



June 2011

Book Lovers Still Drawn to Physical Books – Especially Bargains

A Survey of Used Book Buyers

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Summary of Results

Charity used book sales attract book lovers all over the country: people who love to read or collect books, or hope to one day become a book seller. With over 60 million books available at these sales every year, selling for only a dollar or two each, even the most frugal book lover is able to buy lots of books. Over half (54%) of respondents attend at least 6 book sales per year, and nearly half (46%) buy over \$25 worth of books at each sale.

Although these bargain hunters love “physical” books, 21% indicated that they had bought at least one e-book, suggesting a trend that is likely to continue to grow.

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 buyers). This summary reflects the answers given by those who characterized themselves as book buyers (981 respondents). Published separately are companion results:

- “A Survey of Used Book Dealers”
- “A Survey of Charities Who Run Used Book Sales”

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

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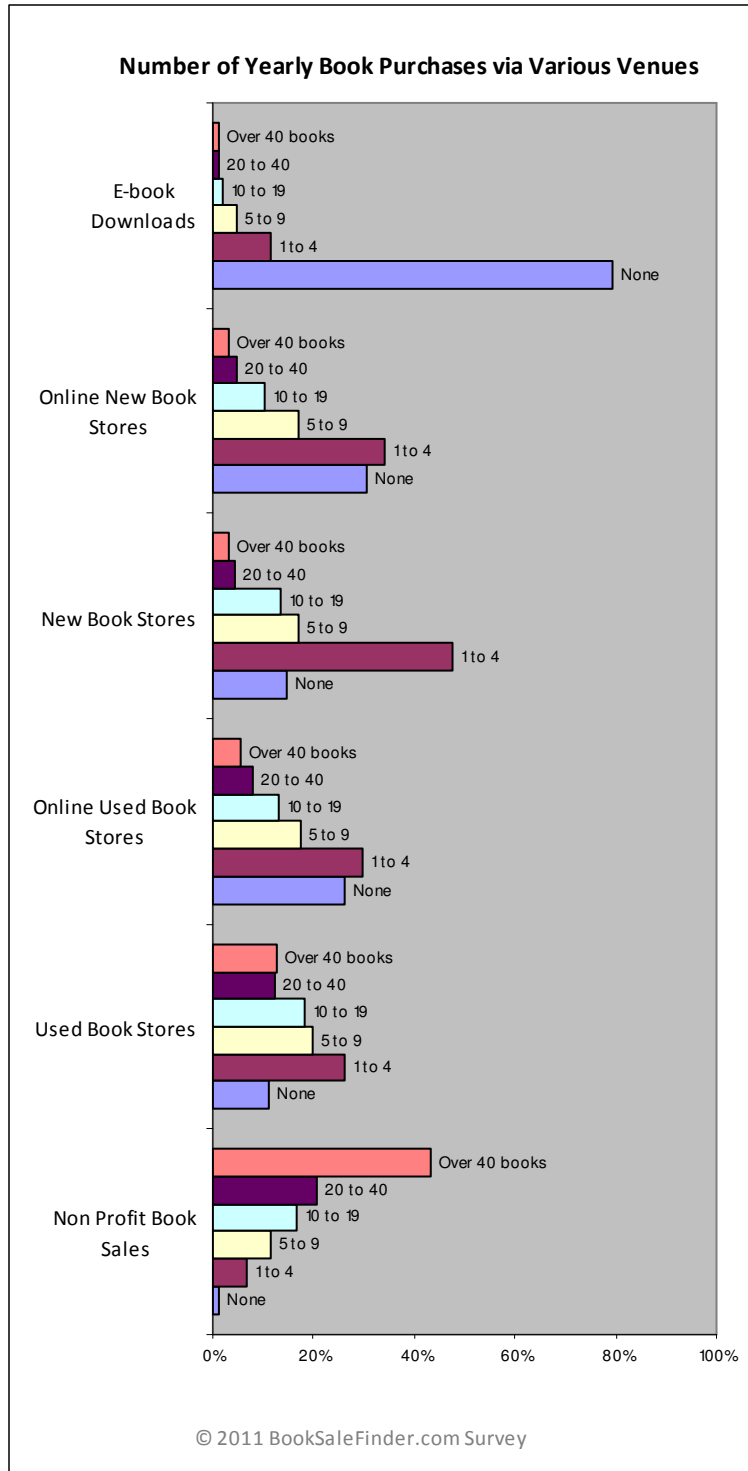
Where People are Buying Books

Despite recent upheavals in the book publishing industry, people who love books continue to purchase “physical” books. And a large number of those people are happy to buy recycled books that they purchase from used book dealers, charity book sales, or yard sales.

Most respondents buy a lot of books at charity book sales, and they also buy quite a few books at other venues as well. The chart to the right indicates the number of yearly book purchases via various venues. Note that people who indicated they were book dealers were given a separate survey, so this survey does not reflect their responses (because most book dealers say they got into the business because they love books, it’s likely that their responses would be similar).

79% of respondents have never purchased an e-book, but with that category being so new, it’s perhaps notable that 21% have bought at least one.

Also notable is that 43% purchased over 40 books per year from non-profit sales, and nearly two-thirds bought at least 20 books from these sales. Since this portion of the survey did not include those who categorized themselves as book dealers, these high numbers of book purchases are remarkable.



Why People Attend Book Sales

When asked their primary reason for attending book sales, 63% responded that they just read a lot of books. The sales appeal to a broad audience, and the comments left by some respondents provide some insight as to why these sales are so popular:

"I collect, treasure and share books, and I love being around books and book people."

"You can never have too many books, like you can never have too many friends."

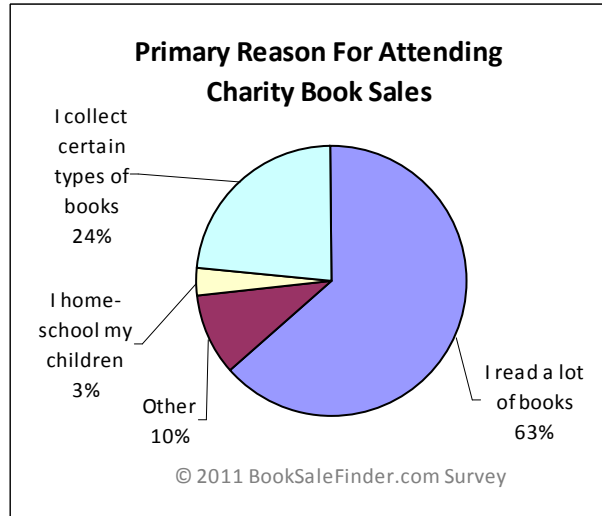
"I buy & donate books to troops overseas."

"I collect books for a jail library."

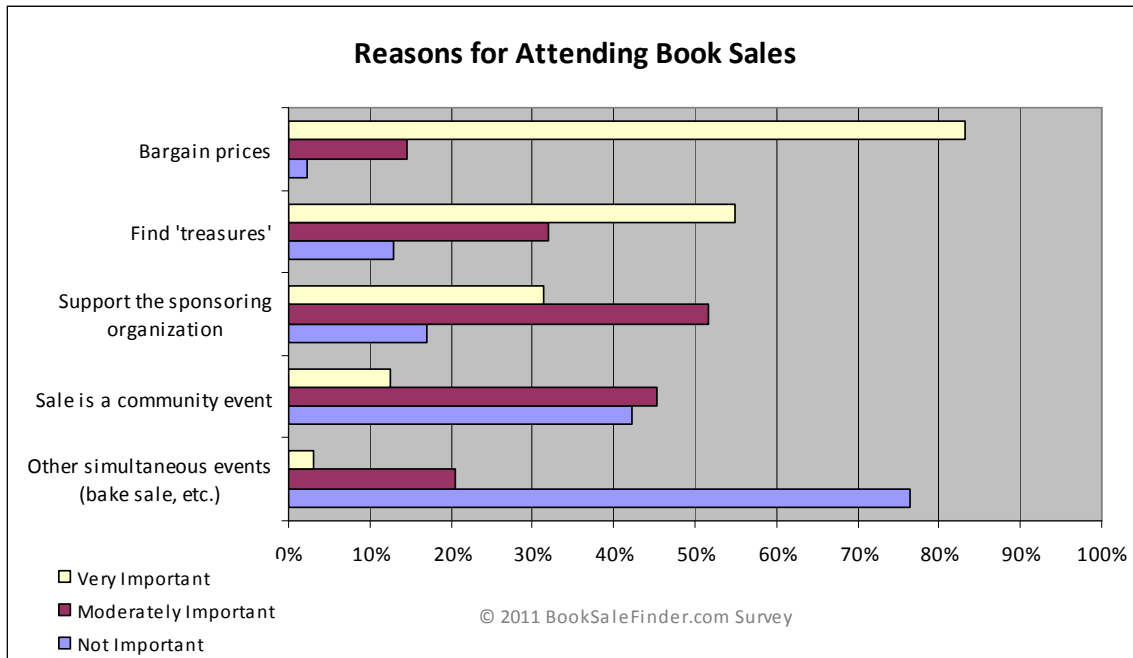
"To build a home library that is very diversified."

"I read a lot and don't reread books usually; the prices are so good, and I just love browsing them!"

"I buy books, read them, and leave them for travelers to find – through BookCrossing.com"

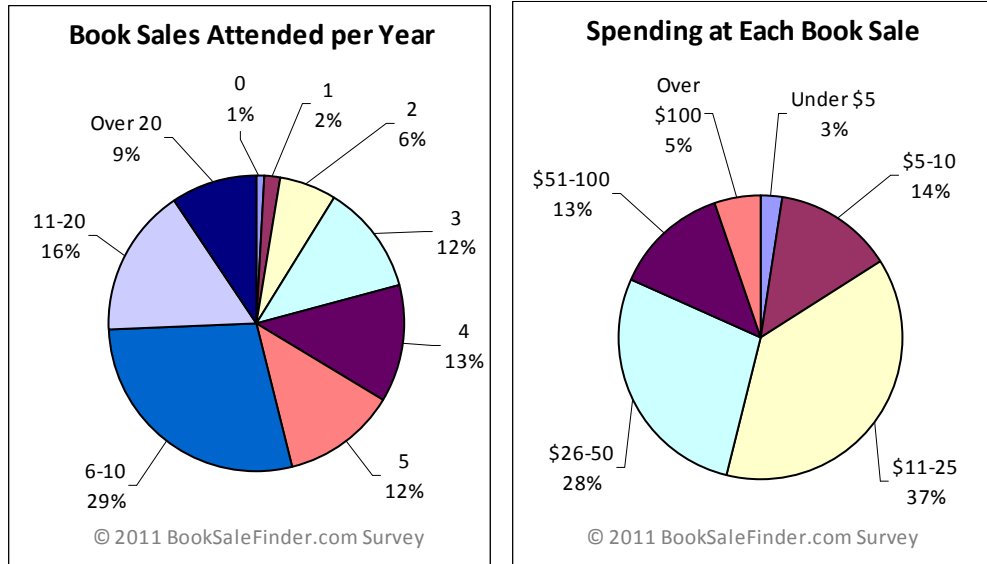


When pressed further to indicate what aspects of charity used book sales appealed to them, most (98%) indicated that bargain prices were the main attraction. But that's not the only reason people go to these sales, as the following chart shows:

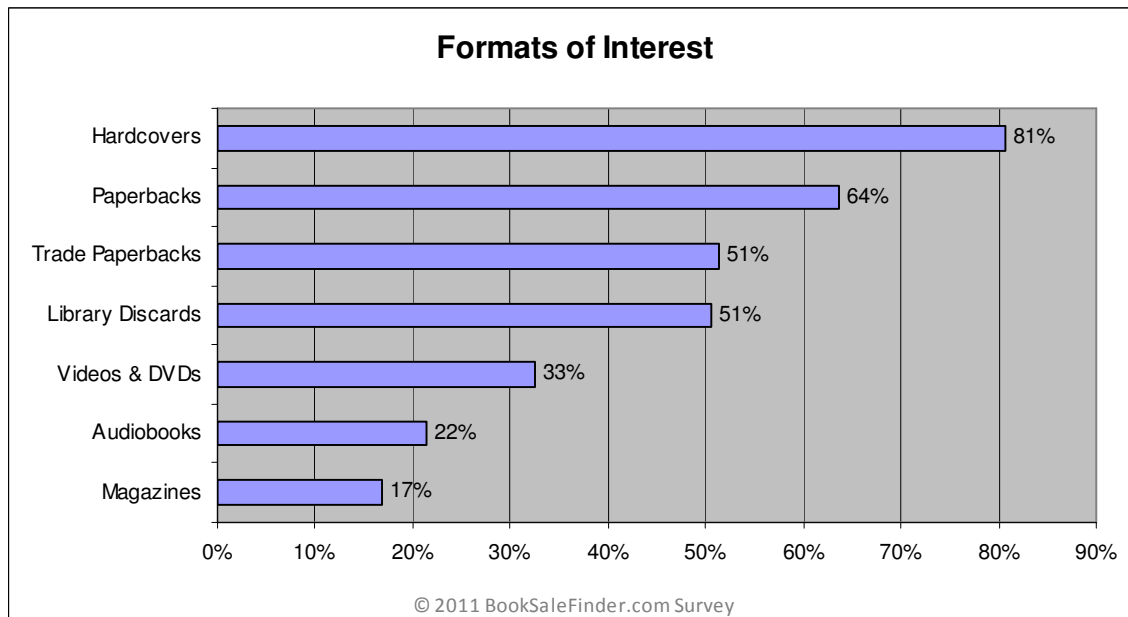


Typical Purchases at Book Sales

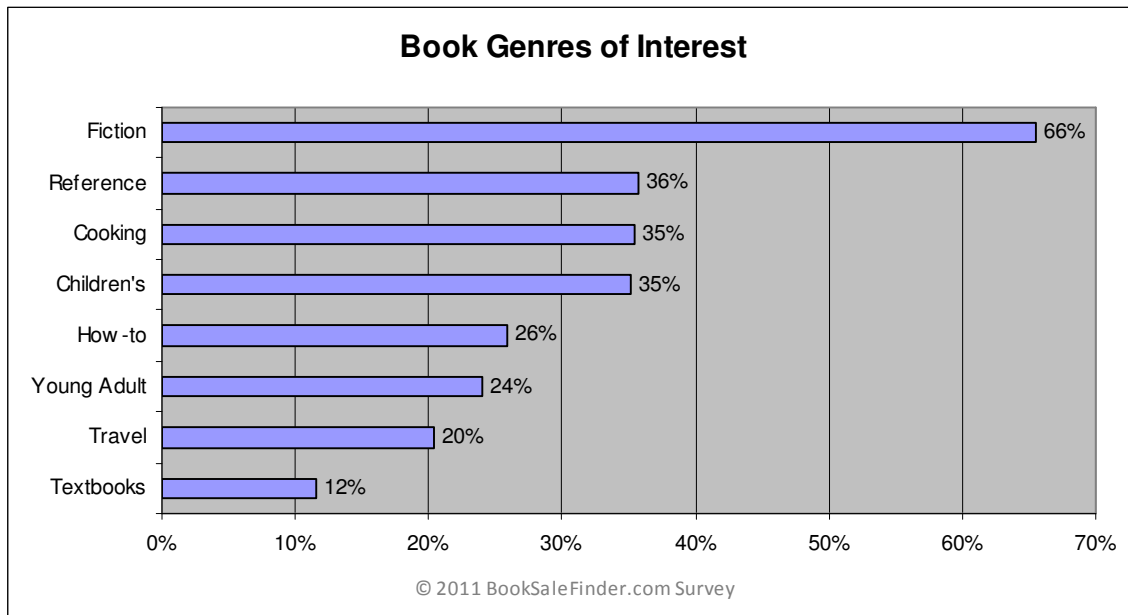
The people who attend these sales do so regularly, with more than half attending at least 6 sales per year, and 25% attending at least 11 sales per year. And they buy a lot of books at each sale. Note that books usually cost 50 cents to 1 or 2 dollars each, so a bag of books may cost only \$5-10.



For the most part, respondents purchase hardcover books at non-profit book sales, but paperbacks are close behind.



Fiction tops the list as the most desirable book genre, with other categories far behind.



Some comments received reflect the many different interests people have:

"I like any book that has the words "tea", "coffee", "cocoa" or "gingerbread" in the title".

"Some biographies, a lot of craft books. Guess it depends on my mood and wish list. I always look at everything because you never know what will call out to you to read or share when at these sales."

"I surprise myself sometimes, buying something SO unlike me!"

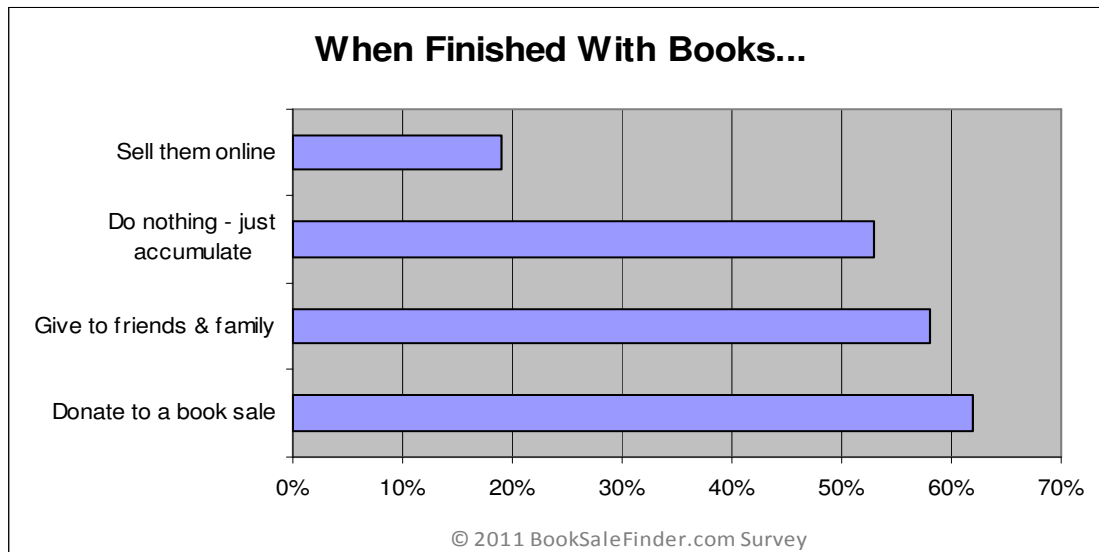
"Sheet music, LP records"

"Books that represent my childhood"

"Africa, polar, pre-1800"

What People Do When They Are Finished With Their Books

There is no shortage of ideas for recycling books. The following are what respondents told us. Note that the people who filled out the 'book lover' section of our survey had already indicated that their primary reason for attending book sales was NOT to buy books to re-sell, so it is remarkable that nearly 1 in 5 sells their books online. As shown in our survey of book dealers, this is consistent with the fact that many dealers indicate that they started selling books by selling the books they and their family and friends had accumulated.



Some of the many interesting dispositions of books purchased:

"Keep in my classroom library"

"I visit the pediatric waiting room every other week and leave about 100 books each time"

"I have at least 9,000 books in my house - it's an obsession"

"Register and release them into the wild via bookcrossing.com"

"Swap via paperbackswap, bookmooch, swaptree, bookcrossing, bookfreeswap"

"Donate to US Navy & US Coast Guard, Donate and send to soldiers through Books for Soldiers"

"I mainly purchase books to give to teachers. Teachers have NO BOOKS; I want to support future readers!"

"Deliver to assisted living homes and retirement homes"

"I contemplate selling them, but put them on a bookshelf"

"Send some to a lady who Brailles them for vision-impaired children and adults"