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From festival to fortune?

By Lucy Wilkins

BBC News

When it comes to performing in front of an audience, it is the actors and singers who usually love the limelight, while writers tend to work away in solitude.

That is until the literary festival invitations arrive and they get a chance to savour the appreciative atmosphere created by thousands of keen readers.

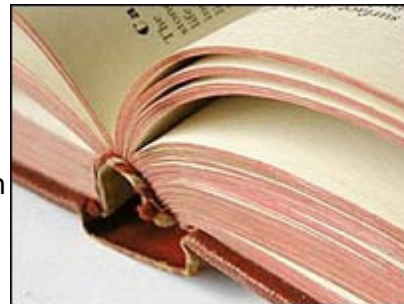
As the hugely popular Hay festival nears an end, do the festivals' marquees and author signings have any impact on sales?

Probably not if you're Dan Brown, author of bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*. Word of mouth and worldwide controversy went a long way to selling millions of that book.

And maybe not for Mark Billingham, author of *The Burning Girl*, which reached number 10 in its first week in the UK's top 100 best-seller list of fiction and non-fiction books, for the week ending 28 May.

Rising profile

His appearance at Hay this week, according to his publisher Time Warner Book Group UK, might boost his



The pages may turn but the cash registers won't necessarily ring

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profile, but not his bank balance.

A sales spokeswoman said that while the company had not done any specific analysis, festivals did "not have a major sales impact, they are just a publicity event".

"It might raise the profile and awareness of the author, but the impact would be minimal."

Nor has Time Warner Books UK noticed a sudden surge in orders for books of authors who have appeared at festivals.

Booksellers Waterstone's describes a "halo effect" of literary festivals.



A book-signing can do more to shift stock

It is the author who steps out from the confines of fans and fellow writers into the high street that will gain added attention.

"People going to festivals are already book lovers, so they're quite up to speed and have usually read the authors they are seeing," a Waterstone's spokeswoman said.

"The impact is when an author does a signing at a local bookshop.

New customers

"They are then available to another group of customers - those that might not be in the mood for going to a festival, but are walking down the high street and see that an author is appearing."

Waterstone's restricts promotions to branches near the festivals.

"We don't do a national promotion, even though

“ There's a fairly small group of people who have read your work... to actually meet

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there is lots of national publicity.

one of them is wonderful

”

Tim Coates
Author

"In terms of generating sales, we do particularly local promotions - as Edinburgh might not mean anything to someone in Taunton, and Cheltenham might not mean anything in Dundee," she added.

Festivals are more of a personal experience for writers and readers.

Author and former bookseller Tim Coates describes festivals as "fantastically good for shops and libraries".

"It adds to the entertainment and enjoyment of reading. A lot of people like to read and meet the authors.

"People can find out about authors they didn't know about, whether they are famous authors or new writers."



Shops rarely order more books just because of a festival

He was involved in publishing and book retailing for 30 years, including working for chain stores and setting up his own bookshop.

"It's terribly good for the whole industry, and it's terribly heartening as a writer.

"Books don't actually sell that many copies - unless you're Dan Brown - so there's a fairly small group of people who have read your work.

"To actually meet one of them is wonderful."

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