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Number of On-demand Titles Topped Traditional Books in 2008

By Jim Milliot -- Publishers Weekly, 5/19/2009 7:21:00 AM

U.S. book production rose and fell in 2008, according to preliminary statistics released this morning by Bowker. The number of new and revised titles produced by traditional production methods fell 3% in 2008, to 275,232, but the number of on-demand and short run titles soared 132%, to 285,394. The on-demand and short run segment is the method typically used by self-publishers as well as online publishers. With the decline in the number of traditional books released last year and the jump in on-demand, the number of on-demand titles topped those of traditional books for the first time. Taken together, total output rose 38%, to 560,626 titles.

Kelly Gallagher, v-p of publisher services for Bowker, said the decline in traditional books reflects not only the difficult economy but the decision by publishers to become smarter and more strategic in the titles they published last year. A breakout by segment shows the impact of the economy on publishing. The number of travel titles was down 15% last year as American's stayed closer to home, while fiction titles fell 11%, to 47,541. The religion segment also had a significant decline with new titles off 14%. The biggest gain among traditional segments came in education where output rose 33%, to 9,510, while new business title rose 14%, to 8,838.

The jump in on-demand output in 2008 followed on even bigger increase in 2007 when production skyrocketed 462%. Since 2002, production of on-demand titles has soared 774% compared to a 126% increase in traditional titles. Gallagher said the improvement in on-demand printing technology was a major contributor to the growth.

The production figures come from Bowker's Books in Print database and includes input from more than 75,000 publishers.

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