

# The Paper Shortage Impacts Craft Publishers

by Clark Tate | Jul 26, 2022



From empty bookshelves to rising price tags to possible [2022 election material woes](#), a [paper shortage](#) is walloping the literate world. It's hard to get a handle on the exact cause or scale of the shortage, but blame ranges from shipping delays to worker illnesses to other pandemic-related stresses. It doesn't help that the online

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We talked to four Craft Industry Alliance members about how the shortage affects their businesses. Here's what they have to say.

## Short Supplies Equal Rising Costs

For Kim Werker of Vancouver-based [Nine Ten Publications](#), this was a heck of a time to get into the print business. "We're a new publishing company," she says. "And we've just begun printing our first product." While planning a Kickstarter campaign to launch a book tentatively titled *Sheep, Shepherd and Land*, Werker's printer, Hemlock Printers, gave her a quote last November. By March, it had increased by \$3,000. "We're not going to send that book to the printer until December," says Werker. "And we know full well that it may cost even more."

Those higher costs mean higher book prices. Nine Ten just printed a mall, 64-page book earlier this year.

"We're pricing it at \$28.95 Canadian," she says.

"Even a couple of years ago, my eyes would  
have popped out."

These days, the distributors and craft store owners Werker works with are reassuring her that such price points are the new normal.

Belinda Johnson, Publisher and Marketing Director at London-based [Pom Pom Quarterly](#), has a similar story. From January to May this year, they saw a 22% increase in print production quotes, forcing them to raise prices as well. They last increased their cover price from £9.50 to £12.50 in 2019. This year it was £17.50.

Deborah Balmuth of [Storey Publishing](#) in Massachusetts cites high shipping costs to and from their printers in China and rising paper prices for pushing the prices of

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As with everything, the paper shortage is hitting large and small businesses differently. Balmuth finds it interesting that we would even write an article about the issue.

“In some ways, it's hard to separate the paper shortage from all the other issues with shipping and printing that we've had,” she says.

Storey publishing moves around 15,000 to 20,000 books a year.

Still, the shortage does impact Balmuth's business. “We use printers all over the world,” she says, “but we're finding, especially with our domestic printers, that they're placing limitations on the number of copies...for a first printing.” That means that if Storey Publishing has high expectations for a new book, they may not be able to meet the demand and will miss out on profits in the process. “We're out of stock with some of our books longer than we want to be.”

Diversification matters too. “We also run an online magazine,” says Werker of Nine Ten Publishing. “We're very comfortable with digital,” she says, “so we may simply not print as many things.” She doesn't think they'll give up on print altogether, though. “We're taking it slow,” she says. “But no, I don't, I don't think we're going to move from print to digital, I think we'll continue to do this dance.”

Pom Pom is in a similar situation. “Digital-only sales have always been strong for us,” writes Johnson, “and we have seen an increase in the number of customers choosing digital editions over print in the last year or so.” But she hopes their print products won't go by the wayside. “Print is a huge part of what we do, and we take huge pride in the quality of our printed publications – knitters are tactile people after all.”

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## Paper Matters — The Art of and Sustainability of Print

The paper shortage may force smaller publishers like Nine Ten and Pom Pom to consider reducing the number of publications they produce and struggle to budget for higher costs. In contrast, larger, more established operations may primarily struggle with the stilted artistic expression of fewer choices.

“We’ve always prided ourselves on producing really high-quality books. And part of that is the quality of the paper,” Balmuth says. Storey Publishing carefully considers the weight, finish, and color of the paper they select for each book. “We don’t have as much flexibility,” she says. Sometimes we have to just take the paper that we can get.”

“We just did a book for kids on how to get a good night’s sleep,” she says. “You don’t want a bright white paper on a book that’s about falling asleep. It has very, kind of dreamy illustrations and you want a softness to the paper.”

For three of the four Craft Industry Alliance members we spoke to for this article, the paper shortage makes it harder for them to work toward their sustainability goals.

Storey Publishing recently committed to printing solely on [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\) paper](#), which ensures that the trees used in their paper were harvested with ecosystem health in mind. Now it’s harder to find.

Werker of Nine Ten Publications has a similar problem.

“We are very committed to using 100% post-consumer, recycled paper,” says Werker. “But nobody’s making 100% recycled paper right

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Her regular printer Minuteman Press in Kitsilano was able to source enough for two projects so far this year. “My printer will not be able to get his hands on any more of it in all of 2022.”

“And that may impact the number of products we choose to print,” says Werker. “Because it’s kind of a balancing act for us. We don’t want to be creating products that aren’t made in an eco-friendly way. But we may not be able to make them at all, without compromising.”

Pom Pom Quarterly is in the same boat. After committing to using 100% recycled paper for their publications, rising costs forced them to switch back in early 2022.

## Your Printer Matters – Domestic vs. International Showdown

Shannon Okey of the Cleveland-based [Cooperative Press](#) says the paper shortage has barely registered for her business. She credits her “decade-plus” partnership with US-based [Ingram Content Group](#), which Okey calls one of the world’s largest book distributors.

“They have a significant advantage over their competition in terms of scale and ability to forecast and ensure they have materials,” Okey said in an email. “We chose to work with them because their print facilities are in the US...and that decision has paid off many times over.”

In contrast, Storey Publishing outsources much of its printing. In Balmuth’s view, the paper shortage is exacerbating what was already an issue for publishers as the pandemic slowed production in and shipping from China. “We were starting to get issues where we sent a book to the printers in China, and we had to push our schedules out,” she says. What used to take three months took six.

“They were already placing limitations on the number of copies they would print in order to try to serve more customers,” Balmuth says. As a result, more North

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## A Challenge or an Existential Threat

It's hard to say how long the paper shortage will last, or how much it will matter to these businesses in the long term.

"It's probably having a bigger impact on smaller and smaller businesses," says Balmuth. "We're printing 15 or 20 thousand copies of a book. So, you know, that's a big business for a printer, and getting the paper for that is probably a priority, I imagine."

The company is moving to have even more control of its supply in the future. "Storey has recently become part of [Hachette](#) publishing (HBG)," says Balmuth. "They do actually buy the paper. And we're not part of their paper buying program yet, but we'll be transitioning."

"That could actually work to our advantage," says Balmuth. "I imagine that they probably have a little bit more clout in accessing paper. I'm not sure about that. I'm just speculating."

For the most part, the members we spoke with are optimistic about their print-based businesses. "I'm not concerned at all that our business would fail because of the paper shortage. But the paper shortage may impact our decisions about projects moving forward," says Werker of Nine Ten Publications.

But weathering so much uncertainty takes its toll. "Thankfully, we have been able to source paper so far, even if we aren't using the most ideal stocks," writes Johnson.

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## L. Clark Tate

### Contributor

Clark Tate is a freelance writer and lifelong knitter. After graduating from never-ending scarves to more complex projects, Clark also graduated with a Master's in Environmental Science. She then worked as a restoration ecologist for six years, before moving on to an obsession with braided hats and writing articles about people and the environments they live in. She's written for Hakai Magazine, Summit Daily News, Salt Lake City Weekly, and [GearLab.com](https://gearlab.com). You can find further examples of her work at [lclarktate.com](https://lclarktate.com).

## 1 Comment



**Lynda** on July 27, 2022 at 2:07 pm

This is very interesting. My company, Sublime Grafx, prints sewing patterns, reproduction artwork and print-on-demand products like mugs and t-shirts. I had issues earlier this year finding tissue paper for our sewing patterns. That hit hard, order backlog was insane. It was a lesson learned. You must have backup suppliers for everything. Since then, I have changed how I order and I have changed what I am printing artwork on. The change in paper is an upgrade to acid-free archival paper from standard poster paper. Same cost to me. Canvas is temporarily unavailable until I can find a decent brand. Specialty papers for sublimation are still readily available. Since most of what I print on is specialty paper, I am fortunate that we only had the one issue with the tissue paper. Tracing paper and plain copy paper is

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more than I need. A printing business really cannot function without ink and paper.

My business is relatively new. It was started during the pandemic in Oct 2020.

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