

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 the genre continues a steady sales climb. Especially in e-book formats.

Digital Christian Fiction Sells

From late 2010 through the third quarter of 2011, Christian fiction title sales were 30 percent e-books—six times the amount from the same time frame in 2010. That's higher than the other genre segments, including general fiction, according to R. R. Bowker's Market Research division. (Bowker manages and publishes *Books In Print*.)

While this is terrific, Christian fiction authors I've talked with say their percentage of e-book sales is half what Bowker is reporting. For example, best-selling suspense author Colleen Coble says her numbers and those of her friends reflect 15 percent e-books 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 are likely to continue as publishers take advantage of their position in the market to shore up 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 in 2006. In addition, the acquisition of

Thomas Nelson makes HarperCollins the largest Christian publisher in the world, as it already owns Zondervan.

Will E-book Sales Level Off?

While e-book sales disappointed analysts, rumors that sales will level off are not likely. That's due to the increase in tablet PCs and e-readers. Apple reported record earnings at 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 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 e-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 e-reader sales. Yet Amazon's profits were a billion below analyst's expectations.

Further, Amazon is predicting losses due to increased operating expenses. Possibly 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 e-reader. And those numbers are expected to climb this year.

The 99-Cent Trend

The increase in devices that can display e-books, from smart phones to tablet computers, leads to the 99-cent trend for e-books. *The Wall Street Journal* reported Darcie Chan, a self-published Kindle author, landed on the best-seller lists when she sold more than 400,000 copies of her first novel, *The Mill River Recluse*, 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 as much as they'd hoped. They went to \$1.99 instead. But Coble reported an upswing in her sales across the board when Thomas Nelson priced her *Without a Trace* title from her Rock Harbor series at 99 cents.

I wonder if Thomas Nelson experimented too early, before there were enough e-readers 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.

2012 Christian Writer's Market Guide

How does Jerry B. Jenkins do it? Not only has he signed a contract for a new fiction deal with Worthy Publishing, and is the owner of the Christian Writers Guild, but now he's also producing the *Christian Writers Market Guide*, formerly published by Sally Stuart. This essential reference tool is helping writers like you take advantage of opportunities in the burgeoning inspirational market.

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 nonfiction. *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 online: www.LindaRohrbough.com.