



ABLE

Bodies

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PB-694-02

6 January 2024

Able Bodies Romance Press

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Summary
- Mission Statement
- Rationale & Market Analysis
- Structure & Operations
- Bibliography

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Able Bodies is a literary press committed to reshaping the romance fiction genre by emphasizing authentic disability representation. We publish narratives where love stories unfold naturally within the vast experiences of characters with disabilities. Through inclusive storytelling and empathy-driven initiatives, we challenge stereotypes, normalize diverse romantic relationships, and offer readers a rich library of love stories that reflect and resonate across all bodies, no matter ability.

The target market for literary romance has evolved. Historically, romance readers have identified as women, typically middle age, but the growing popularity of the genre has caught the attention of a younger, more inclusive audience. The emotional engagement of romance fiction has also boomed, holding stories to a higher standard as readers explore more wide-ranging depictions of love, identity, and relationships. As a means of escape, for a chance at happiness, to develop deeper connections, love stories can promise a happily ever after where any individual feels embraced. Able Bodies will intersect at where romance fiction writers, readers, and fans meet writers, readers, and fans with disabilities.

As an independent press, our main competition manifests in how the literary market is well aware romance is popular and profitable. The Big Five (Penguin/Random House, Hachette Book Group, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan) is something to be reckoned with, specifically their imprints that focus on romance, such as Harper Collins' Avon Books and Harlequin Enterprises. At Able Bodies, we use the romance genre as a foundation for disability representation, releasing love stories that specifically feature characters with disabilities, fulfilling a gap in diverse publishing.

Able Bodies operates as a Limited Liability Company (LLC). Members make up the Advisory team, where the Board of Directors collaborates with Leadership in assigning roles for Editorial, Marketing, and Sales/Finances. Able Bodies will begin digitally, opening up to unsolicited manuscripts, then advertise through social media and word-of-mouth through our Marketing team. With billions of users online, digital footprints now span several social media platforms, necessitating a multifaceted approach. By using Facebook posts to create hype for submissions, YouTube video reviews of books with disability representation, Instagram stories highlighting aesthetic shots of our new releases, and TikTok — specifically #BookTok — serving as a hot spot for literary discourse, we will activate Able Bodies online as an exciting opportunity for readers and writers to explore disability romance.

Marketing will work with the Acquisitions Manager (under Leadership) as a liaison to the Editorial team, ensuring open communication as Able Bodies begins to reach out and receive manuscripts. Then, as our reach expands from generating interest to securing engagement, we can connect with funding opportunities, like setting up a Kickstarter, networking with literary or disability foundations, and landing private investors who support our message, working through our Sales/Finances team for potential contracts and distribution opportunities. Finally, once our catalog has grown, Able Bodies hopes to expand from online purchases to an established physical location, both accessible and accepting.

MISSION STATEMENT

All bodies, regardless of ability, should have the opportunity to feel love, connection, community, and happiness. Nowhere is this more possible than in the realm of romance fiction. At Able Bodies, LLC, our mission is to publish love stories that prominently feature characters with disabilities, capturing authentic experiences and embracing normalization. With inclusivity and empathy at our core, Able Bodies celebrates the vibrant spectrum of disability representation in romance literature, where every body deserves a chance at their own happily ever after.

RATIONALE & MARKET ANALYSIS

Love is universal. Love is connection. Love is rare, elusive, and right around the corner all at once. One need only enter their local bookstore to see. According to Romance Writers of America, “romance made up 23% of the overall US fiction market, second only to general fiction” as of 2016,¹ with a reported 39 million romance books printed in 2023.² Romance is *everywhere* in media, providing “an escape from the stresses of everyday life, the opportunity to lose [yourself] in a good story, and a reminder that love and happiness are both possible.”³

For an independent literary press, the romance genre can be a great place to be: “Romance novels generate over \$1.44 billion in revenue” as reported in 2022, “making romance the highest-earning genre of fiction.”⁴ The romance genre is highly accessible to aspiring writers and eager readers, encompassing a large swath of tropes, with five primary subgenres (and a great deal of overlap): classic, contemporary, historical, suspense, and fantasy. With so many options to choose from, Able Bodies has determined its own romance subgenre: disability romance.

Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that can substantially limit one or more major life activity, affecting quality of life.⁵ In all media, not just literature, there is a significant lack in disability representation. According to the Pew Research Center, “there are about 42.5 million Americans with disabilities,” “[including] people with hearing, vision, cognitive, walking, self-care, or independent living difficulties.”⁶ The World Health Organization estimates “1.3 billion people” manage “a significant disability” in their day to day,

¹ “About the Romance Genre,” Romance Writers of America.

² Curcic, “Romance Novel Sales Statistics.”

³ Clarence, “Why Are Romance Novels So Popular?”

⁴ Curcic, “Romance Novel Sales Statistics.”

⁵ “Disability,” World Health Organization.

⁶ Leppert and Schaeffer, “8 Facts About Americans With Disabilities.”

further stressed by ableism: “Discrimination against people who are not *able-bodied*, or an assumption that it is necessary to cater only for *able-bodied* people” [emphasis mine].⁷ This makes the literary romance genre — the most readily available reading genre — a contradiction in of itself regarding disability representation: Able-bodied people have sex and fall in love while people with disabilities simply can and do not.

Able Bodies intends to prove otherwise with disability romance. As a publishing house, Able Bodies is dedicated to promoting inclusivity and diversity in the romance genre by sharing narratives centered on characters with disabilities. We aim to portray the complexities of disability while dismantling stereotypes, *especially* in love stories where “disability is often cured as a means of enhancing the happily-ever-after ending.”⁸ With Able Bodies, love and disability coexist, creating a world where romance unfolds inside the tapestry of unique, meaningful experiences lived by individuals with disabilities, deconstructing ableist stigmas on our journey to a happily ever after.

Romance fiction is a highly competitive arena in book publishing, emphasized by its wide reader base, prolific authors, and always-evolving trends in genre diversity. For disability romance in independent publishing, there are several names to keep in mind: 39 West Press (Kansas City, MO); Blair Publisher (Durham, NC); Chipmunka Publishing (London, UK); Finishing Line Press (Georgetown, KY); Oleb Books (Minneapolis, MN); and Sword & Kettle Press (Cambridge, MA).⁹ Each entity demonstrates an answer for more inclusive literature with goals similar to ours: “to help writers with disabilities get their work read”¹⁰ (Oleb Books), “focusing on authors and subjects historically neglected by mainstream publishers, including

⁷ “Ableism,” Oxford Reference.

⁸ Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre*, 7.

⁹ Melanson, “Presses & Publishers of Disability Diversity.”

¹⁰ “About Oleb Books,” Oleb Books.

authors of color, authors with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ authors”¹¹ (Blair). To distinguish Able Bodies from such competitors, we will need to curate and expand on our unique value proposition, promising romance literature featuring authentic characters with disabilities. Once we have better cultivated our readership community, garnering positive recognition for our diverse narratives, we will start to reach out for potential partnerships and joints campaigns, collaborating with independent presses as well as disability advocacy organizations, literary groups, and book clubs.

There are also publishing networks focused solely on promoting disability representation to wider audiences, such as Disability in Publishing and INCLUDAS Publishing. These organizations are changing how “disabled people are underrepresented in publishing” by targeting market statistics, such as from the World Health Organization (estimating “16% of the global population experience a significant disability”¹²) as well as the diversity survey results from Lee & Low Books (“11% of respondents identified as having a disability”¹³ in the 2019 report). Able Bodies is open to expanding on these alternative entities, using our complementary mission statements to strengthen this corner of romance fiction and disability romance overall.

Similarly changing is the target audience for romance fiction, widening from “women ages 35 to 54” to “women ages 18 to 54.”¹⁴ Though there remains a stark separation between readers who identify as women — “82% of romance readers are women” — and those who identify as men — “18% are men” — reading culture is changing.¹⁵ The demographics for readership are expanding alongside the publishing landscape for romance literature, shifting from

¹¹ “Welcome to Blair,” Blair Publisher.

¹² “Disability,” World Health Organization.

¹³ Loepky, “Finding a Place for Disability in Publishing.”

¹⁴ Van Dien, “The Romance Novel, Gen Z, and Social Media.”

¹⁵ Curcic, “Romance Novel Sales Statistics.”

being demeaned as “women’s novels” to now being “fueled by passionate readers and prolific authors,” rising up as “a billion-dollar industry.”¹⁶ Able Bodies will utilize the younger market and the thriving interest in romance fiction through popular social media sites (i.e., #BookTok on TikTok), appealing to women as our primary audience but making it clear that our publications are available to anyone. This emphasizes our mission statement of inclusivity: All bodies are capable of love and finding a happy ending, meaning the romance genre is no longer exclusive to gender-coded spaces.

In addition to demographics, Able Bodies will analyze psychographics, which are quickly becoming more favored as the idea of the “average reader” becomes more mythical.¹⁷ Psychographics look at “the psychology of the person” rather than the “broad brushstrokes” of things like age and race.¹⁸ Granted, those demographic points are still important to the development and strategies of Able Bodies, particularly pertinent in our subgenre of romance fiction, but as we present ourselves as an inclusive entity for disability romance literature, we are determined to understand our audiences on a deeper level. Depending on demographics while also considering aspects like personal lifestyles and changing passions will improve our marketing focus, “[identifying] and [playing] to [our] audience’s emotional touchstones.”¹⁹ This again emphasizes Able Bodies’ commitment to authenticity, allowing our mission statement to better reach and resonate.

To attract broad interest, Able Bodies will focus first on the more modern venue for romance with contemporary fiction. These slice-of-life stories are incredibly popular, with the potential to break out into mainstream success, but the goal of “providing escapism, diversity,

¹⁶ Haupt, “How the Romance Genre Found Its Happily Ever After.”

¹⁷ Yardley, “The Myth of the Average Reader.”

¹⁸ Umstadd, “Why Demographics Are Useless.”

¹⁹ Yardley, “The Myth of the Average Reader.”

and even a reflection of society and its change”²⁰ can be improved with better disability depictions: “Books that feature characters with disabilities are not only important for representation for the wider audience, but more importantly for people who have disabilities to read stories that reflect their own . . . experiences.”²¹ By combining the popularity of contemporary romance with specifically emerging as disability romance press, Able Bodies combats the competition through individuality while alluring readers hungry for that unique representation, taking advantage of how “78.3% of romance readers read more than one novel per month.”²²

Additionally, while our primary intent is to illustrate disability in romance, this does not bar other instances of needed representation: Able Bodies will publish romance titles that are diverse even beyond our original mission, championing disability representation as it intersects with LGBTQ+, Native, multicultural, and other underrepresented aspects with the clear promise of a happily ever after. Herein our target audience can find its niche, appealing to a wide audience based on the popularity of the romance genre alone while simultaneously offering a safe space for minority audiences and the unique experiences they wish to see reflected in literature. This explicitly includes readers and authors with disabilities but is not limited to that demographic alone.

For our brand identity, Able Bodies is positioned as a distinctive entity in the publishing market because of our unique selling point: romance literature featuring authentic portrayals of disability, illustrating disabled characters falling in love and living happily ever after. Combining the power of both a niche but critical concept — disability romance as a subgenre — with the

²⁰ Clarence, “Why Are Romance Novels So Popular?”

²¹ Rohlinger, “15 Romantic Novels That Feature Characters With Disabilities.”

²² Curcic, “Romance Novel Sales Statistics.”

romance genre's popularity allows Able Bodies to offer different perspectives when situated next to other publishing entities focused on diverse representation. These key aspects will materialize in various ways with different approaches to better stand out, such as through:

- Collaborative Engagement: Work with and support authors committed to portraying disability in a respectful and empowering manner.
- Content Selection: Curate a library of romance novels that realistically depict characters with disabilities, showcasing a diverse range of experiences.
- Print and Digital Formats: Utilize both publishing formats to reach a broader audience.
- Distribution Channels: Leverage online platforms, bookstores, literary events, and advocacy partnerships to ensure widespread reach.
- Author-Reader Interactions: Encourage communication between authors and readers through online forums, social media discussions, and virtual/in-person events.
- Building Community: Establish a supportive community to discuss, share thoughts on, and connect over the themes of disability representation in romance.
- Promotions and Partnerships: Focus marketing campaigns to raise disability awareness, collaborating with disability advocacy groups, digital influencers, and literary communities to broaden reach and impact.
- Sales and Subscriptions: Sell romance novels in various formats, including e-books and print, and consider a subscription model to offer exclusive content, creating recurring revenue streams.
- Workshops and Programs: Organize informational initiatives to promote understanding and sensitivity regarding disability representation in literature and different ways to portray disability in romance fiction.

- Reader Insights: Incorporate reader response feedback to understand preferences, track engagement, and tailor recommendations for content.

Our main point of attack is through social media, utilizing market analytics to identify and reach our audience. In 2023, “an estimated 4.9 billion people use social media across the world,” with “this number expected to jump” as users “[spread] their digital footprint across . . . six to seven platforms.”²³ This requires a comprehensive approach in introducing Able Bodies, especially as we grow from as an independent publishing house.

Beyond our strategic operations and methodology, however, is our commitment to inclusive storytelling. Able Bodies prioritizes narratives that portray characters with disabilities as fully realized individuals with autonomy and agency, reflecting the myriad experiences that coexist with romance. Additionally, Able Bodies supports the creators behind the work as much as we do the readers in front of the page; with literary empowerment, we hope to encourage authors, across all scores of life and at various levels of ability, to explore themes of love, connection, and personal growth through the lens of disability. Overall, with our independent roots and diverse reach, Able Bodies hopes to leave a meaningful impact on the literary world by making it more accessible than ever to experience a happily ever after.

To better illustrate our focus on disability representation in romance fiction, the following are potential titles for future book releases, social media articles, and engagement programs:

- Books
 - *Love in the Realm of the Unseen*
 - *Love’s Mosaic: A Love Story in Braille*
 - *Boundless in a Limited World*

²³ Wong, “Top Social Media Statistics and Trends of 2024.”

- *Love’s Infinite Reach*
- *Love in Every Hue: A Spectrum of Romance*
- Articles:
 - “Love Beyond Expectations: Disability Representation in Popular Romance”
 - “Valid: A Guide to Writing Romance with Disability Inclusion”
 - “From Pages to Progress: How Accessibility Has Changed Literature”
 - “Love, Disability, & Diversity: Writing Inclusive Romance in a Cynical World”
 - “Able Bodies Spotlight: Celebrating Creators Who Champion Accessibility”
- Programs:
 - Inclusive Ink: A Writer’s Workshop for Disability Representation
 - Able Bodies, Able Hearts – Book Club: Explore Love and Diversity in Romance Literature with New Friends
 - Accessible Ways You Can Engage with the Literary Community
 - Hearts Aligned: Mentorship for Emerging Disability Romance Authors
 - Able Bodies Book Festival: Celebrating Disability Romance

Alongside our marketing designs, Able Bodies will work with the Independent Publishers Group (IPG) for supply and distribution, “the first organization specifically created for the purpose of marketing titles from independent presses to the book trade.”²⁴ IPG represents similar values to Able Bodies, circulating books in various formats (including e-books and audio books) through bookstores, libraries, and online markets such as Amazon. With IPG behind order fulfillment, Able Bodies can more strongly represent itself in the literary market, allowing us to concentrate

²⁴ “About IPG,” Independent Publishers Group.

on scouting out talent and refining our submissions process while also forging relationships with booksellers, sale representatives, literary agents, and of course, our readers.

STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS

Able Bodies works as a Limited Liability Company (LLC), establishing four teams: Leadership, Editorial, Marketing, and Sales/Finance. The different staffing positions within these teams are as follows:

- Leadership
 - Founder
 - Editor-in-Chief
 - Acquisitions Manager
 - Marketing Director
 - Account Executive
- Editorial
 - Editor
 - Copyeditor
 - Proofreaders
 - Sensitivity Readers
- Marketing
 - Media & Event Coordinator
 - Customer Service Representative
 - Public Relations Specialist
- Sales/Finance
 - Distribution & Sales Coordinators
 - Financial Officer

The teams work collaboratively with our Advisory office, which includes the Board of Members as well as Publishing Consultants for both digital and print releases. The Leadership and Advisory teams determine role assignments within each group, and as Able Bodies takes shape, book acquisition and production matters will follow a roundtable policy, strengthening our professional connections.

Able Bodies will begin as a digital publishing house, located in Boston, Massachusetts, to first establish a strong online presence. For our official website, we will register our domain name as Able Bodies Romance Press (www.AbleBodiesRomance.com). Our Marketing team will start building content for maximum engagement, including author profiles and interviews, book summaries and teasers, blog articles featuring news related to health and disability, promotions and discounts, and intuitive accessibility tools to ensure a welcoming experience for all users. Then, Marketing and Sales/Finance, with input from Leadership and Advisory, will work together to launch Able Bodies' online store for direct book sales.

Our Account Executive, leading our Distribution & Sales Coordinators, will partner with a reliable e-commerce platform such as Shopify, also exploring larger markets through Amazon and niche opportunities like with Biblio. For transactions, we will implement a secure payment gateway with several options (e.g., PayPal, Apple Pay, Stripe) for user-friendliness, building trust with our new customers by delivering a seamless checkout process. Our social media handles and sharing buttons will also be available, our Marketing Director utilizing Google Analytics to track engagement and refine the Marketing team's strategies for SEO optimization.

Additionally, through Leadership and Advisory, Able Bodies will engage with readership consultants called Advocacy Advisors. Advocacy Advisors can more specifically address the core topics Able Bodies will publish, corresponding with our Sensitivity Readers in Editorial to

ensure our focus is conscientious and authentic. Consultants include Disability & Health Advocates, Environmental Advocates, Communication Advocates, Legal Advocates, and Education Advocates. Overall, the structure of Able Bodies works to create a well-organized and collaborative environment, aligning with our mission to publish authentic and diverse romance literature featuring disability representation. Open communication and teamwork, centered on our commitment to inclusivity, is and will continue to be a key component to the success of Able Bodies.

Lastly, Able Bodies plans to gain enough traction in the publishing market to support a physical location in Boston. Leadership and Advisory will conduct a feasibility study to review financials, then engage with the disability and literary communities before committing to a central and accessible space. Our goal is to position ourselves as a community hub for diverse romance fiction and disability awareness, nurturing collaborations with local businesses for better promotion. In front, the Able Bodies bookstore will showcase physical copies of our publications, also acting as an event space for literary events like author signings. In the back will be our centralized meeting ground for administrative and operational duties, complementing our online presence for a formidable hybrid model. We will aim for a flexible location, convenient, sustainable, and adaptable for future growth.

If a location that meets these requirements proves challenging to secure — especially in a world that is not yet designed to accommodate those who are not able-bodied — we will continue to thrive as a digital presence until such an inclusive physical place becomes available. Able Bodies will *always* be within reach, extending a welcoming embrace to those seeking diverse representation in disability romance, offering a haven for anyone yearning to see themselves in the pages of a love story.

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