

Change is the theme for 2006, with e-books, big-box stores, and Internet altering the landscape of the publishing industry.

COMPILED BY RWA

# 2006 ROMSTAT REPORT

Simba Information reports U.S. book sales (net revenue from retail sources) at \$6.31 billion for 2006, which is a slight decline over 2005. Contributing factors include the lack of a new Harry Potter book and religious blockbuster title. Also, *Business of Consumer Book Publishing 2007* reports “myriad cultural and demographic changes were also at play...consumers are juggling an ever-growing number of demands on their time” (Agostino 2007, 5).

## Romance Fiction in 2006

The overall decline in the publishing industry was not evident in romance fiction, as sales remained steady in 2006 with

\$1.37 billion in estimated revenue and approximately 6,400 new titles published. Romance fiction was a strong seller—overcome only by the religion/inspirational category.

With these revenue numbers, romance fiction was a 26.4 percent share of all market categories in 2006. What accounts for the strong sales? Variety. Consumers of romance read it how, when, and where they wish. Readers have proven to be consumers of romance in a variety of formats, from traditional to digital.

Readers who want to listen to a romance in the car, bus, or train on the commute to work can purchase an audiobook on CD or download it onto an MP3 player. While audiobook sales as a whole were down 11.7 percent in 2006, Brilliance Audio increased its revenue with “the gain driven by continued success with suspense and romance audiobooks” (Agostino 2007, 12). Similarly, Audible’s revenue was up 20 percent, and Director of Communications Jonathan Korzen

### Romance Fiction Sales in Comparison



Source: Simba Information estimates



Of those who read books last year, one in five read romance novels.

Source: AP-Ipsos poll

Romance fiction was a **26.4** percent share of all market categories in 2006.

“said that romance...titles have done especially well” (Agostino 2007, 13).

Romance titles have “done especially well” in the electronic book format, too. According to the *New York Times*, “As the readers and the devices become more common, e-book publishers are noticing a shift in tastes. The early best-seller lists were dominated by science fiction novels and other titles favored by men....But lately, the lists are led by romance and women’s fiction” (Wayner 2007). The International Digital Publishing Forum (IDF) reported sales of trade e-books for 2006 at around \$24 million, which is double the amount of sales for 2005. In what could be a breakthrough for the industry, the IDPF voted on an official e-book standard. “The IDPF adoption of OPS 2.0 along with the ‘.epub’ file format that goes with it...means that publishers can now create one digital book file instead of the 6 to 10 formats previously required” (Reid 2007). With the new e-book file format, debut of the Sony Reader, and new software from eBook Technologies, Mobipocket, eReader.com and others, sales will continue to rise.

Romance fiction sales should continue to benefit from these technologies, as new (and existing) readers embrace audiobook and e-book romance titles in addition to traditional print books.

**The Readers**

So, who are the readers? According to an Associated Press–Ipsos poll, among those who said they read books in the past year:

- One in five read romance novels,
- People from the South read slightly more, mostly religious books and romance novels,
- More women than men read every major category of books,
- Women read nine books per year, while men read five.

**Best-Selling Authors and Publishers**

The best-seller lists were awash with romance novels in 2006, as “there were 304 editions of 288 romance titles on the best-seller lists, up 24 percent over 2005, and the strongest level in five years” (Agostino 2007, 192). One hundred sixty-one authors, representing fifty-seven imprints, made the lists, with the top spaces going to Nora Roberts, Sandra Brown, Catherine Coulter, Debbie Macomber, and Jayne Anne Krentz. The leading romance subgenres were suspense, history, and fantasy.

Who sold the most romance fiction? The top five romance book publishers of 2006 (as per Simba Information estimates) were:

- 1) Harlequin (\$418 million)
- 2) Random House (\$81 million)
- 3) Penguin Group (\$71 million)
- 4) HarperCollins (64.8 million)
- 5) Kensington (\$37 million)

The solid sales for romance publishers may be attributed to the increasing popularity of niche markets/subgenres such

as erotic romance and paranormal romance, innovative partnerships, on-line marketing, and contests. Major New York publishers recognized the popularity of erotic romance and, in 2006, released their first erotic romances through imprints such as Aphrodisia, Avon Red, Spice, and Berkley Heat.

Harlequin signed a licensing agreement with NASCAR to publish women's fiction titles in an effort to reach the approximately 30 million female NASCAR fans.

Avon sponsored a FanLit contest where the readers and writers collaborated on a novella, which was published as the e-book *These Wicked Games*.

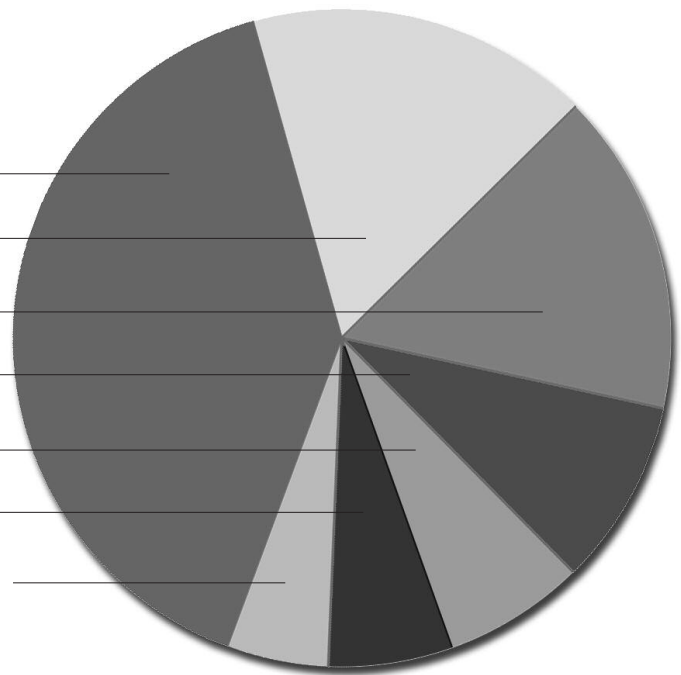
The willingness of publishers to explore new avenues within romance fiction is good news for the future of the industry.

## 2007 Estimates

Sales of romance fiction are predicted to hold steady for 2007, with \$1.375 billion in projected revenue. Overall, the U.S. trade book sales are expected to rise 2.6 percent in 2007, thanks to a new Harry Potter novel, to \$6.47 billion. The popularity of romance audiobooks and e-books, publisher involvement in on-line communities and contests, and the expansion of subgenres spell a strong future for romance fiction.

## Romance Subgenres Published in 2006

- 40 percent: category/series romance
- 17 percent: historical
- 16 percent: contemporary
- 9 percent: paranormal
- 7 percent: romantic suspense
- 6 percent: inspirational
- 5 percent: other (includes young adult, erotic romance, chick-lit, and women's fiction)



Source: Romance Writers of America, 2006 romance releases

### Sources:

- Agostino, David, Michael Norris, Stuart Johnson, eds. 2007. *Business of Consumer Book Publishing 2007*. Stamford: Simba Information.
- Associated Press. One in four read no books last year. The Associated Press-Ipsos. <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3613>.
- International Digital Publishing Forum. Industry statistics. [http://www.idpf.org/doc\\_library/industrystats.htm](http://www.idpf.org/doc_library/industrystats.htm).
- NASCAR. NASCAR, Harlequin sign licensing agreement. [http://www.nascar.com/2005/news/headlines/official/11/02/harlequin\\_nascar](http://www.nascar.com/2005/news/headlines/official/11/02/harlequin_nascar).
- Reid, Calvin. 2007. Trade group moves to make e-books more flexible. *PW Daily*, September 12.
- Wayner, Peter. 2007. An entire bookshelf, in your hands. *New York Times*, August 9, Technology section.

