

# News

## Urban Decay

Book sales in big cities are underperforming compared to those in smaller markets

Since physical retailers started seeing a rebound in business after the plunge in sales in the early days of the pandemic, Barnes & Noble CEO James Daunt has often said that stores in urban areas are having the toughest time recovering. It turns out B&N is not alone in that regard. Kristen McLean, executive director of business development and industry analyst for NPD Books & Entertainment, noted that sales in most retail segments in big cities are having a difficult time making up the ground lost since 2019. Looking at books in particular, eight of the country's 10 biggest book markets have seen their sales performances this year through May 14 trail the 15% increase in the overall market compared to the similar period in 2019, while many midsize markets have seen substantial gains, according to BookScan data.

BookScan analyzed print unit sales from two vantage points: actual changes in sales in 2022 vs. 2019, and how sales in different DMAs (designated market areas) in 2022 vs. 2019 compare to the 15% increase posted by the overall market. Thus, sales in the New York metropolitan region, the country's largest book market, rose about 1% this year over 2019, a growth rate that trailed the overall 15% increase by about 14 percentage points. On the other hand, Portland, Maine, saw sales increase 37% this year compared to 2019, 22 percentage points above the market average.

The weak performance by New York meant its market share of book sales fell from almost 7% in the 2019 period to about 6.1% in 2022. Portland's share, meanwhile, inched up to 0.5% in 2022 from 0.4% in 2019. Overall, the 10 largest book markets accounted for about 31% of total book sales through early May, down from just over 34% in the comparable period in 2019.

McLean said that while at first NPD thought the slow recovery in the major markets was tied to stricter retail lockdowns implemented there, it has since become clear that the biggest factor is the migration

### SALES GROWTH OF THE 10 LARGEST BOOK MARKETS, 2022 VS. 2019\*

DMA	OVERALL GROWTH	GROWTH VS. MARKET AVG.
New York City	1.5%	-14.1%
Los Angeles	14.4%	-1.0%
Chicago	11.2%	-4.2%
San Francisco	-0.2%	-15.6%
Philadelphia	9.6%	-5.8%
Boston	4.6%	-10.8%
Washington, D.C.	7.2%	-8.2%
Dallas/Ft. Worth	19.6%	4.2%
Seattle/Tacoma	8.5%	-6.9%
Atlanta	20.7%	5.3%

### FASTEST-GROWING BOOK MARKETS, 2022 VS. 2019\*

DMA	OVERALL GROWTH	GROWTH OVER MARKET AVG.
Portland, Maine	37.3%	21.9%
Fresno/Visalia, Calif.	31.5%	16.1%
Phoenix	26.1%	10.7%
Others	26.0%	10.6%
Green Bay/Appleton, Wis.	26.0%	10.6%
Tampa/St. Petersburg, Fla.	25.4%	10.0%
Orlando/Daytona, Fla.	24.9%	9.5%
San Antonio, Tex.	24.7%	9.3%
Cincinnati	24.5%	9.1%
Salt Lake City	23.9%	8.5%
Des Moines/Ames, Iowa	23.8%	8.4%
Flint/Saginaw, Mich.	23.5%	8.1%
Columbus, Ohio	22.8%	7.4%
Grand Rapids/Kalamazoo, Mich.	21.9%	6.5%
Providence, R.I.	21.8%	6.4%

\*Print units sold January 1–May 14, 2022, vs. comparable period in 2019.

“Overall, the 10 largest book markets accounted for about 31% of total book sales through early May, down from just over 34% in the comparable period in 2019.

of people away from big cities. She noted that each area has a specific cause for the soft recovery in book sales. For example, she explained that in the Boston area—where sales were up only 5% (10 points below the industry increase)—the slower growth was due to the switch to remote learning at the city’s many universities, as well as office closures that allowed employees to move to less expensive areas—such as nearby Portland. A similar trend can be seen in Northern California, where the San Francisco Bay Area was the only DMA to have a decline in sales in 2022 vs. 2019, while nearby (about 200 miles away) and less expensive Fresno/Visalia saw book sales increase by more than 16 percentage points over the industry average.

It is also worth noting that the two major book markets that had the best sales performances in 2022 vs. 2019—Dallas/Fort Worth and Atlanta—have been popular destinations for people leaving older metropolitan areas. And people, and book buyers, are moving to cities that up until now have ranked outside the top 100 BookScan DMAs. That growth is seen in the “other” line, where 2022 print sales were up 26% over 2019.

McLean noted that the migration away from big cities had started before Covid but was accelerated by the pandemic. Research shows book buyers are more likely to come from middle- and upper-class households, she added, and these are also the workers most likely to have the opportunity and means to migrate. The migration trend raises a number of questions for McLean about the book market, such as how indie bookstores in some of the outlying areas may benefit from the shift and how publishers should adapt their marketing and sales efforts.

—Jim Milliot

## The Weekly Scorecard

### Print Sales Fell 9.3% in Late May

With declines in all categories, unit sales of print books fell 9.3% in the week ended May 28, 2022, from the comparable week in 2021, at outlets that report to NPD BookScan. Adult nonfiction continued to struggle, with units down 12.7% from the week ended May 29, 2021. The #1 title in the category was *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, which sold nearly 19,000 copies. Last year at this time, *Acoustic Guitar Primer* by Bert Casey was the category’s top title, selling about 25,000 copies. The bestselling new release in the category in the most recent week was Elena Aguilar’s *The PD Book*, which sold just over 7,000 copies. Adult fiction sales had a rare down week, falling 1.4%. *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens was the top title in the category, selling more than 40,000 copies. Last year, *Legacy* by Nora Roberts was #1, selling about 33,000 copies. In the most recent week, Roberts’s *Nightwork* was the top new release, selling almost 27,000 copies. *The War of Two Queens* by Jennifer Armentrout sold almost 14,000 copies in its first week, good enough for 10th place on the category list. Juvenile fiction sales dropped 10.6% from 2021. In both 2021 and 2022, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* by Dr. Seuss was #1 in the category, selling approximately 50,000 copies in each week. Erin Napier’s *The Lantern House* was the bestselling new release in the category, selling nearly 12,000 copies. For the year to date, total unit sales were down 6.5% from the same period in 2021.

#### TOTAL SALES OF PRINT BOOKS (IN THOUSANDS)

	MAY 29 2021	MAY 28, 2022	CHGE WEEK	CHGE YTD
Total	14,183	12,864	-9.3%	-6.5%

#### UNIT SALES OF PRINT BOOKS BY CATEGORY (IN THOUSANDS)

	MAY 29 2021	MAY 28, 2022	CHGE WEEK	CHGE YTD
Adult Nonfiction	5,511	4,810	-12.7%	-10.2%
Adult Fiction	3,283	3,238	-1.4%	5.0%
Juvenile Nonfiction	1,310	1,172	-10.6%	-9.3%
Juvenile Fiction	3,220	2,886	-10.4%	-7.1%
Young Adult Fiction	590	533	-9.7%	-4.2%
Young Adult Nonfiction	81	73	-10.2%	-2.7%

#### UNIT SALES OF PRINT BOOKS BY FORMAT (IN THOUSANDS)

	MAY 29 2021	MAY 28, 2022	CHGE WEEK	CHGE YTD
Hardcover	3,992	3,448	-13.6%	-10.1%
Trade Paperback	8,359	7,919	-5.3%	-3.4%
Mass Market Paperback	776	559	-27.9%	-20.4%
Board Books	651	571	-12.3%	-4.9%



SOURCE: NPD BOOKSCAN AND PUBLISHERS WEEKLY. NPD'S U.S. CONSUMER MARKET PANEL COVERS APPROXIMATELY 80% OF THE PRINT BOOK MARKET AND CONTINUES TO GROW.