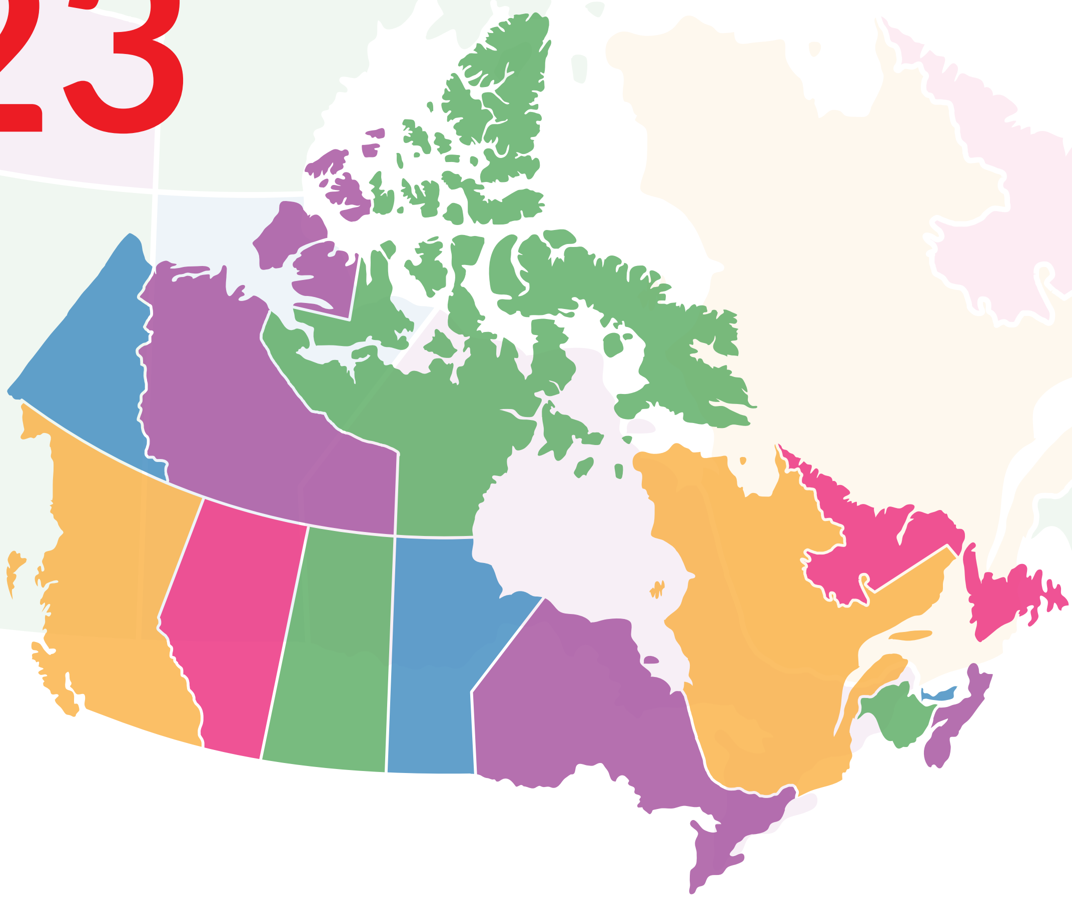
RESEARCH & EDUCATION

The State of Publishing in Canada 2023



BOOKNET CANADA

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Introduction

The State of Publishing in Canada 2023 marks the eighth edition of BookNet Canada's State of Publishing industry survey, fielded every other year. Formerly *The State of Digital Publishing in Canada* and following *The State of Publishing in Canada 2021*, this new edition of the study continues to expand its focus and monitor the health of publishers in Canada.

Offering a comprehensive look at the Canadian English-language publishing landscape, this study includes data from Canadian-based publishers of all sizes and explores publishers' operations and staffing; revenue and sales; distribution; format-specific publishing programs; and more.

Methodology

This study includes data from BookNet Canada's survey, The State of Publishing in Canada 2023, found in Appendix A.

The survey was fielded via an online survey platform from April to September 2024, querying Canadian-based publishers about their performance in 2023. It was shared directly with publishers in Canada, promoted through BookNet Canada's online email and social media communication channels, and shared with industry organizations and associations.

Altogether, aggregated responses from 41 publishers are included in this study. According to SalesData, BookNet Canada's national sales tracking service for the Canadian English-language trade book market, the publishers included in this study represent approximately 54% of the English-language print book market. SalesData itself is estimated to cover 85% of the Canadian trade print book market.

As in past studies, publishers have been segmented based on their self-reported gross revenue and have been accorded the terms “small,” “mid-sized,” and “large”:

- Small: $0-$999,999
- Mid-sized: $1M-$9,999,999
- Large: $10M or more

In *The State of Publishing in Canada 2023*, 63% of respondents fall within the small publishers category, 27% in the mid-sized publishers category, and 10% in the large publishers category.

Throughout this study:

- Sample sizes of questions vary based on the number of responses.
- Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- Percentages may add up to more than 100% for questions where respondents could select more than one response.
- Year-over-year comparisons to prior surveys are shared whenever possible.

This study was prepared by BookNet Canada staff.

Highlights

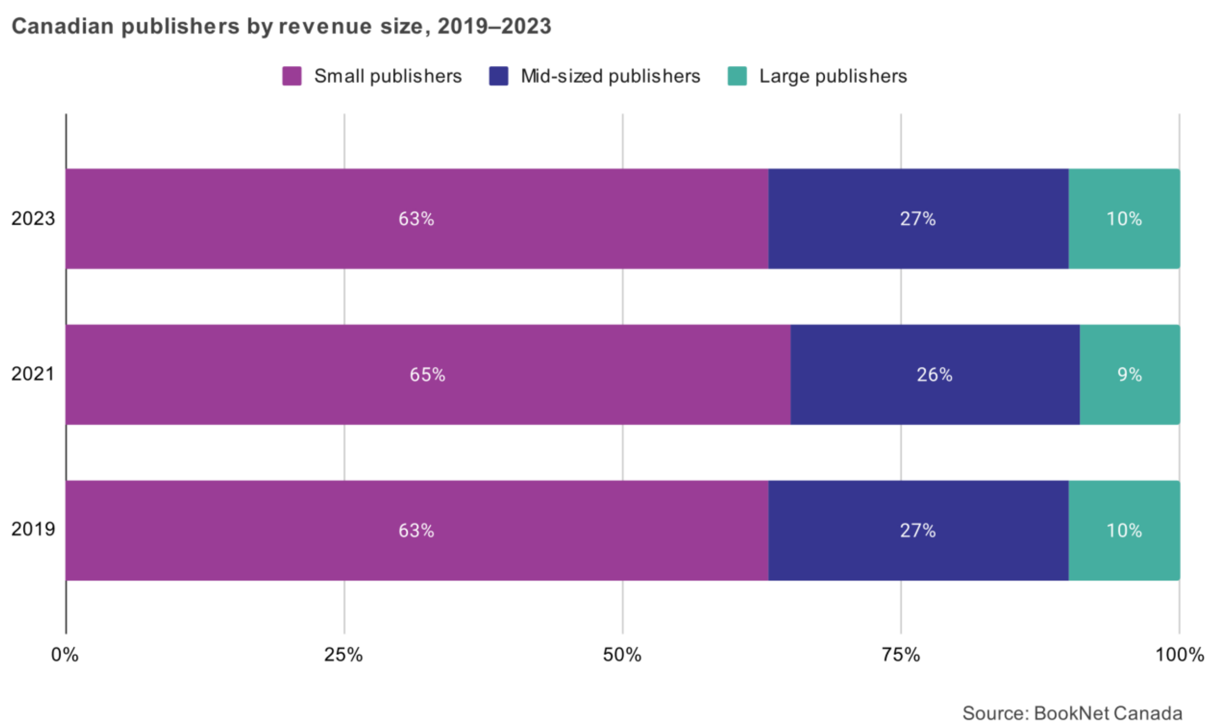
- Most publishers reported that their revenue increased marginally from 2022 to 2023.
- The majority of publishers had staff who worked both in-person and remotely (68%).
- Looking at memberships and associations, we found that 85% of all publishers belonged to at least one organization.
- The most popular way publishers were considering leveraging AI was for marketing materials (49%).
- Canadian publishing divisions published on average 35 books in 2023 and multinational companies published an average of 752 books across all divisions in Canada in 2023.
- Mid-sized publishers had the highest percentage of new books by at least one Canadian contributor (84%) and small publishers followed at 79%.
- Most of the books printed by the publishers we surveyed were published in Canada in 2023 (74%).
- Over three quarters of publishers have scaled down their print runs to decrease waste, mitigate risks, limit overstock, and increase efficiencies (79%).
- The average return rate in 2023, as a percentage of books shipped for all trade publishers, was 9%, down quite a bit from 16% in 2021.
- Almost half of all publishers surveyed saw an increase in ebook revenue from 2022 to 2023 (44%).
- Publishers employed accessibility features more often in their ebooks and audiobooks in 2023 than they did in 2021.
- Audiobook revenue for publishers increased when comparing 2022 to 2023.
- Over half of Canadian publishers produced audiobooks in 2023 (58%), up slightly from 53% in 2021.
- The majority of publishers described the health of their company as fair based on their ability to withstand challenges, adapt, and change (63%).

Profile of publishers

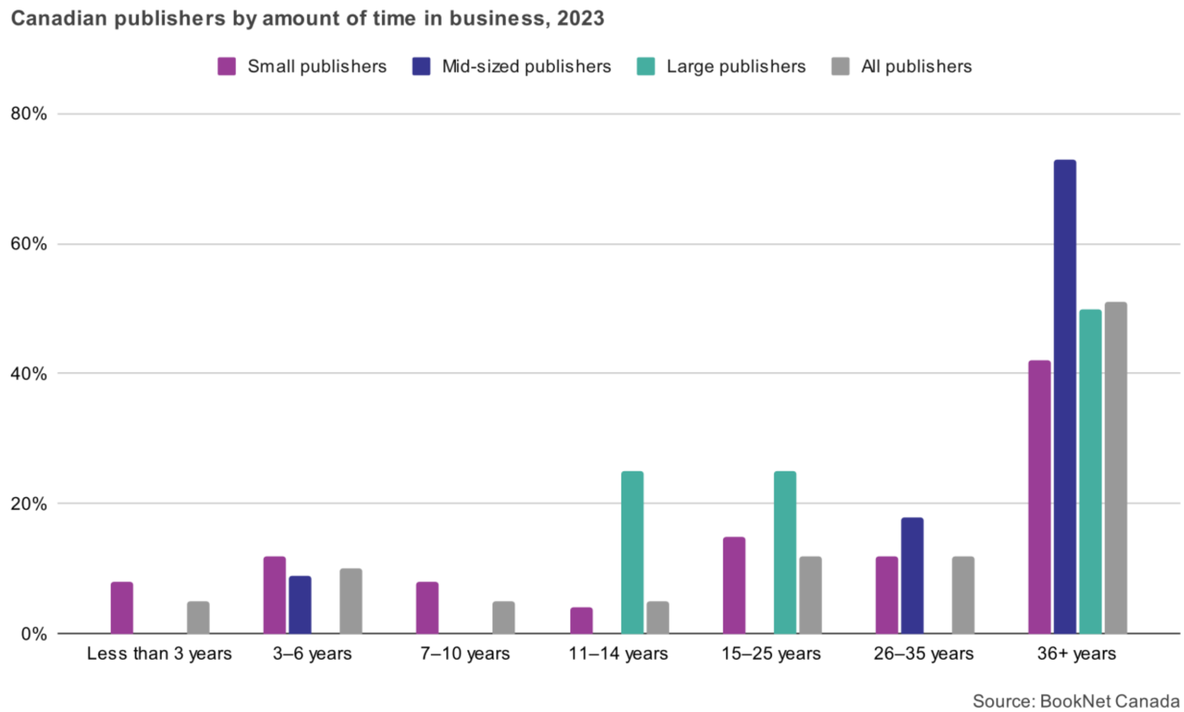
All told, 41 publishers in Canada responded to our State of Publishing survey, which represents approximately 54% of the Canadian English-language trade print book market.

As in previous years, our respondents were mostly small publishers. We classified small publishers as those with a gross revenue between $0 and $999,999, mid-sized publishers as those with a gross revenue between $1M and $9,999,999, and large publishers as a gross revenue of $10M or more.

In 2023, small publishers made up 63% of our survey respondents, mid-sized publishers came in at 27%, and large publishers made up 10% of respondents. These figures were roughly the same breakdown as our last two reports as shown in the graph below.



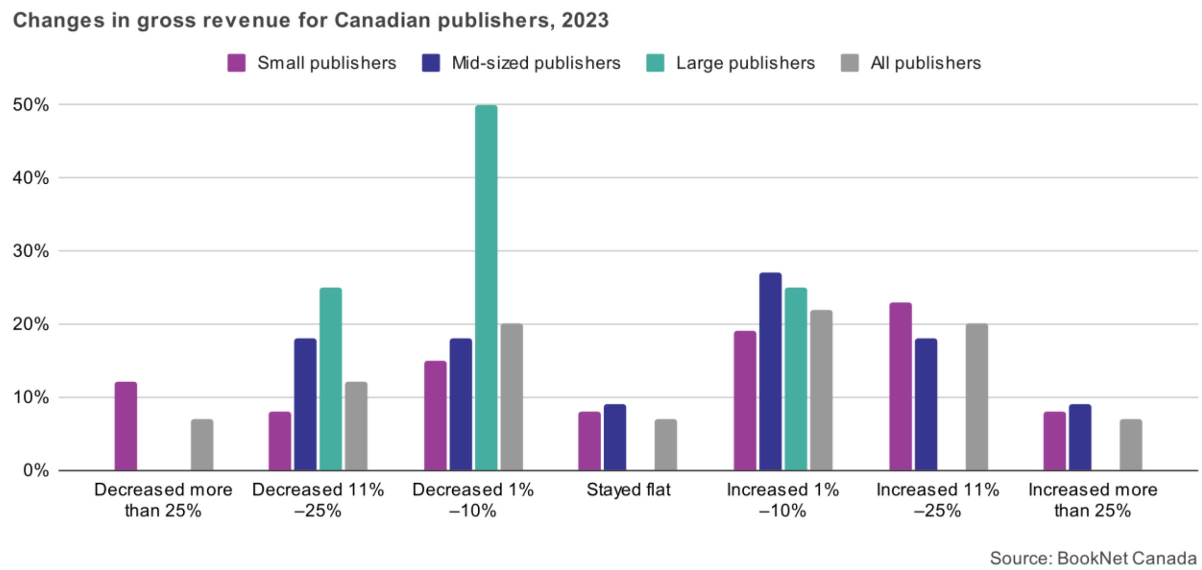
Though the majority of our publishing company respondents were small, they were not new. Over half of the publishing houses who responded to our survey had been in business for 36 years or more (51%). Mid-sized publishers were the group most likely to have been in business the longest, 73% have been around for 36 or more years. A small percentage of small publishers had been in business for less than 3 years (8%).



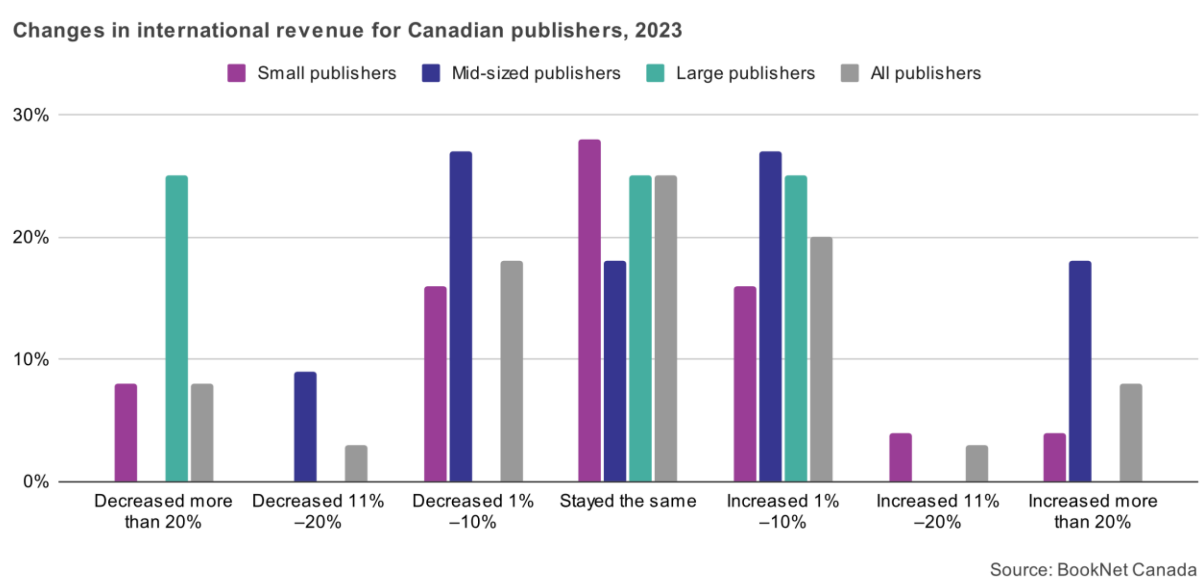
Revenue

Most publishers we surveyed showed that their revenue increased marginally from 2022 to 2023: 42% of all publishers saw their revenue increase up to 25%. Half of all large publishers who responded to our survey, however, saw their revenue decrease up to 10% (50%).

There were very few publishers who saw their revenue decrease by more than 25% or increase by more than 25%.



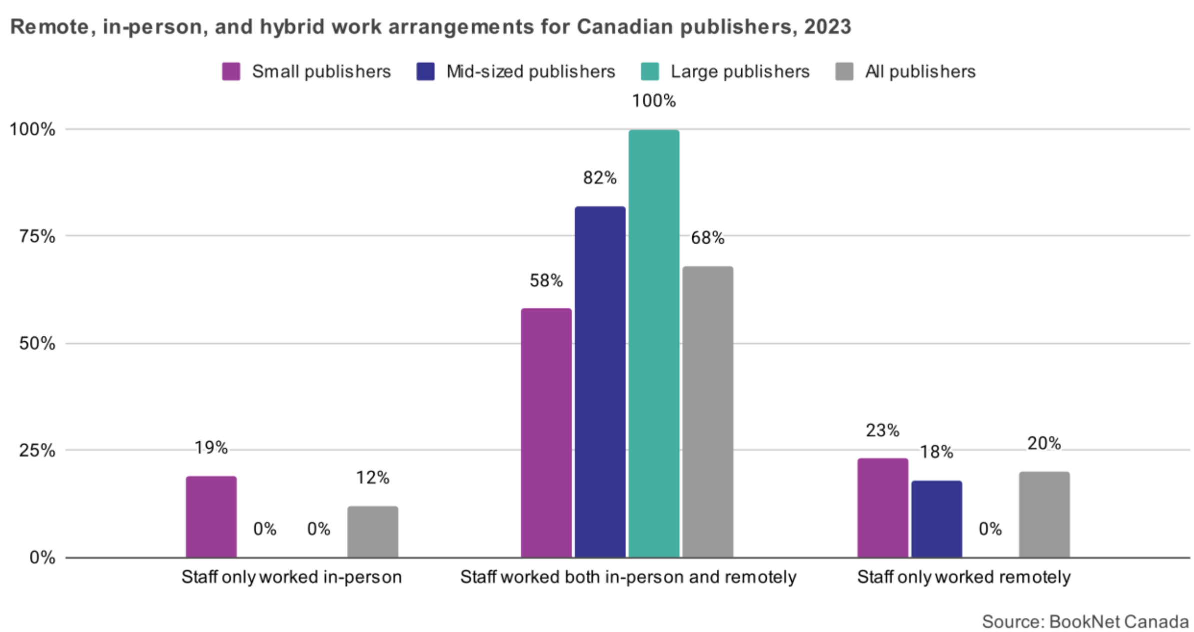
Looking outside of Canada to international revenue streams, on average, publishers estimated that 26% of their gross revenue was from sales in international markets. Mid-sized publishers reported the highest percentage of revenue from international sales at an average of 48%. The graph below shows the change in international revenue for all Canadian publishers in 2023. For those publishers who sold to international markets, most reported that their revenue from these sales either stayed the same (25%) or increased (20%) from 2022 to 2023.



Location and remote work

The majority of the publishers who responded to our survey had their headquarters either in Ontario (34%) or British Columbia (29%). All large publishers were based in Ontario (100%), while 15% of small publishers were located in Alberta.

For the first time in our survey, we asked employers about remote and hybrid work arrangements. The majority of respondents had staff who worked both in-person and remotely (68%). This was true for all large publishers (100%), 82% of mid-sized publishers, and 58% of small publishers. Small publishers were most likely to have staff who worked only remotely (23%) followed by mid-sized publishers at 18%. Small publishers were also the only group to report that all staff worked only in person (19%).

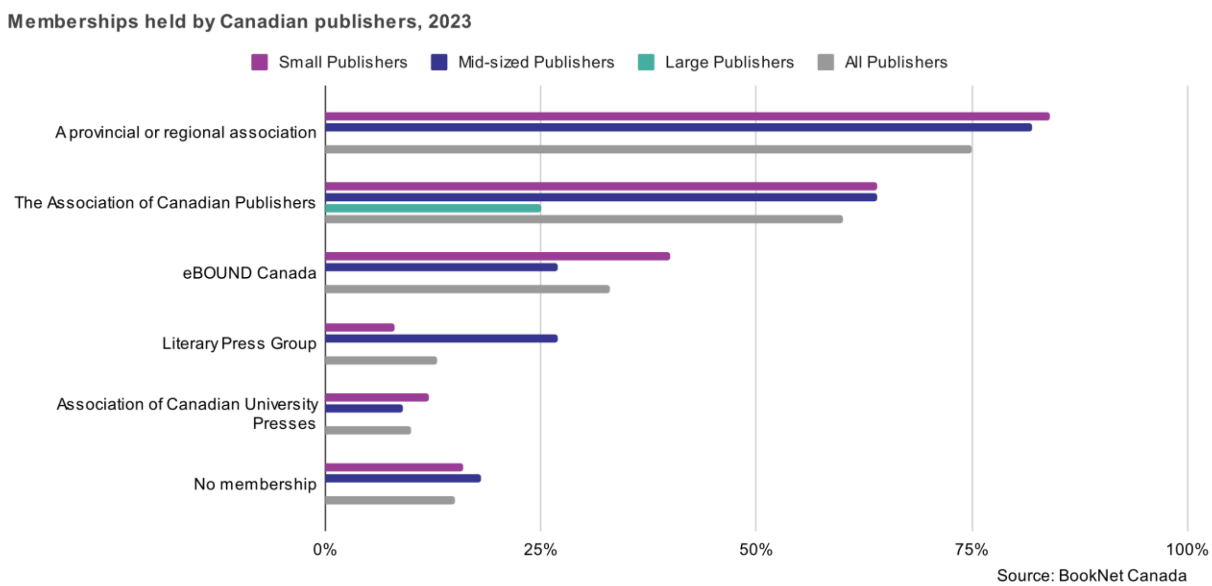


Associations

Looking at memberships and associations, we found that 85% of all publishers belonged to at least one organization. The majority were members of a provincial or regional association (75%), and over half belonged to the Association of Canadian Publishers (60%). Additionally, 33% were eBOUND Canada members.

Small publishers were the most likely to belong to a provincial or regional association (84%) but they were followed closely by mid-sized publishers at 82%. Large publishers were the only group that belonged to the Canadian Publishers' Council (75%).

The graph below shows the top five most popular associations across all publishers in 2023. These numbers are similar to what we found in 2021, though the overall membership has declined to 85% in 2023 from 95% in 2021 and 90% in 2019.

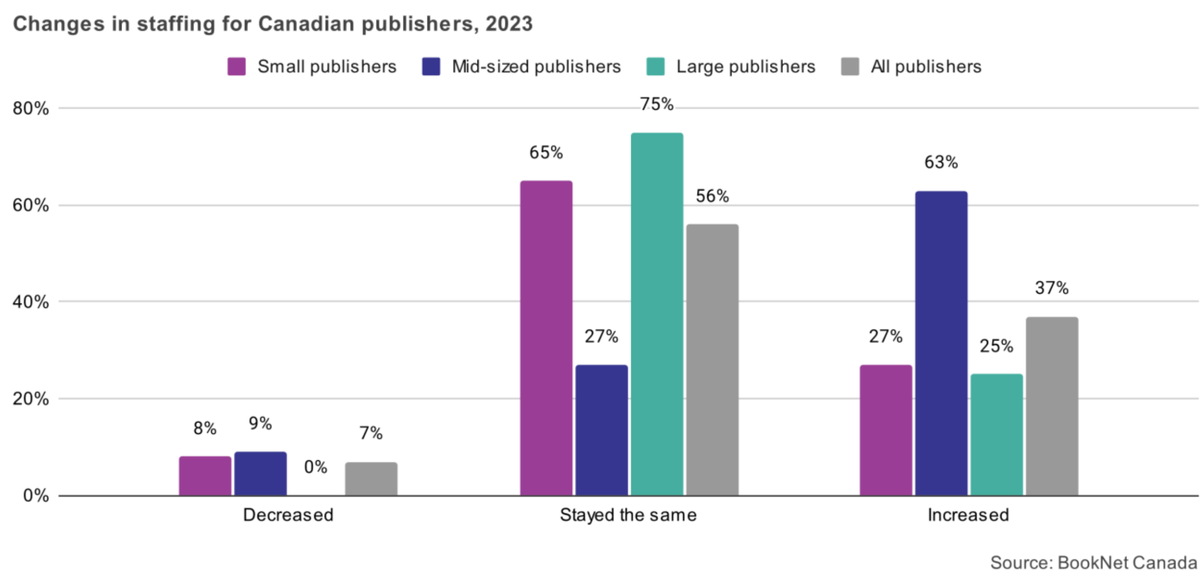


Staffing and employees

Out of all publishers who responded to the survey, respondents had an average of 28.9 full time and 8.2 part time employees. This staff make-up stayed the same between 2022 and 2023 for 56% of publishers. Staff count increased for 37% of publishers and decreased for just 7%.

Perhaps obviously, the number of employees increased with the size of the business. In 2023, small publishers had an average of 10.0 full time and 6.3 part time staff, mid-sized publishers had an average of 18.8 full time and 3.4 part time staff, and large publishers had an average of 179.3 full time and 34.3 part time staff.

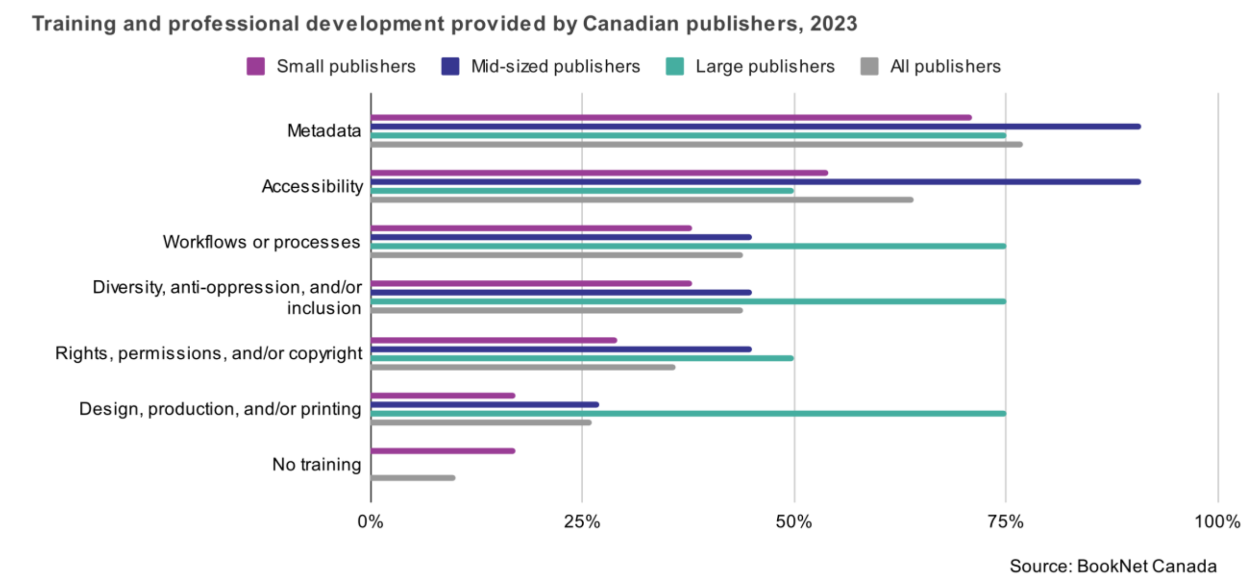
Small and mid-sized publishers were most likely to have seen decreases in their staffing from 2022 to 2023, but they were also most likely to have seen increases of more than 11% (19% of small publishers and 9% of mid-sized publishers). No publisher who replied to our survey saw a decrease in staffing of more than 20% from 2022 to 2023. Large publishers were most likely to have stayed the same (75%).



Training and development

The vast majority of publishers provided training and professional development to their staff in 2023 (90%). Across publishers of all sizes, the most popular topics that staff training addressed were metadata (77%) and accessibility (64%). Diversity and inclusion (44%) and workflows or processes (44%) both tied for the third spot. The top five most popular trainings are shown in the graph below.

Mid-sized publishers provided the most training on metadata (91%) and accessibility (91%), while small publishers were the only ones to report focusing on AI (4%) and open access (4%). Large publishers were more likely to train their staff on workflows and processes (75%); design, production, and/or printing (75%); and diversity, anti-oppression, and/or inclusion (75%).



While there was not much training provided on AI to publishing employees in 2023, publishers were thinking about how best to leverage the technology. The top areas for leveraging AI were in marketing materials, for example summary blurbs, promotion plans, etc. (49%) and metadata creation and management (19%).

Small publishers were thinking of ways to implement AI across more areas than mid-sized and large publishers, though over half of small publishers were not considering leveraging AI at all (55%).

Areas considered for leveraging AI technologies by Canadian publishers, 2023

	Small publishers	Mid-sized publishers	Large publishers	All publishers
Marketing	41%	64%	50%	49%
Metadata creation and management	18%	18%	25%	19%
Audiobook production	23%	9%	0%	16%
Identifying comparable titles	18%	9%	25%	16%
Generating translations	9%	9%	0%	8%
Book design	9%	0%	0%	5%
Manuscript acquisition and review	5%	0%	0%	3%
Ebook production	5%	0%	0%	3%
Determining print runs	5%	0%	0%	3%
Setting selling prices	0%	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	55%	36%	25%	46%

n=37

Publishing books

Canadian publishing divisions published on average 35 books in 2023 and multinational companies published an average of 752 books across all divisions in Canada in 2023.

The majority of publishers who completed our survey described their company's focus to be adult trade publishing (78%). Just over a third published children's trade titles (35%) and a quarter identified their market focus to be scholarly/higher education titles (25%).

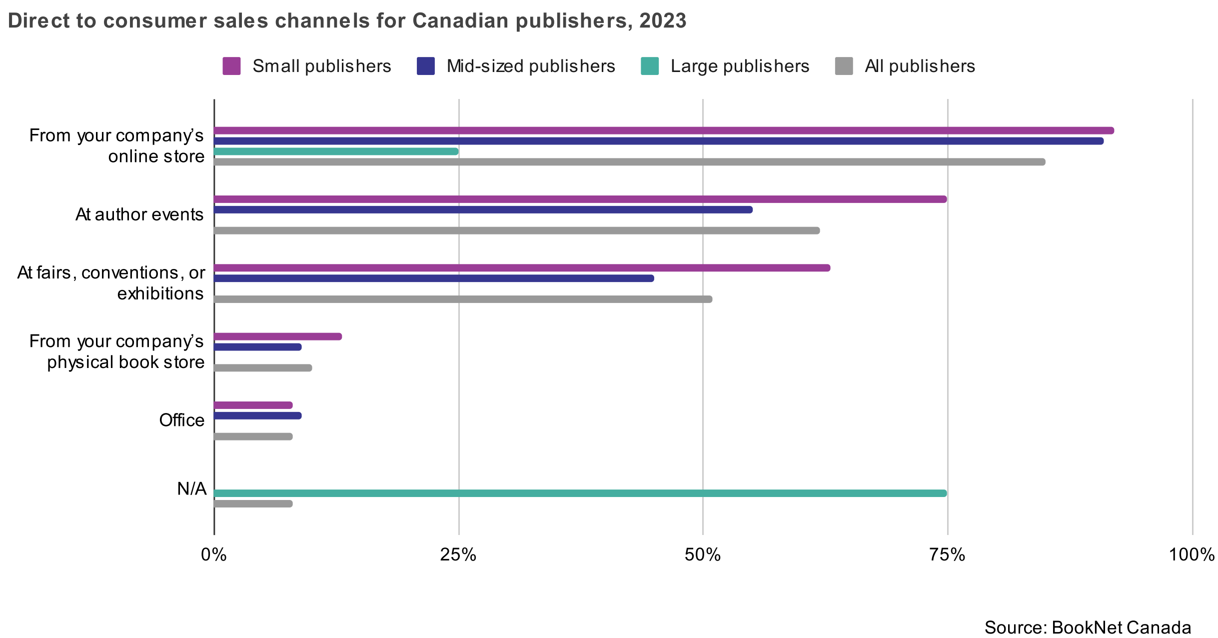
Small publishers were the most focused on the adult trade market (84%) while all large publishers chose young adult and children's trade publishing as one of their areas of focus (100% each). Mid-sized publishers were the most likely to report a focus on the scholarly/higher education market (45%).

The percentage of books by Canadian contributors — authors, editors, translators, and/or illustrators who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada — fell when compared to 2021. In 2021, publishers reported 92% of new books published were by at least one Canadian contributor, however this dropped to only 76% of new books in 2023. Mid-sized publishers had the highest percentage of new books by at least one Canadian contributor (84%) and small publishers followed at 79%.

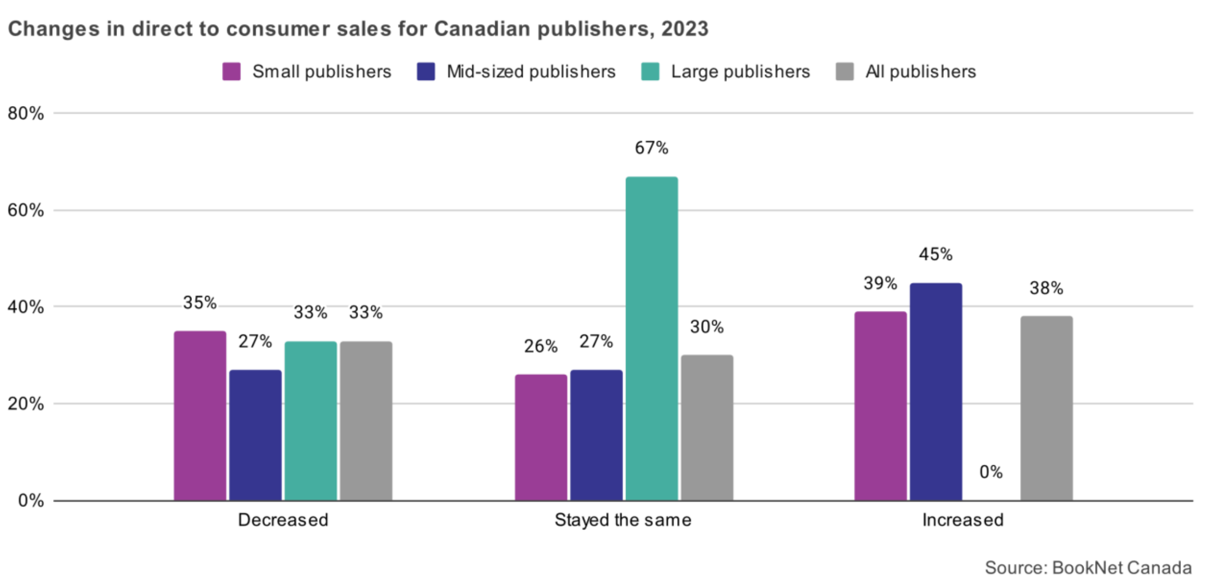
Direct to consumer sales

As in 2021, almost all publishers we surveyed sold their books directly to consumers in some form (90% in 2021 and 92% in 2023). All small and mid-sized publishers sold their books directly to consumers, but only 25% of large publishers did so.

The most popular method of direct to consumer sales was through a company ecommerce or online store (85%), author events (62%), and at fairs, conventions, or exhibitions (51%). Though the order of these channels is the same as in 2021, the amount of sales at author events (40% in 2021 and 62% in 2023) and fairs, conventions, or exhibitions (32% in 2021 and 51% in 2023) rose quite a bit from 2021 to 2023 perhaps due to more of these events taking place in the wake of the pandemic.

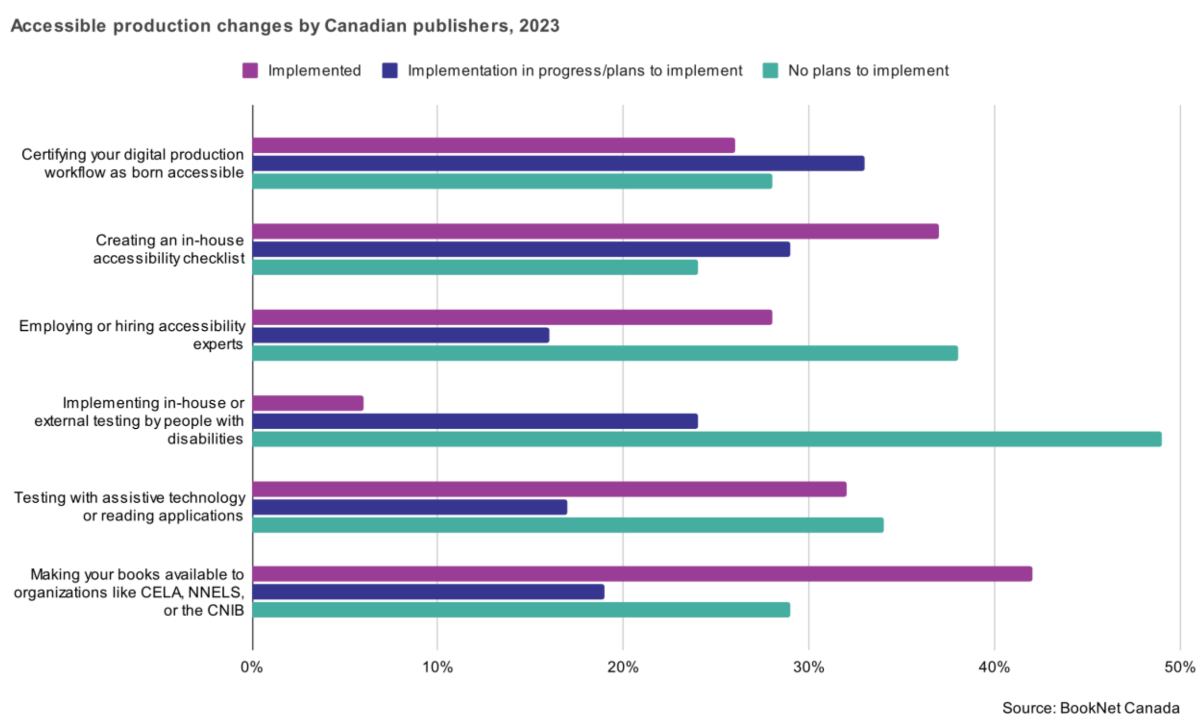


Overall, the majority of publishers reported that their direct to consumer sales remained the same from 2022 to 2023 (30%) or that it increased from 1% to 10% (24%). However, large publishers were most likely to report that their direct to consumer sales decreased more than 20% (33%) and mid-sized publishers were most likely to report an increase of more than 20% (18%).

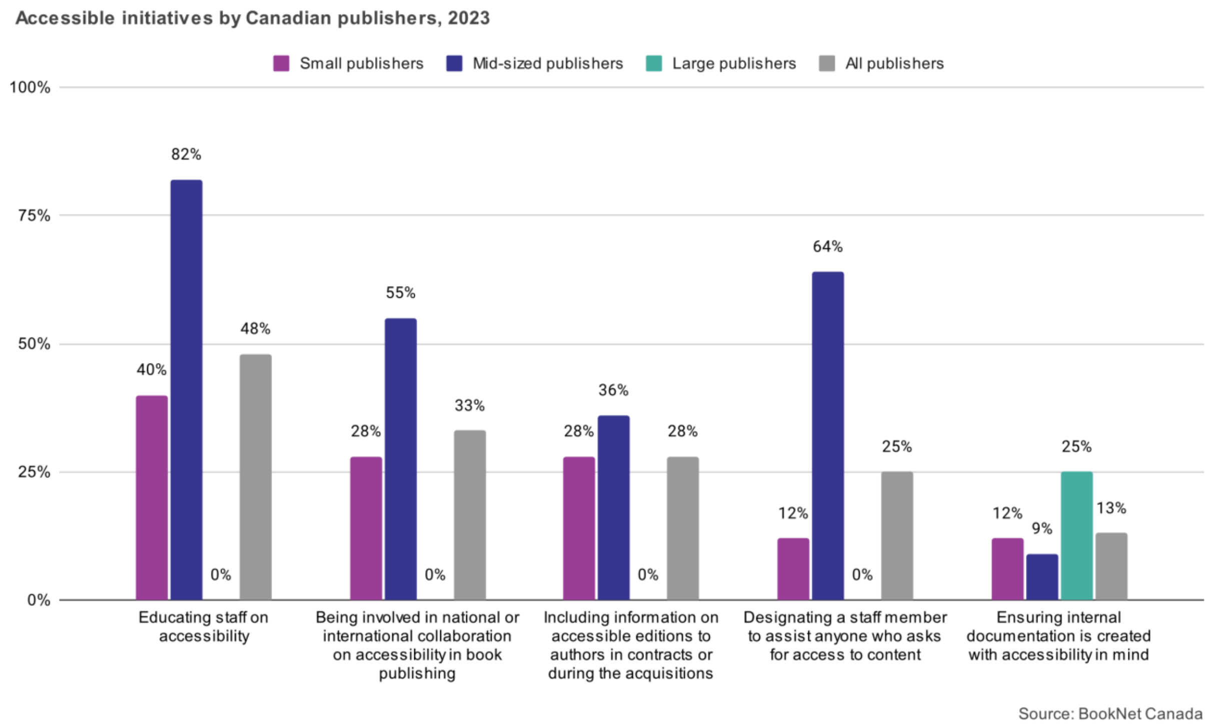


Accessibility and diversity

In 2023, publishers took steps to make sure their overall offerings were more accessible. These include making their books available to organizations like CELA, NNELS, and the CNIB (42% have implemented, 19% either are in the process of implementing or plan to); creating an in-house accessibility checklist (37% have implemented, 29% either are in the process of implementing or plan to); and testing with assistive technology or reading applications (32% have implemented and 17% are either planning to or are in the process of implementing).

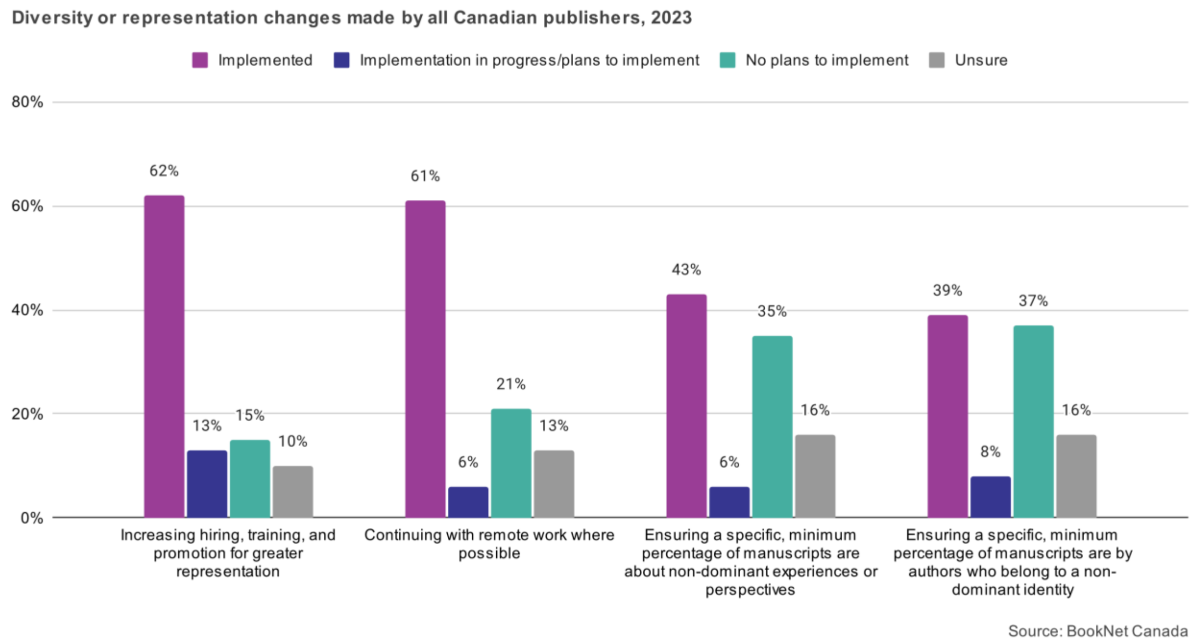


Other initiatives that publishers have undertaken to make their content and their businesses more accessible include educating staff on accessibility (48%) and being involved in national or international collaborations regarding accessibility (33%). Mid-sized publishers were most likely to participate in all the initiatives in the graph below with the exception of one. Large publishers were the most likely to create internal documentation with accessibility in mind (25%).



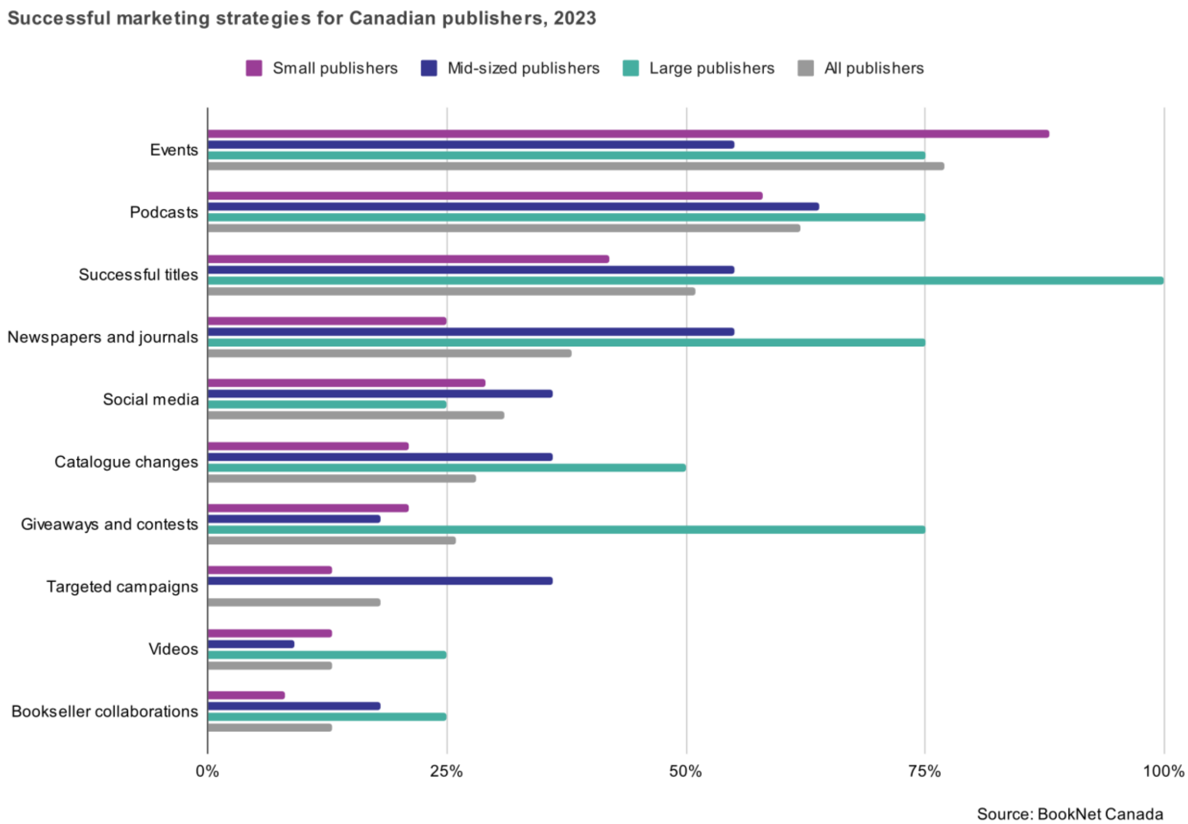
In terms of the authors published in 2023 by publishers in Canada, on average, 38% of new books published were by authors who belonged to a non-dominant or under-represented identity. Mid-sized publishers published, on average, more books by authors from these groups than other sized publishers (40% compared to 38% for small publishers and 24% for large publishers).

Other diversity or representation changes made by publishers in 2023 dealt with the working conditions and hiring of staff as well as the acquisition of books. Over half of publishers surveyed had increased hiring, training, and promotion for greater representation of diverse perspectives and people, across all levels and departments (62%) and a further 13% were either in progress of implementing or were planning on implementing this change. A similar proportion of publishers were continuing with remote working where possible to increase the geographical pool of diverse candidates/workers and lower financial barriers to entry (61%), and an additional 6% were planning to or in the process of implementing that change.



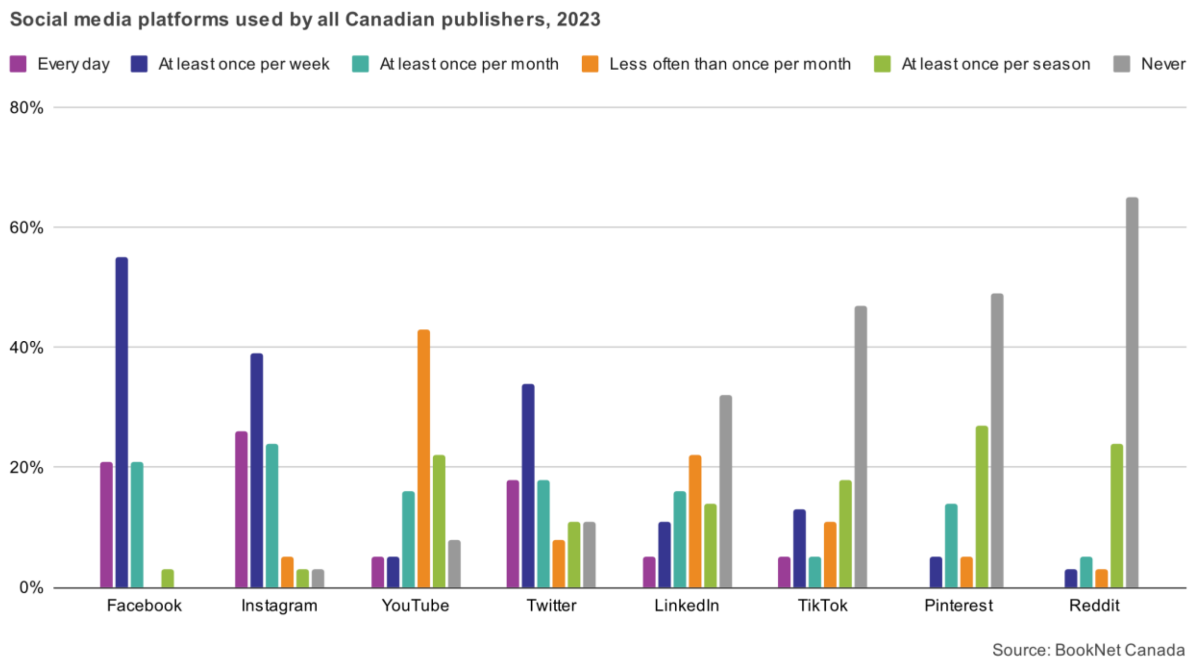
Marketing

Successful marketing has seen significant change since 2021 when the top three strategies were social media, events, and videos. In 2023, publishers have found more success with events (77%), podcasts (62%), and successful titles — those that won awards or had impactful launches (51%). Social media has fallen to fifth place at 31%.

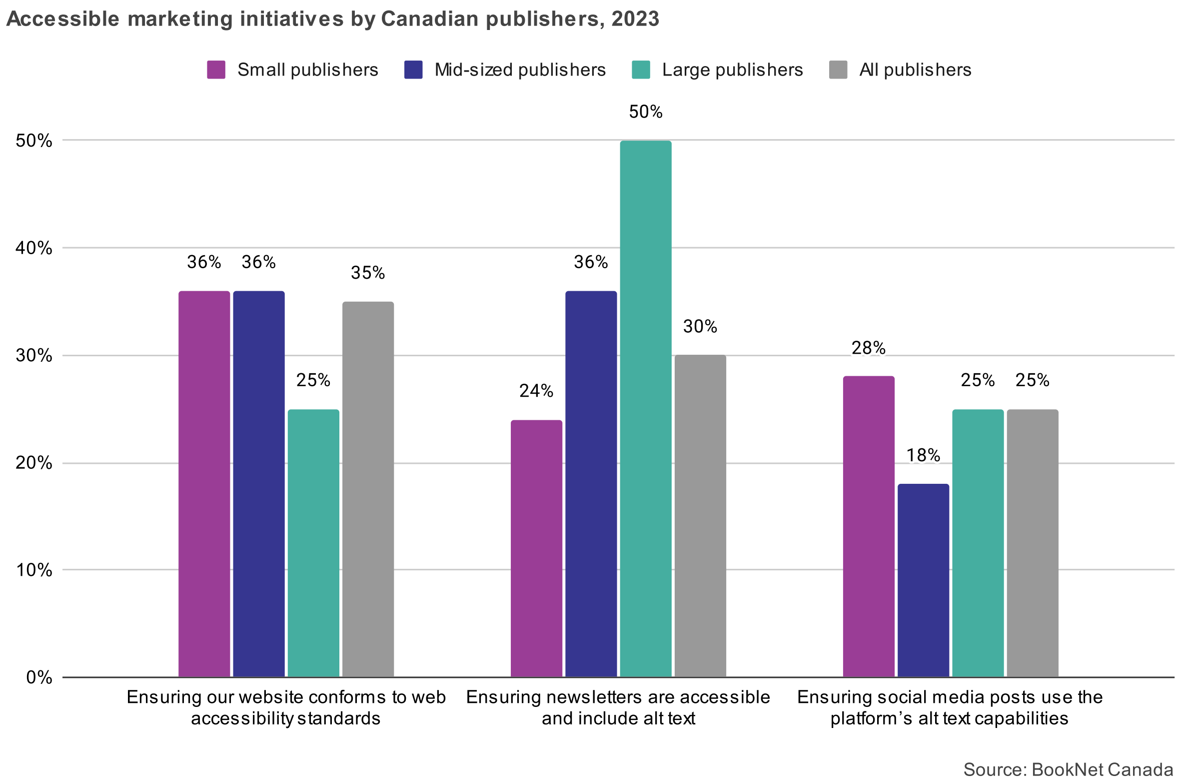


Though social media lost some perception of success in terms of marketing strategies, publishers continue to post and share content in 2023, though with somewhat less frequency than in 2021. The most popular platform remains Facebook (100%), followed by Instagram (97%), YouTube (91%), and Twitter (89%).

Publishers are most likely to use Instagram every day (26%), Facebook use is most popular at once per week (55%), and YouTube use happens less often than once a month (43%).



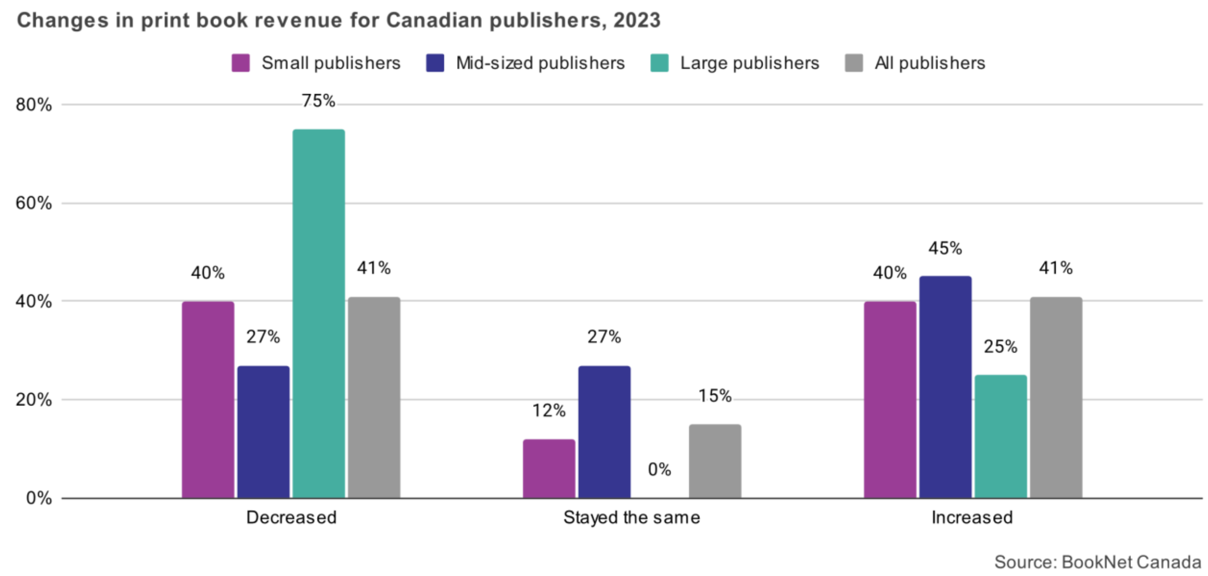
In terms of making marketing content accessible, publishers were making sure their websites were accessible (35%) and that they were using alt text in newsletters (30%) and in social media (25%).



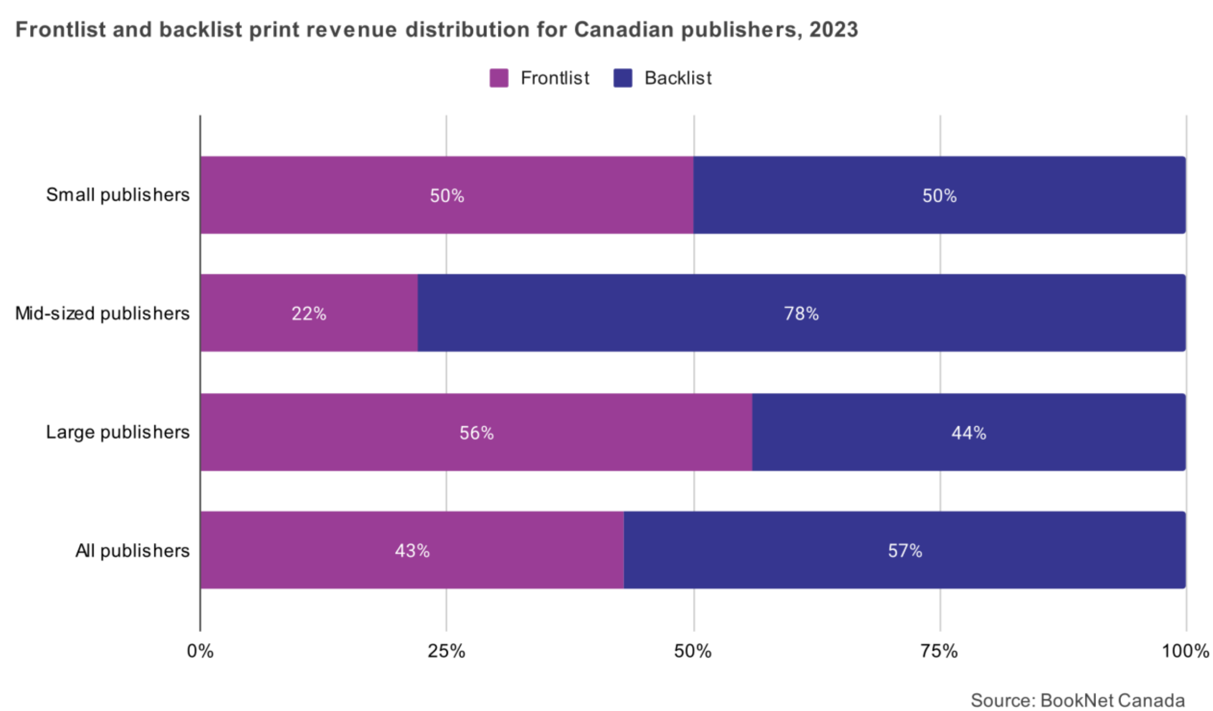
Print books

Revenue

Between 2022 and 2023, most publishers saw a small increase in print book sales: 28% of all publishers saw up to a 10% increase. Small publishers were most likely to have seen an increase of more than 20% (12%), while large publishers saw declines of 11% or more (50%). Mid-sized publishers were the most likely to see increases of up to 10% (36%).



Backlist made up the majority of print book revenue (57%). Mid-sized publishers found over three quarters of their print book revenue was backlist titles (78%), while large publishers said frontlist made up 56% of their print book revenue.



We asked publishers to share the percentage of 2023 gross Canadian print revenue that was derived from specific channels. Similar to 2021, retailers (including subscription services) made up more than half of their print revenue for 30% of publishers. Direct to public sales made up more than half of print revenue for 15% of publishers which is a notable increase from 2021 when only 11% of publishers made more than half of their print revenue through this channel. Trade wholesalers, however, were down in 2023 as compared to 2021: In 2023, 9% of publishers reported more than half of their print revenue as coming from trade wholesalers whereas 17% did so in 2021.

Print revenue by channel for all Canadian publishers, 2023

	Direct to the public	Retailers	Trade wholesale	Library wholesale	Academic	Professional	Other
0%	10%	6%	6%	14%	24%	32%	31%
1%–10%	28%	6%	31%	59%	35%	32%	35%
11%–20%	18%	6%	23%	16%	9%	5%	8%
21%–30%	10%	15%	17%	0%	6%	3%	0%
31%–40%	3%	15%	3%	0%	6%	0%	0%
41%–50%	5%	9%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
51%–60%	5%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%
61%–70%	3%	12%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Over 70%	8%	18%	0%	0%	3%	0%	4%
Unsure	8%	9%	9%	8%	6%	5%	8%
N/A	3%	3%	0%	3%	12%	22%	15%

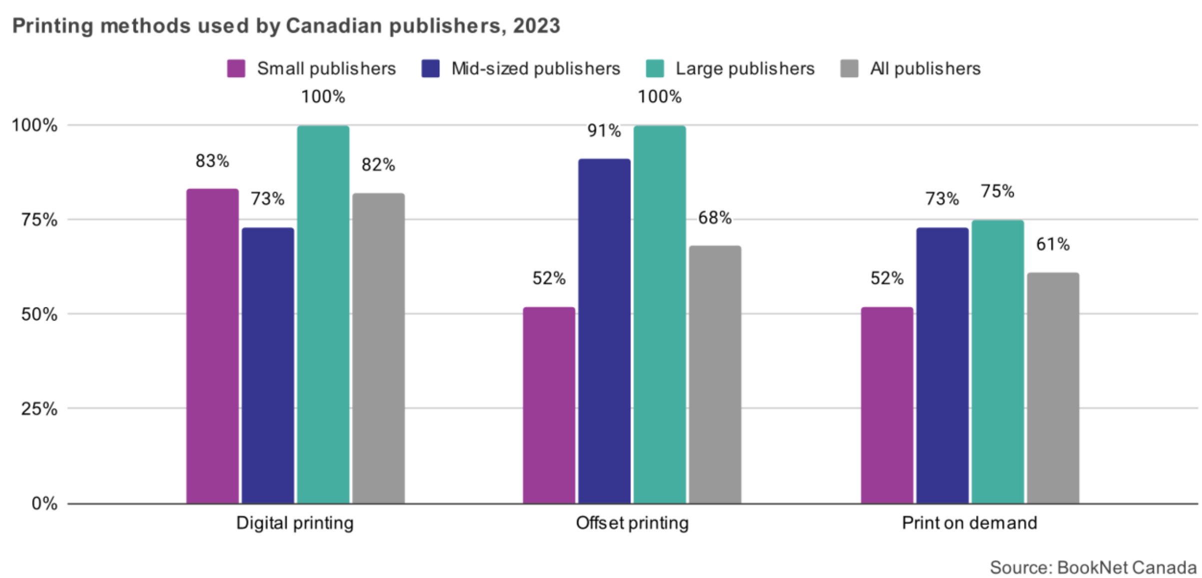
n=39

Production

The percentage of publishers who produce their print books in-house decreased from 75% in 2021 to 69% in 2023. Almost half of all publishers also used third-party providers (46%) in 2023 — also down from 58% in 2021. All large publishers produced print books in-house (100%), but a quarter of them also used a third-party provider (25%).

Most publishers chose to use digital printing for their print books in 2023 (82%). This was up from 79% in 2021. Offset printing, however, decreased notably from 81% in 2021 to 68% in 2023. Print on demand also decreased from 72% in 2021 to 61% in 2023.

All large publishers used digital and offset printing in 2023 (100% each). Mid-sized publishers chose offset printing most often (91%) and small publishers mostly chose digital printing (83%).

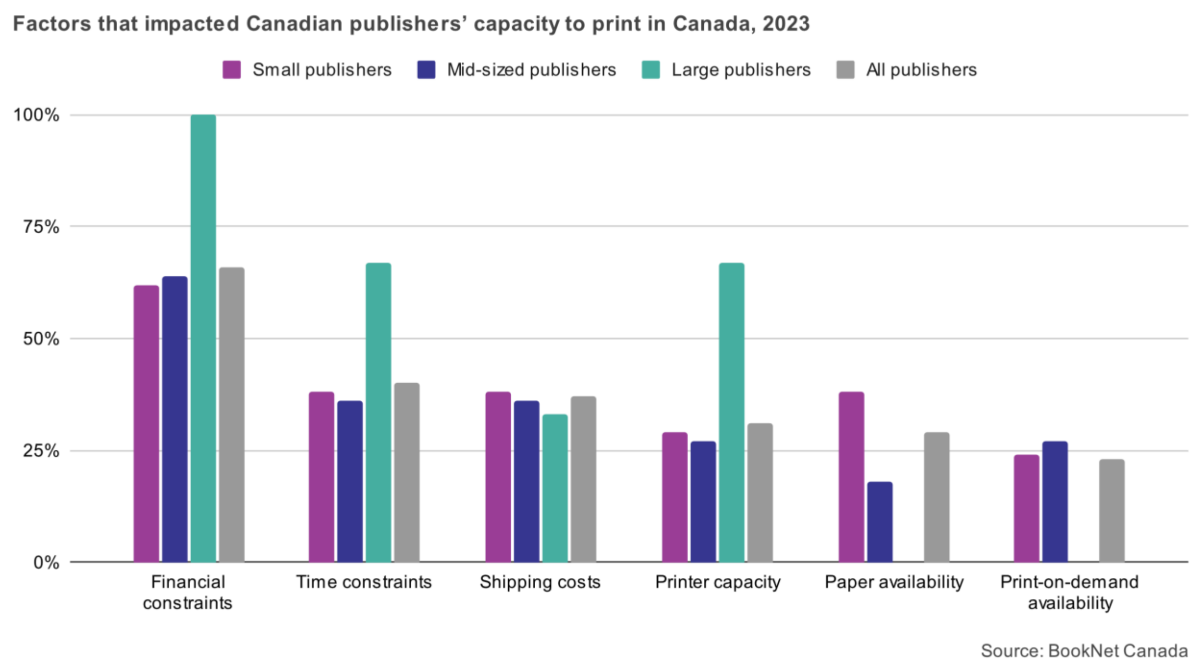


Most of the books from the publishers we surveyed were printed in Canada in 2023 (74%). On average, small and mid-sized publishers each printed 82% of their books in Canada.

The United States (12%) and Asia (8%) were the next most popular locations for printing. Large publishers did the bulk of their printing in the United States (30%).

Publishers cited financial constraints as the main factor that impacted their capacity to print in Canada in 2023 (66%). Time constraints (40%) and shipping costs (37%) were the next most popular reasons.

Small publishers were the most likely to cite paper availability as a factor that impacted their ability to print in Canada (38%) and mid-sized publishers were most concerned with print-on-demand availability (27%).



In terms of production of accessible formats, mid-sized publishers were the only group who offered at least 26% of their frontlist titles as Braille editions (40%) and 67% of large publishers offered over 25% of their titles as large print editions.

Percentage of frontlist print books available in accessible formats, 2023

	0%–25%	26%–50%	51%–75%	76%–100%
Braille edition	81%	19%	0%	0%
Large print edition	79%	17%	0%	0%

n=24

The uptake on accessible formats was higher for backlist titles, 17% of small publishers offered at least a quarter of their titles in Braille format, as did 33% of mid-sized publishers.

Percentage of backlist print books available in accessible formats, 2023

	0%–25%	26%–50%	51%–75%	76%–100%
Braille edition	73%	27%	0%	0%
Large print edition	75%	20%	0%	0%

n=22

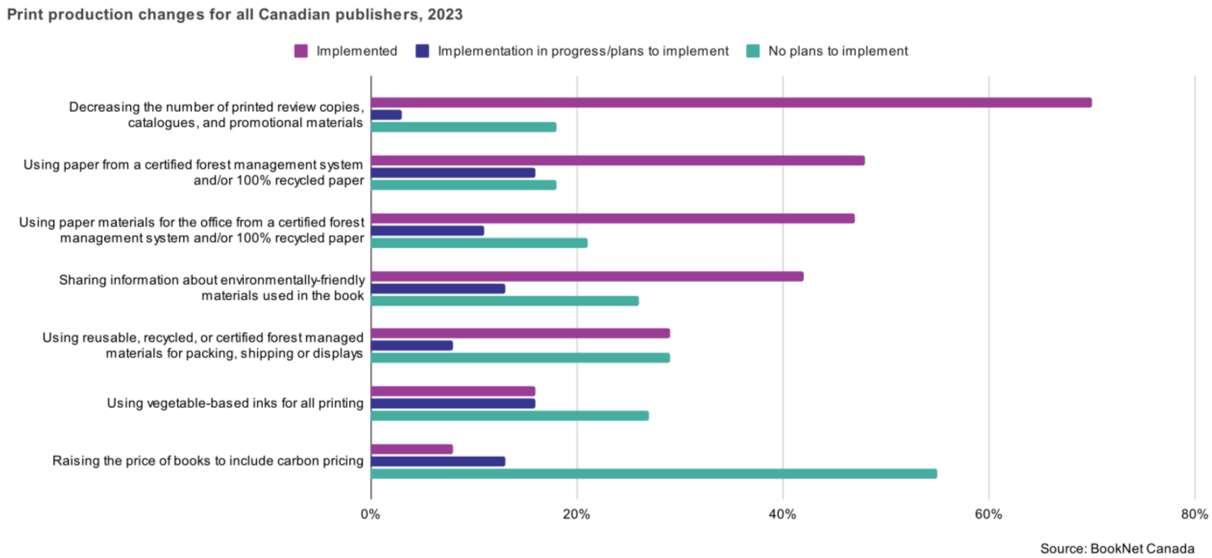
Sustainability

In terms of print production changes, publishers in Canada have already taken steps towards a more sustainable print business. Most of the publishers we surveyed have decreased the number of physical review copies, print catalogues, and promotional materials: 8% implemented that change in 2023, 68% had implemented it previous to that, and a further 3% were in the process of doing so. Mid-sized publishers were the most likely to have adopted this change (91%).

Many publishers were using paper from a certified forest management system and/or recycled paper for

- manuscripts, ARCs, and final books — 48% had implemented this change and 16% either had plans to or were in the process of implementing this change; and
- all office printed materials (including royalty statements and catalogues — 47% had implemented this change and 11% either had plans to or were in the process of implementing this change.

The only area where the majority of publishers had no plans to implement a print production change was related to raising the prices of their books across the board to include carbon pricing; 55% of publishers had no plans to implement that change. However, 13% of publishers either had plans to implement that change or were already in the process of doing so, while 8% had implemented it before 2023.

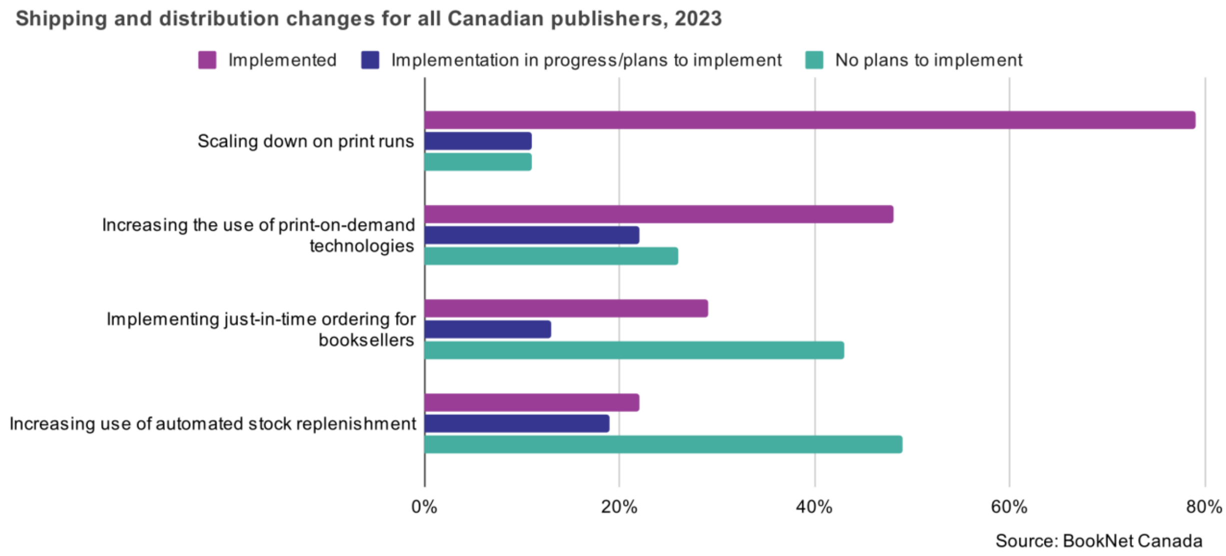


Many publishers have also started sharing information in their marketing material for their titles or in the books themselves about the environmentally friendly materials they are using for their books (42%). A further 13% are either in the process of implementing this change or have plans to.

Shipping and distribution

Over three quarters of publishers have scaled down their print runs to decrease waste, mitigate risks, limit overstock, and increase efficiencies (79%). All large publishers implemented this change before 2023 (100%) as did 57% of small publishers. Just under half of mid-sized publishers implemented this change in 2023 (45%).

Small and mid-sized publishers were the least likely to have plans to implement automated stock replenishment (45% for small and 64% for mid-sized publishers) or just-in-time ordering for booksellers (45% for small and 55% for mid-sized publishers).

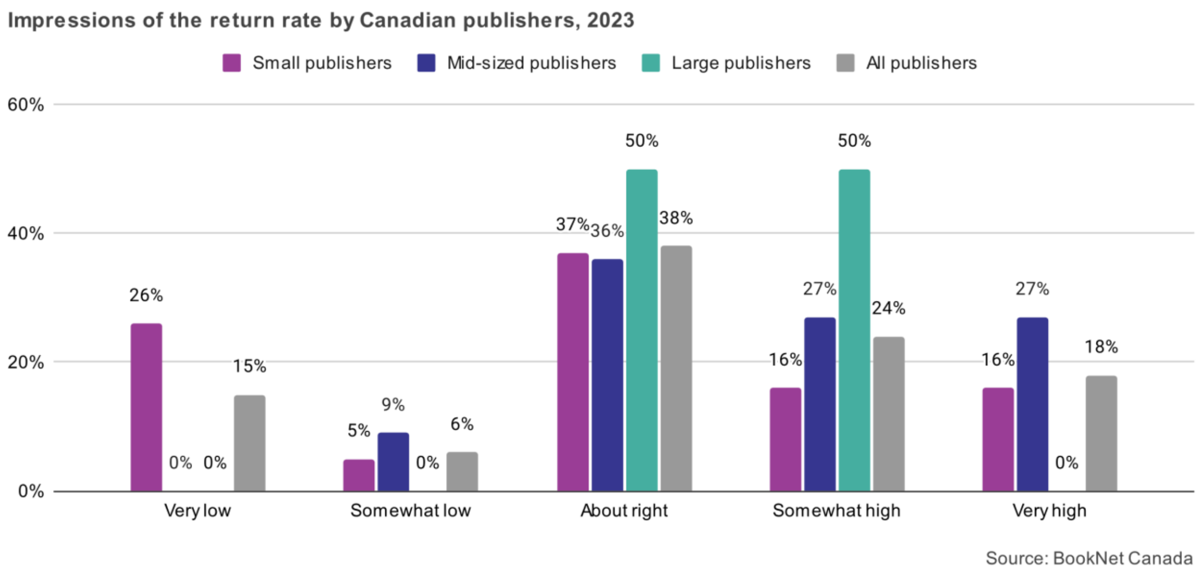


Returns

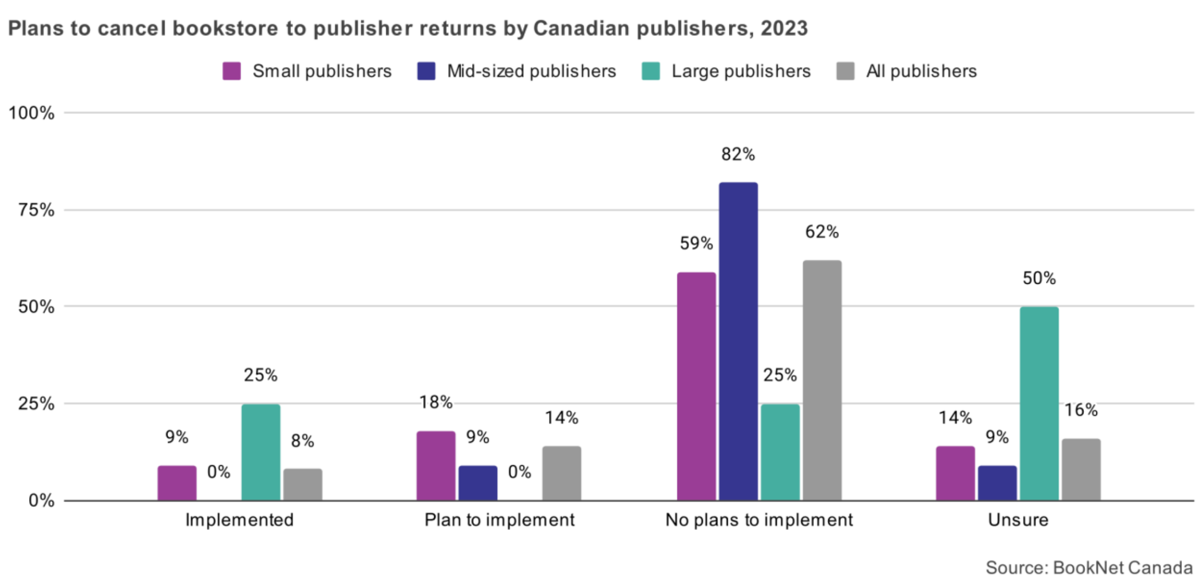
The average return rate in 2023, as a percentage of books shipped for all trade publishers, was 9%, down significantly from 16% in 2021. The rate of return for all publishers who responded to our survey was 5% — including all trade publishers, academic, and professional or corporate publishers.

As in 2021, adult trade publishers had the highest rate of return at 15%. This was also true for small (16%) and mid-sized publishers (13%). For large publishers, children's and middle grade trade books had the highest rate of return (46%).

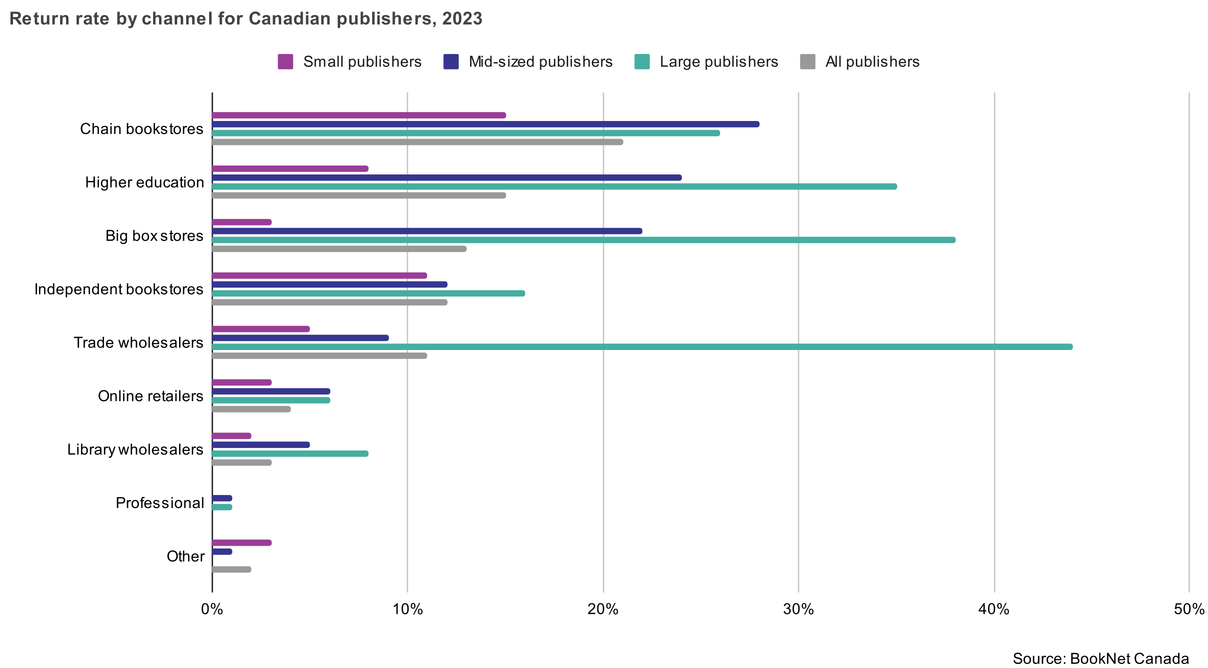
When asked about their impression of the rate of returns from booksellers in 2023, the majority of publishers felt they were about right (38%). Small publishers were the only group to feel their returns were very low (26%) and mid-sized publishers were the most likely to report feeling as though their returns were very high (27%).



Though 42% of publishers found their returns somewhat or very high, most did not have plans to cancel bookseller returns to decrease print runs and shipping, and increase buy-to-sell strategic buying (62%). Even for mid-sized publishers, who were the group most likely to say their returns were very high, only 9% had plans to implement a plan to cancel publisher returns. A quarter of large publishers had cancelled bookstore to publisher returns as of 2023 (25%).

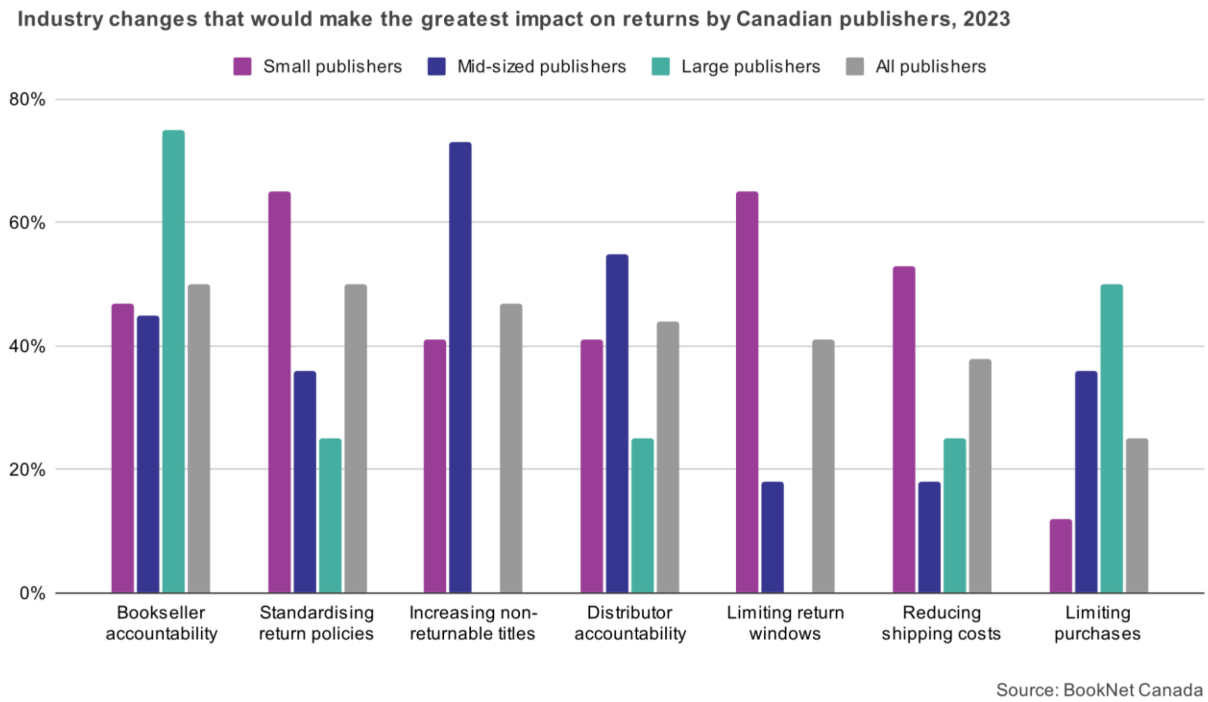


Similar to 2021, return rates varied by retail channel. The graph below shows the rate of return reported by channel for Canadian publishers in 2023. Chain bookstores had the highest return rate (20%) and professional or corporate B2B channels had the lowest (0.3%).



When we asked publishers which changes either company- or industry-wide would have the greatest impact in increasing coordination for all returns across supply chain partners they chose standardizing return policies (50%) and bookseller accountability (50%).

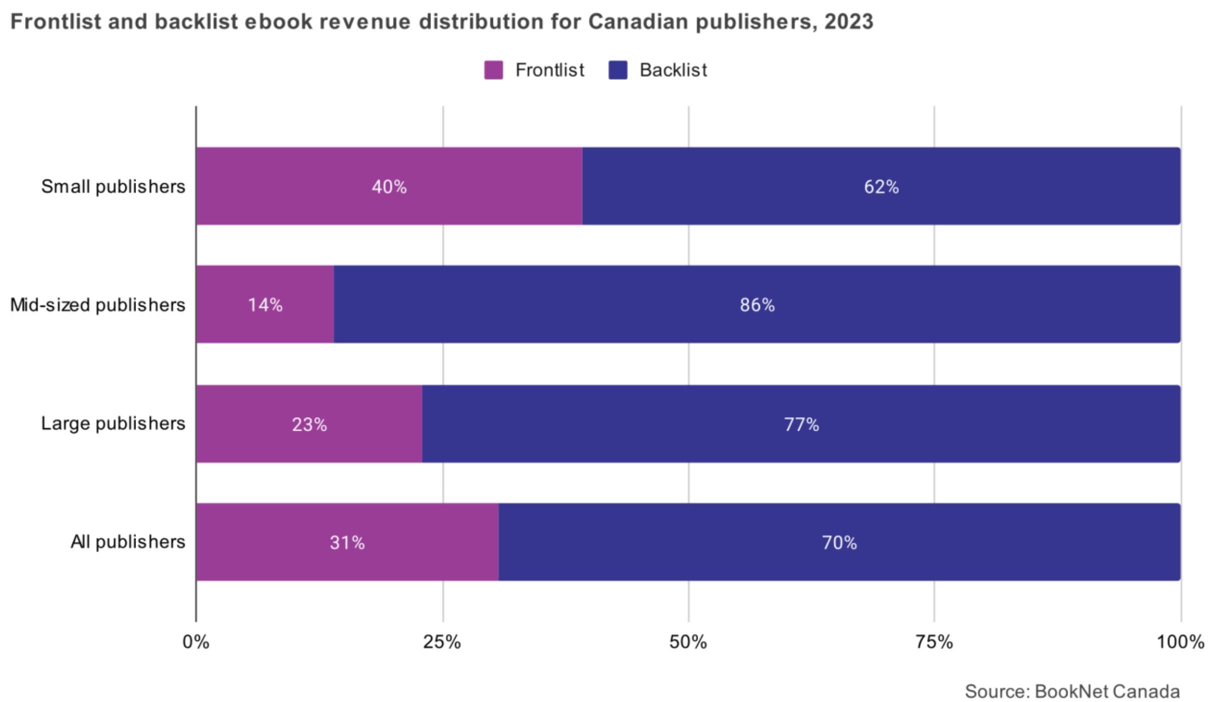
Mid-sized publishers favoured increasing non-returnable titles (73%). Small publishers also thought that limiting return windows would make a big impact (65%).


Industry changes that would make the greatest impact on returns by Canadian publishers, 2023
Small publishers
Mid-sized publishers
Large publishers
All publishers
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Bookseller accountability
Standardising return policies
Increasing non-returnable titles
Distributor accountability
Limiting return windows
Reducing shipping costs
Limiting purchases
Source: BookNet Canada

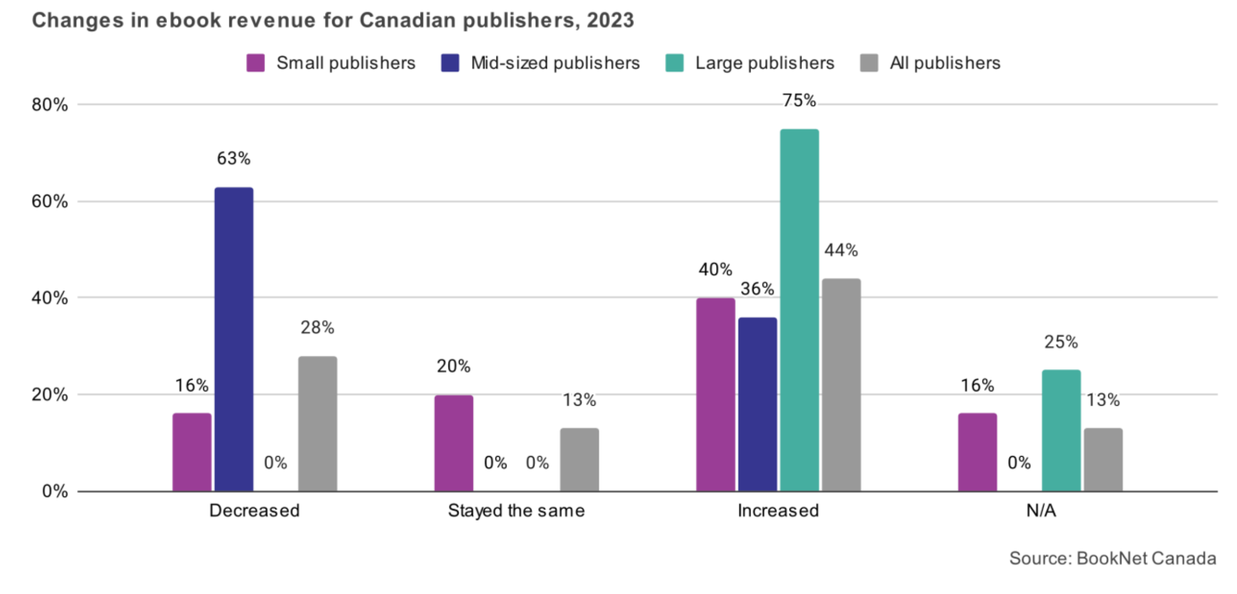
Ebooks

Revenue

Revenue from ebooks in 2023 was mainly driven by backlist titles at 70%. This was up from 60% in 2021.



Almost half of all publishers surveyed saw an increase in ebook revenue from 2022 to 2023 (44%), though for most it was a small increase of up to 10% (28%). Large publishers were the most likely to have seen an increase in ebook revenue (75%) and mid-sized publishers were most likely to have seen a decrease (63%). Small publishers were the only group to have reported that their ebook revenue stayed the same in 2023 as it was in 2022 (20%).



Similar to 2021, publishers derived most of their gross ebook revenue from retailers (71% in 2021 and 68% in 2023). However, direct to consumer sales saw an increase from 48% of gross ebook revenue in 2021 up to 54% in 2023.

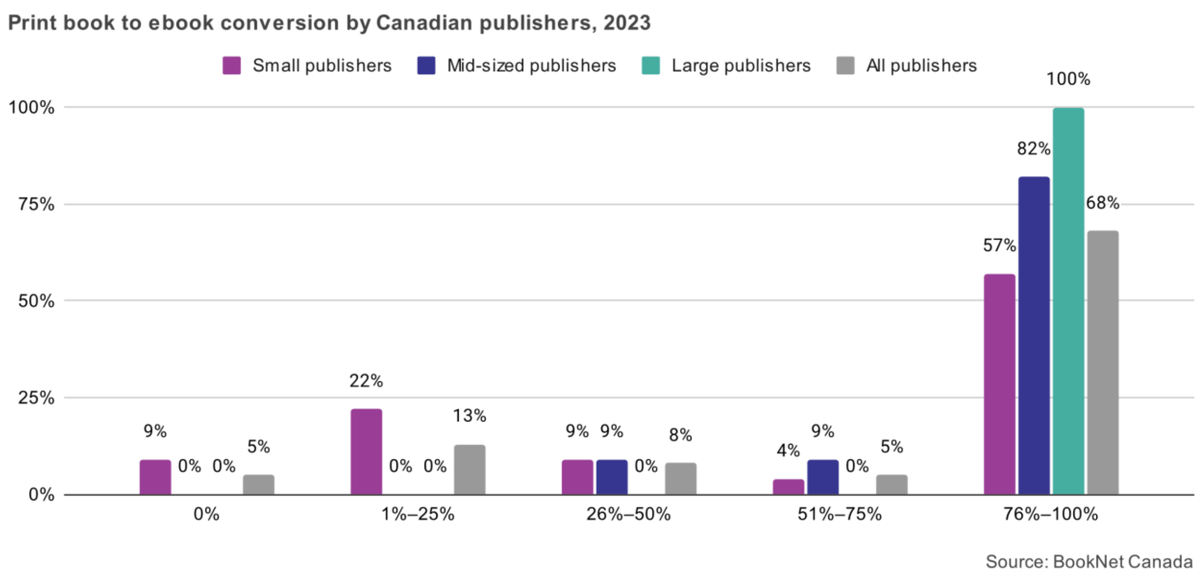
Ebook revenue by channel for all Canadian publishers, 2023

	Direct to the public	Retailers (including subscriptions)	Library wholesale	Academic	Professional	Other
0%	17%	8%	16%	26%	48%	30%
1%–10%	22%	8%	16%	23%	10%	11%
11%–20%	6%	5%	16%	6%	0%	4%
21%–30%	11%	5%	3%	6%	0%	0%
31%–40%	3%	3%	8%	0%	0%	0%
41%–50%	3%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%
51%–60%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
61%–70%	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Over 70%	6%	32%	3%	3%	0%	0%
Unsure	6%	8%	11%	11%	7%	11%
N/A	25%	16%	22%	26%	34%	44%

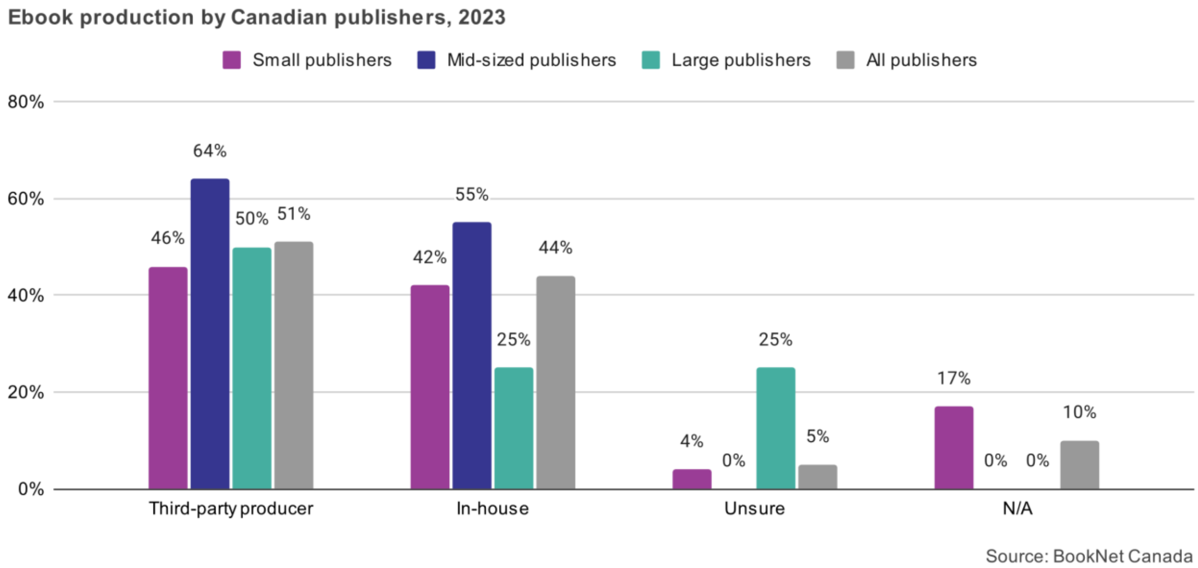
n=38

Availability and production

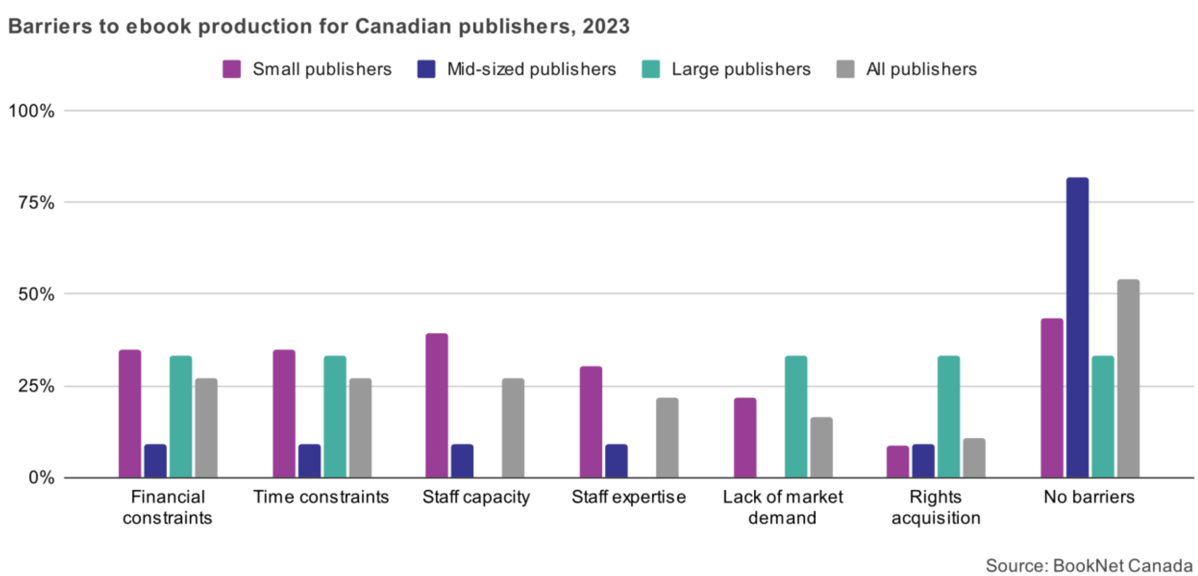
Publishers continued to offer the majority of their print books as ebooks in 2023. Most publishers offered approximately 76% to 100% of their print books as ebooks (68%). All large publishers converted 76% to 100% of their print books to ebooks (100%), followed by 82% of mid-sized publishers and 57% of small publishers.



For production of ebooks, most publishers used third-party producers (51%) in 2023. This was especially true for mid-sized publishers (64%), though they also produced ebooks in-house (55%). Small publishers were the least likely to produce any ebooks (17%).

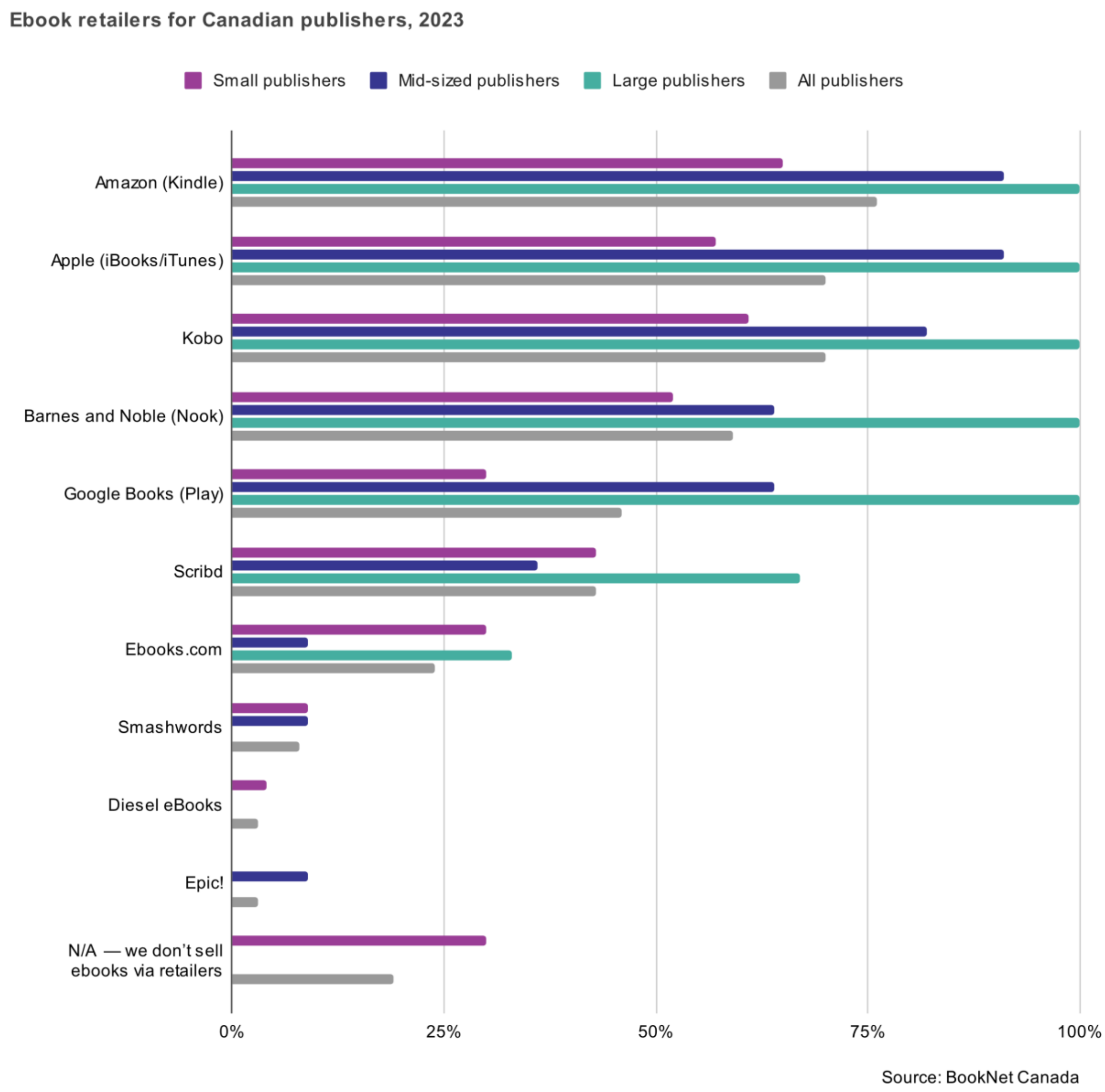


Though the majority of publishers said they encountered no barriers to producing ebooks in 2023 (54%), those who did cited financial constraints, time constraints, and staff capacity equally (27% each). Small publishers also cited staff expertise (30%) whereas large publishers found rights acquisitions and lack of market demand as additional barriers to production (33% each).

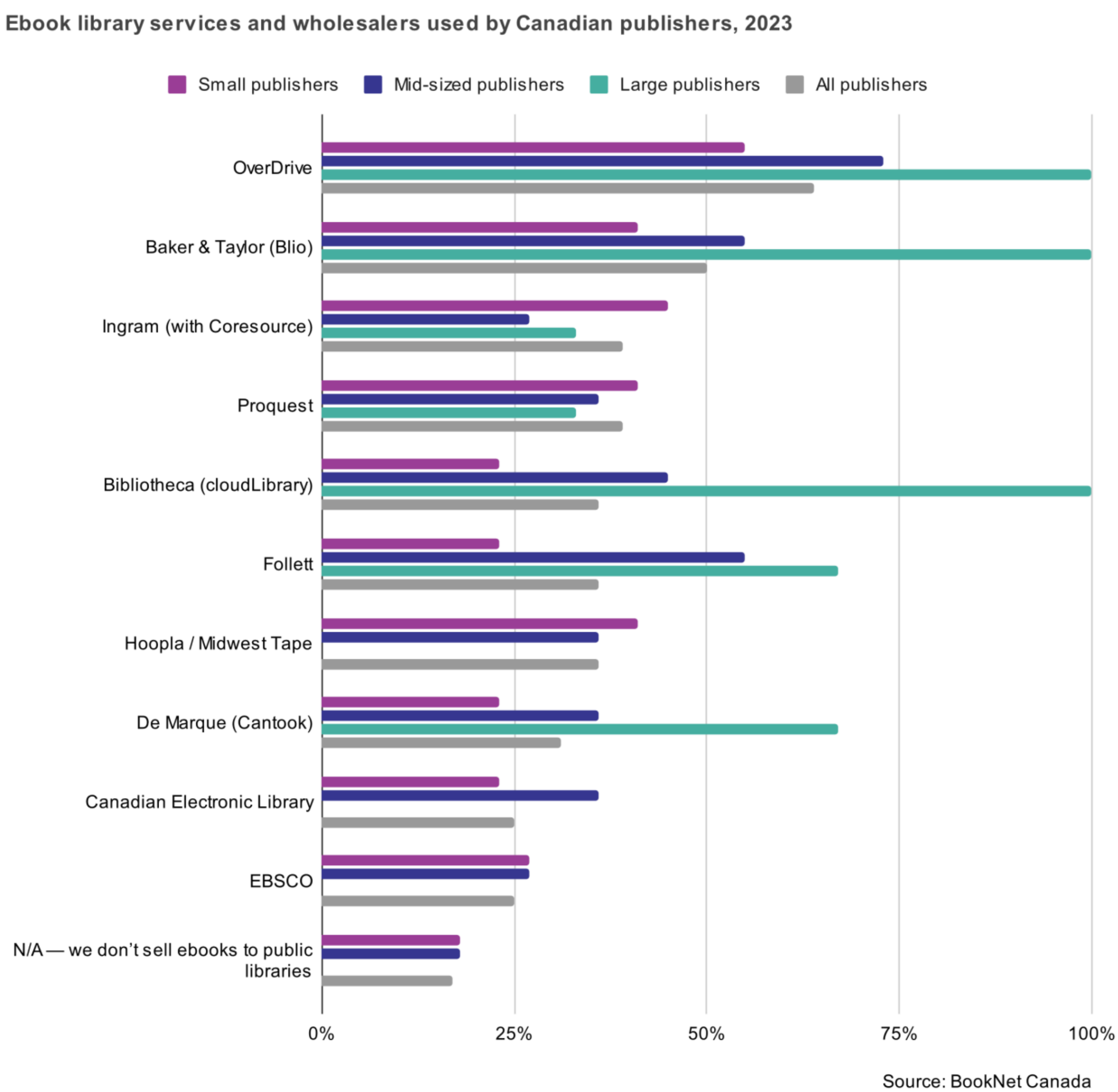


Distribution

The top three ebook retailers in 2023 were the same as in 2021: Amazon (76%), Kobo (70%), and Apple (70%).



For selling to libraries, publishers also mainly used the same distribution channels as in 2021. The most popular were OverDrive (64%), Baker & Taylor (50%), and Ingram (with Coresource) tied with Proquest (39% each). A similar percentage of publishers did not sell ebooks to libraries in 2023 as in 2021 (17% in 2023 and 18% in 2021).



Accessibility

We asked publishers about the accessible formats they provided for both frontlist and backlist titles. The format most publishers offered for over a quarter of their frontlist titles was accessible PDFs (22%). Half of the large publisher group offered over 50% of their frontlist titles as accessible EPUB editions.

Percentage of frontlist ebooks available in accessible formats, 2023

	0%–25%	26%–50%	51%–75%	76%–100%
Accessible EPUB	22%	6%	6%	3%
Accessible PDF	39%	17%	0%	4%

n=32

As with print book accessibility, the uptake for accessible formats for backlist was higher than for frontlist titles: 39% of publishers offered over 25% of their backlist titles as accessible EPUBs and 33% offered over 35% as accessible PDFs.

Percentage of backlist ebooks available in accessible formats, 2023

	0%–25%	26%–50%	51%–75%	76%–100%
Accessible EPUB	12%	18%	9%	12%
Accessible PDF	33%	21%	8%	4%

n=33

Accessibility for ebooks continues to rise in 2023 compared with 2021. The most popular accessibility features remain the same, and a higher percentage of publishers are employing them: navigational aids (61% in 2023 vs. 47% in 2021), alt text (56% in 2023 vs. 44% in 2021), and heading formats (47% in 2023 vs. 31% in 2021).

Ebook accessibility features included by Canadian publishers, 2023

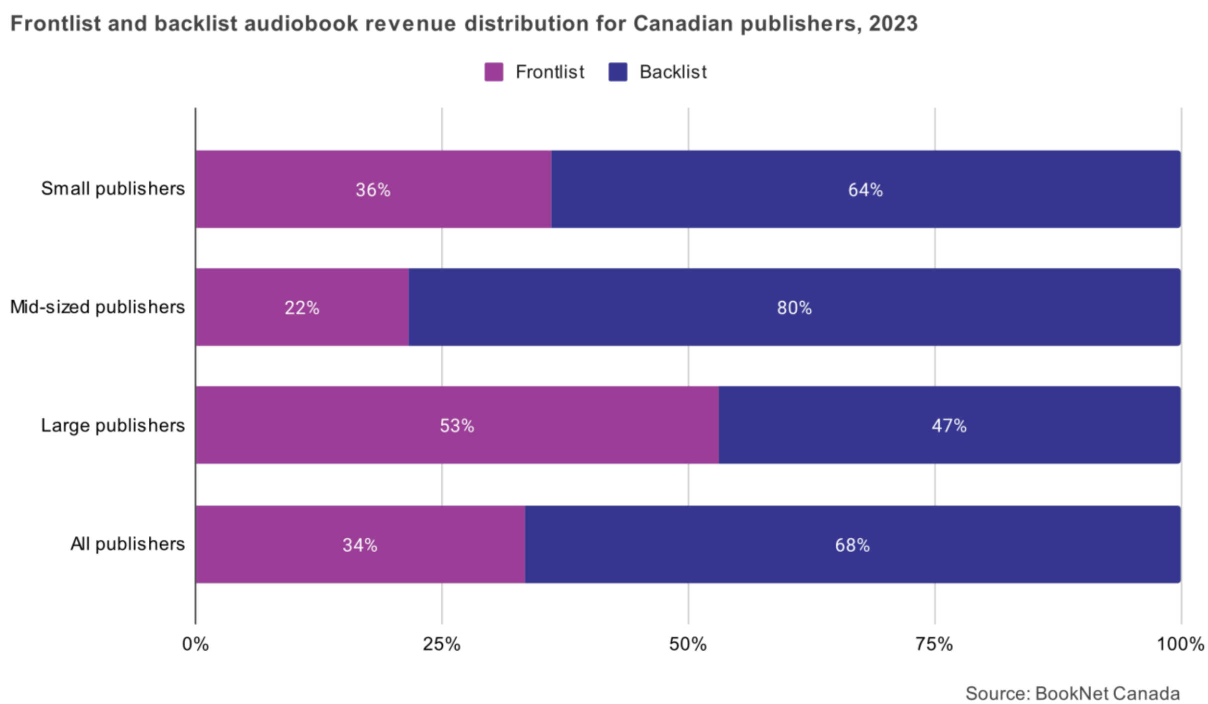
	Small publishers	Mid-sized publishers	Large publishers	All publishers
Navigational aids	50%	82%	67%	61%
Alt text or long descriptions for images, graphs, and illustrations	50%	73%	33%	56%
Heading format	41%	73%	0%	47%
Accessible checker, testing software or tool, or expert	41%	55%	67%	47%
Content marked up with semantic labels to describe it to assistive technology	27%	55%	67%	39%
Accessibility metadata featured in ONIX	27%	64%	33%	39%
Book semantically marked up in HTML5 to describe all types of content	27%	45%	33%	33%
Accessibility metadata featured in-book	23%	45%	67%	33%
Accessibility ‘hazards’ declared	18%	45%	33%	28%
XML-based file to adapt for both print and digital books	14%	45%	33%	25%
No Digital Rights Management	27%	27%	0%	25%
Text-to-speech with special audio markup and aural styles	23%	27%	0%	22%
Plain language	14%	36%	33%	22%
Unicode-compliant fonts	9%	27%	67%	19%
Embedded video or audio	5%	27%	33%	14%
Mathematical Markup Language	0%	18%	0%	6%
Unsure	23%	18%	33%	22%
None of the above	23%	0%	0%	14%
N/A — we don’t produce ebooks	0%	9%	0%	3%

n=36

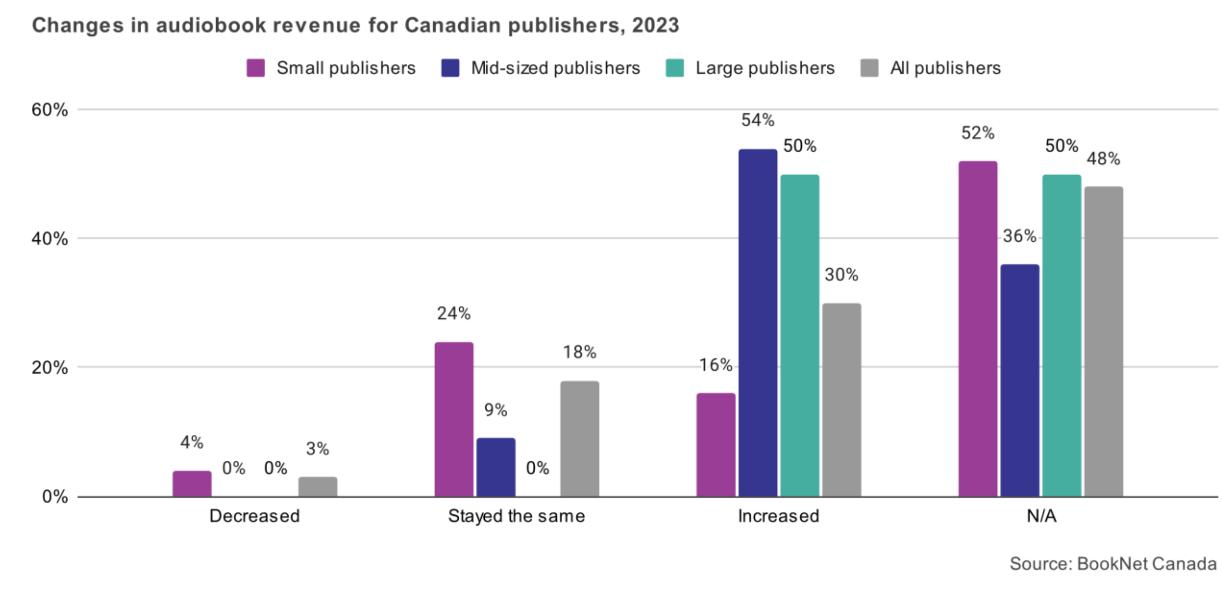
Audiobooks

Revenue

For most publishers who produce audiobooks, revenue is derived from their backlist titles (68%). Mid-sized publishers (80%) and small publishers (64%) derived most of their audiobook revenue from backlist titles. Large publishers were the exception, on average they derived 53% of their audiobook revenue from frontlist titles.



Audiobook revenue increased for 30% of all publishers when comparing 2022 to 2023. This was especially true for half of both large (50%) and mid-sized publishers (54%). Small publishers mostly reported revenue staying the same year over year (24%).



For publishers who produced audiobooks, they mostly derived their revenue from retailers (43%), library wholesalers (30%), and direct to consumer sales (17%).

Audiobook revenue by channel for all Canadian publishers, 2023

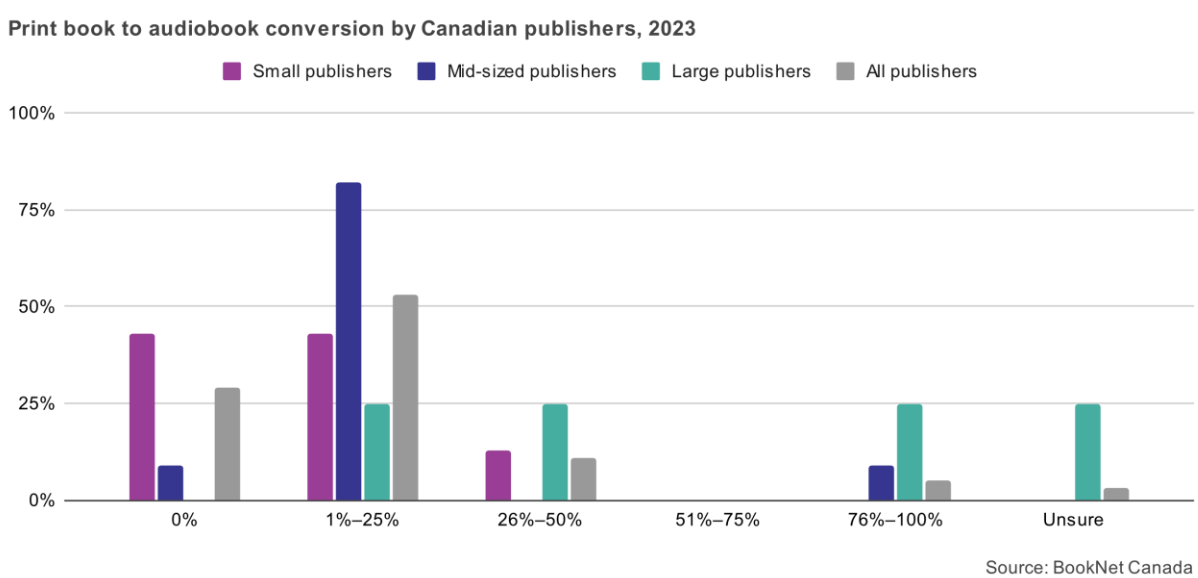
	Direct to the public	Retailers (subscriptions)	Library wholesale	Academic	Professional	Other
0%	24%	8%	16%	28%	31%	26%
1%–10%	14%	0%	5%	8%	0%	3%
11%–20%	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%
21%–30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
31%–40%	0%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%
41%–50%	0%	8%	8%	0%	0%	0%
51%–60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
61%–70%	0%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%
More than 70%	3%	29%	3%	0%	0%	3%
Unsure	5%	5%	8%	11%	14%	9%
N/A	54%	45%	46%	53%	56%	59%

n=34

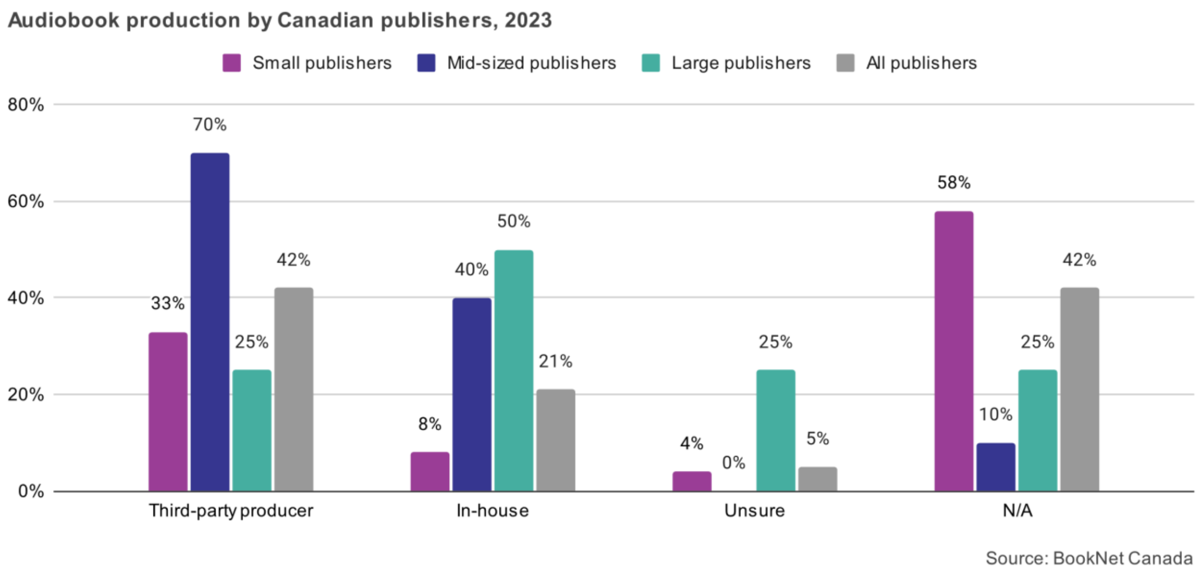
Availability and production

Over half of Canadian publishers produced audiobooks in 2023 (58%), up slightly from 53% in 2021.

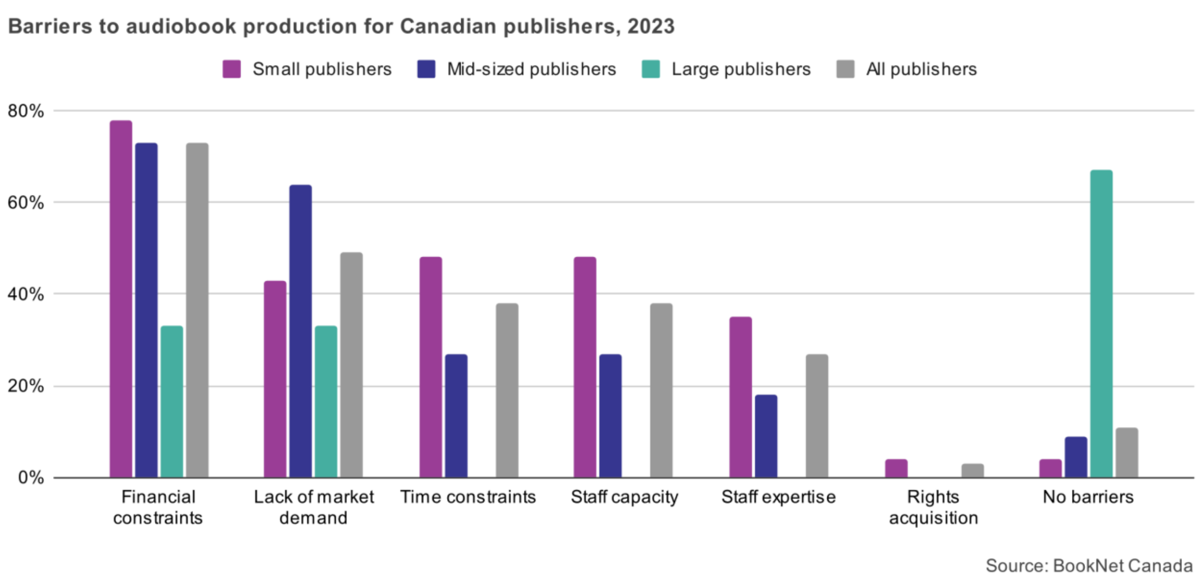
Most publishers offered between 1% and 25% of their print titles as audiobooks in 2023 (53%). The number of audiobooks in the market is on the rise as we can see by the declining share of publishers who offered no audiobooks — from 42% in 2021 to 29% in 2023. Also in 2021, only 8% of publishers reported that they had more than 25% of their print books available as audiobooks, but in 2023, that percentage has doubled (16%) driven primarily by large publishers, half of whom said that they offered more than 25% of their print books in audiobook format (50%).



Audiobook production is mainly done by third-party producers (42%), only 21% of publishers produced audiobooks in house. Small publishers were least likely to produce audiobooks (58% did not produce any) and large publishers were the most likely to produce audiobooks in-house (50%).

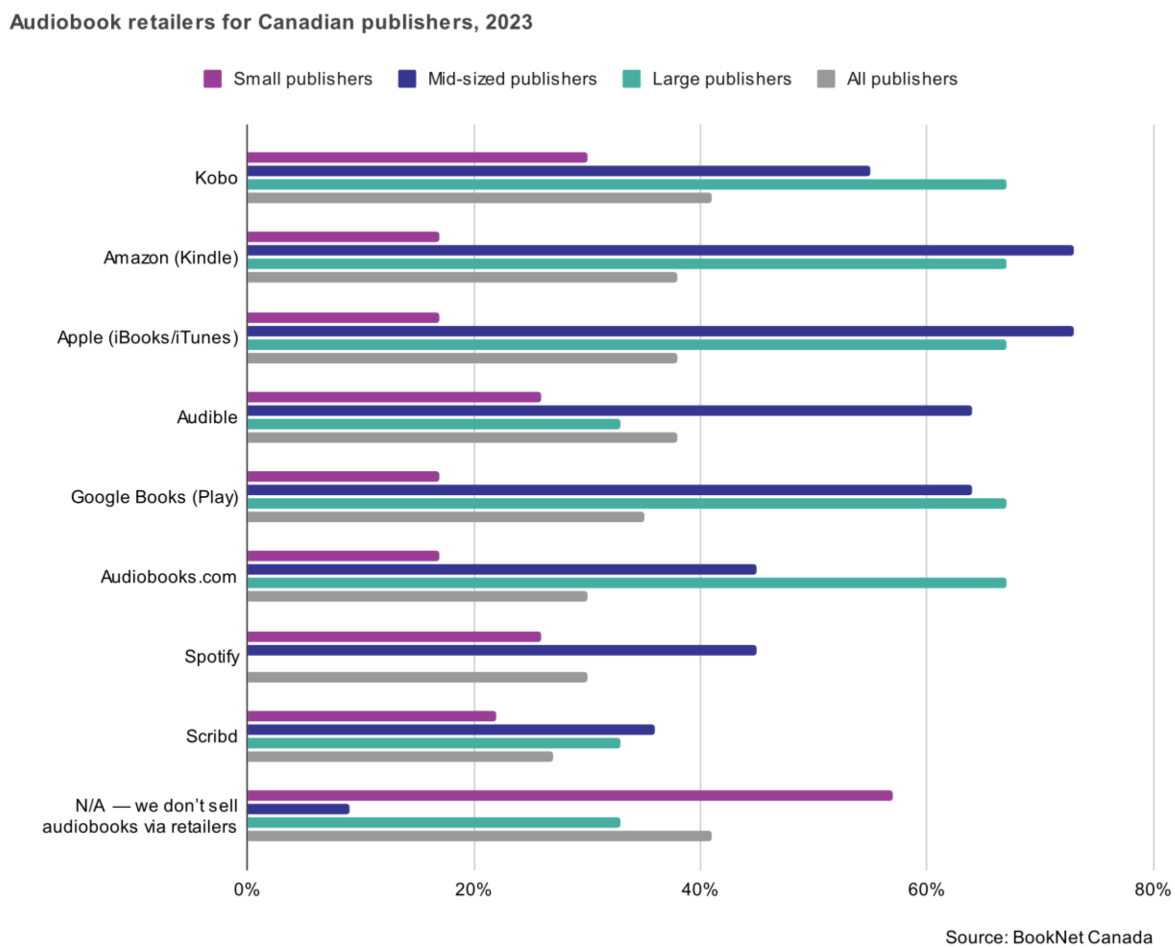


Unlike for ebooks, most publishers found there were barriers to audiobook production (89%). The biggest barrier by far was financial constraints (73%). This was followed by lack of market demand (49%), time constraints and staff capacity tied at 38%.

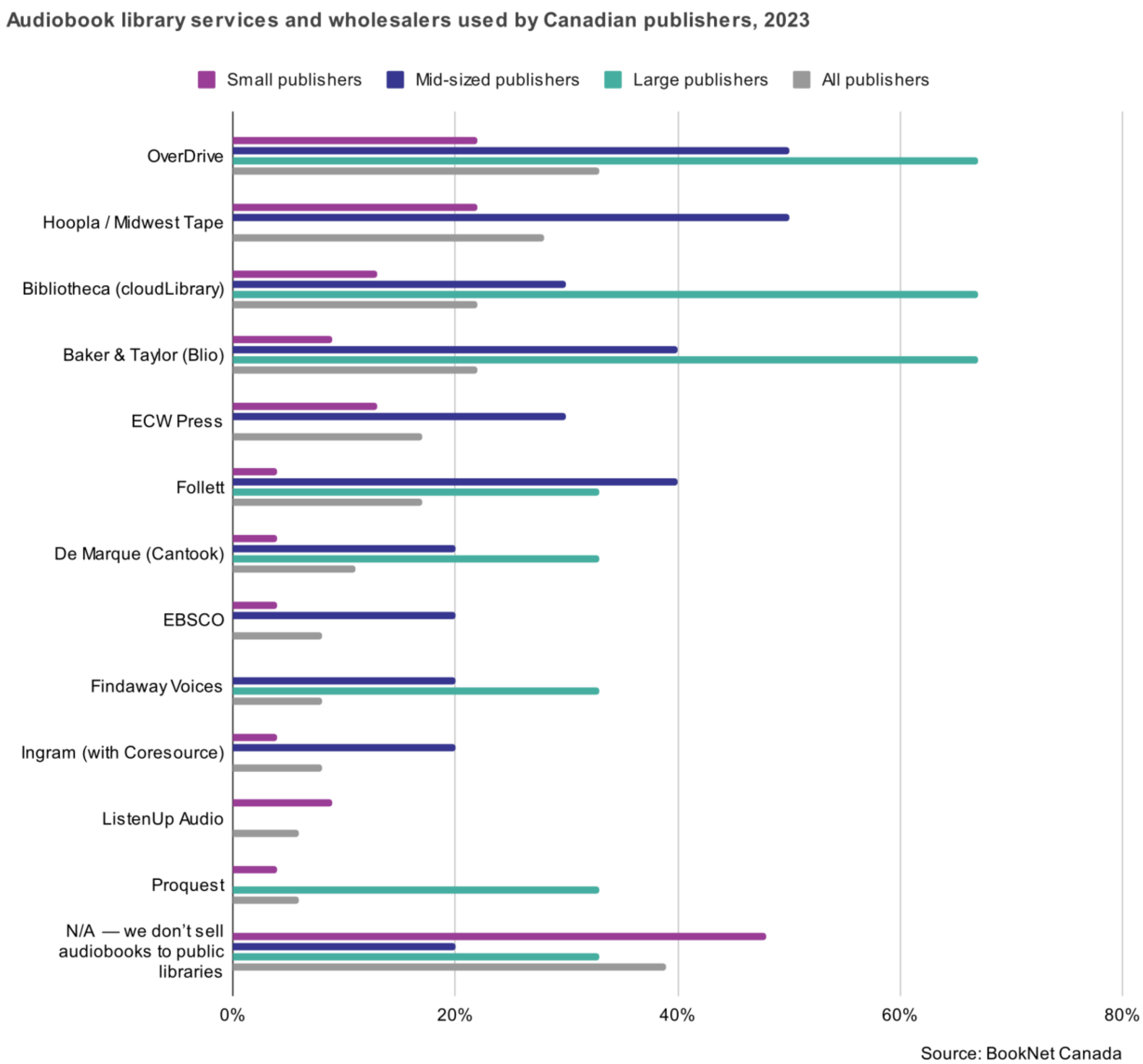


Distribution

The most popular audiobook retailers remained much the same as in 2021. In 2023, the top retailers were: Kobo (41%), Amazon (38%), Apple (38%), and Audible (38%).

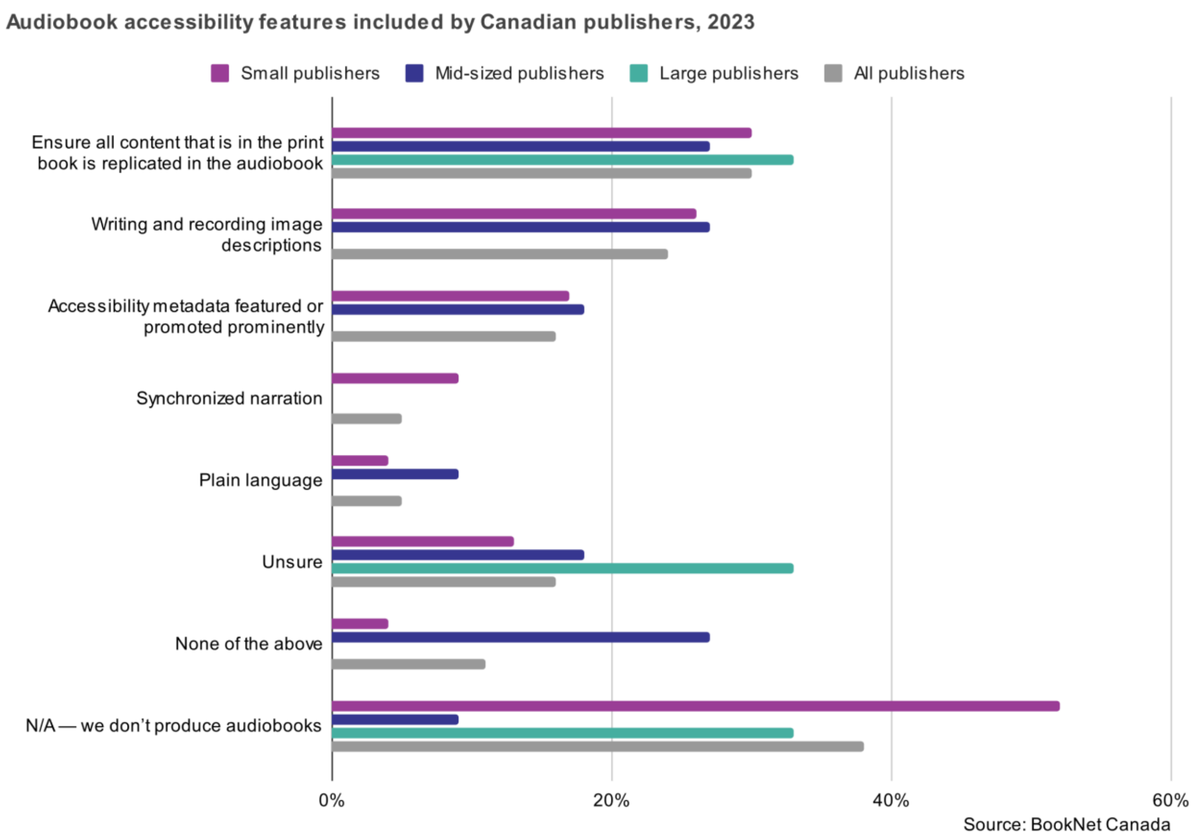


In 2023, 61% of publishers sold audiobooks to libraries using library services and wholesalers. The most popular of which were OverDrive (33%), Hoopla (28%), Bibliotheca (cloudLibrary) (22%) and Baker & Taylor (22%).



Accessibility

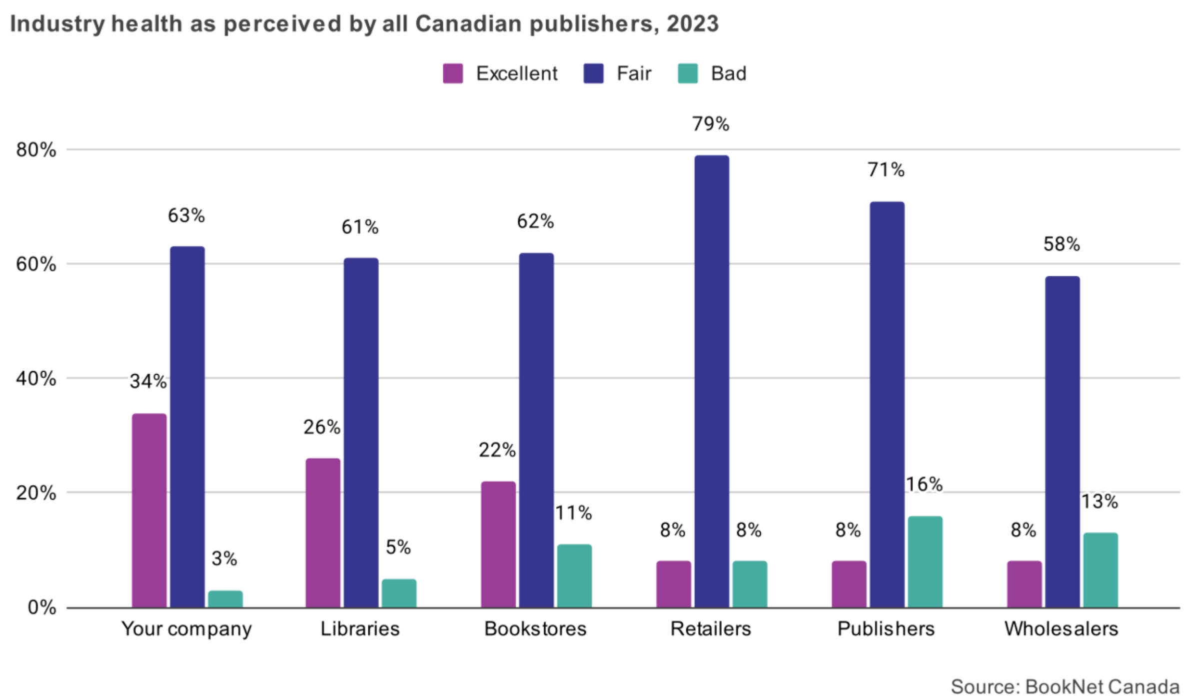
The audiobook accessibility features that were the most popular in 2023 were the same ones that were the most popular in 2021, however, more publishers were including them in their products in 2023: Ensuring all replication of all content from the print book (30% in 2023 vs. 25% in 2021), writing and recording image descriptions (24% in 2023 vs. 21% in 2021), and using accessibility metadata (16% in 2023 vs. 10% in 2021).



Industry perceptions and commentary

In 2021, a larger share of publishers described the health of their company as excellent (49%) than they did in 2023 (34%). The majority of publishers described the health of their company as fair based on their ability to withstand challenges, adapt, and change (63%). Only small publishers described the health of their company as bad (4%), but 39% described their health as excellent, second only to large publishers (50%).

Of the publishers who answered our survey, 26% thought the health of libraries was excellent and 22% thought bookstore health was excellent. The health of other publishers was most likely to have been rated as bad (16%) and retailers were most likely to have been rated as fair health (79%).



The top three ranked areas the industry should pay more attention to going forward according to Canadian publishers were the current economic environment, shipping costs, and environmental sustainability.

Publisher concerns

- “It is incredibly difficult to start a new publishing company in the current climate. Institutional support is basically non-existent, even for the very experienced publishing professionals that make up our team, which has severe ramifications for less experienced publishers seeking to start presses of their own.”
- “While I don't deal with returns directly, Indigo returns are affecting my distributor to the extent that they are late in paying the smaller publishers they distribute.”
- “ACP has done very little to support small publishers like ourselves. If they do not act proactively to aid publishers like us (BIPOC) we will be gone in two years’ time.”
- “2023 was a tough year for us. We saw our sales decline and shift, while our distribution and sales costs increased rapidly. As we serve the higher education market, we are noticing complete decimation of this sales channel. Bookstores aren't ordering books for students. Students are either not purchasing books or buying them from Amazon (free delivery) or downloading pirated ebooks. While inflation is climbing and the cost of everything is going up, we are being strangled by the market need to keep our book prices low and accessible, while printing in Canada, and also absorb the astronomical costs of distribution and returns. This is a major concern for us.”
- “In 2023, our startup micropress had one low-print-run book on our backlist and launched our first major title. We learned how little our industry is set up to support startups, or to support presses that focus on a defined niche. Because of the high cost of producing our full-colour books (which we're committed to printing domestically on recycled paper—so very, very expensive), we are unable to release more than 1–2 books a year. While we intend to begin peppering our production schedule with books that are black/white and much less expensive to print, the slow-going nature of getting a small press up and running, and the general lack of resources to aid such an

endeavour, means that our operation is generally isolated. This is changing in 2024 as we insist on continuing to get our toe in the door of industry associations, but it doesn't make much sense that our industry is so protective of itself that new publishers are left entirely on their own."

- "We continue to be a solid company however are very concerned with the shifts within the industry. It is clear that the pillars of publishing are being pressured by AI, Amazon, self-publishing, lack of strong sales into field retailers, no academic representation, and cost of goods increasing. The margins in publishing for independent publishers are diminishing at a rate that is hard to keep up with. Book prices need to be increased to plug the leaks as Amazon deepens its discount, increases co-op charges and warehousing costs go up as well as printing. Publishers are going to need to be creative in how they provide content as the traditional model for smaller publishers is becoming increasingly challenging."
- "The more we connect as publishers the better we can support each other through the next couple of years. As the price of living increases, books will go lower on the NEED to buy list. Learning to play together makes sure we all get to stay in the sandbox."
- "The current industry significantly undervalues self-publishers who run their own publishing companies, many of whom are highly successful but get zero support from the Canadian industry. We have multiple six- to seven-figure authors in Canada, who are neither highlighted or supported which is a shame."

About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada acknowledges that its operations are remote and our colleagues contribute their work from the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wyandot, the Mi'kmaq, the Ojibwa of Fort William First Nation, the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations (which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie), and the Métis, the original nations and peoples of the lands we now call Beeton, Brampton, Guelph, Halifax, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Vaughan, and Windsor. We endorse the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and support an ongoing shift from gatekeeping to spacemaking in the book industry.

The book industry has long been an industry of gatekeeping. Anyone who works at any stage of the book supply chain carries a responsibility to serve readers by publishing, promoting, and supplying works that represent the wide extent of human experiences and identities, in all its complicated intersectionality. We, at BookNet Canada, are committed to working with our partners in the industry as we move towards a framework that supports "spacemaking," which ensures that marginalized creators and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute, work, and lead.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market.

BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print trade book sales through BNC SalesData.

BookNet Canada has extensive research available on our website, both free and for purchase.

- *Turning Pages: Print Book Use in Canada 2023*: Benchmarks print book use in Canada, exploring the buying, borrowing, and reading habits of Canadian print book consumers.

- *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2023*: Looks at how Canadians are spending their leisure time and the behaviours of Canadian readers in 2023.
- *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2023*: Compiles the results from our quarterly surveying of Canadians about their book buying and reading habits in 2023.

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Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as The Globe and Mail puts it, “the book industry’s supply-chain nerve centre.”

Learn more at booknetcanada.ca.