



**A TikTok Challenge for Publishing
Interview with Mark Gottlieb**

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KENNEALLY: TikTok challenges can range from the sublime to the ridiculous and even the dangerous. There are challenges over art projects, school bathrooms, and sometimes fatally, boat jumping. Now, TikTok may have a challenge for publishers.

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

In May, TikTok's China-based parent company, ByteDance, sought a trademark for its own book publishing imprint, to be called 8th Note Press. This month, *The New York Times* and others have reported the fledgling publisher is approaching self-published romance authors with offers for book deals. The advances aren't large, but the implications for the industry are enormous.

Mark Gottlieb, vice president and literary agent with Trident Media Group, joins me to explore what authors and publishers should know about this news and how they may want to respond. Mark Gottlieb, welcome back to the program.

GOTTLIEB: Thank you so much for having me back here. It's wonderful to be back.

KENNEALLY: Glad to have you and to help us understand why TikTok would choose to become a publisher. It's of course important to understand the role that this video-first social media platform has already had to play in bookselling. What kind of bookselling power does TikTok have, and where does it come from?

GOTTLIEB: They have a very highly engaged, influential book community, along with the ability to make book recommendations go viral. They have a lot of authentic and relatable content and impulse buying through book hauls. They have direct links to their purchase pages. And they have a very broad user base that spans diverse demographics and interests. It's sort of all these factors – this amalgam of factors that allow TikTok to really effectively promote and sell their books, drive this kind of awareness, generate a lot of interest, and facilitate direct sales through its platform.



KENNEALLY: And we know it matters, we know it counts, because if anyone goes to a bookstore these days, there'll be a table that says, "As seen on BookTok." So it really is making a difference for sales.

GOTTLIEB: And a lot of publishers more and more are coming to rely on TikTok as a means for marketing and promoting books.

KENNEALLY: Traditional or legacy publishers today, Mark, are increasingly under pressure to be more diverse with the authors they publish and the audiences they serve. Have they ceded this diversity ground, though, to TikTok? Are they competing effectively there?

GOTTLIEB: I don't think it's simply that TikTok has entirely replaced publishers in that space. Traditional publishers – they will and continue to play a significant role in curating and publishing a very big range of diverse voices across many genres and perspectives. Publishers really have established different distribution networks. They have their editorial expertise. They have industry connections that all kind of contribute to discovery and promoting diverse voices.

So even while TikTok can bring a lot of visibility to specific book titles – we talked about TikTok before as a means of marketing and promoting authors, and that does drive the diversification of book recommendations – I think the publishing industry still remains as a crucial factor in championing those diverse voices just by the very nature of acquiring books and their editorial process.

KENNEALLY: To be a startup in the publishing world, that's never easy. What advantages, Mark Gottlieb, do you think TikTok has coming to the publishing market?

GOTTLIEB: I think TikTok definitely brings many advantages to the publishing market to set it apart from other kinds of publishing startups. First, of course, TikTok has a massive reach, with millions and millions of users. They have a very diverse user base. They have a very big audience for promoting books, for reaching potential readers.

And then the platform – again, being driven by that algorithmic content discovery ensures that book recommendations can quickly gain traction and go viral. This exposes books to a very wide audience – these two factors of just the large user base and their algorithms. People will basically be fed more videos that they watch. So if they watch a video, I suppose, about a mystery crime thriller book, they're going to start receiving more video recommendations along those lines.

You combine that with TikTok's engaging and immersive format, and that allows TikTok to really captivate their users' attention and generate significant interest in specific titles.



TikTok's interactive and community-driven nature fosters an engagement and a conversation around books, and then this in turn creates a very vibrant ecosystem for literary discussion. I think these advantages really stand to position TikTok as a unique and influential player in the publishing market, and this will further enable them to drive book sales and shape reading trends in their own distinct manner.

KENNEALLY: Indeed, Mark Gottlieb, you were talking about the conversation around books. In this influencer culture of TikTok, there seems to me to be a challenge to the traditional tastemakers of the book world. They've begun to alter publishing and bookselling. Is it possible that these market-makers may even have an effect on the format of content?

GOTTLIEB: I think the rise of influencer culture in the book world does present a set of challenges to traditional literary tastemakers and critics and established reviewers. Obviously, influencers come with very large followings, an engaged community, and may have the power to sway readers' choices and impact book sales. This shift could really alter publishing and bookselling by placing a greater emphasis on personal recommendations and relatability, rather than relying solely on the opinions of just traditional publishers or tastemakers. This opens up, I think, opportunities for niche genres and even self-published works and diverse voices that may not have received attention from traditional publishing channels.

So these market-makers, which include influencers, I think can potentially influence the format of content by popularizing shorter, more digestible formats, such as novellas, even serialized books, that kind of align with this fast-paced nature or attention-grabbing nature of social media consumption as it relates to the kinds of videos we see on TikTok.

KENNEALLY: TikTok has already made the fortunes of many authors, Mark Gottlieb, particularly in trade book publishing, and especially for the romance genre. Does the video-sharing platform possibly have an impact on other publishing markets, including business books?

GOTTLIEB: Let me just start by saying obviously I use TikTok to seek out potential talent for books. That definitely includes people from the business world who are TikTokers who are talking about what they do. So yes, as a video-sharing platform, TikTok can have an impact on other publishing segments, which definitely include business books.

I think even while TikTok is primarily known for more so its entertainment-oriented content, it has definitely a growing community of business professionals and entrepreneurs who share their tips, their insights, their recommendations as it relates to the business world. TikTok's ability to present information in these short or bite-sized, engaging videos



can make these kind of complex or otherwise difficult-to-understand business concepts a lot more accessible or easily digestible to a broader audience.

So business authors and experts can really actually leverage TikTok to promote their books. They can share a lot of the key takeaways, engage with readers, and thereby potentially expand their reach and influence. The platform's algorithm-driven content discovery can help business books gain visibility and reach new audiences, thereby contributing to their success in the publishing market. So it serves two factors – discovery in terms of preexisting business books, but also people who could potentially be writing business books.

KENNEALLY: So it's this video-friendly content that's essential for success on TikTok, Mark Gottlieb. What can you tell us about how authors and even publishers should think about how to satisfy this need for TikTok video, whether it's for their own brands or for this new publishing imprint from TikTok?

GOTTLIEB: Because TikTok is primarily video-based, obviously, video-friendly content is what will really do best on TikTok. So authors and publishers should then consider a few key aspects to really satisfy that need. They should focus on creating visually engaging and attention-grabbing content that can kind of just quickly grab the attention of readers. That can include using very compelling visuals, bright colors, concise messaging, because it's a short video format, just ensuring that this is easily digestible, but also leaves kind of a lasting memory for the viewer.

And then I think incorporating storytelling elements – so humor, unique angles – can help make the content a lot more relatable and shareable.

I think this shift towards the more personalized, interactive, and visually oriented book discovery and engagement really does have the power to reshape the way books are discovered, but also the way in which they're marketed and consumed in this new digital age.

KENNEALLY: Well, Mark Gottlieb with Trident Media Group, thanks for joining me today on Velocity of Content.

GOTTLIEB: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening.



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