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Market News

by Linda Rohrbough

Yes, folks, it's true. *Publisher's Weekly* was caught bragging early this year about its coverage of Christian fiction, because it continues a steady sales climb. Especially in ebook formats.

Digital Christian Fiction Continues to Sell, Sell, Sell

From late 2010 through the third quarter of 2011, Christian fiction title sales were 30 percent electronic books, which is six times the amount from the same time frame in 2010 and is higher than the other genre segments, including general fiction, according to R. R. Bowker's Market Research division. (Bowker is known for managing and publishing *Books In Print*.)

While this is terrific news, Christian fiction authors I've talked with note higher sales, but their percentage of ebook sales is half of what Bowker is reporting. For example, I spoke with best-selling suspense author Colleen Coble at the Christian Writers of the West one day mini-conference in Phoenix in late January. Her numbers and those of her friends reflect 15 percent ebooks format sales.

There's no doubt, however, that Christian fiction is on a strong upward curve, and the secular market has taken note. Acquisitions and mergers of Christian publishers and Christian publishing lines abound and are likely to continue as publishers attempt to take advantage of their position

in the market to shore up sagging bottom lines. A couple of the most notable are Harlequin's purchase of Barbour's Heartsong romance line and the wholesale purchase of Thomas Nelson by HarperCollins. Thomas Nelson has changed hands a number of times in its history, but what's notable is this last purchase at \$200 million is less than half of the \$473 million the publisher sold for 2006. In addition, the acquisition of Thomas Nelson makes HarperCollins the largest Christian publisher in the world, as it already owns Zondervan.

Will Ebook Sales Level Off? Nah.

While ebook sales disappointed analysts, rumors that sales will level off are not likely. That's due to the increase in tablet PCs and ebook readers. Apple reported record earnings as of the end of 2011, mostly due to the iPhone, but the company said it had 40 million iPads on the market. Sales of the iPad continue to be strong as new models are introduced and older versions experience lower price points, which is spurring a lot of "me too" tablets from other manufacturers.

The other big player in the ebook reader market, Amazon holds its Kindle sales numbers close to its chest. But analysts estimate the company sold between five and six million Kindles during the 2011 holiday season, which accounts for about half of all ebook reader sales. (Yet Amazon's profits were a billion below analyst's expectations. Further, Amazon is predicting losses due to increased operating expenses. I suppose that's because the company is investing in attractions to garner \$79 a year Prime members. These include its own Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud storage and internet browsing technology, \$700,000 a month royalties to authors participating in its book lending program, and licensing deals with Twentieth Century Fox Distribution for hit Hollywood television titles for instant viewing.)

Overall, estimates are one in five Americans now own an ebook reader. And those numbers are expected to climb this year.

The 99 Cent Trend

The increase in devices that can display ebooks, from smart phones to tablet computers, leads to the 99 cent trend for ebooks, especially on the Kindle Reader. *The Wall Street Journal* reported Darcie Chan, a self-published Kindle author, landed on the best-seller lists when she sold over 400,000 copies of her first novel, *The Mill River Recluse*, priced at 99 cents.

Colleen Coble told me her editors at Thomas Nelson gave up on 99 cent pricing a year and a half ago, saying it didn't spur sales of other titles as much as they'd hoped. They went to \$1.99 promotional pricing instead. But Colleen reported an upswing in her sales across the board when Thomas Nelson priced her *Without a Trace* suspense title from her *Rock Harbor* series at 99 cents.

I wonder if Thomas Nelson experimented too early, before there were enough ereaders out there to support 99 cent pricing. One author I know, James Kaufman, reported sales of 2,000 copies a day of the Kindle version of his mainstream novel *The Collectables*, when he priced it at 99 cents during the last holiday season.

Backlist Books Cha-Ching As Ebooks

Authors who have a following, and reverted rights to re-publish their backlist titles in Kindle or Nook format, are reaping tidy benefits. Reports are these writers earn as much as \$1,000 monthly per title.

2012 Christian Writer's Market Guide

How does Jerry Jenkins do it? Not only has he signed a contract for a new fiction series, and heads the Christian Writers Guild, but now he's writing the *Christian Writers Market Guide*, formerly published by Sally Stuart. Tyndale is publishing the revamped 2012 version (\$24.99) aimed at helping writers take advantage of opportunities in the burgeoning inspirational market.

Two Marketing Tips For Authors

1. According to my publicist, the easiest way to get publicity is to let reporters find you. How? You need to know what they're looking for. You can pay to subscribe to services such as PR Newswire or BusinessWire, but why not let someone bring these reporter requests to you for free? Help a Reporter Out (HARO) at www.helpareporter.com and Reporter Connection (www.reporterconnection.com) are free, daily services that publish the wish-list for media sources including radio, television and print media of all kinds. Make no mistake, it's work to sift through the plethora of reporter wants. But when you hit, you can hit big.
2. Google Alerts – To track your successes in obtaining mentions online, there's Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts). It's like having your own free clipping service. Put in keywords and Google delivers results obtained by its massive online search engine along with the relevant links.

God bless you and the work of your hands.

Bio:

Linda Rohrbough has been writing since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles and seven books to her credit along with national awards for her fiction and non-fiction. *New York Times* #1 bestselling author Debbie Macomber said about Linda's new novel: "This is fast-paced, thrilling, edge-of-the-seat reading. *The Prophetess One: At Risk* had me flipping the pages and holding my breath." *The Prophetess One: At Risk* won the 2011 Global eBook Award and the 2011 Millennium Star Publishing Award. An iPhone App of her popular "Pitch Your Book" workshop is available in the Apple iTunes store. Visit her website: www.LindaRohrbough.com.