

The Author's ADVOCATE



Special Newsletter

June 2005

Published exclusively for the authors and associates of
Infinity Publishing and Buy Books on the web.com

Independent Bookstore Sales Continue Upward Trend

2004 Figures Surpass Previous Two Years' While Industry Remains Flat

In a pre-**Book Expo America** media release, the **American Booksellers Association** announced on Thursday, May 19, that independent bookstores' 2004 sales increased, in terms of both dollars and number of units sold, capping a three-year period of sustained growth, according to **Ipsos BookTrends**, a syndicated study based on data collected directly from consumers by the global market research firm **Ipsos-Insight**. This increase occurred while the bookselling industry, as a whole, remained essentially static. Additionally, the BookTrends survey indicated that consumer demand for books (book buying) outpaced spending in 2004 -- a reversal of recent trends.

"The independent bookstore and small chain segment of the book market remains a vibrant and important part of the retailing landscape," said **ABA CEO Avin Mark Domnitz**. "The continued growth in both dollar and unit sales shows that the American reading public continues to look to the independents to discover new books of quality and as a primary source for the knowledgeable servicing of all of their book buying needs."

Ipsos estimates that consumer spending for books (across all channels) held at \$13.3 billion for the second straight year. Unit sales were up 2.5 percent from 2003, reaching 1.7 billion. Independent and small chain bookstores' market shares accounted for 9 percent of the dollars spent by consumers, up 2.1 percent since 2002.

"The importance of independent bookstores increased each of the past two years," said **Barrie Rappaport**, manager of **Ipsos BookTrends**. "The market share percentage appears lower than in previous years be-

cause Ipsos BookTrends recently issued a restated database." According to Rappaport, enhancements to the database included combining the adult trade and juvenile book databases; a move to quarterly data releases; and improved data quality in terms of classifications, descriptions, and detail. "Ultimately, this aspect of the restatement affected the market share position of all classes of trade. The numbers and shares are likely different from past years, but the story for independent booksellers remains the same: dollars spent and units sold in independents have risen," she continued.

Of note in the independent/small chain share position was a recovery in the children's sector, which caught up with the turnaround in the trade sector that began in 2000. According to Ipsos, the independents' overall performances exceeded the industry average for the past several years.

On Friday, May 20, 2005, the prestigious newspaper, *The Arizona Republic*, published a related article by **Kerry Lengel**, *Hits and Niches*, reflecting the same book buying trends cited in the ABA news release as seen from a different perspective. Part of Lengel's article -- which includes quotes from Infinity author and conference presenter **Penny C. Sansevieri** -- follows:

With the next Harry Potter racking up sales months in advance of its July 16 release and *The Da Vinci Code* still dominating after two years on the shelves, this seems to be the age of the megabestseller. You'd think publishers would be thrilled, but they're not, because book sales overall are in a slump at a time when more and more titles are available. The megaseller is triumphant, but the plain old bestseller may be an endangered

species as authors and publishers fight for ever-smaller slices of the pie.

“Publishers are gravitating toward what I call *microgenres*,” says **Penny C. Sansevieri**, founder of **Author Marketing Experts** in San Diego. “You used to have chick lit, but now you have mommy lit, hen lit, chick lit for African-American women. They're breaking this down to the point that it's becoming very myopic.”

Romance, which accounts for nearly half of paperback fiction sales, has marketed subgenres - novels set in Regency England, for example - for decades. But in recent years, the niches have been “branching out like crazy,” says Phoenix author **Vijaya Schartz**, who specializes in science-fiction and fantasy romances. “Now they have gothic romances, horror romance, mystery romance, they have all kinds of different categories that didn't exist before,” she says.

Overall book sales are flat, and the move toward narrowly defined audiences is a response to an increasingly competitive market. After strong growth in the '90s, book sales have stalled. In fact, the number of books sold dropped by nearly 44 million in 2004 from the year before. “Dollar sales have been persistently flat, while numbers of books being published rise, meaning dollars are generally spread out over more product,” says **Michael Cader**, founder of **PublishersMarketplace.com**.

Scottsdale author **Connie Flynn**, who writes paranormal romances and other niche genres, says the niches “make it easier for new writers to enter the marketplace. Because the bookstores put you with other writers of their kind, you're more likely to be discovered by the kind of audience you're looking for,” she says. “The downside of that (is) things that don't fit easily into the genres just get overlooked and get impossible to sell.”

There are many ways to slice the reader profile pie. Some of the variations on chick lit are based on age, for example. Sansevieri even advises her clients to write their novels with a specific readership in mind, such as the single mothers who read “mommy lit” because they see it as a reflection of their lives. “I try to profile the reader of a book the same way you would flesh out a character in a novel,” Penny says.

There are regional interests, such as Southwestern mysteries or Southern chick lit, and ethnic audiences are a big category, with black women being a growth market in romance. Sales of religious books grew 50 percent in 2003 alone, with insiders predicting an annual growth rate of more than 6 percent into 2009. Then there's the increasing cross-pollination of genre fiction. In addition to the new varietals in romance, whodunit fans have glommed onto such specialties as **J.D. Robb's** futuristic

detective tales and **Charlaine Harris'** series of vampire-and-werewolf mysteries.

“I think a lot of what we're seeing is the development of specific niches within established categories,” says literary blogger **Ron Hogan**. “The most interesting trend I've seen in recent months is the revival of the amateur sleuth mystery as chick lit, with sassy women trying to negotiate tricky love lives and solve murders. **Red Dress Ink** (a **Harlequin** imprint) has put a lot of these out lately, but **Beth Saulnier** has a similar book out from **Warners**, so the biggest houses are clearly taking interest in this minigenre. Any time a genre becomes successful, a need for constant innovation develops because the popularity of the first few books creates a demand for new novels which are close enough to the originals to feel familiar, but not so close that they feel repetitive.”

Of course, innovation is more easily aspired to than accomplished, and many niches are the result of good, old-fashioned imitation. The success of **Dan Brown's** *The Da Vinci Code*, for example, has inspired a spate of thrillers based on historical research. Just this month **Steve Berry** released *The Third Secret*, which spins the real-life Fatima prophecies of 1917 into a tale of Vatican intrigue.

Gwendolyn Osborne, a Detroit journalist who reviews African-American women authors for theromance-reader.com and themysteryreader.com, is all too familiar with the phenomenon. “I am so tired right now of all the 'girlfriend' novels,” she says. “It's become a pattern: Three or four or five friends get together and lament their lack of love lives, their lack of jobs, their nagging mothers. It's basically *Waiting to Exhale redux*. It's not a niche, but like a copycat killer almost. The white version of that is the coming-of-middle-age book, or boomer lit, as I'm coming to call it, like (**Nancy Thayer's**) *The Hot Flash Club*. It's variations on a theme, and they're doing it to death.”

How far can the *nichification* of literature go? “Pretty far,” says **Chris Anderson**, editor of **Wired** magazine, who is expanding a 2004 article about the growth of niche entertainment into a book called *The Long Tail*. “A **Barnes & Noble** Superstore might have 130,000 books. That may seem like a lot, but Amazon carries 2.5 million books,” Anderson says. “So what might count as a niche that sells in Barnes & Noble is still high up the curve of total books available. There are *subniches* and *subsubniches* and *microniches* and *nanoniches*, and the tail goes on forever and ever.”

Anderson's *long tail* of niches applies to all forms of entertainment. The clearest example of the trend is the rise of cable television, which captured viewers from

the big networks and distributed them among hundreds of specialty channels. The networks are still the hit-makers, but their overall ratings have dropped. As with television, Anderson says, technology is driving the shift toward niches across the board, from digital music downloads to self-published *print-on-demand books*.

“Over the past decade, you've seen the emergence of businesses that have, in effect, infinite shelf space,” he says. “We know them in examples such as **Amazon** and **eBay**, the e-commerce success stories of the last decade. What's interesting about them is not simply that they've shifted sales from offline to online, but that they've also shifted sales from hits to niches. This is something new and wasn't necessarily anticipated. It's a new phenomenon of massive increase in variety of products and availability of products, plus powerful tools to find stuff. . . . Those two things combined are revealing a previously unanticipated amount of demand for stuff that isn't hits.”

Niche books, along with an explosion in *print-on-demand*, may be stealing readers from the bestsellers, but they also serve as a sort of farm team for the big leagues. For example, **Amanda Brown's *Legally Blonde*** started as print-on-demand, then got picked up by **Plume Books**, a **Penguin** imprint. **Barbara Peters**, founder of mystery specialist **Poisoned Pen Press** in Scottsdale, says that despite declining sales, there is room in the market for both hits and niches. The top publishers don't look at Poisoned Pen as competition so much as a potential source for future bestsellers.

“Something like 50 percent of all books are sold at mass-market retailers like Costco, Target and Wal-Mart, instead of traditional bookstores. But the sort of book sold at Costco has to have brand recognition,” she says. “As the mass market takes over, it's opening up opportunities for smaller presses with niche audiences and regional audiences. It makes it possible for both to exist without any real rivalry.”

Why is this important???

First of all, this article validates much of the basic philosophy long held by **Infinity Publishing**. **Tom Gregory**, **Infinity President** and publishing visionary, has always believed in the resilience of the nation's independent bookstores and their ability to stay in business and go toe-to-toe with chain super-stores. The national chains are in bed enjoying sweetheart deals for deeply discounted *bestsellers* from major houses, whose intent of the super-discounts and making their famous authors available for book signings were clearly to out-price and upstage those nearby indies. Tom brought Infinity's continuing support to a higher level when he imple-

mented a guaranteed return policy for booksellers that includes every Infinity title at no cost to our authors. Combined with our standard 40% off-cover discount for bookstores, our liberal return program clearly provides inventory support for bookstores staying the course and staying in the business of selling books.

We have always stressed the importance of regional connections by encouraging our authors to schedule events in their local independent bookstores. The owners/managers know the value of community roots and the appeal of introducing a newly published author with books -- autographed for their customers. Niche market books have always sold well through indies, and Infinity offers a dazzling array of niche topics -- fully returnable at a 40% discount is a good deal. Plus, we have authors in the store's backyard poised to do readings.

It's interesting to note that the chains and major houses who hooked up early on with POD publishing services haven't done much that's noticeable in support of the resulting books. Perhaps the universal fault in the business model was their impersonal approach with contracted and over-taxed authors.

As a First Amendment press, Infinity Publishing aligns with authors interested in having their books published and distributed through our unique *Just-In-Time* book publishing system. By engaging in *author-publishing* through Infinity, the author retains all rights to the book and Infinity pays monthly royalties on every book sold -- we earn our profit selling books to ever expanding niches and discount books to our authors who create and control the content.

The importance of increasing independent bookstore sales, coupled with expanding customer purchases of niche books from small presses and evolving publishers, demonstrates the ability of indies and small regional chains to thrive and profit under the giants' shadow. They're doing this by expanding their on-shelf selection of niche books, introducing new flavors of fiction, spreading out romance, and howling over a vast offering of how-to books. We live in fascinating times -- and the happenings in our evolving branch of publishing are especially interesting. The content and course of the book in the market place is being returned to the control of the author to decide upon -- and not the corporate bean-counters who have counted too long on formulated publishing to produce the over projected profit. Authors who know and care about the content, published by a cost-effective book publishing system, delivered to a customer-aware and author-friendly indie is a winning combination that's producing increasing sales when the rest of the industry is rather flat.

Infinity Authors semi-finalists for Independent Publishers Awards

Infinity authors Lana Waite and James D. Yoder have received word that their books are semi-final winners for the 2004 Independent Publishers Awards (IPPY).

Madd Mountain Murders - Lana Waite

The *Madd Mountain Murders* was written twenty years ago. I sent it to fifteen editors and even more agents. The first reply was a personal letter, not a printed rejection slip. One line said, "This book deserves to be published, but I can't publish it." That was encouraging and I continued sending it out for a year (working on a new book at the same time, of course). Finally I put it in the cupboard and concentrated on *Cobwebs and Contraband*. And guess what! I couldn't sell that one either. In 2004 I realized that, if I didn't take things in hand, nothing was going to happen with those books. But they were part of my legacy and I had to do something.

For days I researched self-publishing on the web, and Infinity came out on top. In a short time I held a book which pleased me very much. The cover was great. The page margins were generous, the book easy to read. I renewed my efforts on the second book, *Cobwebs*, and sent it in also. Then, in an Author's Advocate, there was an announcement about the **Independent Publisher Book Awards (IPPY)**. I entered the competition and just this week received notice that *The Madd Mountain Murders* is a **semi-finalist** in the mystery category!

You just never know...Lana Waite

Echoes Along the Sweetbrier - James D. Yoder

"Everyone likes a story of escape from doom and a protagonist's march toward transformation," says author, James D. Yoder. His newest novel, *Echoes Along the Sweetbrier*, is set in a fictional Pennsylvania community in the 1890's.

Susanna Steiner, pregnant against her will, turns to the church for understanding but she is excommunicated and shunned by her friends and the wider community. What are the options in the 1890's for Susanna? Suicide? Marry Reuben, who abused her?

Susanna, encouraged by family and friends, marries Reuben and struggles to make a home in his family's old stone house. Soon Susanna realizes that she has married a man who is wounded in his deepest center. When abuse escalates, where can Susanna turn when she is the mother of three children? If she leaves Reu-

ben, how will she survive? Does Christ hear her prayers? Can Susanna's life ever be filled with meaning and love?

The author, James D. Yoder, is a former licensed psychologist and university professor familiar with victim-offender relations. Readers will be amazed at the well-springs of spiritual strength Susanna finds, even when she recognizes some of her own wounds that cause some of her own misplaced steps. "The book," says Yoder, "is a story of redemption."

Author's Advocate Newsletters Achieved on Conference Website

We would like authors recently published by Infinity to also be able to benefit from the content in previous issues of our monthly newsletter. Thusly, we've posted printer-friendly PDF's on our conference website at:

www.authorsconference.com

You'll also find updates posted about the developing line-up of presenters, topics and tentative scheduling for our annual authors' conference in Valley Forge, PA.

Conference Scholarship Contest

Our conference is open to all authors and aspiring authors interested in learning new promotional and marketing concepts that are possible with this evolving branch of publishing. However, this contest is only open to authors currently publishing with Infinity. Easy rules: write 3 short paragraphs of 100 words or less about 3 marketing efforts that produced results. From those 3 efforts, select the one that worked the best to sell your book and write an essay of at least 400 words but not more than 500 words explaining the aspects of your successful marketing efforts. Entries not conforming to the word count limit will be disqualified. All entries become the property of Infinity Publishing. All prizes will be scholarship assistance to help Infinity authors attend our 6th annual authors' conference – authors must attest to their ability to attend. Only emailed entries sent to john@infinitypublishing.com by August 15, 2005, with "conference" in the subject line will be accepted and must include your name, phone number, Infinity book title, 3 short paragraphs, and the essay. Grand prize is a \$500 scholarship, first-runner up \$400, second-runner up \$300, third-runner up \$200, and 4 honorable mentions for \$100 in registration assistance for Infinity authors to attend the 2005 conference.

Take care and enjoy often...John