

# After Hushion House

*Bill Hushion's new role at Fitzhenry & Whiteside*

BY SCOTT MacDONALD

**A** year and a half ago, the book distributor Hushion House collapsed into bankruptcy – defaulting on more than \$1.5-million in debt to its publisher clients – but the company's former owner, industry veteran Bill Hushion, is still going strong. Hushion has kept his hand in a variety of publishing projects, and most recently he's landed at Fitzhenry & Whiteside as marketing director.

Hushion says company president Sharon Fitzhenry brought him in last August, after some informal chats about working together. According to Fitzhenry, the company hasn't really had a proper marketing director until now; some of those duties had fallen to marketing manager Peter Taylor, who left last summer, or, before that, former sales manager Nelson Doucet, who mostly focused on selling rights. Hushion was brought on, says Fitzhenry, to help oversee and overhaul both the sales force and the company's publicity and promotional efforts. (U.S. sales


manager Stephanie Stewart and Canadian sales manager Sonya Gilliss both report to him.) Fitzhenry's ultimate goal in hiring Hushion, however, was to start getting the books out in a more timely fashion. "We weren't known for getting things out quickly," she says.

Hushion says his first duty was to get everyone in the company working together more efficiently. To that end, he instituted weekly group meetings of the sales and marketing team, and refined communication between sales and editorial. "Now there's a system in place where the editors present an idea for a book, we cost the idea out, come back with a marketing plan, and then – if the numbers work – we proceed," says Hushion. "Whereas before we had a tendency to just issue a contract and *then* see if the numbers could work." Hushion also wants to improve the U.S. sales and marketing presence, which he says is currently strong only in children's titles. "On the adult side it isn't as great," he says.

For the moment, Hushion is only part-

time, and he has no official contract. "So if I get pissed off one day, or they get pissed off at me, I can walk out," he says. "So far it seems to be working." In other changes at Fitz & Whits, Fitzhenry's sister, Holly Doll, was promoted from head of special sales to company operations manager earlier this year. According to Fitzhenry, Doll will be responsible for overseeing the warehouse, inventory, customer service, and several other day-to-day parts of the business.


Hushion, for his part, wasn't exactly idle before Fitzhenry came calling. Even after the bankruptcy of Hushion House, he continued to run a more modest U.S. sister firm, also called Hushion House; he helped White Knight Books owner Bill Belfontaine start up a distribution arm, which took on a number of former Hushion House clients; and he partnered with friend James Chalmers, a former co-owner of Canadian Manda Group, to create the sales agency TOF, which sells a handful of titles per year, mostly to large retailers like Indigo and Costco.

Hushion says, though, that he's done starting up new companies of his own. "As I go into my senile period," he says, "I have no interest in ever owning anything again as long as I live." 

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market for self-published titles can be a small and challenging one. After this spring, Publishers Group Canada is dropping the imprint from its stable – part of parent company Raincoast's general restructuring announced earlier this year. Bastian says he's currently in talks with another distributor.

He's also betting on future growth through another arm of his business, BPS Books. Launched last fall, that scheme is similar to Bastian Books – with Bastian taking an up-front fee and then a 5% royalty later – but focuses on print-on-demand titles, which authors generally sell online or at their own events. Books may also be sold through U.S. wholesaling giant Ingram Book Group, though there's no sales force pitching titles to retailers.

"I still favour the traditional model, but I recognize that there aren't enough berths open on the ship for these authors," says Bastian. "My business is a one-stop shop, and provides this service of getting them out into the book system." 

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### PLR gets funding boost

**FEB. 15** – The Public Lending Right Commission, which compensates authors for use of their books in libraries, has gotten a slight boost. This coming year, the program will have another \$700,000 at its disposal, pushing the total dispersal budget to nearly \$10-million. For several years, the total PLR funds available have held steady at \$9.1-million. Since more authors register with the program all the time, however, the average author payment drops a little each year. In this year's payments, more than 15,900 authors split the pot, a rise of around 500 from 2007. The average author payment was \$570, down slightly from \$588 last year. – DEREK WEILER

### Christian bookseller closes nearly half its stores

**FEB. 8** – Canada's largest Christian bookstore chain has been forced to close almost half its stores. In late January, creditors agreed on a restructuring plan that closes 10 of 23 Blessings Christian Marketplace stores. Only four stores will remain under direct Blessings control – in Chilliwack and Langley, B.C., and in Edmonton and Calgary. As part of the restructuring plan, says Blessings' owner Mark Hutchinson, six stores have been sold off to staff and associates, and three that operated as franchises are now independents. The remaining locations were closed down. Since September, the B.C.-based chain has lost more than half a million dollars and sales have plummeted by about 20%. – MICHELLE COLLINS