

Collective Book Studio Tries A Different Approach



“I think only an insider like myself—and my team—can really disrupt the industry,” said Collective Book Studio publisher Angela Engel, who has previously held senior sales and marketing positions at Cameron + Co., Chronicle Books, Ten Speed Press, and elsewhere. “Disruption is

needed. We need to move the needle.”

Engel bills her two-year-old company, headquartered in Oakland, Calif., as a “partnership publisher,” available to those who want to bypass the traditional path to publication but don’t want to take the risks inherent in self-publishing.



Angela Engel

“It’s custom publishing with a trade arm added,” she explained.

Though the pandemic made CBS curb its output to three fall titles last year, it has completed 50 projects in its first two years, with 20 planned for 2021. More than 60% of its list is published in partnership with author clients. The rest is evenly divided between custom packaging projects and titles featuring CBS’s original content.

Authors who work with CBS pay a “creative fee,” and in return the company shepherds their books through the developmental editing stage and on to marketing and publicity—a process that typically takes 15 months. Author retain the rights to all intellectual property. CBS’s fee varies, depending on the extent of editorial and design services provided, as well as on any illustrations added. Similarly, royalties range between 20% and 50%, depending on the amount of the fee and CBS’s own financial outlay on a given project.

Like Engel, most members of CBS’s 12-person team have backgrounds in traditional publishing and packaging at such companies as Cameron + Co., Chronicle, Harper, Random House, Ten Speed, and Weldon Owen. Engel said she is able to retain seasoned industry veterans because at CBS, they can select which projects they work on. “That’s why we’re called the Collective Book Studio,” she added. “We’re a collective.”

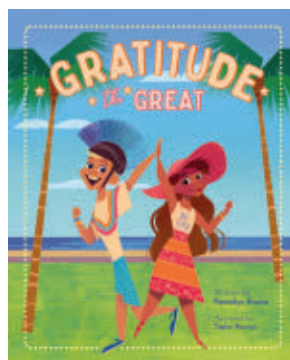
It is that collective power that authors are paying for when they sign on with CBS, Engel said. “They’re paying to have access to traditional publishing people who are not just offering a service to get on an Amazon platform. We’re leveling the playing field.” One of her goals is to open up the publishing process to a wide range of people. “Why are we not giving access to publishing to entrepreneurs, to business owners, to restaurants, and letting them know we can serve them, that we can be a partner in publishing?”

Engel said that CBS’s acquisition process is highly selective, just as it is with most traditional publishers. The company specializes in lifestyle, nonfiction (except memoir), and children’s books. “We are a traditional publishing house in many ways,” she added. “We create content just like any traditional house, and we are extremely picky when it comes to submissions. We choose our clients as much as they choose us.”

And, Engel added, “When you come to us and you talk titles, you get everybody—from marketing, design, editorial, and sales”—and distribution: IPG began distributing CBS titles to the trade last fall.

Since CBS works with many illustrated titles, Engel has one ironclad rule when it comes to production: offset only, no print on demand. “The book is an art form,” she said. Initial print runs for titles headed to the trade market range from 4,000 to 10,000 copies.

CBS’s varied approach to publishing is working. On the custom packaging side, it has just finished a board book *Baby Animals* series for Costco. New books finished in



collaboration with authors include *Parenting with Sanity & Joy* by Susan G. Groner, which has been sold into Target stores, with endcap placement for Mother’s Day promotions, and *Gratitude the Great* by Pamelyn Rocco, who will be a keynote speaker at the California Independent Booksellers Alliance and Pacific

Northwest Booksellers Association’s virtual spring forum in early April.

Investor advisor Fran Hauser, author of the bestselling *Myth of the Nice Girl: Achieving a Career You Love Without Becoming a Person You Hate*, signed on with CBS in February; her career workbook for women is scheduled for release in March 2022. “Three million women have been forced out of the workplace in the past year, so I wanted to get this book out sooner than later,” Hauser told *PW*. “What I love about CBS is that I get the same quality I would working with a traditional publisher, but they’re so agile: they can get this book out in a year. And I like the idea of owning the IP. I’m seeing some logical brand extensions, and I can do what I want. Sometimes it makes sense to go with a traditional publisher who takes the financial risk. And sometimes partnership publishing makes sense—especially when it’s time sensitive. I’m open to both models.” —Claire Kirch