



## Crystal Ball Gazing: Publishing Trends for 2006

by  
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In 2005, North American markets predicted growth in 2006 in book sales of 18.3%, driven by a whopping 50% growth in religious books.<sup>1</sup> Other categories in which revenues are expected to grow include mass market paperbacks (16.9%), adult trade books (12.3 %), and professional books (11.6 %). I hope this isn't wishful thinking...

Two experts from the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia (Canada) spoke in late 2004 of a drop in demand for books on science and a growing interest in history and the mind-body-spirit (formerly New Age) categories of non-fiction. Also of interest, the Food Network TV channel has aided a significant rebound in cookbook sales.<sup>ii</sup>

In the fiction world, fantasy and other speculative fiction (SF) sub-categories remain strong sellers, especially with young adult readers – to wit, the sales of *Harry Potter* and the resurrected *Lord of the Rings*. Everyone seems to think SF will continue to sell well.

Looking at a variety of sources, including interviewing top editors and agents in October 2005 and studying bestseller and 'most borrowed' lists, here are some thoughts as 2005 draws to a close:

- **Chick Lit** is the hottest category in 2006 for both fiction and non-fiction. Once sneered at, chick lit is now very sought after and is defined as books for women in the 18-34 age group. Independent and often living alone, these women are devouring novels geared for their lifestyle and non-fiction that guides them in purchasing their first home, managing house renos, buying their first car, etc. You get the picture.... Chick Lit's style is easy to read, has lots of illustrations and white space, and much *info with attitude*.
- As North Americans continue to put on weight, **dieting** books, which have always sold strongly, will be stronger.

- The baby-boomers are closing in on **retirement** and will redefine the meaning of this life passage.
- **Spirituality** is booming.
- Fully one third of bloggers write about **self-help** and self-esteem topics, apparently for self-therapy, which may indicate a strong market for books in this category. Additional evidence for this possibility is the huge increase in books on social science subjects in libraries.
- **Biographies** soared in the nineties and are still holding up well; so are popular histories, especially in Canada.
- **Current events, unique ways of life, career management, and family structure** are considered good bets too.

Canada has an international reputation for literary excellence. Our smaller presses are part of that tradition, said Joy Ferguson in “Publishers GREAT and small”, Canadian Booksellers Association website, [www.cbabook.org](http://www.cbabook.org) in 2004.

In 2001, John Bemrose wrote about Canadian publishing in an article for *McLean’s Magazine* (2001):

*Thanks to government grants, small and large Canadian-owned publishers have been able to invest in Canadian writers to a degree unheard-of 30 years ago. And the big foreign-owned firms that operate so profitably here (thanks to their marketing of popular foreign titles) have found it to be in their interests to publish as many Canadian writers as possible. They lose money on many of them, as do the Canadian companies, but their domestic publishing programs make for good corporate citizenship.*

Since I wrote this article in November 2005, I have seen a variety of different predictions from both the Canadian and US publishing industries, the sources of which I could not identify. However, having said that, they were overwhelmingly in agreement that publishers around the world were cutting back fiction in their lists as never before....

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<sup>i</sup> *TRENDS 2005* US Book Industry Study Group 2005 at [www.bisg.org](http://www.bisg.org)

<sup>ii</sup> The Canadian Booksellers Association, 2005