

“Selecting one book out of the many, many thousands available seems almost impossible when you think about it.”

—An avid reader in “Making Choices” study, Catherine S. Ross

2011 SinC Publishers Summit Report

# How Readers Find Books



Report Authors

**Frankie Bailey & Cathy Pickens**

Summit Team

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As the publishing industry undergoes enormous changes, and each year more books jostle for attention in a fragmented marketplace, a key question emerges: *How do readers find the books they want to read?* Sisters in Crime took that question to the American Library Association (ALA) annual convention, where more than 20,000 people who help answer that question every day were gathered.

The 2011 Summit Team descended on the ALA annual conference in New Orleans to learn how librarians, as well as publishers, reviewers, marketing reps, distributors, and electronic delivery help readers find books.

SinC began issuing Publishers Summit Reports in 2007. The initial studies focused on traditional New York publishing, interviewing publishers, editors, agents, and others, then branched out to include distributors, consolidators, and new technology companies. (To see past Summit Reports, visit [www.sistersincrime.org](http://www.sistersincrime.org). If you aren't already a member, you can also join on the website.)

This year's Summit sought to build on SinC's January 2011 study "The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age," based on publishing industry data gathered by R.R. Bowker's book sales analysis division, PubTrack. That report is also available on the SinC website.

So, how do readers find books? A recent study by Codex, a leader in book audience research, surveyed 8200 readers to ask that question and confirmed what we found in last year's SinC Mystery Book Consumer study with Bowker: The vast majority of book buyers find their book recommendations in traditional ways: in bookstores, from other readers, reading groups, interviews or reviews. Our SinC study found that mystery readers are often older readers who rely on these traditional methods, while younger people tend to find book recommendations in new technology; the Codex study found that 19% of the 8200 book buyers it surveyed looked to e-bookstores, blogs, author websites, and other online sources. As with the SinC/Bowker study, Codex found that social networks like Facebook and Twitter currently account for a small percentage of book recommendations for readers.

Both the SinC Mystery Book Consumer study and the Codex study focused on book buyers. Because crime fiction remains the most popular genre in libraries, libraries buy lots of mysteries. Because mystery readers report that libraries are an important resource for finding new authors and new series, librarians are valuable guides to understanding how readers and books meet up.

## **The Rock Stars of Reader's Advisory**

We started our investigation at the ALA conference with three renowned experts in the field of readers' advisory.

*Readers' Advisory* (RA) is the process of helping readers discover books they will enjoy. Librarians consider this a primary professional responsibility and make an effort to be well-read in multiple genres. Good RA requires good interview skills paired with a mastery of a wide range of books.

Our experts were some of the rock stars in the field:

- ***Nancy Pearl***, the author of *Book Lust*, the only librarian with her own action figure, and frequent guest on NPR's Morning Edition;

- **Catherine Sheldrick Ross**, Canadian scholar and editor of *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about Reading, Libraries, and Community*; and
- **Jessica Moyers**, author of *Research-Based Readers' Advisory*.

Their combined research into reading experiences and years of practice matching readers and books gives them an authoritative position from which to view the reading experience.

Nancy Pearl believes that readers enter books through one of four preferred doorways: story, characters, setting, or language. The most common doorway is **story**; these readers want action and want to be swept up in it. Some readers are most interested in compelling, three-dimensional **characters** that leave a long-lasting impression. **Setting** is another doorway: These readers love having detailed worlds created on the page. Least common is the reader for whom **language** is the key. These readers talk about the beauty of phrases and the need to slow down to savor a passage; the books they are most attracted to are the ones that win literary awards.

A reader will seek different doorways depending on her mood. A good advisor will know not only which books suit which taste, but how to help readers articulate what they want in a reading experience. Pearl believes readers would benefit if they learned how to articulate their own preferences, without feeling constrained by what others consider “good” or appropriate. Libraries should have signs that say, “Never Apologize For Your Reading Tastes,” she says. She suggested SinC and its members look for ways to help readers get to know authors as *readers* to make the kind of connections readers enjoy. Interacting with readers as a fellow reader, rather than as an author in marketing mode, is the key. She recommended FictionL as a valuable resource and outlet (see “Resources”).

Catherine Ross, with the help of generations of graduate students at Western Ontario University, has interviewed in a long-term study around 300 avid readers. She defines “avid readers” as those who feel distinctly nervous if they find themselves without a book ready to hand. In her research, the paradox she discovered is that reading can fill contradictory needs: It offers both escape from the world and engagement with it; it’s both relaxing and stimulating; it allows a reader to be solitary and to be social; and it confirms ideas readers have while exposing them to new ones.

Readers, her research affirmed, read for a wide range of reasons. Readers gain a lot from genre fiction, including an affirmation of self, an entry point into a wider world, and a chance to learn new things (see “Resources.”).



Barbara Fister (left) with Catherine Ross (center) and Frankie Bailey (right)

Though her Ph.D. was in English literature, Ross has found the study of everyday readers much more rewarding than literary criticism. She also believes rumors of the death of reading are greatly exaggerated and cites research that suggests the percentage of people who read for pleasure has been steady for decades.

Jessica Moyer is a relatively new voice in the field, having just earned her PhD with a dissertation that compared reading in three formats (print, digital, and audio). In her study, readers found no difference in comprehension or reading experience, regardless of which format they used.

She has written or edited three books on readers' advisory and is particularly interested in the ways that social networks are influencing reading choices among younger readers. She has observed that how readers find books is changing among younger readers, and tapping into the buzz on Twitter around teen reading gives her a chance to discover what's hot; she finds a lot of discussion among younger readers on social networks. As the world of publishing undergoes upheaval, social networks are becoming a key medium for sharing reading experiences and discovering new books to download and read, particularly among those under 40. This confirms information gathered in the SinC study by Bowker.

We also met with *Joyce Saricks*, author of *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* and a major contributor to *Novelist*, a reference tool librarians use to guide them in recommending books. In her library, she advocated using every opportunity to help people discover books, including displays, endcaps, shelf talkers [cards on shelves, often used in bookstores, to call attention to and describe books], and "the power of a librarian loose in the stacks with an armload of books." She routinely solicits reviews and feedback on books from patrons, who love to share what they're reading.

Saricks described displaying brand new books in her library but not allowing them to circulate for two weeks, so more readers could notice and become interested in them. She also described a "genre study," a staff development process that involves librarians in a systematic immersion in the characteristics of fiction genres that makes them familiar with a range of styles and authors. The process can be a lengthy one (for her library, a two-year process); staff members read and share with each other books in the selected genres and sub-genres.

Within even a well-defined subgenre, mysteries are enormously varied. Rather than seek out books based on genre labels that fail to convey enough information for making choices that satisfy, Saricks focuses on *appeal*—those vague urgings that turn into book lust. A reader may not be looking strictly for a police procedural, but rather for realistic and sympathetic char-

acters who can become familiar friends. Or she may not know the phrase “amateur sleuth,” but she’s in the mood for something gentle and light-hearted. Another reader may not care what kind of mystery she reads, as long as the pacing is breakneck and the action non-stop. Saricks has developed a checklist that helps librarians coax these yearnings out of readers—and can help writers describe their books in ways that . . . well, *appeal* to readers.

Among the appeal factors that Saricks explores are pacing, tone or mood, characterization, storyline, frame or setting, and style or language.

All the reader’s advisory librarians talked about using appeal words to describe books and to pull from readers what kinds of books they enjoy. Saricks shared with us her copyrighted list of appeal words and questions (see sidebar).

To help a reader explain what specific elements of a book are appealing, one effective technique is to invite readers to choose three words or phrases (from the list in the sidebar, for example) they would use to describe their reading tastes or what they liked about a particular book.

Saricks told us that once you’ve unlocked not just what books a reader likes but why, you can find more books to recommend.

One of Saricks’ recommendations for librarians is *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* by Paco Underhill. It explores what influences purchasing decisions, which are similar whether a reader is buying a book in a bookstore or choosing one in a library.

She also emphasized the importance for authors to build relationships with libraries. Some suggestions were to:

- Send shelf-talkers similar to those used in bookstores to talk about your books.
- Maintain a presence on Goodreads, Shelfari, and other online review sites, not as a promoter but as a reader.
- Twitter with libraries.
- Volunteer to blog on library sites, especially about what you’re reading.

## Considering a Book’s Appeal

by Joyce Saricks

### Pacing

- What is the pattern of the pacing? Are characters and plot quickly revealed or slowly unveiled?
- Is there more dialogue or description?
- Is the book densely written?
- Are there short sentences, short paragraphs, and short chapters?
- Does a prologue or introduction set up the story?

### Words to Describe Pacing

breakneck, builds in intensity, compelling, deliberate, densely written, easy, engrossing, fast-paced, leisurely-paced, measured, relaxed, relentless, stately, steady, unhurried

### Tone/Mood

- Does the book offer a scholarly or popular treatment of a nonfiction subject?
- Does the tone dominate the readers’ impression of the book?

### Words to Describe Tone/Mood

Atmospheric, austere, bittersweet, bleak, candid, chilling, claustrophobic, comfortable, compassionate, contemplative, dangerous, darker, didactic, dramatic, earnest, edgy, elegiac, emotionally-charged, evangelistic, evocative, exuberant, flamboyant, foreboding, gentle, gritty, hard-edged, haunting, heartwarming, homespun, hopeful, humorous, impassioned, introspective, lighthearted, magical, melodramatic, melancholy, menacing atmosphere, moody, moving, mystical, nightmare, nostalgic, optimistic, paranoid, persuasive, philosophical, poignant, psychological, playful, romantic, sarcastic, sensual, sobering, sophisticated, stark, suspenseful, thoughtful, unaffected, uneasy, unpretentious, upbeat

(continued on pages 6 & 7)

## Considering a Book's Appeal (cont.)

### Characterization

- Are the characters developed over time, or are they stereotypes we recognize immediately?
- Is the focus on a single character or on several whose lives are intertwined?
- Is the reader expected to identify with the characters or observe them?
- What is the point of view from which the story is told? 1st person?
- Are there series characters, followed through and developed over several related novels?
- Are there memorable and important secondary characters?
- Is characterization the most important aspect of the book?

### Words to Describe Characterization

Closely observed, detailed, distant, dramatic, eccentric, engaging, evocative, faithful, familiar, flawed, insightful, inspiring, interior, intriguing, introspective, lifelike, multiple points of view, quirky, realistic, recognizable, series (characters), strong secondary (characters), sympathetic, vivid, well-developed, well-drawn

### Storyline

- What is the author's intention in regard to story line?
- Does the story emphasize people or situations and events?
- Is the focus of the story more interior and psychological or exterior and action oriented?
- Does the story take place on more than one level?

### Words to Describe Storyline

Storyline action-oriented, authentic, character-centered, cinematic, complex, conclusive, domestic, episodic, explicitly violent, family-centered, flashbacks, folksy, gentle, imaginative, inspirational, investigative, interior, issue-oriented, layered, linear, literary references, multiple plot lines, mystical, mythic, open-ended, plot-centered, plot twists, racy, resolved ending, rich and famous, romp, sexually explicit, steamy, strong language, thought-provoking, tragic

## The Social Lives of Books

*Neal Wyatt*, a *Library Journal* columnist, librarian, and Ph.D. candidate studying the impact of social media, talked about the importance of *affinity* in a reader's search for books. One of the reasons a reader chooses a book is because of her affinity or connection with someone who has read and/or recommends the book. For many, that recommendation will come from a friend, a librarian, a newspaper review, a book club, or a similar source. The key is that we feel affinity for recommendations from those whose tastes have proven similar to ours in the past. We've learned to trust that, if they like it, we probably will too.

Wyatt believes that even in an age of social media, the basic process of affinity remains the same. As she put it, we don't see people who engage with each other using social media acting that differently as a social group than people who ride the bus together every day. In either situation, people develop a sense of relationship. And once affinity is created, the "bandwagon effect" may come into play. Everyone wants to be a part of the group; no one wants to be left out. But with the technology of social media, this bandwagon may draw riders faster than simple word of mouth can; in many ways, its reach is the same as the Oprah effect and the power of her book club recommendations.

Once the reader has the book in hand, appeal factors come into play. Wyatt believes covers are important. How does the cover make you feel? Do you want to open the book? Paratextual information on the cover, and even the shape, can help sell the book. The title may be important or the author's name can matter more than the title in creating buzz about the book. All these elements factor in to a reader's choice to pick up a book.

But, Wyatt told us, what really matters in the end is the appeal of the book itself. A good story hooks the reader. As emphasized by others we interviewed, the appeal factors differ from reader to reader. Some will be attracted to a book because of the characters, others because of the plot. Marketing works best when it conveys these elements of appeal or can make use of the affinity factor.

## Connect: Tips for Building Reader Relationships

Essentially, librarians encourage connections. As one librarian told us “we make relationships.” Librarians in three focus groups (on adult readers, young readers, and library programming) shared their thoughts on how their readers discover books.

Mystery’s consistent popularity in libraries is especially notable because its popularity crosses genders—and because it’s a respectable addiction. Having been less stigmatized than romance readers (who expect some undeserved condescension about their reading choices), mystery readers are more likely to seek suggestions from librarians.

A primary strategy for helping readers discover new authors they might enjoy is to develop “*readalikes*” lists: “While you’re waiting for the next Janet Evanovich, try . . .” or, “If you like this author, you might like these, too.”

Related to read-alike lists are “*read-around*” lists, displays, or programming. For example, a display might feature books that are tied together and annotated—a World War II display with novels set in that era, music CDs, and a documentary or photo display. Or a cooking mystery may be displayed with a regional history, cookbooks, and related materials.

To help readers find books they will enjoy, librarians use a combination of lists (either generated by their library or from shared sources), face-to-face interactions in the library, social networking features based in the library catalogs, blogs, online book lists, shelf talkers, and displays that tempt readers to try books. Particularly popular with younger readers were the social networking features that allowed readers to post and read reviews from their peers.

The ideas librarians had for introducing books in their collections were energetically creative and varied, and they share those ideas that work among libraries.

## Considering a Book’s Appeal (cont.)

### Frame/Setting

- Is the background detailed or minimal?
- Does the frame affect the tone or atmosphere?
- Is there a special background frame?

### Words to Describe Frame/Setting

accurate, contemporary, detailed setting, details of [insert an area of specialized knowledge or skill], evocative, exotic, historical details, intimate, lush, political, rural, small-town, stark, timeless, urban

### Style/Language

- Does the writing matter?
- Is language more important than story or characters?
- Are there unusual styles—diaries, journals, IMs, emails, etc?

### Words to Describe Style/Language

academic, accessible, austere, breezy, cadenced, candid, chatty, classic, colloquial, colorful, complex, concise, conversational, descriptive, dialect, direct, dramatic, earthy, elaborate, elegant, engaging, extravagant, fervid, flamboyant, frank, graceful, homespun, informal, informative, jargon, journalistic, literary, lush, lyrical, metaphorical, natural, ornate, passionate, persuasive, poetic, polished, profanity, prosaic, restrained, seemly, showy, simple, smart, sophisticated, spare, stark, straightforward, thoughtful, unaffected, unembellished, unpretentious, unusual, vivid, well-crafted, well-researched, witty

### Questions to Consider in Describing Books

- What does the author do best?
- What makes the book popular? What do readers talk about?
- What other authors/titles does the book remind you of?
- Who else might enjoy reading this book and why?
- How does it fit with other books in a genre?

### Factors Specific to Nonfiction

- Is it authoritative (well-researched)?
- Is it informative?
- Is it entertaining?

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## The Importance of Reviews

How do librarians find the books they choose to acquire for their libraries?

Pre-publication reviews in the four traditional review publications are **essential**. Reviews in *Library Journal*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *Kirkus* are the single most important factor in library book selections. If librarians don't know about a book, they can't acquire it or recommend it—and these review magazines are where they look first. To put it in perspective, *LJ* reviews about 6000 books each year; *PW* reviewed 7900 last year, up from 7000 in 2007.

Librarians also learn about forthcoming books through distributors' catalogs, on [www.EarlyWord.com](http://www.EarlyWord.com), in publishers' webinars (in which they particularly like to hear why an editor chose to acquire a particular book), and through blogs, though they caution that with reduced staffing, they are too stretched for time to follow too many blogs. One said she reads the bad Amazon reviews to see what the weaknesses in a book may be before she makes a final decision (taking into account that the “wisdom of the crowd” may not be uniformly wise).

Some library book acquisitions are chosen by the distributor; libraries contract with distributors who send set selections of books. In those situations, the four review outlets likely drove many of the distributors' decisions. Libraries can also add other selections to customize their collections; some libraries generally customize their acquisitions, but also automatically order some “must buys” (the latest bestsellers, for instance).

Other than the specialized review sources, librarians tend to find book recommendations in the same places that general readers do by:

- Hearing about it in a media outlet and being intrigued (TV interview, a popular magazine such as *Entertainment Weekly* or *Parade*, a respected review source such as *The New York Times* or *Chicago Tribune*, a feature article, etc.)
- Knowing that readers have heard about it and will want it or a patron requests the book
- Seeing it on Amazon (some pay attention to these reviews and some discount them)
- Receiving an ARC from the publisher and liking it
- Recognizing the established reputation of the author (some are “must buys” for a library because of their long-term popularity with their patrons)
- Having an established track record in that library

If a librarian (or any reader) sees a book positively mentioned in more than one source, she is likely to try it. Most libraries buy more than one copy of a book, and large systems may acquire dozens of a single title. After a library acquires a book, it will check how well the book circulates. If it does well, more copies will be purchased and the author will become someone to watch in the future.

Neal Wyatt, who writes the column “Wyatt’s World” for *Library Journal*, talked about what additional sources she believes influence readers’ book choices:

- Librarians’ recommendations or selections highlighted in the library
- Other readers (non-librarians) with similar tastes
- Local bookstores (displays, recommendations, shelf-talkers)
- Outlets with reviews, such as Amazon, bn.com, and IndieBound
- Reviews in local papers. This can be a powerful source for “affinity” choices because readers get to know the reviewer’s choices over time. In addition, others in the area will be reading the book, so the reader can be part of a larger group.
- Blogs, especially those the reader routinely follows so that affinity and trust have developed
- Book clubs and other sources

## ***Library Journal* Reviews**

Because *Library Journal* is a respected and “library-centric” review source, we interviewed ***Wilda Williams***, Fiction Editor/Book Review and ***Heather McCormack***, Book Review Editor & Editor of BookSmack! (part of *LJ*).

Assignment for review work for *Library Journal* is both anonymous and wide-scattered. It is topic-driven, so books to be reviewed for mystery fiction are consolidated under one editor. The editors prefer to review first novels rather than the 26TH book by an established writer since the newer books are the ones readers don’t know to look for. Since *LJ* can’t review everything, its editors look for newer authors who can use and deserve the “push.” Even though *LJ* doesn’t usually review auto-purchases, it does mention them to alert readers of a new publication.

*Library Journal* likes to focus on midlist authors who write “books that people will want to read and books they don’t know yet.” Because mysteries are popular with library audiences, they remain a large focus.

*LJ* does review self-published books, but it is very important that authors and publishers follow the submission guidelines! A professional presentation is important.

When asked about gender balance from the prospective of a reviewer, Wyatt told us that she “won’t cheat matches” when putting together “best of” lists. If the best in a subgenre one year come primarily from a single publisher or a single gender, for example, “so be it.” But she feels “some responsibility to try to balance subgenres, publishers, and male/female authors” in her general reviews, so she looks at those things when she’s pulling together a column. She agreed that reviews drive purchasing and, perhaps by extension, publishing. But she noted that she generally received few negative comments from readers (other than self-publishers) and has received positive comments based on the appeal of her matches.

When asked what separates a smash success from one that may be as well-written but doesn’t receive the attention, she said, “Lightening strikes sometimes.” *A Discovery of Witches* is a recent example of a lightning-struck book. For that book, a good review in *Entertainment Weekly* was “worth its weight in gold.” Mentions in *Parade* and other popular outlets (which reach more general readers than *Kirkus* or *Publisher’s Weekly*) brought it into the public eye. The book tied into larger cultural themes and the multiple reviews created energy. But she also noted that there are “great books that nobody reads because they don’t win the lottery.”

*IJ* continues to experiment with ways to introduce books to librarians and, ultimately, to their patron/readers. Karin Slaughter was recently invited to be the first blogger on the *Library Journal’s* Facebook page.

## Library Programming

One librarian focus group the Summit Team interviewed included those who develop library programs, an important part of library outreach.

They noted that *consistent* programming is essential to success. The most successful programs usually build a regular schedule of offerings so that patrons will be primed for events. Publicizing the events in as many venues as possible is also important. Posters, leaflets, monthly newsletters, and announcements in the local newspaper all help attract attendees. One library was adding a large roadside sign to promote events; the librarian said, “We’re going to look like a Pentecostal church!”

Reaching different age groups, particularly busy young people in their 20s and 30s, can be challenging. Children and seniors are the most frequent audiences at library events, but children’s programming can be affected by transportation issues (i.e., whether parents can drive them to the library). Libraries are experimenting with alternative ways of reaching patrons, such as

# How Do Publishers Place Books in Libraries?

by Nancy Martin

While listening to librarian focus groups talk about how they respond to patrons and influence their choices of books to read, I found myself wondering how books get into the hands of librarians in the first place. I decided to go looking through the crowded aisles of the ALA exhibit hall to find publishers and distributors who might help me understand the process of stocking books into libraries.

The Macmillan library sales rep, Brian Heller, was standing in Macmillan's Minotaur exhibit, and he explained to me that Macmillan doesn't sell books directly to libraries. Instead, they use book distributing companies like Baker & Taylor, Brodart, and Follett to get their products into the hands of library patrons.

First, publishing sales reps contact distributors by sending catalogs and sales materials and by paying personal calls. The distributors take the information and, before they purchase the books, they create "packages" for libraries to consider buying. Turns out, distributors employ their own librarians to help select books and package them into lots suitable for various kinds of libraries. (An elementary school library will want books for small children. But a library located in a community of more mature patrons might prefer to buy non-fiction dealing with World War II and fiction such as current literary titles and mysteries.)

Once virtual collections of books are prepared by in-house librarians, distributor sales reps present packages to libraries and bid on a library's business. (Pre-selected packages probably include a few currently "hot" titles—bestsellers—as well as titles carefully chosen to suit certain kinds of libraries.) Libraries tend

to buy based on the lowest cost for the kinds of books they most want for their collections. Once the library places its order, the distributor buys the books from the publisher (at a discount) and sells the books to the library (passing along the discount.)

Libraries only order specific titles by favorite authors if they have extra spending money after the pre-packaged books are purchased. To encourage sales of specific books, Macmillan sales rep Talia Ross creates a newsletter she sends to her regular distributor clients. Her newsletter includes info about upcoming titles from Minotaur. She reports that YA titles and mysteries are the kinds of books Minotaur sells best to distributors.

Penguin VP Alan Walker agreed that Penguin's process for selling books to distributors is a lot like Macmillan's. He went into detail about their advertising, however, saying Penguin puts ads into industry publications like *Library Journal*. The Penguin sales department has staff writers who create ad copy, which means editors and authors rarely have input into ads.

When asked what writers can do to help influence their books' being picked up by libraries, Alan said contributing to blogs and websites may help, but his best suggestion is, "Stay home and write more books."

When I asked if library popularity helped books sell in retail stores, Alan pointed to *The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett and reported that library buzz "kept it alive" in the marketplace until bookstore patrons began buying the book in large numbers.

Although the publishing representatives I spoke with said they primarily rely on distributors to sell books into libraries, some face-to-face time with librarians is good (which is why they set up elaborate displays at conventions like ALA.) But

those meetings rarely result in placing specific books in libraries. Why? Librarians already “like what they like,” said Macmillan rep Brian Heller. He has a hard time influencing librarians to buy titles they haven’t heard about.

When it comes to buzz about books, Brian pointed to *Library Journal’s* blog “Advanced Selections” by Barbara Hoffert as an example of a touchstone for many libraries, distributors and publishing reps. Barbara highlights what she considers the best books coming on the market and influences librarians.

Baker & Taylor sales manager Eric Thronson took time from exhibiting B&T’s hot new product, Blio (software that enables digital books to be read on a variety of e-readers) to talk about the ways his company places books in libraries. (B&T distributes books to retail outlets as well as libraries.) Their in-house librarians compile extensive lists of books that appeal to specific audience tastes. They also put together the famous Baker & Taylor “cat bag” (a shopping bag imprinted with the two cats of B&T’s logo) filled with sales sheets, brochures and promotional items. “Librarians love swag,” he reported, pointing to a bag stuffed with sales materials and freebies.

A few times, Baker & Taylor sales reps have been encouraged to push certain titles by publisher-sponsored contests. The most memorable, Eric said, was a contest in which the rep who sold the most copies of an unmentioned book won a \$100 AmEx gift card. But “we don’t have contests very often,” he added. Sometimes authors go to the B&T warehouse in New Jersey to sign books,

but he was quick to add that authors wouldn’t meet sales reps at the warehouse. If an author wants to contact the B&T sales reps, she should go through her publisher’s representative.

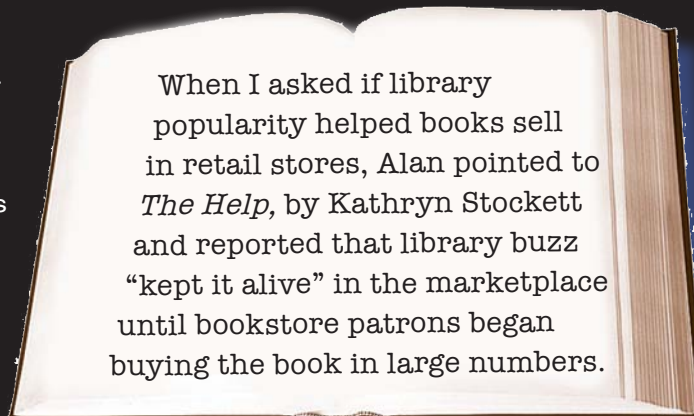
When asked how long Baker & Taylor keeps books on its lists for libraries, Eric said, “as long as the title is active.” He meant that books continue to be pushed to libraries as long as the publisher keeps the titles in print.

Another distributor that sells books exclusively to libraries is Brodart.

(Brodart does not sell books to retail outlets.) Brodart reps interact with publishing house representatives exactly as those from Baker & Taylor—by sales sheets, e-mail and personal calls. Brodart also employs its own librarians to make lists of books that will best appeal to libraries. But Brodart employees told me they primarily

rely on libraries to request books rather than creating packages of books for libraries to buy. Brodart also “rents” books to libraries. The most popular books—about 100 titles a month—are rented to libraries through the “hot time” (meaning the time a bestseller is hottest with readers.) James Patterson titles are typical rentals. A library receives the rented books, can ask for replacements if damaged, and then returns them when their circulation wanes. The used books are then re-sold via Brodart’s outlet store.

After learning how books go from a publishing house to a library patron’s hands, I found that a lot of middlemen are involved. But the system works.



running contests on Facebook or having gaming or music events or even setting up remote radio broadcasts in the library parking lot to draw new patrons.

Author appearances are popular library events, but most programming directors felt that readings don't always go over well. Audiences are more interested in hearing about the writing process and the research underlying a story. Tie-ins to current or historical events are also popular. Panels are popular and often more well-attended than single-author events.

Certain types of books (such as those set during World War II) or activities (such as storytelling) have been successful in getting more men to come out to programs.

Libraries often host regular book discussion groups. Sometimes authors attend these regular groups in person or via telephone or Skype. Groups often welcome this virtual presence. However, because book discussion groups gather to talk about the good as well as the bad, some librarians noted that it could be awkward to discuss the author's book when the author was present. One librarian told us about a particularly successful book discussion where the author called in for Q & A and then hung up, leaving the group free to discuss the book (which included negative comments about the author's work).

Though few of the librarians have scheduled "appearances" by Skype or phone, they felt their discussion groups would be interested in that option.

Some librarians were more receptive than others to scheduling self-published authors. They reported varied degrees of success with such events, but noted that audience members may be interested in the self-publishing process more than in the book itself. One of the primary stumbling blocks for scheduling a book event is that self-published authors generally are not reviewed in traditional outlets. When approached by a self-published author, the programming librarian is therefore placed in the role of evaluating not only the author's ability to interact with the audience but the quality of the book. The librarian is placed in the role of "gatekeeper," a role traditionally taken by agents and publishers.

## Successful Strategies Libraries Use to Promote an Event

- Offer regular programs. A library that runs regular programming is building an audience. A one-shot program in a library that doesn't have programs risks low attendance.
- Display event signs outside the library. (This sounds elementary, but it's important!)
- Actively use Facebook. (Does the library have a presence? Does it have FB book clubs?)
- Send press releases.
- Display material for use on TV screens inside the library (a podcast by the writer or an event announcement, for instance).
- Host a SinC, RWA, or other reader/writer group at the library.
- Invite a group of presenters, since panels are better received than a single speaker.
- Use Friends of the Library to promote event, sell books, or organize other tie-ins.
- Run a contest in advance of appearance. Present the prize or book at the event.
- Schedule a local radio station remote/tie-in.
- Sell books on site.

One librarian mentioned that she had resolved this by scheduling an annual book fair at the library, which allowed both traditionally and self-published authors to reach readers.

## What Do Library Program Directors Want from Authors?

- Provide lots of advance notice about availability. If you are on tour, let libraries know you are available for events. Six months in advance is not too soon; less than six weeks may be too late.
- Have an author website that makes it easy for librarians to plan an event, including
  - ▲ Contact information,
  - ▲ Author bio and introduction,
  - ▲ A high-quality, high-resolution headshot,
  - ▲ Printable list of series titles in order and with each series listed separately,
  - ▲ Discussion questions (3 to 5),
  - ▲ Video or podcasts of the author that can be sent out in advance as part of a publicity package (and which also demonstrate whether the author is an effective speaker),
  - ▲ Indication of willingness to travel or to appear by phone or Skype.
- Tell readers what you're reading. They always are curious. Let them know on your website or on your blog.
- Show up and be approachable! Talk to the audience, answer questions, and sign copies. [Note that many libraries are not allowed to sell books, though Friends groups often are. Ask in advance about arrangements.]

For other suggestions on conducting successful author events at libraries, see articles by Kate Flora and Rosemary Harris in the SinC publication *Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies*, available for purchase on the SinC website.

## Trends

Interacting with authors is important to readers. The wide popularity of mysteries and the interest in interacting with authors were emphasized by most of the librarians we interviewed.

In terms of trends in crime fiction, the librarians reported that “adrenaline” is big right now, with high demand for thrillers and “page-turners.” Cozies have a loyal core audience, but they don’t see the readership growing. Not as many cozy books are coming out with interesting new scenarios, they said, so is the stagnant audience a chicken or egg phenomenon?

Librarians would like to see more crossover books that appeal to more than one core audience.

Among the trends noted by the *Library Journal* staffers are post-apocalyptic stories, especially for YA readers, but on the other end of the spectrum, there seems to be a return to Golden Age-style mysteries for older readers. Staffers anticipate that the popularity of fantasy may be on the wane; they continue to be intrigued by “fresh takes” on zombies and the like, but they’re sick of vampires.

The *Library Journal* staff had a sense that “publishers are pulling back support for midlist authors. Marketing support is being drained from the midlist.” At one time, bestsellers grew from the midlist, so where will bestsellers come from now? Are foreign writers (like Jo Nesbo) the new midlist? The question remains open.

As to following trends, the reviewers we interviewed echoed the advice authors often receive: Writers should avoid jumping on popular bandwagons (particularly with gimmicks), but each writer should develop her own unique voice.

## Younger Readers

The gender divide is still strong in young readers. Boys are unlikely to read stories about girls, but girls will read more widely. The librarians we spoke with say there is a market for fast-paced mysteries in series featuring ordinary boys as protagonists. They pointed to Steve Hamilton's *The Lock Artist* (the 2011 Edgar Best Novel winner which was not marketed as a YA novel) as a successful blend of adventure, romance, suspense, and appealing teenage insecurity which is popular with YA male readers.

A focus group of librarians whose work focuses on young readers told us that kids are drawn to:

- What other kids are reading
- Books in series
- Books that are not all long blocks of text; stories that include alternate formats (letters, documents, scripts, images, free verse) are more enticing, particularly for reluctant readers. Increasingly, books like *Skeleton Creek* are being packaged with rich interactive websites that involve kids in a social experience as they solve puzzles and follow clues.
- Something that seizes their interest on the first page
- Books that offer suspense, action, and a protagonist with whom they can identify
- Books that have a cool cover and a “non-dorky” title they won't be embarrassed to read.

Though paranormal has been popular, historical mysteries are also well received. When asked about differences among readers based on age, several noted that YA readers seem to be drawn to “darker” books, such as *The Hunger Games*.

Younger readers like to engage with books through interactive websites, entertaining book trailers, contests, and interactive opportunities to share their thoughts through reviews and comments on reviews. One writer held a contest for “best book trailer” which attracted a lot of buzz among tech-savvy YA readers.

Several states make annual “children's choice” awards; those books are typically chosen *by* young readers, and the lists of books chosen indicate what's most popular with those readers.

## Tips On “New” Technologies

Librarians are a tech-savvy group—and they expect the same from authors.

When we asked how writers could better reach readers, the librarians consistently emphasized the importance of interacting with readers, and that social media is an excellent vehicle. However, as with any communications tool, it has a learning curve. One commented, “I love social media when it's working. I

hate it when it's stupid." Announcing what you ate for breakfast, for example, isn't a good way to create rapport with readers.

They agreed that authors should work to develop rapport with people who love what they do. When an author does a good job of creating an online community, the fans will eventually take over and drive the conversation themselves. One good example is Nora Roberts' site, with its message boards and vibrant community.

While far from an exhaustive list, other recommended sites included:

- Book Country on Twitter
- Colleen Lindsay, a former agent, on Twitter
- BookSmack! newsletter
- Joe Finder on Facebook

## Behind the Scenes with Publishing Insiders

The SinC team interviewed some of the publishing industry representatives attending the ALA conference. These individuals talked about the missions of their own companies and provided insight into how they help books reach readers.

### **Poisoned Pen Press**

**Robert Rosenwald** is the publisher and president of Poisoned Pen Press. He noted that the bookstore (which many mystery writers know) and the press are two separate companies.

Rosenwald explained that initially he maintained complete control over the publishing process from acquisition to distribution. In 2009, however, Ingram began to handle distribution for PPP.

What has remained unchanged since the inception of the publishing company is that libraries are the target market for its books. Currently, the company publishes 36 new mysteries a year (three a month). The majority (65-75%) of sales are to the library market. Rosenwald's wife, Barbara Peters, makes "95% of the decisions" about what PPP publishes.

Echoing what the librarians we interviewed had said, Rosenwald said that reviews played a critical role in the library book-buying process. He said that as a publisher, he needed to get books out to potential reviewers at least five to six months ahead of publication. Until last year, PPP sent out about 150 advance review copies (ARCs). Starting last year, the press began using NetGalley.com, an online site from which reviewers can download the manuscript for review. Now, the press prints only 30 to 40 paper ARCs that are distributed to media such as the *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Library Journal*. Enclosed with the ARC is a letter describing the book and basic bibliographic



Robert Rosenwald

information. Getting reviews ensures that libraries will discover and purchase the books. Rosenwald's goal is to reach a point where libraries will automatically purchase any book published by PPP. The Press has enjoyed an increasing number of reviews. He noted that mention anywhere is valuable.

Regarding hardcover books versus paperback, Rosenwald noted that libraries tend to buy hardcover. In January 2011, PPP began to split its initial print run into part hardcover, part paperback, partially because trade paperbacks are easier for independent bookstores to sell than hardcovers. For a debut author, the print run is 2500 to 3500 hardcover; with the new split run, they do about 2500 hardcover and 1500 paper. With established authors, the print run is in the same range, with perhaps more paperback books. A really successful book may have two reprints.

PPP also does e-books and large type; however, large type always has been a loss leader. For the library market, selling 300 to 500 copies in large print is considered a success. PPP uses print on demand for those editions, but that printing technology has more expensive unit costs.

But, he noted, the emphasis, whatever the format, should be on a well-written, well-edited book. Rosenwald believes that a large number of avid mystery readers “devour three to five books per week.” These readers will move quickly through the traditional best-sellers and will be looking for other good books to enjoy.

PPP tries to get books into the hands of librarians so that they can recommend those books to readers. However, library budgets have been decimated the last few years. “All a publisher can do is continue to work,” he said.

Rosenwald noted that a publisher has a limited ability to interact directly with readers. Their website has become more important, and Poisoned Pen Press has a presence on Facebook and Twitter. The press's associate publisher, Jessica Tribble, has been active in the use of social media. PPP's authors are encouraged to do “anything and everything that feels appropriate for them” to promote their work.

One of PPP's most effective tools has been its authors' e-group. The e-group allows authors to have on-going conversations with each other and share ideas about what works in terms of reaching readers.

Publishers are required to provide a huge amount of bibliographic information used in selling and cataloguing their books, including: ISBN, author bio, reviews, blurbs, cover copy, publication date, in warehouse date, promotional plans, previous editions, marketing (including related titles and competitive titles), and similar information. Typically, this information must be entered into an electronic system starting twelve to eighteen months before

Rosenwald believes that a large number of avid mystery readers “devour three to five books per week.”

publication. The information is entered online into a title management system. Once the information is entered, it is ready to be sent out to users.

None of PPP's e-books use Digital Rights Management (DRM) because it interferes with readers' ability to enjoy a book when and where they want. For example, a reader may want to read a book on a laptop as well as an e-reader. DRM was designed to prevent piracy, but he points out that DRM will always be crackable, so why erect barriers to legitimate users when you can't realistically prevent all the abusers? He believes most readers believe the author has the right to compensation so few readers will pirate the work.

He suggested that e-books are the new mass market in a lot of respects, and e-books are becoming the way some people discover new authors. Rosenwald has priced his e-books at \$6.99 because that was a logical price for the "new mass market" book, but he expects to play with that price point.

Speaking candidly about the contracts that authors receive from PPP, Rosenwald said royalties on e-books are 50% of what PPP gets—25% of retail. On hardcover/trade, authors receive 9% royalties, escalating to 15% when more than 6,000 books are sold. PPP authors receive a \$1,000 advance. The press also requires an "absolute option" on the author's second book. After two books, the advance increases to \$1500. The pricing for trade paperbacks is \$14.95; for hardcover, \$24.95. Most books published by PPP are in a series; however, the press has done standalones.

When asked if he saw a gender trend in the types of books being published and that readers want to buy, Rosenwald said he hadn't studied the matter. There are only a few rules about what PPP will publish. The press will not publish books about serial killers or spousal/child abuse. He also noted that he believes it is a mistake for authors to write to a trend. What PPP is interested in is "voice more than anything," books with strong character and setting. He said once readers discover an author they enjoy, they will continue to buy.

Rosenwald noted that at the PPP authors are "incredibly supportive of each other." The press has tried to avoid the kind of "star system" found in big publishing. All authors are treated the same, and the authors appreciate that. PPP does still accept unsolicited manuscripts, and it handles everything electronically.

## OverDrive

**Dan Stasiewski**, public relations manager for OverDrive, has been with the Cleveland-based company as it has grown. With 150 employees, OverDrive has taken on the role of a traditional print distributor for libraries, but in digital format.

The company provides services to more than 15,000 libraries around the world, serving 97% of the top 25 libraries. This includes 11,000 to 12,000 libraries in the United States, 2,000 in Canada, and 1,000 to 2,000 in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

OverDrive provides an e-book platform for publishers. Publishers provide the content; the content goes into OverDrive's reserve system and then is downloaded by customer-libraries. OverDrive is also involved in retail publishing and works with retailer Books-A-Million. OverDrive serves as the retail platform for the recently announced Pottermore.com [the website for Harry Potter fans]. Amazon Library will launch late in 2011 as a partnership with OverDrive, to provide Amazon's e-content to libraries and their patrons.

OverDrive has several models for providing books to libraries. With the one copy/one user model, the customer-library purchases a license to provide the digital book to one patron at a time. Other patrons are placed on a waiting list, just as they are for print books. The customer-libraries go through the publisher's catalog to see what books are available for that year. This option is particularly attractive for access to books that are updated frequently because the "lease" lasts only one year.

Under another option, titles may be grouped, and a specific publisher may allow multiple patrons to check out each book at the same time, rather than only one at a time.

Under yet another model, library/customers may purchase a perpetual license, which is not subject to yearly renewal, but some publishers (e.g., Harper Collins) have placed a checkout limit on a book. Because writers receive royalties for each book sold, perpetual licenses haven't been popular with writers. Libraries, with their limited budgets, like the idea of not having to replace popular books as they wear out. On the other hand, print books are often cheaper for libraries to acquire than e-books. The different interests continue to be negotiated as stakeholders navigate this new business model.

In the OverDrive system, the publisher sets the price of the book. The revenue is split between the publisher and OverDrive. The author receives his/her share from the publisher.



Dan Stasiewski (in white shirt)  
at OverDrive Booth

OverDrive will be adding a retail component to library websites via an affiliates program. A patron can look for the book in the library's online catalogue but then decide she wants to buy it directly from a "buy" button on the library catalogue website. When she buys through library website, the library receives a share of the proceeds. Retailers can elect to join the affiliate program, and it will be possible for independent publishers to become affiliates and to offer books in any format.

OverDrive provides library website support among its many services. The OverDrive system also allows for "patron-driven acquisition" at the library's option. A library patron may click on the library's website to recommend a purchase from the OverDrive collection. To the patron, the OverDrive system is invisible. What the patron sees is a library website.

The system can also automate the holds management process for a library, which automatically alerts the library when the list of holds gets too long and recommends the purchase of additional copies of the book.

OverDrive is a DRM provider, though content providers can elect whether to have DRM or not. No DRM provides better compatibility and ease of use for the reader/patron; however, DRM prevents users from sharing in different formats. Further, for OverDrive, DRM provides one way to enforce expiration of license.

OverDrive primarily serves public libraries. Additionally, it has a small academic market, serves the Harlequin Library, and is the Audiobook provider for Barnes and Noble.

For more information, see "Resources."

Libraries that are lending Kindles and other e-devices have found them very popular with patrons. As to the debate about whether print books are superior to audio or digital formats, the librarians report, "It's all about story, not the method of delivery."

### **Social Networks for Bibliophiles**

Social networks devoted to books, such as GoodReads, Shelfari, LibraryThing, and Anobii, have become popular ways for avid readers to share their love of books. *Tim Spaulding* is the founder of LibraryThing, the first book-based social networking site.

Spaulding noted that "the landscape has changed" for the ways in which readers find books. LibraryThing started primarily as a site where members could catalog their own book collections, using data from Amazon and from library catalogs around the world, but the benefits of sharing information about books became clear. Now, in addition to millions of user-supplied book reviews, tags, and ratings, members can compare collections, swap books,

engage in threaded discussions, and get recommendations generated by the data aggregated from members' libraries. Members also can list their collections' self-published books, e-books, CDs, and DVD. Spaulding described LibraryThing as "the world's largest bookclub," with 1.3 million members.

LibraryThing authors are invited to share what they are reading and get involved in author chats. Publishers can provide members with advanced copies through the Early Reviewer program, which aims to match readers with books that will interest them and books with readers who will post reviews.

Libraries can subscribe to a service that imports tags, reviews, and recommendations into library catalogs.

Spaulding described LibraryThing as a fun company with an international presence. (There's even a Welsh-language version.) Members can create groups of like-minded friends and add information about books and authors. "Our job is to set up the backyard," Spaulding said. "The members' job is to run around with silly string."

"Our job is to set up the backyard," Spaulding said. "The members' job is to run around with silly string."

Though GoodReads has more members, LibraryThing appeals to bibliophiles and is more about discovering "long tail" books (books that remain in print and draw an audience over time) than about bestsellers. As Spaulding put it, "the goal is to be fun and interesting." Unlike similar platforms, it's a member-supported provider of services. Members who list more than 200 books pay \$25 for a lifetime membership, a barrier that discourages spam and fake reviews written by social network strategy companies that can clutter the site with false recommendations. LibraryThing doesn't collect and resell personal information, unlike other social networks, making it more like Wikipedia than Facebook.

Spaulding recommends that authors develop at least a minimal presence on the major social networks including Facebook, Twitter, GoodReads, Shelfari, and LibraryThing. The goal is to develop authentic relationships and to avoid antagonizing readers with a hard sell. The LibraryThing monthly newsletter includes an author interview. Authors can engage at a personal level with readers who will then go on to discover the authors' books.

Just as LibraryThing avoids using "books as bait" for personal information or for advertising, authors need to tread a fine line and be themselves online. Blatant self-promotion is a definite negative with this sophisticated book audience.

## Resources

**Early Word** [[www.earlyword.com](http://www.earlyword.com)]: The Publisher-Librarian Connection “a Blog and Web site on a mission—to give libraries the earliest information possible on the books their customers will be looking for, so they can stay ahead of demand.”

**Prepub Alert** [<http://blog.libraryjournal.com/prepubalert/>], compiled by Barbara Hoffert of *Library Journal*, is “your first-buy guide to what’s new in publishing, featuring in-depth coverage of leading titles from a wide range of publishers up to six months in advance of publication. Plus recommended picks, breaking news, editor/author interviews, and more.”

**Fiction-L** is a “list devoted to reader’s advisory topics such as book discussions, collection development issues, booklists and bibliographies, and a wide variety of other topics of interest to librarians, book discussion leaders, and others with an interest in reader’s advisory.” Lists compiled by members can be found at <http://www.webrary.org/rs/flbklistmenu.html>.

Authors for Libraries [[http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/altaff/authors\\_for\\_libraries/authors-for-libraries.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/altaff/authors_for_libraries/authors-for-libraries.cfm)] was inspired by author Marilyn Johnson (*This Book is Overdue!*). This coalition gives friends, library foundations, and authors an opportunity to advocate together for libraries. An author membership is \$39/year.

Follow book chat on Twitter:

#fridayreads (members post what they are reading every Friday, most popular results are listed online)

#ewgc (Early Word Galley Chat) is held on the first Tuesday of the month at 4:00 PM EST; librarians talk about forthcoming books they are excited about.

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