

Opinion: No, Ebook Sales Are Not Falling – The Self-Publishing Author Perspective

by Orna Ross on November 2, 2015 in Advice: Book Production & Distribution, Debate & Opinion



Orna Ross: “When are we going to start telling the truth about what’s really happening in our marketplace?”

Contrary to recent reports, ebook reading is up everywhere, says Orna Ross. And it’s time publishing booksales figures and bestseller lists started to include self-published books in their data.

Another day, another story announcing the downfall of digital.

Today it’s the **declining sales of ereader devices**. Last week it was Canada CTV News Vancouver reporting Indigo, Canada’s largest book seller, saying “**paper books soar as people put down their ereaders**”. Last month, it was the *New York Times* article claiming **e-book sales were down 10%**.

The Canadian story touted its conclusions while blithely ignoring the existence of indie-penned ebooks altogether. The *NYT* article did mention Amazon and self-publishing authors at the end, but made no attempt to enumerate their sales.

Or come up with any data of its own. Or interview anyone who might shed light on how undocumented sales by self-publishers meant this figure, presented by the Association of American Publishers, must be

flawed.

Neither did they feel any compunction in headlining their article: “Ebook Sales Slip...”, while acknowledging they were failing to include what is estimated to be **30% of the ebook market**.

Not Facts, But Attitude

What’s possibly even more troubling than such lazy hackery from the “paper of record” is the mindset that gives rise to it.

The article made its prejudices clear as it kicked off with “collective panic over the uncertain future of print” among “publishers and authors [who] feared that cheaper e-books would cannibalize their business.” And what about those of us, also publishers and authors, for whom cheaper ebooks *are* our business?

We, it emerged at the end of the article, are those cannibals.

Ebook Reading Is Up, Everywhere

This barely restrained glee about the supposed ebook decline is not just sloppy journalism. It’s ideology posing as information.

And thankfully, for writers and readers, it’s wrong.

Where there is no prejudice or vested interests in what the *NYT* calls “the tug of war between pixels and print”, in libraries, for example, the indicators are that e-reading is still on the rise, even in the US, widely agreed to be the most ebook saturated reading market in the world. *Library Journal* reported last week that their ebook catalogues increased by 37% in the past year, with demand for adult ebooks increasing by 80% in that time.

Ebooks are the preferred reading format for a large percentage of readers in the US and UK, and now beginning to take off internationally, through “globile”: reading on mobile phones.

UNESCO surveyed over 4,000 people in seven countries (Ethiopia, Ghana,

India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe) to learn more about their mobile reading habits and found that reading on their phone led 65% of respondents reported an increase in their time spent reading. 90% said they planned to read more on their mobile devices over the next year. The report's authors conclude that "mobile reading represents a promising, [and] still underutilized, pathway to text."

China, currently the world's largest smartphone market, is taking to e-reading in a big way. (Apple iBooks just opened in China.)

India is expected to jump into second place ahead of the USA as soon as 2017. India officially has 30million more internet users than the USA has people even though only 27% of its people are as yet online.

The Death of Print?

No, print is not going away, any more than ebooks are. Even in the US, the country where most ebooks are sold, print still accounts for a sizeable chunk of the market (though probably not the 65 – 70%% quoted by the same flawed figures that skew the ebook data).

Print is far from dead and indie authors need to find a way to make print work better for them. (ALLi is currently talking to Ingram about ways in which that might happen). But to say this is not the same thing as saying ebook sales are falling.

There is no war between print and pixels in the indie author's mind. Both are ways to reach readers and there's no war for them either, as demonstrated by an email I received from a reader this week, as he put in a pbook order on my website. "I ordered the ebook 2 days ago," he wrote, "and am really enjoying it.. [and]... I decided I really needed a physical copy for my shelf." This is by no means a rare occurrence.

Many readers love both formats as do most writers.