

Canadian books gained strength in 2020: industry report

Books by Canadian authors gained visibility and sales in the holiday 2020 season, according to a just-released industry study.

These gains came mostly in independent bookstores across the country, where Canadian-authored books accounted for almost a fifth of all book sales in 2020.

Local and regional books published by independent publishers across the country helped these companies account for half of all Canadian authored book sales in independent bookstores.

Key to these gains was a \$10 million program put in place in early fall 2020 by Ottawa's Department of Canadian Heritage. The program allowed independent Canadian book distributors to offer incentives to retail bookstores to increase their stocks of Canadian books. Industry data shows a 10.3% increase in those books available on bookstore shelves during the pre-holiday period.

A survey of bookstores conducted by the new Canadian Independent Booksellers Association found that the federal program allowed retailers to improve their margins on Canadian books, increase their stock of those books, and increase sales.

Two-thirds of the publisher-distributors surveyed reported that the program had led to increased sales of their Canadian-authored books to independent bookstores.

The major bookstore chain retailer in English Canada, Indigo Books and Music, Inc., benefitted from the program and responded by paying publishers faster for their books. Indigo Books and Music, Inc. also worked with publisher-distributors in Atlantic Canada piloting a program to promote and feature local and regional books. The pilot was a big success, according to Halifax publisher Terrilee Bulger of Nimbus Publishing. "I've never seen a program that impacted Canadian-authored titles as much as this campaign did," she said.

Publishers and bookstores are urging Ottawa to turn the one-time program into an ongoing support measure for Canadian authors and publishers. Over the past 10 years, Canadian-authored books have been losing ground on bookstore and library shelves, and this program is the first new government initiative to help reverse that decline. Bookstores and publishers surveyed were unanimous in their support for continuation of the program. "Ensuring continuation should be a primary goal for everyone in the Canadian book industry," says publisher Don Gorman of Victoria's Heritage Group Distribution. Two national associations, the Canadian Independent Booksellers Association and the Association of Canadian Publishers, have also lent their support to this measure.

Indigo Books and Music, Inc. is also joining in the cause, and is rolling out new prominent display space for local and regional books in their stores across the country starting in April.

With ongoing support from government and retailers, Canadian authors could see their books gain space in stores and find more readers in 2021.

The study of the Support for Distribution program of the Canada Book Fund has just been published by the More Canada think tank. It uses data from BookNet Canada, a survey of Canadian Independent Booksellers Association members, and a survey of publisher distributors who received program funding. The report was prepared by the More Canada steering committee: Philip Cercone, McGill-Queens University Press, James Lorimer, Formac Lorimer Books, and Jeff Miller, Irwin Law.

For more information contact Cecilia Stuart at More Canada (info@morecanada.ca)

The report is available at www.morecanada.ca