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Non-profits Continue to Earn Revenue through Book Sales

A Survey of Charity Groups Who Run Used Book Sales

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Summary of Results

Public Libraries and other charity groups sponsor book sales throughout the year where over 60 million donated books are available for sale. Some of these sales are very big, with hundreds of thousands of books available. With books typically selling at only a dollar or two, it's remarkable that nearly half the groups (41%) report yearly sales over \$10,000.

About 1 in 4 charities (27%) who run sales also sells books online, and half (52%) report online sale revenues over \$1,000.

Spring and fall are the prime times for book sales, especially in the Northeast. But with over 7,000 sales per year, nearly everybody in the USA or Canada can attend a few sales per year without traveling too far.

Book sales are also a primary source of stock for online used book dealers. At some sales, book dealers account for about half the total sales, and the charities greatly appreciate their business; but the relationship has some 'rough edges' that are being resolved by various rules set by the organizers.

About the Survey

The survey was conducted in November 2010 by BookSaleFinder.com. Book Sale Finder was established in 1994 to provide information about used book sales, primarily those sponsored by non-profit organizations such as Friends of Libraries, churches, hospitals, university alumnae groups, etc. There are over 7,000 such sales in the USA and Canada each year; some have a few thousand donated books for sale, others have hundreds of thousands.

People are attracted to non-profit sales because the books usually cost about \$1 each, so they can buy lots of books at bargain prices. Used book dealers will often spend hundreds of dollars at a single sale for books to sell online or in a 'brick and mortar' used book store.

Over a period of about 2 weeks, we asked visitors to our website to take the survey, and we also asked subscribers to our free weekly "Sale Mail", which tells people about upcoming sales in their area.

The first question in the survey asked whether the respondent buys books primarily to resell (book dealer), or is part of an organization that sponsors book sales (organizer), or primarily buys books for personal use (book buyer). This summary reflects the answers given by those who characterized themselves as book sale organizers or volunteers (979 respondents). Published separately are companion results:

- "A Survey of Used Book Dealers"
- "A Survey of Used Book Buyers"

All surveys can be found at <http://www.BookSaleFinder.com/Surveys>

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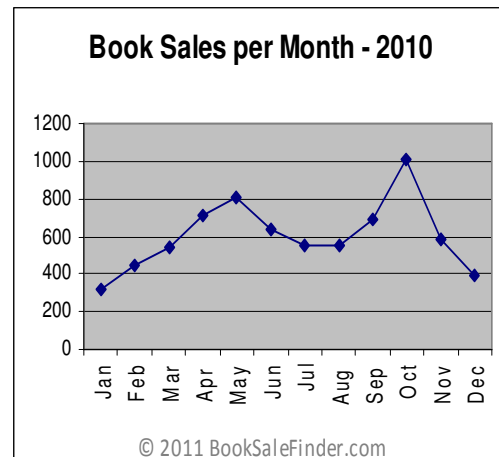
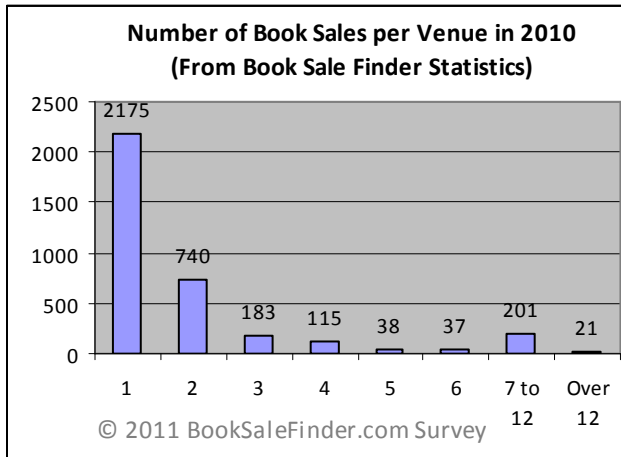
Overview

Of the 979 people who took the survey, 78% represented public libraries and Friends of public libraries. This is not surprising, since these groups run the most used book sales. But many other types of groups also sponsor used book sales, such as churches, the American Association of University Women, university libraries and their Friends, and other charity organizations. Book Sale Finder, the publisher of this survey, reported over 7,000 non-profit used book sales last year; this is clearly a big business.

Nearly all books at these sales are donated by the general public. Sometimes libraries include books that they no longer need, but these usually account for only a small percentage. Despite (or perhaps because of?) the recession, 41% said they received more donations than in the past 2 years, and only 13% of the respondents noticed fewer donations.

Organizations with Book Sales

Most organizations that hold book sales have 1 or 2 book sales per year; some have many more. Spring and fall are the most common seasons for book sales, with sales peaking in October. In 2010, Book Sale Finder listed 7,263 sales held at 3,473 different locations.



The following shows the US states or Canadian provinces with the most book sales in 2010

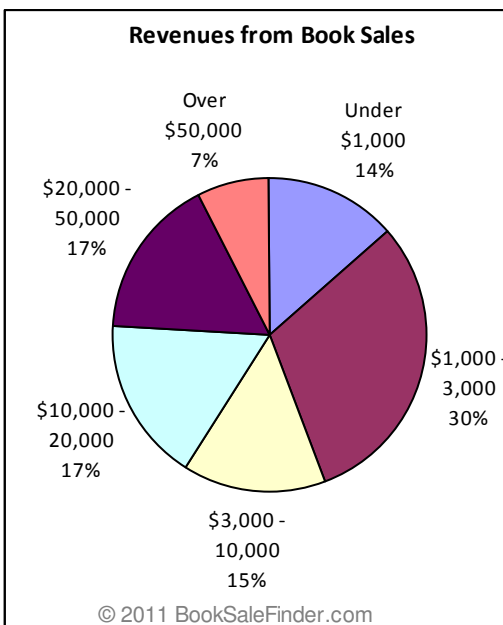
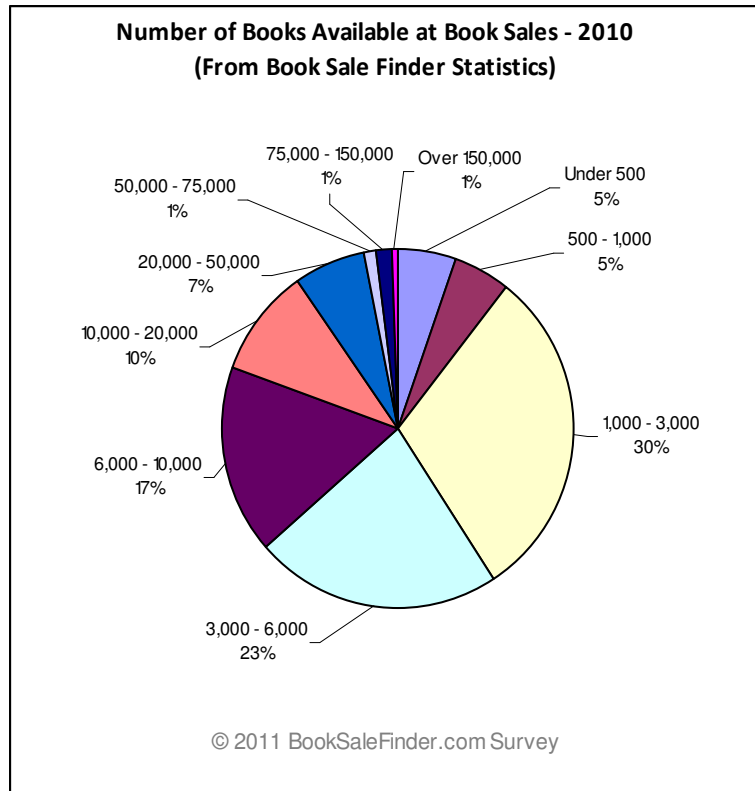
Ranked by Total Number of Sales		
Rank	State or Province	Number of Book Sales
1	CA	909
2	MI	473
3	PA	459
4	MA	380
5	NY	377
6	IL	332
7	OH	315
8	IN	296
9	NJ	285
10	CT	269
11	VA	267
12	WA	238
13	TX	229
14	WI	203
15	NH	164
16	FL	141
17	ME	135
18	GA	120
19	MD	115
20	NC	113
21	OR	112
22	MN	110
23	TN	101
24	MO	100
25	ON	95

Ranked by Sales per 100,000 People		
Rank	State or Province	Book Sales per 100,000 People
1	VT	12.53
2	NH	12.41
3	ME	10.13
4	CT	7.51
5	MA	5.79
6	MI	4.77
7	RI	4.64
8	IN	4.55
9	WY	3.70
10	PA	3.60
11	WI	3.56
12	WA	3.52
13	VA	3.32
14	NJ	3.24
15	OR	2.91
16	OH	2.72
17	IL	2.58
18	CA	2.43
19	NM	2.27
20	DC	2.16
21	KS	2.10
22	MN	2.07
23	WV	2.04
24	MD	1.99
25	SD	1.95

Books Sold at Periodic Book Sales

Some sales have a few hundred books to sell, while others have hundreds of thousands. In 2010, well over **60 million** books were available for sale at book sales in the USA and Canada. The average number of books at a sale was about 11,000 and the median was 5,000.

The chart shows the wide variation in number of books for sale. About 75% of the organizers report that from sale to sale, at least three-quarters of the books are newly donated. The others are typically books left over from previous sales. Because many patrons donate their books back to the library after reading them, the same book can appear in multiple sales!

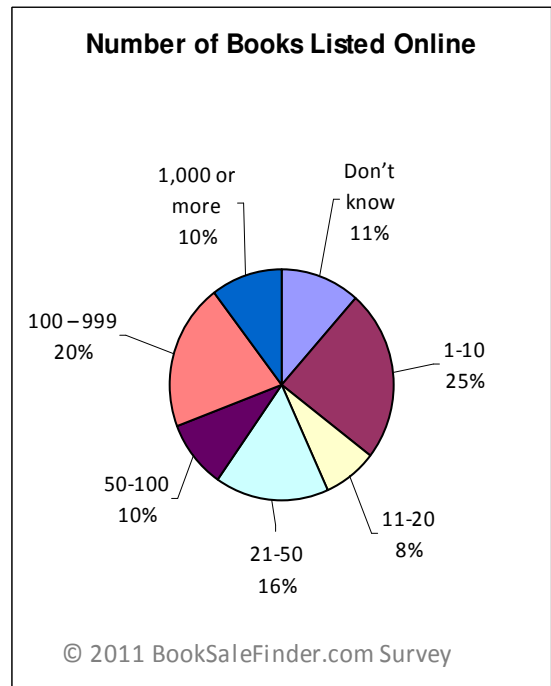
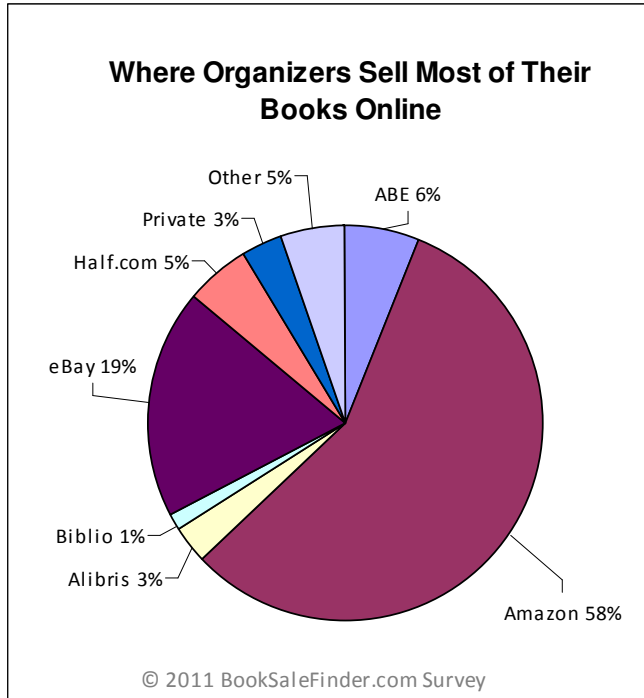


Despite selling books very inexpensively, book sale organizers bring in a substantial amount of money to support their charities. The sales are normally staffed by volunteers and held in public buildings or shopping malls so virtually all revenue goes to the charity rather than overhead costs.

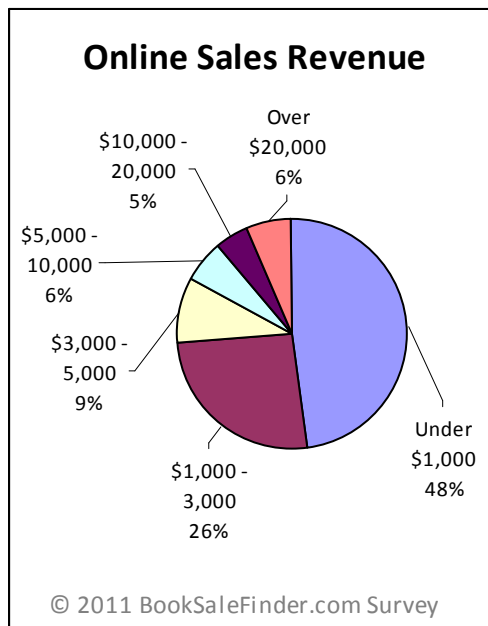
Approximately 51% of respondents indicate that revenues in 2010 were similar to the previous 2 years, while about 33% report an increase.

Selling Donated Books Online

In addition to selling books via periodic book sales, approximately 27% of organizations also sell donated books online. In those cases, organizers usually take just those books which they think have a relatively high value and list them on one or more of the many available used book sites:



The median number of books listed online is 50, while the average is 388. This difference shows that there are some organizers who list a large number of books online. The revenues from online sales can be substantial for those who list many books.



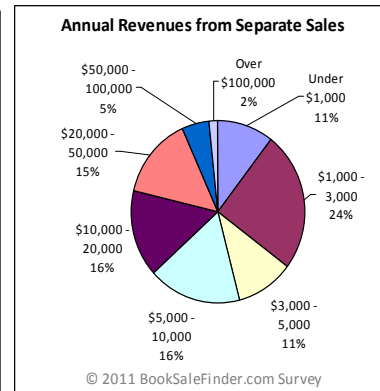
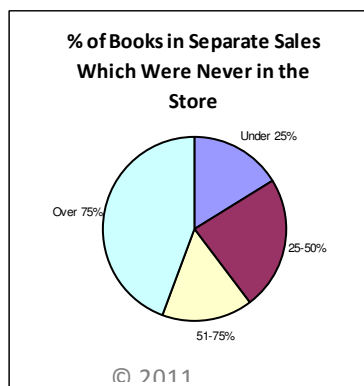
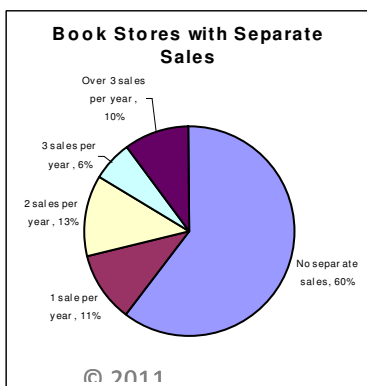
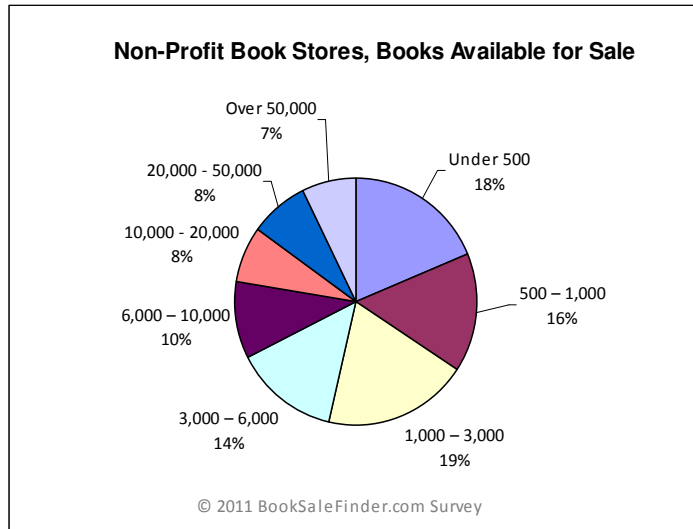
Organizations with Book Stores

People donate books for book sales throughout the year, and the organizers usually schedule periodic book sales. However, some organizations such as Goodwill and thrift stores sell books year-round. Also, about 40% of Friends of public libraries run book stores or large ongoing sales. These are usually staffed by volunteers and are open at least 1 day a week to the public.

As the chart shows, many non-profit stores rival for-profit stores in number of books available for sale.

The yearly revenue from these stores is substantial and remarkable considering the low prices, typically a dollar or two for a hardcover book. Nearly half report sales over \$10,000 per year.

In addition to running a book store or large ongoing sale, many also have periodic sales. Most groups include books from the store in the sale, but nearly half say at least 75% of the books in the periodic sale are donated specifically for the sale. In many cases, organizers take the books remaining after the sales and put them in their book store. The revenues from these separate sales add substantially to the organization's yearly revenues.



Book Sales and Book Dealers – A Mutually Beneficial Alliance

Used book sales by non-profit groups have been held for decades. For the most part, people who attended these sales were buying for their own use or collections. However in recent years there has been a substantial change in book sale attendance: the influx of used book dealers. The Internet has removed virtually all barriers to entry into the used book trade. In the past, a used book dealer was expected to have a store of some sort, and he or she would sell to walk-ins. More valuable books were sold via mail-order from periodic catalogs of available books. But now, virtually anybody can sell used books online. It's easy and inexpensive to set up a 'virtual store' online and to list available titles in the store. As mentioned earlier, even some book sale organizers sell some books using these online services.

A cottage industry has grown around these new book dealers, providing them with tools to make it easier for them to sell their books. For example, there are services that allow a person to scan or enter a book's ISBN and immediately receive the listed price for that book in various conditions. There are also services that help book dealers track and price their inventory, and even store and ship books.

Book dealers often buy hundreds of dollars worth of books at a sale, and some will travel across the country for a good sale. They are usually the first in line when the doors open, or they pay a fee to attend a preview sale – in hopes of finding an underpriced 'treasure'. This brings in a lot of money to book sale organizers, but sometimes it comes at a price. Some very few dealers have behaved badly and this has led some sales to set up additional rules (one sale had a simple, yet telling rule: "You can't make our volunteers cry.")

In our companion Book Dealer survey at <http://www.BookSaleFinder.com/Surveys> there is a lot more information about used book dealers, but we also asked the sale organizers how they felt about book dealers who attend their sales. The overwhelming majority (95%) say they "welcome dealers – they buy a lot of books". However, organizers have needed to adjust to having dealers, especially those with scanners, and many have set rules for behavior.

"We love the dealers. We have a group that return every year and we know them by name - we cultivate them"

"Not all book dealers recognize that we are a nonprofit trying to generate funds. Many wish to haggle and get upset when we won't. In addition to perusing displayed books, some open up and forage through boxes set aside for other purposes."

"Now that scanners have become the method that everyone uses, dealers have become more discourteous. We have considered banning scanners but we do like the money earned."

"Ours have always been courteous and understanding of our request to put back books they don't want. They are also aware that a few book dealers have given all of them a "bad" name."

"Making friends with them calms down their competitive rush and thus takes the stress and objections away from the regular shoppers."

"They are some of our most faithful customers! We have one special favorite!!"

"Dealers who come to our sale are welcome. Dealers who "volunteer" to help set up the sale & who surreptitiously go about using their scanners & making secret stashes of books are not popular."

"Our dealers have become our friends and we often ask them for advice for pricing"

"They are our bread and butter. They like the prices and the way our sale is organized. In return, they are courteous to other shoppers."

"Some dealers are great, some a pain. but they do buy loads of books."

"Most of the dealers are friendly and do not haggle."

"They can be challenging at times, but we welcome them because the challenge is outweighed by the number of books that they purchase."

"We love them! 5 or 6 joined our friends group so they can shop our member-only early sales. That helps us even more!"

"We have some people who come to the sale and buy books and resell them on the internet or at flea markets. We really don't care as long as the books get sold and we can help out our library."

"In general, [dealers are] polite, interested and helpful - and ~50% of our income."

"Our group is evenly divided between liking and not liking dealers. We liked them a lot more before they scanned. [We] are working on a policy for scanning that will try to please all."

"We have a separate area for dealers where they can bring their books while they shop, check-out, and exit. Our member preview is held on a Monday night. We would consider holding it on a Sunday afternoon if that meant more dealers would attend."

"Some are inconsiderate and accumulate books they decide not to buy. But most are good customers and they account for about 45% of total gross income. We like them. We allow every electronic device."

"We are somewhere in between - we like the revenue from the dealers but don't like how they scare off community members."

"They cause a few problems, but in general we're happy to have them."

"Many dealers come year after year and we have come to know many of them."

"While some can be rude, others are helpful, giving tips for better sales."

"They need occasional 'calibration'."

"It's a love-hate relationship. I'm here to make money and their money is just as green as anyone else's. But they can be rude, pushy and obnoxious"

"They're our best customers and more often than not make our sales successful."

"They tend to be greedy, pushy, and often rude, but they buy a lot of books and we appreciate their business."