The unstoppable rise of bookazines
Insights from the UK market

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Why is the bookazine market so hot right now?

The bookazine market is going from strength to strength. What's driving this, and what opportunities does it offer?

Taylor Swift products are dominating the newsstands at the moment. But unlike many of the magazines taking up shelf space next to them, these rarely have a publication title beyond ‘Taylor Swift’.

Taylor is a popular subject for bookazines; special one-off titles that take deep dives into one subject. Once purely the realm of tech guides, crafts and motoring, the market has expanded over the past few years. They are united by topic-led titles and considerably higher cover prices, and they’re selling well.
A history of bookazines

Territories such as the US took to bookazines before the UK, according to Richard Salsbury, Head of International for Marketforce. Technology bookazines dominated initially, but gradually, bookazine topics diversified to reflect television trends and pushed boundaries in terms of price point and branding. Post-pandemic, bookazines are taking up more and more shelf space.

“Distributors were saying: this is clearly working very well for this publisher, can other people do it?” says Salsbury. “They could see what type of content people will pay extra for, the longevity on the newsstand and how that can improve length of sale, efficiency and overall profitability.”

Simon Gage, Commercial Director at wholesaler Smiths News, agrees. “As publishers have found profitable means of publishing bookazines, they've started to extend the subject matters and ranges that they're trying to produce.”
Market performance

Bookazines had a very good year in 2019. Marketforce reports 2.2m sales that year, generating £17.7m in revenue. Like the rest of the publishing market, sales dropped in 2020, but still delivered a relatively healthy £10.3m in revenue. However, the pandemic also increased public interest in bookazines. “All of a sudden, products that spoke to people's passions and interests really enjoyed a renaissance,” says Tim Mathers, Head of Future International and Bookazines. “One of the things that really helped to fuel that was the non-digital aspect. People appreciated getting back to an analogue print experience.”

The market started picking up in 2021 and 2022. Interestingly, while sales may have fluctuated, the revenue generated has stayed relatively consistent. Marketforce predicts 2023 to deliver around £17m once all sales data is in.
Top retailers for bookazines include the traditional magazine retailer WH Smith High St and Travel, and supermarkets Tesco, Sainsburys and Waitrose. Independent retailers have the 4th highest bookazine retailer share.

Individual titles, if they tap into the right zeitgeist, can make considerable amounts of money for publishers. According to data from magazine data analytics company Cover Rocket, a single bookazine covering the coronation of King Charles generated over £450,000 in UK cover price revenue.

What’s driving bookazines’ popularity?

The rise of the bookazine reflects changing consumer habits in the internet age. For many consumers, what they read is driven more by topic than brand. It reflects how people use platforms such as YouTube, says Richard Salsbury.

“Previously, you’d always need a brand and a masthead – something on fashion would be branded InStyle or ELLE. With the rise of YouTube, people are happily consuming advice content from people with no brand behind them.”

The appeal for publishers and distributors is clear: if done right, bookazines are relatively cost effective to make and the higher cover price means that it’s possible to turn a profit with fewer sales. The audience is also broader than the typical magazine’s.

“Over 80% of purchases don't come from magazine buyers,” says Gage.

“The buyer can be 15 or 55,” says Jon Bickley, CEO of Anthem Publishing. “It just depends on the topic.”

### Pricing in the UK

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<th>Monthly cover price</th>
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The prices have seen a considerable leap between 2022 and 2024, says Gage. “Previously, you’d expect Bookazines to be priced at £6.99 or £7.99. A lot of them now are £12.99 or £14.99. We’ve handled products all the way up to £36.99.”

While higher inflation is a factor, prices are still increasing as inflation comes down, and people are willing to pay it. Cover Rocket reports cover prices between £5 and £30. Price points are determined by pagination, production value and heritage value over subject matter.

“For example, if you look at the motoring sector, a bookazine covering the life of legend Sir Jackie Stewart retailed at £19.99. There is a weighting towards higher priced bookazines in the US market.”

Top performing topics and sectors

1. ROYALS (driven by Coronation)
2. MUSIC (driven by Taylor Swift)
3. LEISURE INTERESTS
4. CRAFTS
5. FOOD
6. SPORT
7. SCIENCE
8. GENERAL INTEREST
9. HISTORY
10. HEALTH

Royal family-related bookazines dominated UK sales revenues last year, due to the Coronation of King Charles, according to Cover Rocket. Cooking titles, particularly those capitalising on the Air Fryer trend, sold well in the UK and the US.

Cover Rocket data reveals the US market was dominated by music stars Taylor Swift and Harry Styles. Tapping into such fandom topics is a big opportunity, says Bickley. “Fandom is one of the biggest trends along with health, science and history, but
fandom in particular is volatile. A previously safe bet can flip like a coin and see sales drop almost overnight. So you have to monitor sales and social media extremely closely to stay on trend. Working with a proven successful partner can be key here.”

Salsbury also flags mental health as big bookazine topics. “Self help is really big. It’s supported with your traditional specialist areas: hobbies, crafts, history – much less high profile, not massive volumes individually, but collectively builds up to a nice piece of business.”

The US market is bigger on pets: Cover Rocket data reveals the highest selling cover in 2023 featured a dog, with a cat cover coming in at number three.

What can we learn from bookazines?

Despite the increasingly topic-led focus, ‘specials’ built off the back of regular magazines remains the safest way to publish in the bookazine market, says Bickley. “If you can tell your own audiences about your new releases and sell some direct, that gives a great foundation that hopefully gets built on with wider discovery.”

Publishing outside of the core is riskier and takes careful setup. Tim Mathers explains that setting up a dedicated bookazines team, producing on various topics, works better than relying on existing teams. “It helps us manage the business in a really controlled way. It also helps us to be really clear on the cost and investment that we’re putting into them.”

Bookazines aren’t likely to translate into increased sales of magazine titles, but the market offers an opportunity for a publisher to diversify in a big way. And as they’re generally evergreen, they can be reprinted in subsequent years. “We print around 700 bookazines a year,” says Mathers. “Of those, about a third are new titles.”
More and more publishers are launching into the bookazine market post-COVID. The flexibility that they offer on topics is a big opportunity, says Mathers.

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