

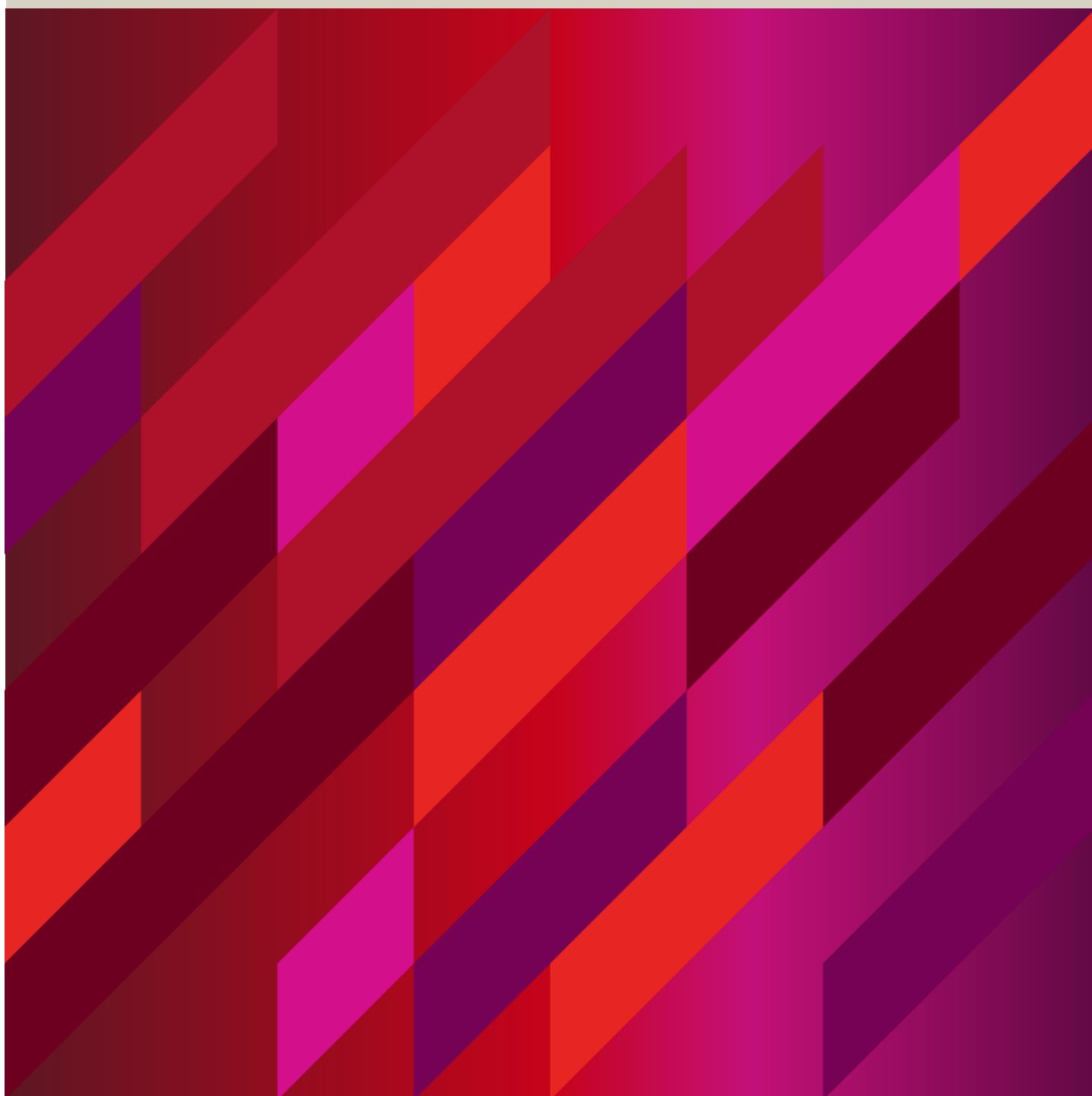


# Australian authors

## INDUSTRY BRIEF NO. 8: PROMOTION

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.

## INCREASES IN AUTHORS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROMOTING THEIR WORK

Over 20,000 new book titles were released in Australian in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Authors, publishers and booksellers face a substantial challenge in drawing the attention of potential readers to their new works in the face of competition from other new and existing titles (known as 'discoverability'). Further, members of the Australian book industry have to contend with a plethora of other media and entertainment options that compete for the attention of potential book readers.

In an online discussion forum with authors conducted in 2014, several trade authors comment on a shift they perceive in responsibility for the promotion of an author's work:

During the course of my writing life, the promotion of a work has shifted from the publisher's taking the entire responsibility for this to one where the author is expected to be, at least in part, the salesman.

... we have no choice. Engaging with the public is crucial to success.

In Table 1 below, we present the results after we asked authors if they spend more time promoting their work than five years ago. Over half of trade authors are spending more time promoting their work, compared to only one quarter of education and scholarly authors. One fifth of authors are unsure: perhaps the difference is too close to judge or they have not been practising as a book author for a sufficient period of time to make a judgement. Genre fiction authors are the most affected, followed by authors of literary fiction, children's books and poets.

**Table 1 – Do you find you have to spend more time promoting your work these days than, say, five years ago? (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
<b>Yes</b>	60.7	64.5	56.6	45.9	38.9	45.2	55.2	24.5	24.5	47.6
<b>No</b>	16.9	14.9	20.2	31.6	37.9	39.3	23.7	59.9	56.1	32.3
<b>Unsure</b>	22.5	20.6	23.2	22.4	23.2	15.5	21.2	15.6	19.4	20.2
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	89	282	99	98	95	84	747	147	98	992

## WHO OCCUPIES THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING AN AUTHOR'S WORK

Next, we asked authors who plays the most important role in promoting their work. Table 2 demonstrates that nearly half of authors consider that they themselves play the most important role, especially poets and other trade authors, while one quarter nominate their publishers.<sup>2</sup> In the Macquarie University 2014 online discussion forum with authors, some participants refer to the lead role of their publisher in promotion upon the release of a new title, and after this campaign ends the author takes the most responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> The exact figure provided by Thorpe-Bowker, which manages ISBNs for the Australian territory, is 20,877. While this number includes several ISBNs for one new book title published in multiple formats, it does not include additional books published directly to Amazon or other online platforms with their own cataloguing system, nor does it include self-published print books without an ISBN. As such, this is a conservative estimate.

<sup>2</sup> Industry Brief No. 8: 'Authors and Publishers' in this series includes an appendix with selected comments by authors who rated their relationship with their main publisher as 'highly satisfactory' or 'satisfactory'. Promotion is an important theme in the comments.

**Table 2 – Most important people for promotion of own work (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
<b>My agent or manager</b>	3.1	2.4	0.0	6.8	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	1.6
<b>My publisher</b>	35.9	20.7	40.0	18.6	30.3	20.0	26.3	67.6	53.2	34.8
<b>My readers</b>	14.1	20.2	12.5	16.9	13.6	12.7	16.4	4.9	9.7	14.1
<b>Me</b>	39.1	52.9	45.0	54.2	51.5	63.6	51.1	20.6	27.4	44.5
<b>Book sellers</b>	6.3	2.9	2.5	0.0	1.5	0.0	2.4	6.9	4.8	3.3
<b>Other</b>	1.6	1.0	0.0	3.4	3.0	3.6	1.7	0.0	4.8	1.7
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	64	208	80	59	66	55	532	102	62	696

Although half of genre fiction authors nominate themselves as having the most important role, genre fiction authors are also the most likely (compared to other genres) to nominate their readers. In the 2014 online discussion forum, one author commented:

A huge marketing and promotional campaign (at enormous expense) can sometimes push a book into a bestseller list, but the only thing that will keep it there is word of mouth. I work in a genre (crime/mystery) where authors often become 'brands'. It is difficult to establish a core readership, but they tend to be very loyal once they 'discover' a favourite writer. I work hard on keeping in touch with these readers and trying to find new ones - via social media, websites, touring and events.

While booksellers did not receive a high level of nominations as the *most* important role, in practice a senior publisher commenting on these findings observed that it is virtually impossible to successfully launch a new Australian trade author's work without the support of bricks and mortar bookstores because their staff play a particularly important role in 'hand selling' titles (through personal recommendations).<sup>3</sup>

Next we consider the importance of serious reviews, general reader reviews and winning prizes for sales of authors' work.

### **'SERIOUS' REVIEWS**

Two thirds of all authors consider serious reviews important for sales of their work, particularly authors of literary fiction, scholarly works and poetry (see Table 3).

### **GENERAL READER REVIEWS**

A notable change in the industry is the easier and more widespread access to reviews by other general readers, and these are now approximately as important for authors as 'serious' reviews. General reader reviews are particularly important for trade authors, especially genre fiction and children's authors but they are important in all genres (see Table 4).

<sup>3</sup> In another example, the closure in 2011 of the REDgroup Retail group, which owned Borders and the Angus & Robertson chain of bricks and mortar bookstores, is viewed within the book industry as contributing to the loss of a substantial proportion book sales in Australia with particular implications for literary, children's and illustrated book authors (the latter grouped under 'other non-fiction authors' in this survey). According to senior publishers, physical displays of books in popular retail outlets remain an important aspect of promotion strategies for trade books.

**Table 3 – In your experience, how important are serious reviews for sales of your work? (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
<b>Important</b>	86.5	64.9	66.7	67.3	57.9	70.2	67.7	55.8	75.8	66.8
<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	5.6	13.8	9.1	9.2	17.9	10.7	11.8	19.0	6.1	12.3
<b>Unimportant</b>	2.2	6.4	3.0	4.1	1.1	6.0	4.4	2.7	5.1	4.2
<b>Don't know / No opinion</b>	4.5	7.4	15.2	11.2	11.6	11.9	9.6	8.8	12.1	9.8
<b>Not Relevant / Not Applicable</b>	1.1	7.4	6.1	8.2	11.6	1.2	6.4	13.6	1.0	6.9
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i>	89	282	99	98	95	84	747	147	99	993

**Table 4 – In your experience, how important are general reader reviews for sales of your work? (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
<b>Important</b>	66.3	80.1	69.7	63.9	66.3	48.8	69.7	46.6	43.4	63.6
<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	10.1	11.4	12.1	11.3	13.7	21.4	12.8	17.8	21.2	14.3
<b>Unimportant</b>	9.0	2.5	2.0	4.1	4.2	9.5	4.4	1.4	6.1	4.1
<b>Don't know / No opinion</b>	14.6	4.3	13.1	12.4	11.6	17.9	10.2	16.4	18.2	11.9
<b>Not Relevant / Not Applicable</b>	0.0	1.8	3.0	8.2	4.2	2.4	3.0	17.8	11.1	6.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	89	281	99	97	95	84	745	146	99	990

## PRIZES

We asked authors whether winning a well-regarded prize relevant to their genre has an impact on sales of their work. The question was not relevant or not applicable to over one third of authors, with another tenth responding that they didn't know or had no opinion.

Of the remaining authors, winning such a prize is the most important for poets, followed by literary fiction and children's authors. It is also important for approximately one third of creative non-fiction, other non-fiction and scholarly authors (Table 5).

**Table 5 – In your experience, how important has winning a well-regarded prize relevant to your genre/s? (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
<b>Important</b>	55.1	28.5	49.5	33.0	33.7	60.7	39.3	21.2	30.3	35.8
<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	4.5	17.4	6.1	11.3	10.5	10.7	11.9	11.6	7.1	11.4
<b>Unimportant</b>	1.1	8.9	3.0	4.1	3.2	1.2	5.0	9.6	6.1	5.8
<b>Don't know / No opinion</b>	12.4	13.5	10.1	5.2	13.7	11.9	11.7	13.0	12.1	11.9
<b>Not Relevant / Not Applicable</b>	27.0	31.7	31.3	46.4	38.9	15.5	32.1	44.5	44.4	35.2
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i>	89	281	99	97	95	84	745	146	99	990

## PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Finally, in Table 6 we asked authors about the activities that they find the most useful in promoting their work.

In the following section we discuss these results for each genre in turn.

## LITERARY FICTION

Nearly three fifths of literary authors use social media and websites, followed by over half who give interviews for newspapers, radio and/or TV, and then personal appearances: attending a writers festival, in-store events, school and library visits and writers centres. Nearly one quarter of literary fiction authors give away a free sample of part of a work, and nearly one fifth present at writers conferences and/or create an editorial, news article or online article. Over one tenth of authors create additional content to extend their work (other than a teacher's resource). Approximately one tenth of literary fiction authors provide a free sample of a complete piece of work, use paid advertising, a paid publicity service and nearly one tenth create a book trailer or YouTube clip. In the 'other' category, literary authors also specified visits to book clubs and interaction with online author communities.

## GENRE FICTION

Over four fifths of genre fiction authors use social media and websites, the highest proportion of any authors in the survey. Next, less than half of genre fiction authors attend a writers festival, and/or give interviews for newspapers, radio and/or TV, over one third provide a free sample of part of a work, and make school or library visits, followed by under a third who appear at in store events. Over one quarter of genre fiction authors present at writers conferences, provide a free sample of a complete work, and create an editorial, news article or online article and nearly one quarter use paid advertising. Genre fiction authors have the highest proportion of all authors who are active in a readers' association (over one fifth). Other notable promotional mechanisms include the highest proportion of trade authors who send out a regular newsletter to readers (nearly one fifth), book trailers or YouTube clips (nearly one fifth) and using 'street teams' of readers to promote their work (7%). The 'other' category of responses include Goodreads giveaways, online interviews and live speaking engagements, popular culture conventions including Supanova and Pininterest, and one author experienced a promotional benefit after becoming president of a writers' association (which raised the authors' profile as a national spokesperson).

**Table 6: The activities that you have found useful in promoting your work as an author (percent of authors within each genre)**

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Promotion using social media and websites	58.1	83.3	67.7	58.3	55.9	54.8	68.4	33.1	38.9	60.3
Interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV	55.8	44.7	42.4	51	52.7	38.1	46.8	13.1	36.8	40.8
School visits and/or library visits	29.1	33	74.7	31.3	22.6	32.1	36.5	26.9	10.5	32.6
Attending a writers' festival (as a speaker or attendee)	51.2	46.1	47.5	21.9	25.8	46.4	41.2	4.8	6.3	32.4
In-store events (including readings & book signings)	37.2	29.1	38.4	32.3	19.4	31	30.7	5.5	14.7	25.4
Providing a free sample of part of your work	23.3	36.2	12.1	13.5	24.7	20.2	25.3	29	14.7	24.8
Creating an editorial, news article or online article	17.4	25.2	21.2	24	34.4	13.1	23.4	15.2	26.3	22.4
Presenting at writers' conferences	19.8	26.2	32.3	14.6	9.7	28.6	23	5.5	10.5	19.2
Providing a free sample of a complete piece of work	12.8	26.2	11.1	22.9	16.1	13.1	19.5	19.3	11.6	18.7
Attending a writers' centre (as a speaker or attendee)	26.7	18.8	25.3	15.6	15.1	23.8	20.3	3.4	5.3	16.3
None of the above	19.8	3.9	9.1	13.5	9.7	9.5	9.1	26.9	27.4	13.5
Other (please specify)	11.6	8.9	15.2	18.8	15.1	22.6	13.6	11	12.6	13.2
Creating a teachers' resource	1.2	5.7	31.3	3.1	4.3	8.3	8.4	37.2	12.6	13.1
Creating additional content that extends my published work (other than a teachers' resource)	11.6	11.3	16.2	6.3	11.8	13.1	11.6	16.6	7.4	11.9
Being an active participant in a readers' association	8.1	21.3	12.1	4.2	10.8	14.3	14.2	2.1	2.1	11.2
Paid advertising	10.5	23.8	4	4.2	4.3	2.4	12.2	4.8	4.2	10.3
Sending a regular newsletter to readers	4.7	17.4	8.1	10.4	8.6	6	11.4	5.5	0	9.4
Creating a book trailer or YouTube clip as a promotional activity	9.3	17	13.1	5.2	2.2	6	10.9	4.1	4.2	9.3
Paid PR/publicity service	10.5	8.2	3	7.3	3.2	2.4	6.4	1.4	2.1	5.2
'Street teams' or other teams of readers	0	7.1	2	0	2.2	0	3.2	0	0	2.4

## CHILDREN'S

Three quarters of children's authors make school or library visits, two thirds use social media and websites, and nearly half attend writers' festivals. The next most popular activities are interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV and then in store events (over one third of children's authors). Nearly one third of children's authors create a teachers' resource (second only to education authors). Over one quarter attend a writers centre to promote their work and over one fifth create editorial, news or online articles. Children's authors have the highest proportion of trade authors who create additional content to extend their work other than a teacher's resource (16.2%) and they also are the second-highest creators of book trailers or YouTube clips (over one tenth of authors). Over one in ten children's authors provide a free sample of part of their work, are an active participant in a readers' association, and/or provide a free sample of a complete piece of work. Nearly one tenth of children's authors send a regular newsletter to their readers. Other activities that are specified on a one-off basis included creating a competition to win a book, online interviews and guest blog posts, presenting to historical societies, publishing other people's work, a solo exhibition and book launch, speaking to booksellers at a promotional night, and writing reviews of other books.

## CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Two thirds of creative non-fiction authors use social media and websites and over half give interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV. Live appearances are popular, with nearly one third of creative non-fiction authors appearing at in-store events including readings and book signings, school visits and/or library visits. Nearly one quarter of authors create an editorial, news article or online article and over one fifth provide a free sample of a complete piece of work. In addition, creative non-fiction authors' other specified activities include speaking opportunities at conferences (apart from writers' conferences), seminars, community events, public lectures, and speaking to community groups.

## OTHER NON-FICTION

The activities most selected by other-fiction authors are quite similar to creative non-fiction authors, however over half use social media and websites. Over half also give interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV. Over one third of other non-fiction authors create an editorial, news article or online article. Over one quarter attend a writers' festival and provide a free sample of part of their work. Other promotional activities specified by other non-fiction authors include giving talks at events relevant to the content of their book and soliciting reviews from readers.

## POETRY

Over half of poets use social media and websites and nearly half attend a writers' festival, followed by interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV (38%). Live appearances are also important to poets: nearly one third make school and/or library visits, and/or appear at in-store events including readings and book signings. Over one quarter present at writers conferences and nearly one quarter attend a writers' centre. One fifth of poets have given away a free sample of their work and 14% are active in a readers' association. Other activities specified by poets include poetry readings, multimedia presentations, online interviews, performing at festivals, events and open mic occasions, a book launch in a prestigious venue, editing a literary journal and having a poem read on an ABC Radio National program.

## EDUCATION

Not surprisingly, the most popular promotional activity for education authors is creating a teachers' resource (over one third of education authors) followed by using social media and websites (one third) and providing a free sample of part of a work (less than one third). Over one quarter of education authors make school and/or library visits, and interestingly, an equal proportion do 'none of the above' of all the promotional activities on the survey questionnaire. Nearly one fifth of education authors provide a free sample of a complete piece of work. Education authors, along with children's authors, are the most likely to create additional content that extends their published work (other than a teachers' resource) (16.6%). Other activities specified by education authors include presentations at teachers' conferences, seminars and workshops, 'publisher-organised seminars', endorsement by judges and academics, presentations at universities and university conferences, and [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net).

## SCHOLARLY

Scholarly authors, like many other authors, use social media and websites (nearly two fifths) and interviews for newspaper, radio and/or TV (over one third). Scholarly authors have the highest rate of selecting 'none of the above' for all the promotional activities listed (over one quarter), closely followed by education authors. Over one quarter of scholarly authors provide a free sample of part of their work. Other activities nominated specifically by scholarly authors include presenting at academic conferences, publishers' displays at professional conferences, contributing to peer-reviewed journals, informal networks, workshops for teachers and talks to community groups.



## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Trade authors in particular are keenly aware of a shift to them to take greater responsibility for promoting their work, while scholarly authors are the least likely to be affected by changes or to have undertaken the range of promotional activities discussed. A high proportion of trade authors use websites and social media to promote their work but live events in a range of forms and formats are also important. In general, it appears that websites and social media have not supplanted live appearances; rather, they supplement one another (although in some cases, communication technologies enable authors to make live appearances from remote locations). Further, industry advice is that the physical display of books in bricks and mortar retail outlets remains important, although the survey did not address this.

Several authors from a range of genres commented that they have not had time to undertake any of the promotional activities specified.<sup>4</sup> And several authors wrote that they have undertaken a number of the promotional activities listed in the questionnaire but they are unsure whether or not these had increased sales of their books. As the options for promoting books increase, it's likely that authors and publishers will continue to seek ways in which they can measure the effectiveness of various promotional tools.

*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>

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<sup>4</sup> The issue of time is discussed in another industry brief in this series, 'Authors' Allocation of Time'.