



When Anything Can Be A "Book," Anything Is A Book--At Least 3.1 Million In 2010 Alone

by Michael Cader on May 18, 2011

It's time for the reporting of annual publishing statistics and as usual, the most profound numbers for us are the unreported ones. The bigger and more technologically-fueled book publishing gets, the less we actually know about the universe in which we all work. It all comes back to the metadata mess, in which many newer players do not use standard identifiers at all for their books, and even traditional players have not agreed on a single practice.

The "known universe" clearly continues to expand, and we infer that the darker "unknown universe" is doing the same. Today, Bowker's Books In Print reports their preliminary estimates of print books published in 2010. The big number is the continuing explosion of public-domain reprints and self-published works that exist primarily as files promoted on the web in case someone wants to pay to print one. These "nontraditional" books published with ISBNs last year grew to 2.776 million works, well up from 1.033 million such titles in 2009.

Though we've been told that traditional publishers are cutting their lists, the statistics show continuing growth there as well. Bowker projects 316,480 new traditional titles in 2010, up from 302,410 in 2009. Note that the final 2009 numbers are substantially revised, upward. This time last year, Bowker estimated 271,851 traditional books for 2009, so the "final" number was over 11 percent higher than the preliminary tally. Bowker says they see the "significant change...as an anomaly...because of the significant number of print on demand titles from traditional publishers after last year's initial release." Similarly, the preliminary 2009 estimate for non-traditional books was roughly 750,000.

Fiction remained the largest category in traditional publishing, with 47,392 titles, followed by juveniles (at 32,638), sociology/economics, science, and religion. Major increases were shown in computers (51%), science (37%) and technology (35%).

Self-publishers monitored by Bowker are growing at over 10 percent. CreateSpace led the field, with about 34,000 titles. Lulu was in second place with 11,000, followed by Xlibris at 10,700 and AuthorHouse with 8,500 (or about 64,000 titles as group). Last year the top 5 self-publishers, also including PublishAmerica, accounted for 57,500 titles. Remember that self-

publishers who do not use ISBNs for all (Blurb) or some (Lulu) of their books are not included in these totals.

Also still not included at all are ebooks, whether self- or independently-published, or digital-only works from traditional publishers. We know that means the published counts are “missing” works in the six-figures, but we don’t know anything more than that. As an example, Barnes & Noble’s PubIt launched in October 2010 and already has 90,000 titles or more. Bowker’s Kelly Gallagher says that they are “working on addressing the ‘e’ book quantification challenge and hope to share perspectives in the coming year.” He notes that “even while making tremendous strides to collect ‘e’ data, Bowker faces this challenge due to: 1. Lack of consistent application of identification standards; 2. Proprietary numbering schemes [such as Amazon’s ASIN]; and 3. Deliberation on other metadata aspects not previously considered for print—such as how to determine the pub date for an e-book.”

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