

# Bucking the Odds

Indie publishers tap new channels to spur growth

by Jim Milliot



## More Channels, More Sales for Barefoot

**A**s a \$5-million company, children's book publisher Barefoot Books in Cambridge, Mass., and Bath, England, set itself a seemingly impossible goal: to become a household name. But its branding efforts, which include direct-to-consumer sales, à la DK's Tupperware-style book parties, led to a dramatic increase in revenue in 2004. According to president and co-founder Nancy Traversy, sales were up 40% on both sides of the Atlantic.

"We just haven't gone down the traditional publishing path," says Traversy of the company's sales initiatives, which are based on what she regards as "the basic premise" that people prefer to buy through different channels: independents, big-box retailers and online. "We couldn't survive the push-it-out and 50% returns," she adds. Instead, a two-page spread in the Chinaberry catalogue recounting the story behind Barefoot—two mothers seeking quality, multicultural books for their kids—along with a 100,000-copy print run for Barefoot's own fall/holiday catalogue for consumers helped boost mail-order revenue 80% last year. Increases at Amazon were even more dramatic, up 180%. Canadian sales grew at a markedly slower rate, but were still up 30%.

Sales at Barefoot's children's bookstore in Cambridge, where it test markets its products, increased 20%, though it was a lackluster year for many independents. And in keeping with the company's global aspirations, Traversy and cofounder Tessa Strickland are scouting a location for a second store, this one in London, to open in 2006.

Using Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* as its guide to finding ways to make a big impact with a minimum outlay of cash, Barefoot launched its Stallholders home-selling program at the beginning of last year. Since then, Barefoot has recruited more than 200 resellers in the U.S. "We recruit every day," says Traversy, who looks to Stallholders not only for cash-up-front sales, but for getting the word out about Barefoot Books and helping to create a brand.

To provide both retailers and Stallholders with unique products, last year Barefoot signed agreements with Folkmanis to manufacture puppets based on Barefoot titles and with Gallison for its Mudpuppy Press to create puzzles and games based on its books. Traversy plans more add-ons in the coming year for both the U.S. and the U.K.

Looking forward, Barefoot's most immediate challenge is U.S. distribution. "We're leaving Baker & Taylor in the next few months," says Traversy, who is in the process of selecting a warehouse for pick, pack and ship.

—JUDITH ROSEN

### PW's Small Publisher Standouts

PUBLISHER	SALES GROWTH 2002-2004	TITLES		EMPLOYEES	
		2002	2004	2002	2004
Square One Publishers GARDEN CITY, N.Y.	233%	20	28	7	8
North Atlantic Books/Frogs Ltd BERKELEY, CALIF.	104%	53	66	15	18
Quirk Books PHILADELPHIA, PA.	88%	7	24	10	18
Chelsea Garden Publishing Co. WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT.	87%	15	19	10	13
Interweave Press LOVELAND, COLO.	80%	19	23	9	14
Ronnie Sellers Productions PORTLAND, MAINE	65%	14	30	16	24
Chicago Review Press CHICAGO	40%	8	10	34	47
Arcadia Publishing MOUNT PLEASANT, S.C.	37%	437	542	55	70
America's Test Kitchen BROOKLINE VILLAGE, MASS.	25%	4	6	38	62
Red Wheel/Weiser BOSTON	22%	19	20	82	63
iBooks NEW YORK CITY	17%	180	200	9	10
Barefoot Books CAMBRIDGE, MASS.	17%	76	65	30	26
Inner Traditions, Bear & Co. WASHINGTON, D.C.	15%	66	69	32	34
Quail Ridge Press BRANDON, MO.	10%	7	10	13	13