

A WISH LIST FOR AUSTRALIAN PUBLISHING

Patricia Genat is all of the following: a bookseller, a library supplier, a small publisher, a reader, a teacher, a mother and a traveller. Her day job is as Managing Director of ALS Library Services. She also currently serves as President of the Australian Booksellers Association and has a micro publishing house with two successful non-fiction titles. INCITE asked Patricia to give us an overview of the industry as it is now and what she's wishing for.

Because I wear a number of different hats, I am often asked for my opinion about the Australian book industry. For simplicity, I've assumed that a definition of the Australian book industry includes all of the following: authors, agents, booksellers, libraries, publishers, distributors, printers, and of course, readers. All of this list can exist in physical and/or digital manifestations (except perhaps the readers?).

Recently I have been answering this question with the reply that, because the industry globally is in such flux, it's rather hard to have an opinion. But I do have a clear opinion of what I'd like the industry to be, and thought it worth sharing with you – for discussion, disagreement and clarification.

I'D LIKE THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY TO BE EXCITING AND EXCITABLE, COMMUNICATIVE, AUSTRALIAN, DIGITALLY INNOVATIVE, AND PROFITABLE.

I'd like the Australian industry to be exciting and excitable, communicative, Australian, digitally innovative, and profitable.

EXCITING AND EXCITABLE

Let's encourage the glamour and fizz of our local industry. Let's celebrate the success of publishers and authors and booksellers and marketing campaigns to produce readable and profitable books. The Australian

Book Industry Awards (ABIA) night in late May is a good example of an attempt to make this happen. This year the Australian Publishers Association (APA) has taken full ownership of this annual and rather tired event. I wish them well; I'll be there to be excited.

And the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) has put its marketing resources behind National Bookshop Day on 9 August. This fourth year of celebrating bookshops in their local community, concentrates our focus on children's books – what better way to grow the next generation of readers than to excite them about finding and reading Australian authors?

COMMUNICATIVE

When I asked the ABA Management Committee what their priority might be for an excellent Australian book industry, communication took priority. We recognise that we don't always do that very well. We offer seminars on social media, marketing plan writing, more social media and roundtable discussions across the supply chain.

And yet we're still bad at it. I can turn up at an event in another state and no one says hello, where are you from, who can I connect you with? I grumble about a bad data feed but forget to ring the publisher direct and ask them to fix it. Or conversely, I use the customer service hotline email address and it takes nine days to make a simple ISBN change – really! Maybe we all need to be a little more forgiving and less paranoid about our words and a little more gracious about sharing thoughts and mistakes.

AUSTRALIAN

No compromises here. Sure we want to be a part of the global industry and some of us have owners based in other countries that dictate how we do business here, but without raising nationalistic fervour and flag-waving, let's be committed to our Australian base.

We should never ever send a reader to an overseas website to purchase a book – ever! We have plenty of excellent physical and web-based bookshops from which to purchase. Those companies pay taxes here, employ your nephews and nieces, and support your local fete and community programs.

Life would be less without local publishers and retailers. The difference in price is not worth the sacrifice of a community. Enough said.

DIGITALLY INNOVATIVE

Be brave publishers and booksellers, be strong librarians, be demanding and generous readers. I'm asking suppliers to try new things – new supply models, new software iterations, authors to play the field with print on demand (POD) and digital distribution, publishers to let their titles loose in digital library collections with state of the art marketing initiatives to collect readership data.

All suppliers, however small, need to remember that the Australian Tax Office still requires an audit trail of order, receipt and payment despite it happening in a local cloud. Please, please, provide proper invoices, packing slips and payment receipts. We should all be prepared to take some digital risks and make a few digital mistakes but still maintain good business practices.

PROFITABLE

This week I received a call from wealthy retailer who wanted a free lunch. The book industry doesn't really do a lot of free lunches, thankfully. When we have money to throw around we tend to spend it on software systems, upgrades, our websites and our supply chain (I hope). I'm quite sure that a large majority of those employed in the industry are readers and book lovers, but we all have taxes and/or mortgages to pay and are generally law-abiding companies and individuals committed to an often slightly utopian view of the bookish world. A book, like any other product needs to be sustainable and profitable, otherwise the industry won't be either.

Andy Warhol said 'Making money is art, and working is art and good business is the best art'.

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