

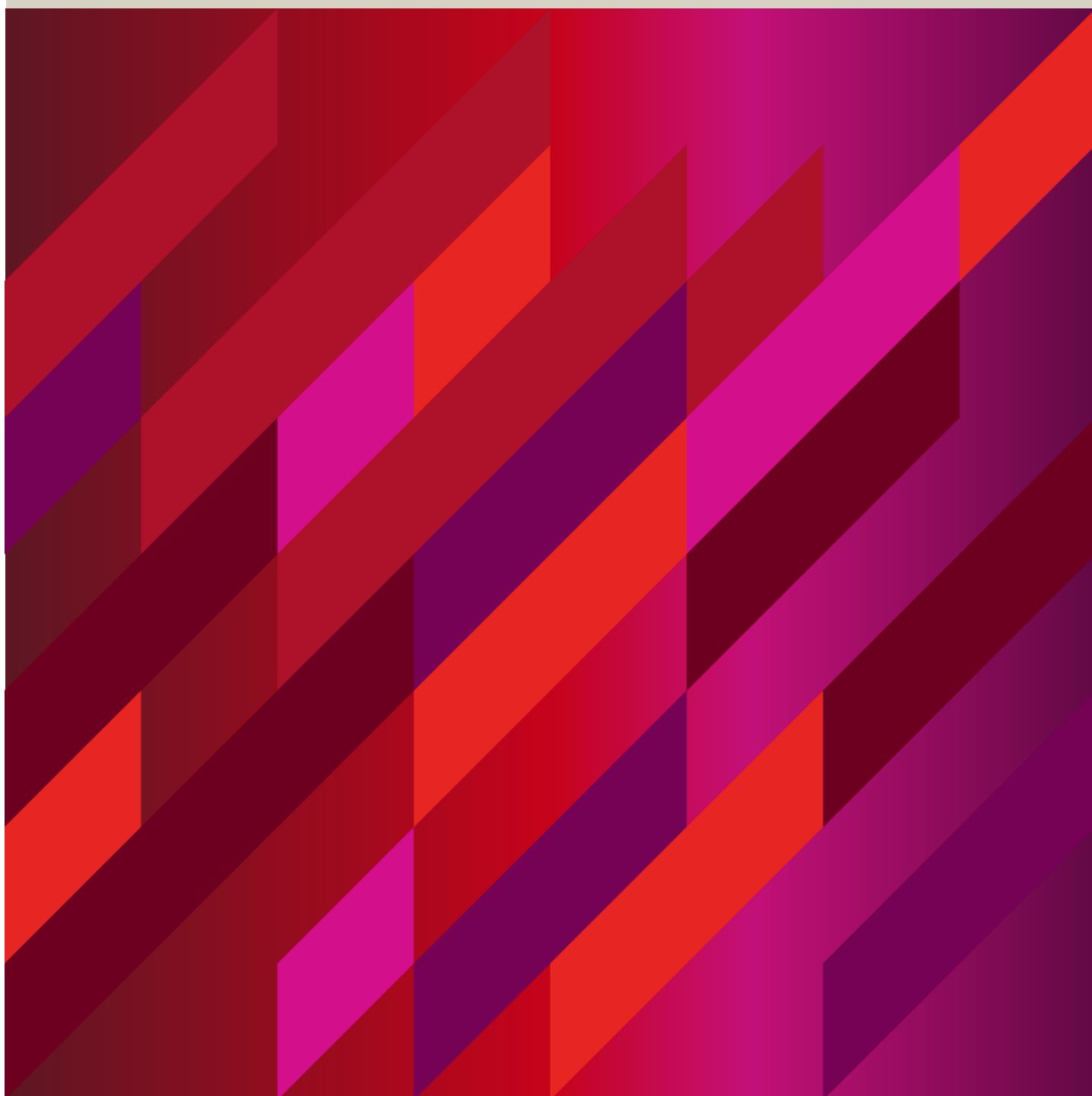


Australian authors

INDUSTRY BRIEF NO. 5: AUTHORS' CHANGING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

The Australian book industry: Authors, publishers and readers in a time of change

October 2015



The Australian Book Industry: Authors, publishers and readers in a time of change' is a three-year research project led by Prof. David Throsby, funded by the Australian Research Council under Discovery Project grant DP 140101479 and Macquarie University. In February 2015 the researchers conducted an online survey of over 1,000 Australian book authors.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND AUTHORS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Overall, the greatest impact of new technologies in the book industry over the past five years is on authors' professional practices, especially for authors of trade books. Table 1 presents the proportion of writers in each genre who identify particular impacts of new technologies on their work and their careers.

Table 1 – Authors affected by new technologies: percent within each genre

The most widespread changes to authors' practices are in the ways they are promote, publish or distribute their work, and the ways they interact with or access new readers. Approximately two-thirds of all authors are experiencing these sorts of changes. The changes are discussed next, in order of the scale of their overall impact across all types of authors.

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Total (Trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All)	<i>n</i>
Proportion of authors for whom new technologies have had an impact (percent within genre)											
Creating drafts	50.0	47.5	44.9	54.2	57.1	63.1	51.3	66.7	67.0	55.1	544
Gain inspiration	36.7	37.6	37.5	34.7	39.8	46.4	38.4	50.3	43.2	40.6	398
Ways to publish/distribute	60.7	84.0	47.4	63.2	72.4	73.5	71.1	57.3	60.4	68.1	667
Interaction with readers	69.7	87.5	72.4	55.8	66.3	60.2	73.5	40.6	47.9	66.2	650
Genre of writing	13.8	21.4	13.7	12.6	18.4	18.1	17.6	14.7	14.7	16.9	165
Opening new avenues	44.4	78.5	51.6	44.2	47.4	69.0	61.4	47.2	36.7	56.8	557
Release of backlist	43.3	45.2	32.0	40.4	38.5	28.6	39.9	23.9	28.4	36.4	356
Access new readers	63.3	85.8	59.4	56.8	61.9	64.3	70.4	40.1	54.7	64.5	632
New promotion activities	74.4	91.1	83.5	73.7	78.4	82.1	83.2	54.2	65.3	77.3	759

PROVIDING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF AUTHORS' WORK

Over three quarters of authors are experiencing new opportunities for the promotion of their work. More trade authors are affected than education or scholarly authors, including very high proportions of genre fiction authors (over 90%), children's authors and poets. Three quarters of other trade authors are also changing the promotion of their work. Education authors are the least affected (although over half are experiencing this change), perhaps reflecting the fact that some education authors are less directly involved in the promotion of their books.

NEW WAYS TO PUBLISH/DISTRIBUTE WORK

A very high proportion of genre fiction authors are changing the way their work is published or distributed (84%), reflecting the consumer uptake of ebooks in genre fiction as a contributing factor. Nearly three quarters of poets are also experiencing

changes, which could reflect shifts to digital printing by small, boutique poetry publishers, print on demand, and the use of the internet and social media as new forums for publishing poetry.

INTERACTING WITH READERS

Two-thirds of authors are changing the way they interact with readers. The highest proportion is among genre fiction authors (87.5%) and children's writers (72.4%). In a discussion forum with Australian authors conducted by Macquarie University in 2014, one children's author commented on the differences in contact with readers that he has experienced in his career:

Until 1997, it was only by letter and postcard (other than live events). For the following decade or so, it was mostly by email. Now email's still there, but much more of my interaction comes via Twitter, Facebook and my blog. It's more genuinely interactive and it's some part of every day.

Literary authors (69.7%) and poets (60%) also report high levels of change. A poet in the 2014 discussion forum observed:

Social media has meant that supporters of my work are able to get in touch more easily, and do so. In the last five years I have seen an increase in contact from those who read/watch my work and receive emails, messages, tweets etc., daily.

ACCESSING NEW READERS

Over 64% of authors are accessing new readers through new technologies, with genre fiction authors constituting a significantly higher proportion (85.8%). The lowest response is from education writers.

OPENING NEW AVENUES FOR PUBLISHING PAID ORIGINAL WORK

Over half of authors have found new avenues to publish paid, original work using new technologies. Genre fiction authors (78.5%) and poets (69%) are the most likely to benefit.

OTHER

In other changes:

Over half of authors are altering the way they draft their work, particularly scholarly authors, education writers and poets.

Over one third of authors are releasing their backlisted titles as e-books, particularly genre fiction, literary fiction and creative non-fiction authors.

Over one quarter of authors have composed, edited and published a substantial creative work without a printed version being part of the process.

Nearly one quarter of authors have shown drafts of their work in progress in online forums (closed or public) to gain feedback from other authors or readers.

The lowest rate of change (from the options provided in the survey questionnaire) is in regard to changing the genre or genres in which the authors write. Only 16.9% of authors have made this change, although some trade writers are more likely to have changed the genre in which they work, particularly genre fiction, other non-fiction and poetry authors.

EXPERIENCE OF CHANGES AS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

It is one thing to report that technology has had an impact, it is another to consider whether the impact has been positive or negative.

We asked the authors who experienced the changes reported above if the changes have been positive or negative, and the results are reported in Table 2. Changes in the ways that authors create drafts of their work (91%) and the ability to access new readers (90.6%) are viewed the most positively. However the impact of all the changes is viewed overall as positive.



Table 2 – Authors affected by new technologies who regard the impact as having been positive (percent of authors within each genre)

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Total (Trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All)	n
Proportion of authors affected by new technologies who regard the impact as having been positive (percent within genre)											
Creating drafts	93.3	92.5	93.2	88.2	89.3	88.7	91.1	90.5	93.8	91.3	495
Gain inspiration	87.5	91.4	91.7	90.9	76.9	84.6	88.0	86.1	87.8	87.7	348
Ways to publish/distribute	81.5	85.6	73.3	81.7	81.7	80.3	81.5	85.6	73.3	81.7	549
Interaction with readers	79.0	91.8	84.5	83.0	80.0	84.0	86.4	77.6	82.6	85.4	554
Genre of writing	58.3	86.7	69.2	83.3	44.4	66.7	73.8	71.4	85.7	74.5	123
Opening new avenues	85.0	90.9	85.7	92.7	89.1	81.0	88.5	75.8	69.4	85.8	476
Release of backlog	84.6	86.5	66.7	63.2	81.1	79.2	79.9	78.8	74.1	79.4	281
Access new readers	87.7	93.8	89.5	92.6	90.0	88.9	91.6	91.1	80.4	90.6	571
New promotion activities	88.1	91.8	88.9	87.1	93.4	79.7	89.3	85.5	85.2	88.6	670

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The majority of book authors, especially trade authors, are experiencing significant changes in their writing practice, with all stages of the creative process potentially affected, from gaining inspiration and writing drafts to publishing/distribution, and to promotion and interaction with readers. Overall, these changes are experienced as positive.

However, technological change has not solved the key challenges faced by many book authors. For example, while technology has opened up new ways for authors to draft their work, they still face the challenge of being able to set aside sufficient time to work on their writing. While technological change has had a positive impact on the capacity of many authors to publish their work and to access new readers, overall the average of authors' incomes from their creative practice remains low. And although there are new opportunities for authors to promote their work and to communicate with readers, authors increasingly face the challenge of achieving 'discoverability' for their books when so many new titles are released each year. In brief, technological tools are being taken up enthusiastically by the majority of authors but the fundamental economic challenges of developing and maintaining a career as an author remain unchanged.

This industry brief is part of a series prepared for Australian book authors and other members of the Australian book industry to highlight key findings of the 2015 survey.

Thank you to all the authors who gave generously of their time and expertise by participating.

The complete series of industry briefs about this survey is:

1. Key Findings
2. Demographics of Australian Book Authors
3. Authors' Income
4. Changes in the Financial Position of Australian Book Authors
5. Authors' Changing Professional Practices
6. Authors' Allocation of Time
7. Rights Sales, Translations and Piracy
8. Promotion
9. Authors and Publishers

See also the Department of Economics Working Paper, 'Book Authors and their Changing Circumstances: Survey Method and Results'.

These can be downloaded at:

<http://goto.mq.edu.au/book-industry>

