

General trade sector

Annual report week 1–26 2015

By OLINKA NEL,
SA Booksellers, Trade Chairperson

The first half of 2015 in the trade sector has been one of colouring books and more colouring books, albeit ever more expensive colouring books as the Rand plummeted from R18 to the British Pound on January the 1st to R19 by the end of June. Deon Meyer kept local spirits high with yet another mega seller, *Ikarus* while the banting craze inspired by Prof. Tim Noakes continued unabated. Job cuts and store closures at CNA caused tremors across the trade. We waved goodbye to the Kalahari brand, faced an existential dilemma in the wake of the Franschhoek furore, got our hopes up when Marlene van Niekerk was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize and finally gave a sigh of relief when E.L. James provided welcome respite amidst continued loadshedding woes.

Sales*

The year 2015 will alas be one we cannot fully report on due to significant changes to the Nielsen panel, with a truer picture due to emerge from 1 January 2016 onwards. What is certain is the growing strength of Bargain Books, as average selling prices drop to new lows and Mills & Boon sales take to the skies. What we do know is that sales for the panel came to **R 880 525 630** incl. VAT in the first half of the year (trade excluding academic), with unit sales totalling **6 173 945**. That translates into an average selling price of R142. The SA panel sold **249 992** unique ISBN's. None of this can however be compared year on year due to the aforementioned panel changes. Anecdotally, prices have increased by an estimated 4% in general bookstores over this period.

According to SAPnet statistics the country of publication split and the top 10 titles are as follows (see tables). Nielsen category sales over the period are also shown on this page.

Of total sales, 79% were of English books and 14% Afrikaans.

Trade News

Exclusive Books continued to awe the trade and customers alike with their new-look stores with a brand new bookshop-cum-café at Dainfern Square and a neat refurbishment in Greenstone

Mall. Big plans are afoot for a proper restaurant offering at the Waterfront and a café offering at Canal Walk, while CEO Benjamin Trisk's plans for the expansion of their flagship store in Hyde Park Corner is the talk of the town at present. It will feature a world class eatery with Michelin star chef Russell Armstrong confirmed as the chef, will give new prominence to children's books and provide ample space

for browsers of the shop's signature coffee table book selection.

Staff changes at Exclusive Books saw the departure of Financial Director Steve Thomas, the return into the fold of Louwrens Potgieter as buyer and manager at Clearwater Mall, and the welcome addition of industry stalwarts Estienne van Wyk, Susan Pieterse and Colleen Whitfield to the head office product team.

COUNTRY OF PUBLICATION: 2015 Weeks 01–26

COP	VALUE	% VAL	QTY	ISBN	ASP
Total	880,525,630	100.00%	6,173,945	249,992	142.62
South Africa	343,288,792	38.99%	2,578,671	25,263	133.13
United Kingdom	327,007,377	37.14%	2,116,304	105,389	154.52
United States	149,252,395	16.95%	876,657	93,278	170.25
Other	60,977,065	6.93%	602,313	26,062	101.24

NIELSEN CATEGORY SALES: 2015 Weeks 01–26

CAT	VALUE	% VAL	QTY	ISBN	ASP
Total	772,390,903	100.00%	6,173,945	249,992	125.10
Adult Fiction	140,279,080	18.16%	1,090,473	48,040	128.64
Adult Non Fiction	418,981,003	54.24%	2,587,559	123,683	161.92
Children Fiction	55,294,019	7.16%	557,913	24,027	99.11
Children Non Fiction	120,775,090	15.64%	1,377,380	37,609	87.68

GENERAL TRADE TOP 10 SELLERS: 2015 Weeks 01–26

	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	QTY	VAL
1	At the Cattleman's Command	Lindsay Armstrong	Mills & Boon	77,425	R297,718
2	Oxford South African School Dictionary		Oxford University Press Southern Africa	52,817	R5,063,290
3	Official Best Selling K53 Learner's & Driver's		Safeways Publishing	40,392	R2,121,592
4	Oxford Afrikaans/English Skoolwoordeboek	OUPSA	Oxford University Press Southern Africa	34,249	R3,929,150
5	Ikarus	Deon Meyer	Human & Rousseau (Pty) Ltd	26,736	R5,762,939
6	Rooiwyn vir Geluk / Bestemming Liefde		LAPA Publishers (Pty) Ltd / LAPA Uitgewers (Edms)	24,623	R1,293,007
7	Real Meal Revolution	Prof Tim Noakes, Sally-Ann Creed, Jonno Proudfoot, David Grier	Quivertree Publications	24,284	R5,955,265
8	Oxford Mini School Dictionary	Oxford Dictionaries	Oxford University Press	23,887	R1,896,855
9	Low Carb is Lekker			20,627	R3,633,319
10	Kreatiewe Inkleurboek vir Grootmense	Human & Rousseau	Human & Rousseau (Pty) Ltd	16,194	R1,734,769

Charmaine Muller was appointed as a regional manager in Gauteng.

Exclusive Books closed their branch in Eastgate early in 2015 to focus on serving their customer base in the area from Bedford Centre. The chain also elected to close their much-loved but long-suffering branch at Mandela Square, and made a strategic call to close their small branch in East London.

Sales at the nation's leading book chain remained buoyant in terms of revenue growth, but unit sales declined on the back of a weak Rand and ever-increasing book prices. CEO Benjamin Trisk commented that *"The elephant in the room remains price. As long as book prices keep escalating, we will see unit sales declining."*

Andrew Marjoribanks reported sluggish sales at Wordsworth due to rising book prices and loadshedding over weekends, with more and more customers opting for Kobo or Amazon. The SA Booksellers trade sector in Cape Town raised concerns about increased rentals as landlords look to recover generator costs from tenants.

John O'Sullivan at Bargain Books summarised the difficult first half of this year:

"The combination of the stagnant economy, load shedding, mall revamps and several of our own revamps lead to a fairly flat like for like sales picture."

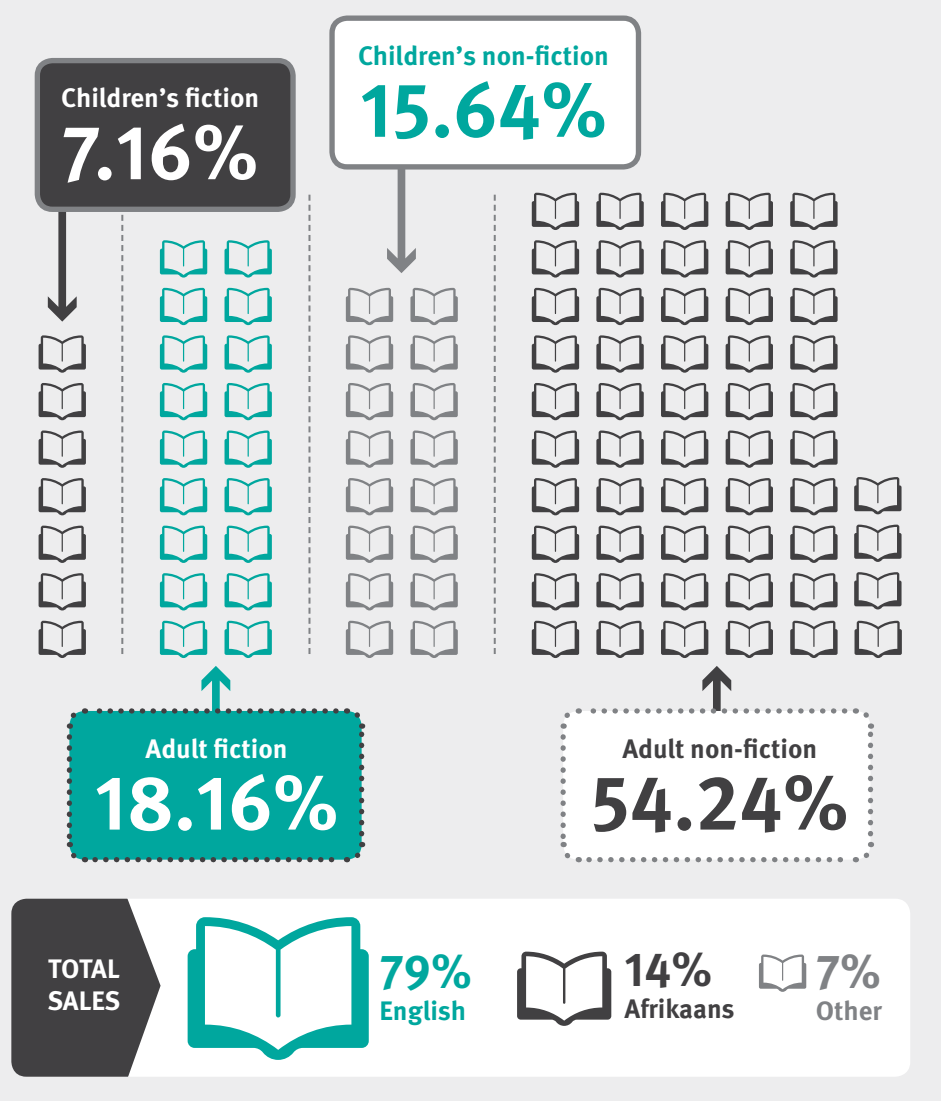
Bargain Books revamps this year included Centurion, Key West, Fourways, Hillcrest, Shelly, Ballito and Greenacres and several others.

Independent Cape Town bookshop Clarke's reported fair business so far this year, with no visible influence on them due to new visa requirements. Owner Henrietta Dax said she was relieved that the post office was up and running again, with parcels all reaching their destinations. Clarke's have done quite a few launches this year, but according to Dax *"they bring in people but not much money"*.

Events

The SA Booksellers trade sector this year successfully participated in a World Book Day initiative with a range of titles offered at R15 to the public, who could then donate the books to Project Literacy's Run Home To Read campaign by depositing the books in SA Booksellers bins in-store. SA Booksellers trade members collected more than 4000 books for the charity, which were sent to libraries in Soshanguve, Greater Tzaneen (Limpopo), Thulamuhache

Category unit sales for South African General Trade (2015 Weeks 01-26, Nielsen)



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(Bushbuckridge Mpumalanga), Smash Block (South Western Limpopo) and Kliptown Soweto.

The Franschhoek Literary Festival in May turned out to be quite a controversial one, with panellist Thando Mgqolozana declaring it to be his last ever attendance of a literary festival because:

"I feel that I'm there to perform for an audience that does not treat me as a literary talent, but as an anthropological subject – as though those people are here

to confirm their suspicions that somehow I am inferior to them."

A media storm ensued, ultimately resulting in a panel discussion at the University of the Witwatersrand entitled Decolonising the Literary Landscape, organized by Jacana Media and led by Eusebius McKaiser.

Sunday Times books editor Ben Williams commented on this watershed moment on Books Live:

"In 1976 the worm turned on apartheid. In 2015 I feel like the worm may have started to turn on the white literary system."

Despite the furore, the festival was a resounding success with higher book sales than ever. The most popular book at the event was John Boyne's *The History of Rain* followed by G.G. Alcock's *Third World Child*.

* Data sourced from SAPnet.