

■ Introduction

Major sales have been praised as an indicator of quality (or the reverse), and as an outcome of effective marketing ~~or as~~ requiring dissection to differentiate between hype and what actually gets into the hands of consumers.

Sales figures have been notoriously slippery for a number of reasons, mostly, because: publishers mislead consumers (or simply do not disclose the 'real' numbers);, because there has been little independent monitoring of claims (in contrast to tracking of newspaper and magazine sales by national circulation audit boards);, and, because in the past much content was pirated or published in regimes such as the ~~US~~ United States, that inadequately recognised overseas' copyrights.

Albert Greco, author of *The Book Publishing Industry* (Allyn & Bacon 1997), thus quipped in 2007 that:

The publishing business has never gone out of its way to report actual sales numbers because it has no real interest in doing so. It's hard to know what's real. If an author on ~~TV~~ television talk-says his book has sold one million copies, only a few people will know if that's true.

We estimate that out of every ~~10~~ ten hardcover adult books, seven lose money, two break-even and one is a hit. So, of course, this business is secretive about sales. Would you want to tell the world that ~~70%~~ seventy per cent of your output is losing money?

■ The golden age

One of the myths of contemporary publishing is that the 'bestseller' (often characterised as a work that gains global sales of over ~~100,000~~ one hundred thousand copies within a year) or 'blockbuster' (over one million copies in the same period) is purely a modern phenomenon.

Works such as Thomas Whiteside's *The Blockbuster Complex: Conglomerates, Show Business & Book Publishing* (Wesleyan ~~Uni~~ University Press 1981) and claims by publishers have variously attributed to those sales to: effective marketing, timeliness, the authors capacity to provide a ripping yarn, emulation of peers ~~or and merely~~ the depravity of the mass audience.

Bestsellers ~~are were~~, however, identifiable in the past. They pre-dated the ~~Net~~ Internet, television, retail chains and radio.

Major sales ~~preir~~ prior to 1900 were attributable to word of mouth, coverage in journals and newspapers, aspirations to 'betterment' ~~or gentility~~ and serialisation. They were also attributable to the ~~conjunction~~ invention of reduced paper costs (as ~~a~~ result of increased demand and the shift from rag to wood pulp);, aggressive marketing campaigns by new and established publishers; reduced distribution costs (via railways, steamships and ~~the~~ post);, greater disposable income among the lower classes; and expansion of retail mechanisms such as circulating libraries.

■ Pervasive pulp

~~Arport~~ novelist Arthur Hailey (~~1920-2004~~ 1920 – 2004) reportedly sold over ~~300~~ three hundred million copies by 2006, with estimated earnings from books, film and television of US\$-3 billion. Philip Anschutz took legal action after paying US\$10 million for rights to a Clive Cussler novel that ~~suppo~~esedly sold ~~100~~ one hundred million copies.

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