



## Sales Period Details

**APRIL 25–MAY 31, 2008**

NYT lists are published *online* about one week after the end of their retail reporting period (list published 5/11/08 covers period ending 5/3/08).

Pub Alley sales reports are on a 2-day delay, and B&T sales precede retail sales in the supply chain by about a week.

Because of these timing variations, the study compares titles (by category) on ALL of the NYT lists published 5/11–6/8 to titles on ALL of the Pub Alley reports pulled 4/25–5/23.

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# What Is a Bestseller?

## Distinguishing Wholesale from Retail Sales through the *New York Times* and Publisher Alley

### Study Goals

The purpose of comparing *New York Times* (NYT) and Publisher Alley® (Pub Alley) lists over the same period was to establish guidelines for interpreting Pub Alley (Alley Talk) trade sales data. Pub Alley reports B&T sales only, but B&T sales filter through the largest components of the retail supply chain. In addition, B&T is the only source for library sales.

- Primarily, we wanted answers to two basic research questions:
- To what degree do the NYT and Pub Alley rankings “cross over,” showcasing the same titles?
- For the titles appearing in Pub Alley rankings only, which markets (retail or library) support the units sold?

### Study Results, Part 1

*To what degree do the NYT and Pub Alley rankings “cross over”?*

There was a higher degree of crossover among the hardcover lists.

#### Hardcover Fiction

# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions:	175 (35 titles x 5 weeks)
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions UNIQUE:	62
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions COMMON:	113
% of Pub Alley rankings COMMON to NYT lists:	65%

#### Hardcover Nonfiction

# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions:	175 (35 titles x 5 weeks)
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions UNIQUE:	77
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions COMMON:	98
% of Pub Alley rankings COMMON to NYT lists:	56%

It seems likely that B&T’s library sales account for the higher correlation on the hardcover lists. Traditionally, with some exception, libraries prefer to acquire hardcover as opposed to paperback books for maximum shelf life. Note the higher overall hardcover unit sales for B&T bestsellers as opposed to paperback. It could be that the B&T customer base buys more hardcover than paperbacks overall, or it could be that new releases—which typically comprise the top sellers—are frequently hardcover.

In terms of broad genre factors, note that the hardcover fiction list is the most straightforward of all the NYT major categories. Hardcover *nonfiction*, by contrast, is actually split by the NYT into “nonfiction” (35 entries per week) and “advice” (15 entries per week)—see sidebar, next page. Without a definition of the “advice” genre, we were unable to survey Pub Alley for precisely the same pool of titles as the NYT.<sup>1</sup>



## About the Lists

The *NYT* reports so-called “Advice” titles separately from other nonfiction titles. If a title appears on the hardcover advice list in the *NYT*, it is restricted from appearing on the hardcover nonfiction list for that week (the same applies to paperback).

Also, the *NYT* reports mass-market fiction (paperback) titles separately from other paperback fiction (called trade fiction). If a title appears on the paperback mass-market list, it is restricted from appearing on the paperback trade fiction list unless there is a separately priced trade ISBN.

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The variations in paperback were more pronounced, and the paperback non-fiction category was the only one in the study for which more ranking positions were unique than common.

## Paperback Fiction

# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions:	175 (35 titles x 5 weeks)
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions UNIQUE:	83
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions COMMON:	92
% of Pub Alley rankings COMMON to NYT lists:	53%

## Paperback Nonfiction

# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions:	175 (35 titles x 5 weeks)
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions UNIQUE:	115
# of Pub Alley Ranking Positions COMMON:	60
% of Pub Alley rankings COMMON to NYT lists:	34%

The higher discrepancy among these lists is readily explained. The *NYT* does not “actively track” book sales in specific categories, namely “perennial sellers; required classroom reading; text, reference and test preparation guides; journals and workbooks; calorie counters; shopping guides; comics and crossword puzzles.” Pub Alley does track these, and in fact it would be difficult to exclude them with a broad brush. Within paperbacks, the following categories are prominent in Pub Alley bestseller lists:

*Perennial sellers (or required classroom reading).* Five classic fiction titles and 1 classic nonfiction title were ranked in multiple weeks during this study, perhaps because of the seasonal approach of school “summer reading.”

*Reference and test preparation.* The nonfiction Pub Alley rankings were heavily weighted by these titles, which included 6 traditional reference books and 1 test preparation book.

Pub Alley rankings also included 7 titles in the Mobil Travel Guides series, 2 gambling how-to’s, and 3 pet reference titles. We can’t say with certainty, but it seems unlikely that these “personal reference” titles would be tracked by the *NYT*.

There was even 1 *calorie counter* on the Pub Alley paperback nonfiction list.

So, in total, 5 fiction titles and 20 nonfiction titles identified as B&T bestsellers by Pub Alley were not included in the *NYT* survey pool. This set the correlation bar lower for paperback titles across category lists at the outset.

There are further complications related to both paperback categories as they are tracked by the *NYT*. On the newspaper’s lists, mass-market and trade fiction have been tracked separately since September 2007 (*see sidebar*). A title can appear on both the mass-market and the trade bestseller lists, provided there are two different editions/list prices. Pub Alley does not distinguish between the two categories, and so we compared our base paperback fiction list to the titles on both *NYT* lists.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned on page 3, the *NYT* splits nonfiction into nonfiction and advice. We were unable in this study to pull paperback “advice” titles specifically, in the absence of a definition of the genre. So, we compared our base paperback nonfiction list to the titles on both *NYT* lists.



## What is a Pub Alley bestseller?

Pub Alley contains B&T sales data in a variety of markets: retail (Internet/chain/independent), library (academic/public/school), international, and J.A. Majors (medical books distributor). The government/other sales channel did not drive the success of any titles in this study.

Units sold of the top-ranking titles varied greatly from week to week and from category to category.<sup>2</sup> The ranges are described below.

### HARDCOVER FICTION

Excluding one week of overall low sales: 13,000 on the high end and 1,000 on the low end.

### HARDCOVER NONFICTION

Showing the greatest variation of all categories: one week 291,175 copies for the top overall title, but most other weeks 5,000–20,000. For titles in the lower positions: about 500–1,000 copies.

### PAPERBACK FICTION

The most consistent category: 1,000 to 4,500 copies for the #1 title, and about 450 at the #35 position.

### PAPERBACK NONFICTION

Blockbuster sales for 1 title: 125,418 copies. Otherwise, a few thousand at the top end and several hundred at the bottom.

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## Study Results, Part 2

For the titles appearing in Pub Alley rankings only, which markets (retail or library) supported the units sold?

(Note that in order to eliminate potential flukes, in this section we only analyze titles that appeared on a Pub Alley list in **more than one week** of the study. The category with the most “one-week wonders”—all excluded below—was paperback fiction.)

There was a surprising consistency in the market types supporting Pub Alley-only bestsellers in each category, with the exception of the motley “paperback nonfiction” group. Overall, the strongest drivers behind titles unique to Pub Alley were retail (chain stores and Internet) and library (public). To follow is a summary of top-ranking titles in each category and the market channels most directly responsible for their sales.

### Hardcover Fiction

<i>The Angel</i>	All conclusively supported by sales to PUBLIC LIBRARY.
<i>The Body in the Gallery</i>	
<i>Comfort Food</i>	
<i>Collateral Damage</i>	
<i>Escape</i>	
<i>Fidelity</i>	
<i>Frames: A Valentino Mystery</i>	
<i>The Girl of His Dreams</i>	
<i>The House on Fortune Street</i>	
<i>Last Post</i>	
<i>Mercy Street: A Novel</i>	
<i>Moon Shell Beach: A Novel</i>	
<i>Mummy Dearest</i>	
<i>Poisoned Tarts</i>	
<i>The Rosetta Key</i>	
<i>Secrets in the Shadows</i>	
<i>The Sharing Knife, Passage</i>	

### Hardcover Nonfiction

<i>Everything They Had: Sports Writing ...</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to RETAIL/INTERNET.
<i>Fish! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale ...</i>	
<i>Jeffrey Gitomer's Sales Bible ...</i>	
<i>Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism ...</i>	
<i>What Got You Here Won't Get You There</i>	
<i>Escape from the Deep: The Epic Story ...</i>	Sales split between PUBLIC LIBRARY and RETAIL/INTERNET.
<i>A Funny Thing ... Way to White House</i>	
<i>Strength for Life: The Fitness Plan ...</i>	
<i>The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to PUBLIC LIBRARY.
<i>Boots on the Ground by Dusk</i>	
<i>Franklin and Lucy: President Roosevelt ...</i>	
<i>The South Beach Diet Supercharged ...</i>	
<i>YOU: The Owner's Manual ...</i>	
<i>Yum-O!: The Family Cookbook</i>	



## What is a NYT bestseller?

The following accompanies each NYT list: "Rankings reflect sales, for the week ending xxx, at many thousands of venues where a wide range of general interest books are sold nationwide. These include hundreds of independent book retailers (statistically weighted to represent all such outlets); national, regional, and local chains; online and multimedia entertainment retailers; university, gift, supermarket, discount department stores and newsstands."

The exact methodology of the NYT list is not disclosed, and unit sales are not posted. Certain categories of books are excluded (see page x.)<sup>1</sup>

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## Paperback Fiction

<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to RETAIL/CHAIN.
<i>The Gravedigger's Daughter</i>	
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to RETAIL/INDEPENDENT.
<i>Catcher in the Rye</i>	Sales split between RETAIL/INDEPENDENT and INT'L/RETAIL
<i>Black Widow</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to PUBLIC LIBRARY.
<i>Dial M for Mischief</i>	
<i>The Diplomat's Wife</i>	
<i>Island of Lost Girls</i>	
<i>Naughty Neighbor</i>	
<i>Payback with Ya Life</i>	

## Paperback Nonfiction

<i>Confident Baby Care: What You Need ...</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to RETAIL/INTERNET.
<i>A Guide to the Project Management ...</i>	
<i>Essential 55: Award-Winning Teacher's ...</i>	
<i>Grand Theft Auto IV: Signature Series Gde.</i>	
<i>Dog Training for Dummies</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to RETAIL/CHAIN.
<i>My Soul Looks Back in Wonder ...</i>	
<i>Puppies for Dummies</i>	
<i>Seven Days to Online Networking</i>	
<i>Calorie King Calorie, Fat &amp; Carbohydrate ...</i>	Sales split between RETAIL/INTERNET and RETAIL/CHAIN.
<i>Harrington on Cash Games: How to Play No-Limit Hold 'em Cash Games (vols. 1, 2)</i>	
<i>Night</i>	Sales split between RETAIL/CHAIN and RETAIL/INDEPENDENT
<i>Rats: Practical, Accurate Advice from Expert</i>	
<i>The Most Decadent Diet Ever!</i>	Sales split between RETAIL/INTERNET and PUBLIC LIBRARY
<i>Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association</i>	Sales split between RETAIL/INTERNET and MAJORS RETAIL
<i>ARCO Master the ASVAB: Armed Svcs ...</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to PUBLIC LIBRARY.
<i>Guinness World Records 2008</i>	
<i>Mobil Travel Guides (7 regions, 7 ISBNs)</i>	
<i>Occupational Outlook Hdbook (Library Ed.)</i>	
<i>Thanking the Monkey: Rethinking ...</i>	
<i>Maxwell Quick Medical Reference</i>	Conclusively supported by sales to MAJORS RETAIL.
<i>Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy</i>	

## Nonfiction Considerations

It's worth noting that Pub Alley reports were generated *weekly* for this study, to correspond with NYT reporting. *The bestseller lists on Alley Talk*, however, derive from sales over the past **30 calendar days** (rolling history, updated daily). For this reason, we're not likely to see titles such as the Mobil Travel Guides series displayed as bestsellers there. Also, Alley Talk does not discriminate between hardcover and paperback in the categories of fiction and nonfiction, focusing instead on other categories (such as audiobooks) that often go unre-



ported. This means that paperback titles are unlikely to appear on Alley Talk, except in the Backlist Bestsellers list.

Another point of interest in paperback nonfiction is *My Soul Looks Back in Wonder: Voices of the Civil Rights* experience, which was published by Sterling in 2005. Sterling is owned by Barnes and Noble, and the vast majority of lifetime sales for this title are in the retail/chain market. Something unusual is behind this ranking ... perhaps a B&N restocking through B&T. The Amazon sales rank for this title on July 2, 2008, is only #109,430, so the popularity seems specific to one chain.

## Where Does the Data Lead?

Speculation is fun—does *Catcher in the Rye* appeal to international audiences because of its prototypical American antihero?—but often less than conclusive. With some background knowledge and a little probing, we can use Pub Alley to draw some inferences with relative certainty: for example, *14 of the 17 hardcover fiction titles unique to Pub Alley rankings were part of a B&T auto-ship program for public libraries*. Typically covering the work of prolific fiction authors, these programs enable public libraries to streamline the ordering process behind “must-have” new titles. (The YBP approval plan, though more complex, works similarly for academic libraries.) In the category of hardcover nonfiction, we would attribute the predominance of Internet sales to the ease of preordering forthcoming titles online; bookbuyers are more likely to back-order online than in a brick-and-mortar store.

In general, when interpreting Pub Alley bestseller information, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Be aware that Pub Alley data is live, and that B&T will often register sales ahead of retailers. For these reasons, some titles ranked by Pub Alley will not appear on other bestseller lists published at the time the reports are run.
- By the same token, B&T sales are not final sales. It's possible for B&T to sell large numbers of trade titles to retailers, only to have the copies returned because of a lack of consumer interest. A good candidate for this might be *How I Helped O.J. Get Away With Murder*, a true-crime title that appeared on the 5/9/08 Pub Alley hardcover nonfiction report. Only time will tell, but we are wise to recall reports of large returns when Simpson himself published *I Want to Tell You* in 1995.
- Libraries purchase certain new titles promptly upon release, and this particularly affects hardcover fiction rankings.
- Pub Alley is without predetermined genre/format filters of any kind. The bestseller reports generated there include titles in all categories unless the user specifies exclusions.
- Because B&T has a large percentage of library sales overall, and libraries tend to prefer the hardcover format, there is more crossover with retail bestseller lists for Pub Alley in that category.

There is one final point that probably applies as well to other bestseller lists as it does to Pub Alley reports, though perhaps not in the same degree. There is

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no threshold “units sold” test for a bestseller in any category. The lowest-selling paperback nonfiction title in this study sold just 191 copies in a week, and the highest-selling hardcover nonfiction sold 291,175 copies the following week.

### Endnotes

1. The practice of separating advice titles from other nonfiction began at the *NYT* in 1984. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/24/books/review/24tbr.html?ref=review>
2. For an overview of expected unit sales for bestsellers, as well as an analysis of many available bestseller lists, see <http://www.answers.com/topic/bestseller>.
3. For details on the *NYT* decision to separate mass-market titles, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/books/review/PaperRow-t.html>

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