especially for faculty and students.”

Jason Brockwell, president of National Book Network, says that one of the “big things” his company is investing in right now is a significant upgrade of its warehouse management system.

“We want to make sure that our non-bookstore customers, who have different capability or requirements than, say, a Barnes & Noble, find us easy to work with, too,” he adds, noting that NBN looks forward to expanding into “more true e-commerce and even direct-to-consumer sales; I think those will be important.”

NBN knows that not all of its customers need thousands of different titles. Some, like Cracker Barrel restaurants, might want hundreds, while Zulily stores might want dozens. “We have approximately a hundred outside clients, including quite a few of the D.C. area publishers,” Brockwell says. Over the past couple of years, he notes, some of those clients, “particularly those with travel guide titles,” went through “some very difficult times.” However, “depending on the categories, some did very well. Books about the outdoors, whether trail guides or local interest, sold well. It was a safe way to get some relief from the isolation.”

Brockwell is happy to report that NBN “had a phenomenal year in 2021,” adding, “Most categories seemed to bounce back, with the exception of international travel, although there are signs that it is improving as of late last year and first quarter this year. We’ve also seen a huge uplift in our backlist, including titles like *The Only Astrology Book You’ll Ever Need* and *The Falcon*, which is from our parent company’s trade imprint.”

Like most publishers and distributors, NBN continues to experience supply chain delays, especially with international shipments. “The one thing that has helped us and our clients is that we do have a print shop in our distribution center,” Brockwell says. “This year we’ve expanded our print-on-demand capacity 40%.” Not every book is appropriate for print-on-demand, but it works well for small runs of academic monographs, textbooks, and reference titles, Brockwell adds.