

PUBLISHING TRENDS

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News & Opinion on the Changing World of Book Publishing

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Watch Your Backlist

Publishers and Booksellers Re-Assess Their Backlists, Stocking Deeper, While Printing Less, Plus: Looking Beyond the Shelf

Backlist has always been a cash cow for those willing to milk it. Publishers have long tried enticing booksellers with annual promotions, Buy-Now-Pay-Later deals, Just In Time Inventory and the like – all with the hope of boosting their backlist cushion. And yet, invariably, attention wanes as focus shifts back to the frontlist, and the backlist is neglected, until the cycle flips anew.

In the era of the Long Tail, the ease with which a title can be published and then kept in print has resulted in a staggering 450,000 English language titles flooding the global market in 2004. Technology has intensified this torrent, even as it has created methods – think Google, Amazon, Lightning – to navigate it.

As **Josh Marwell**, President of Sales at **HarperCollins** said, “The challenge for the industry is to make sense of how to organize and sell these titles. A lot of publishers just throw their hands up, and say forget it, unable to make sense of it all, but it’s much more profitable to figure it out.”

The Backlist, Essentially

Nearly four years ago, **John Rubin** – coming out of a 10 year stint as a management consultant – went into his mother’s independent bookstore in Chicago to help her manage her cash flow. It was there, after coming to the realization that his mother’s store was operating “in a vacuum” that he began working on **Above the Treeline**, a web based, sales organization tool for the independent trade, Christian and university booksellers. Rubin established the company under two premises: 1) To provide booksellers with the tools to help them better manage their titles, and 2) As a way in which to link independent stores by allowing them to see what was selling not only in their own stores but elsewhere. The program works by mining stores’ point of sale data, and loading it onto a central server, according to Rubin. The data is then organized and can be used to create buy and return lists, view publisher’s core lists, create sales goals, see what categories are selling in both one’s own store and others, etc. There are also plans in the works that will enable bookstores to buy directly on the Above the Treeline site through both distributors and publishers.

“Seventy-five of the larger independents and small chains are already signed on, including **Tattered Cover**, **Powells**, **Northshire** and **Harry Schwartz**,” Rubin said. ATL isn’t just for buyers and stores, but for sales reps as well, boasting partnerships with publishers such as **Random House**, **HarperCollins**, **Penguin**, **S&S**, **Norton** and **Wiley** among others.

“We’re providing the program as a conduit for their sales reps,”

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Book View

PEOPLE

Big moves this fall, with the news that **FSG’s** Editor-in-Chief **John Glusman** is stepping down at the end of the year, and that **Annik LaFarge** will move to **Bloomsbury** to become Publishing Director, starting November 14. Her position at Crown has been filled by **Heather Jackson**, who leaves **Rodale** after 2 years.

HarperCollins announced the appointment of **Tina Andreadis** as VP, Director of Publicity, for Harper Trade. She was formerly Deputy Director of Publicity at **Warner Books**. **Elizabeth Viscott Sullivan** has been named Senior Editor for **Collins Design**, and imprint of Collins. She reports to **Marta Schooler**, VP and Publisher.

Liate Stehlik is joining **Avon** as SVP Publisher -- she was Associate Publisher at **Pocket Books**.

Ann Jackson, erstwhile of **Time Inc.**, has been named CEO of **WRC Media**, parent of **Weekly Reader**. **Emily Swenson** resigned as President of **Weekly Reader** last month and **Neal Goff** has taken her place.

Lifestyle public relations firm **Susan Magrino Agency** has hired **David Thalberg**, former SVP at the book publicity agency, **Planned Television Arts (PTA)**, for the newly-created role of Executive Director. Thalberg will report to agency President, **Allyn Magrino**.

Will Lippincott has resigned from **Booz Allen** - where he was editor of their publication **strategy + business** effective January ‘06 - to assume his agency duties full time at **Lippincott Massie McQuilkin & Co**. A search is underway for his replacement.

Jean Feiwel, Senior VP and Publisher has left **Scholastic** after 22 years with the company. Trade Sales Director **Jack Perry** (jackwperry38@hotmail.com), who came to Scholastic from **Sourcebooks** last year, has also left, as has former Director of Marketing, **Jennifer Pasanen**.

Ann Marie Resnick has been hired for the new position of VP, Marketing and Promotion in the book club division. She was VP, Marketing at **Columbia House**.

Gene Brissie has left **Kensington**, where he was Editor in Chief of **Citadel Press**, for **The Lyons Press**, where he is Associate Publisher. He may be reached at 203 458 4656 or

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he said. "It's easier to identify what's going to move, and make suggestions. Backlist can be so big, it's difficult to sift through it. We enable stores to manage their backlist."

Above the Treeline also works with 150 stores in the **CBA** market along with Christian publishers **Thomas Nelson**, **Tyndale** and **Zondervan**. It was through Zondervan that HarperCollins first became aware of ATL technology, and began investigating a possible relationship of their own. The result, the HarperCollins Essential Backlist program that began beta testing at the end of September, and goes live the first week of November (essentialbacklist.com).

An incentive program that rewards retailers for taking different levels of stock of their core backlist, Essential Backlist has discount categories that range from small cuts for stores that stock 25% of core titles, all the way up to a significantly larger price slash for stores who stock up to 75% plus.

According to HC's Marwell, titles in the promotion were compiled through a composite of information – "These lists are notoriously difficult to create," he said. "We were careful not to put reminders on the list, to make a very real list with titles that resonate."

Daniel Goldin, a buyer at Harry Schwartz Bookstores said that they are participating in Essential Backlist through ATL. "We are very supportive of publisher efforts to find our backlist holes," Goldin said. "We have been using Above the Treeline with several publishers to fill these holes without any more reward than successful sales increases."

Chris Morrow, co-owner of **Northshire Books**, also uses ATL which he says makes it "much easier to identify backlist titles which we should be paying attention to." Northshire, where 70% of books are six months or older, is currently waiting to talk to HC about their program.

Publishers working with ATL are also pleased with the program. **Bill Rusin**, VP, Trade Sales, **WW Norton** has been working with ATL for a couple of months, and thinks they're "absolutely fantastic." Rusin said that Norton isn't launching a new backlist incentive program with ATL, they're just folding the information gathered from the program into their backlist promotion plan – "which we've continually tweaked over the past 20 years." What makes ATL work, according to Rusin, is the fact that it gives on hand inventory and rate of sale which allows reps to nudge buyers for a re-order. The prevailing assumption that accounts will reorder when they note changes in inventory or sales rates, is "incredibly unrealistic" since accounts have so much on their plates - so having a program that shows the publisher all of the sales data account by account is a real boon.

Carlo De Vito, former publisher of **Chamberlain** (an imprint of Penguin) and **Running Press**, agreed. "As often as I've been upset with one buy or another, the fact of the matter is, any buyer is completely overwhelmed. As a buyer, it's not your responsibility to keep pushing someone's backlist if they are not. It's just a sad fact of the jungle."

Mike Shatzkin, whose **Idea Logical Company** helps publishers increase their sales through the analysis of inventory and sales patterns, agrees: "Between the need to cover the frontlist and monitor the movement of backlist, most buyers are maxed out on time and bandwidth. But a lot of improvements can be made by minor adjustments on titles that are under the old-fashioned radar, but which stand out when the searchlights are trained on them."

The Shelf Gets Short Shrift

As frontlist titles proliferate, and backlist titles are vigorously resurrected, the question remains - just because a store has a deeper backlist stash, will the books necessarily ever see the shelf

space, or get the staff attention, necessary to sell?

Most publishers complain that although booksellers always want to have more backlist titles on hand, they have become reluctant to give those titles the shelf space they need.

"The whole drive behind backlist is twofold: One, is to put books back on the shelf that may have fallen off, and two is to find books that are underrepresented on the shelf and turn spine outs into face outs, etc," said **Matty Goldberg**, VP Sales and Marketing **Perseus**, "But shelf space only goes so far, you can only have so many face outs, so it turns into making it worth the bookseller's while."

Since the competition for shelf space is so fierce, some publishers are skipping the struggle entirely, and reprinting and repackaging books whose second incarnations are never intended to see the shelf. Rather, the books, exhibited in special displays throughout the store act as reminders, directing customer attention to other titles that may be tucked away. De Vito, for example, worked on the **Wiley's DUMMIES Series** mini books, which were placed on spinners near the check out. He sold Wiley on the idea, by pushing not only the books themselves, but the fact that they would act as publicity for the regular sized Wiley books – mini-ads that customers would be sure to see, and revenue generators to boot. The books not only sold themselves but redirected customers back to the original series. De Vito also repackaged **Signet Classics** with DVD's of movie classics for **Chamberlain**, which were also sold on special displays.

"We had a tremendous response, especially from the independents, for the Signet/Chamberlain Bros. classics," De Vito said. "We created a 12-copy pre-pack, which was quite successful on the laydown." De Vito said that the spinner for Dummies minis also had a 24-copy pre-pack with header, and that both were hugely successful, selling hundreds of thousands of copies a piece.

Another Penguin packaging invention, **Hot Shots**, launched at the end of September, serves the similar function of a miniature ad – displayed on floor stands throughout stores. The line features the short work (between 96-128 pages) of six authors that has previously been available only in anthology/collection form. The super-low \$2.99 price point is set to mimic **i-Tunes** and the idea of "sampling" individual works – with the sought after end result being to fuel future purchases by the same author in their more expansive (and expensive) forms. Originally the books were intended for supermarkets and mass merch stores, but have since expanded to include bookstores as well. As **PW** reported, Penguin is encouraging stores to carry the titles in floor displays rather than vie for and take up shelf space. Penguin will also just do one print run for the titles – in an effort to keep inventory and therefore returns to a minimum. (It's been reported that the estimated print run for each of the titles will be in the mid-six figures).

On the pricier end of the spectrum, **Maureen Donnelly**, VP Director of Publicity, noted another recent Penguin backlist promotion – the Penguin **Essential Editions**. The series is taking bestselling titles from across imprints (ten titles are currently in the works such as **THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES**, **THE STONE DIARIES**, **THE KITE RUNNER**, **THE BLUEST EYE**) and buffing them up into a high end trade paperback with a \$16 price point. "They're beautifully designed, with a gifty look and it's working," Donnelly said. "They're selling as nicely alongside the other editions."

"Good publishers consistently find ways to reinvent their backlist – through promotions or repackaging – which gives the bookstore buyers and managers reason to help you," De Vito said. Every year, reprints and new editions account for about 7-9% of the total number titles published in the US, according to **Bowker**.

Along with the numerous repackaging and reprinting at Penguin to fluff up the backlist, **Patrick Nolan**, Marketing Director, says that they do offer "generous stock up *continued on the next page*

A Fair to Remember?

FRANKFURT. LONDON. BOOKEXPO. CAPE TOWN? THE TRIAD of must-attend book fairs may become a quadrumvirate next year after the inauguration of Barcelona and Cape Town's own. With equally idealistic mission statements, the **Saló del Llibre** and the **Cape Town Book Fair** will finally happen after ten years and two years of planning respectively. However, claiming a few days out of the already crowded calendar of international book fairs might prove to be a quest more quixotic than realistic.

Catalonia has been the publishing industry's darling lately and last month's announcement that Spain's autonomous community will have the spotlight at the **Frankfurt Book Fair** in 2007 did not shock many. The region also held the privileged position at the **Guadalajara International Book Fair** last year. The **Guild of Catalan Editors** and the **Guild of Catalan Bookstores** appear to be taking advantage of the hype by holding its own fair in November. The **Saló del Llibre** boasts a lineup of 400 activities over four days with 13,000 square meters available for the more than 220 exhibitors. All the major Spanish publishers, including **Random House Mondadori**, **Grupo Planeta**, **DeBolsillo**, and **Círculo de Lectores**, along with virtually every Catalan counterpart will host stands, but international publishers are conspicuously absent from the schedule. For the past 25 years,

the Catalan publishing industry has been making up for the time lost during the 40 years of **Franco's** dictatorship when speaking and writing Catalan was *prohibido* and book publishing suffered under strict laws of censorship. Organizations like the **Catalan Publishers Association**, established in 1978, hope to spread the word that Catalonia is a major publishing center and has been for over 500 years. By all counts their work is paying off. In 2003, books published in Catalan comprised roughly 10-15% of Spain's output.

Although English-language books have long dominated Cape Town's publishing industry, there are ten other official languages in South Africa and books in all of them will be featured at the Cape Town Book Fair, a joint venture between the Frankfurter Buchmesse and the **Publishers Association of South Africa**. The fair will take place in June, only a month before the 22nd Annual **Zimbabwe International Book Fair**. Organizers of the Harare event fear the new fair will overshadow the smaller one, but with Cape Town shaping up to have a "business" focus and Zimbabwe traditionally being more "cultural/regional," many say the events are dissimilar enough to avoid competition. In fact, many say the Zimbabwe fair is on the way out. At a time when book fairs are booming, a dozen others are ready to take its place.

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options throughout the year," although there isn't an equivalent to HC's Essential Backlist to date.

At Random House, Senior VP Director Sales and Marketing **Anthony Ziccardi** said, "We're looking at Essential Backlist closely and waiting to see what happens." At present, the ratio of backlist to frontlist at RH is about 60/40 according to Ziccardi. "There have been increased backlist sales this year over the last two," he said. "Trade paperback has really grown, which is the biggest factor in the overall growth, even though mass market is down." Ziccardi mentioned some other factors, as well, including the fact that the DA VINCI CODE is now backlist.

To increase backlist sales, Ziccardi mentioned numerous initiatives. "We're engaged in chain-driven value promotions with **BN** and **Borders**, running low price points, like \$4.99, using mixed displays, general promotional opportunities, reading groups, spinner racks that come free when stores buy 72 books." Unlike De Vito's displays, he noted that most of RH's displays do involve co-op dollars.

Perseus' Goldberg said "In terms of marketing, I'm seeing ways in which we will begin to promote the backlist as a whole in more aggressive ways." According to Goldberg, Perseus did traditional backlist stock offers for a long time, but then moved away from that model since they found that they weren't rewarding sell-through in the stores. "Like Harper, we're looking into various forms of incentive policies – like Essential Backlist, looking at the merge and purge, programs where we get printout of a stores holdings and tell them what they might be missing – how they could fill in the gaps," he said.

The Infinite Shelf

"The basic difference between Brick and Mortar vs. an online venture is that it is incumbent upon Brick and Mortar stores to get as much out of backlist as they can. It behooves everyone to work that space as best they can," Goldberg said. "The beautiful thing about Amazon is that the shelf space is infinite."

Richard Davies, PR Manager of **Abebooks.com**, an online marketplace of over 70 million new, used, rare and out of print books, said, "Over the past decade, the Internet has breathed life into countless titles that could have faded away into true backlist obscurity. Once the marketing behind a book drops away, the Web becomes the ideal method to ensure sales tick over." He

continued, "The term 'backlist' simply does not apply in the world of online bookselling."

Random House's Ziccardi also touted the success of the internet, "I think that Amazon is doing an especially good job in promoting trade paper backlist." The reason lies not only in the infinite shelving as Goldberg pointed out, but in the instantaneous ease with which one can search that infinite space. Ziccardi notes that publishers selling direct to consumers through their websites would be a possible vehicle for emulation. "We've delicately entered into direct to consumer, but it's still very quiet at this point. We're not doing anything to market it."

And what of print on demand previously hailed as the savior of all inventory controls? **Ingram's** Lightning is reprinting thousands of OS titles for most major publishers (including Perseus who found it was no longer cost effective to operate their own Docutech machines). Yet the selling and marketing to consumers of this elusive piece of the backlist has yet to happen.

For RH titles that are POD, Ziccardi says that they let "key customers" know that they are available (i.e. retailers) but in turn the retailers don't actively market them. "It's more if someone comes in and specifically asks for them," he said. However, once a direct to consumer venture is more firmly established, it could offer an opportunity for publishers to market POD titles to the general public. "We obviously wouldn't tell them that they're POD, we'd probably say 'a rare, limited book' but we'd be able to promote them," Ziccardi said.

Regardless of all of the Long Tail inspired emphasis on the future of backlist sales residing in ether, many booksellers contend that their stores are just as full of backlist browsers as ever. **City Lights'** buyer **Paul Yamazaki** said that backlist sales are at an all time high with much of the increase coming from university presses and independent press fiction. All of the 14 staff members regularly discuss backlist books they think deserve more attention or should be acquired.

Roxanne Coady, Founder of **RJ Julia**, echoed Morrow's sentiment, "We find we're a strong backlist store, generally about hand selling, and staff recommendations which may or may not be of current titles." **RJ Julia** is using Above the Treeline ("a big help" according to Coady) and is getting involved with HC's Essential Backlist. "I think that in times where there aren't a lot of frontlist titles, everyone in the industry immediately looks to backlist as a way to keep interest up among readers," she said. "It's a cycle."