



BNC RESEARCH

# Deep Dive: The History Book Buyer

2017



**BOOKNET  
CANADA**

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# The History Book Buyer

## About BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series

BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series takes an in-depth look at some of the biggest genres selling in Canada. The goal is for readers of these reports to have both an overview of sales patterns within the genre and a better understanding of the genre buyers themselves.

Data for these reports have been obtained through two primary sources:

- BookNet Canada's SalesData – representing approximately 85% of the print trade market in Canada, SalesData tracks the weekly sale of print books across the country.
- BookNet Canada's Consumer Research – adult book-buying Canadians participate in online surveys about their book purchases from the prior month. Book buyers report on such information as what they purchased, where they made the purchase, what influenced their purchase, and other quantitative data. Buyers were surveyed from the beginning of 2015 up to and including the second quarter of 2017. The data represents 243 History book buyers representing 323 book purchases.

Data for this survey focuses on both books purchased by adults and, when reviewing sales trends, the sale of adult titles.

# Overview of the History Book Buyer

In 2016, *The Guardian* published a story on how “popular history writing remains a male preserve”, finding that of 614 popular US history titles, 75.8% of the titles were written by men. While exploring gender bias in authorship is outside the scope of our study, it is interesting to consider whether this male-dominated authorship influences the type of books that are published in the genre and, by extension, whether this creates a male-dominated readership. With Canadian book buyers, we find that there is indeed a higher ratio with 67% of History buyers identifying as male.

So, who buys History books? The average History buyer is:

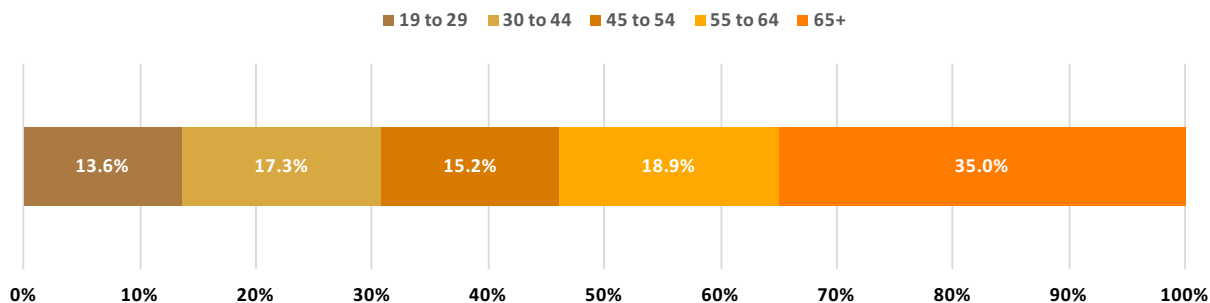
- male (67%);
- 54 years old;
- married;
- has a university degree; and,
- is more likely to reside in the Maritimes (24.9%), least likely to reside in Western Canada (8.2%).

History generally appeals to older buyers; there is a slightly higher following among those aged 65+ (35%). The graph below takes into account all History book purchases reported by respondents, so the age brackets that purchase in higher volume are more heavily represented.

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<sup>1</sup> Flood, Alison. “Popular history writing remains a male preserve, publishing study finds”. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/11/popular-history-writing-remains-a-male-preserve-publishing-study-finds>. Jan. 4, 2018.

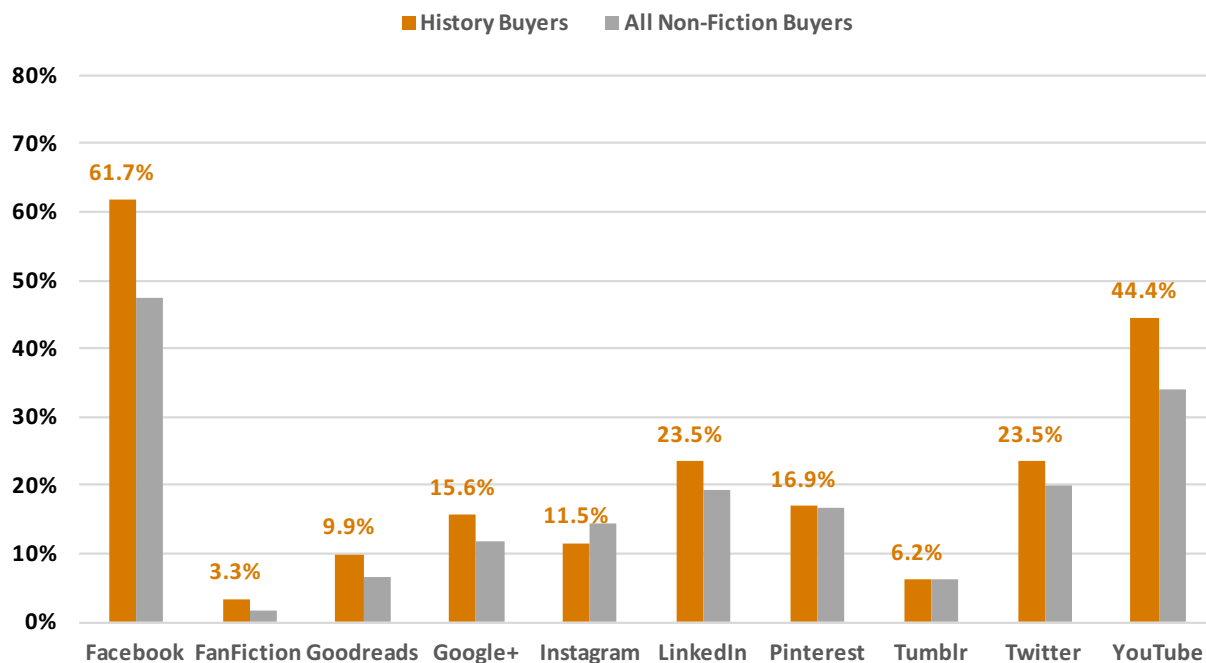
## History Purchases by Buyer's Age



How old are you? (N=243)

History buyers tend to be quite engaged with social media, with higher than average use of all channels except for Instagram (perhaps due to an older demographic) — 62% of History buyers use Facebook, compared to 47% of all Non-Fiction buyers, and for YouTube the difference is 44% versus 34%.

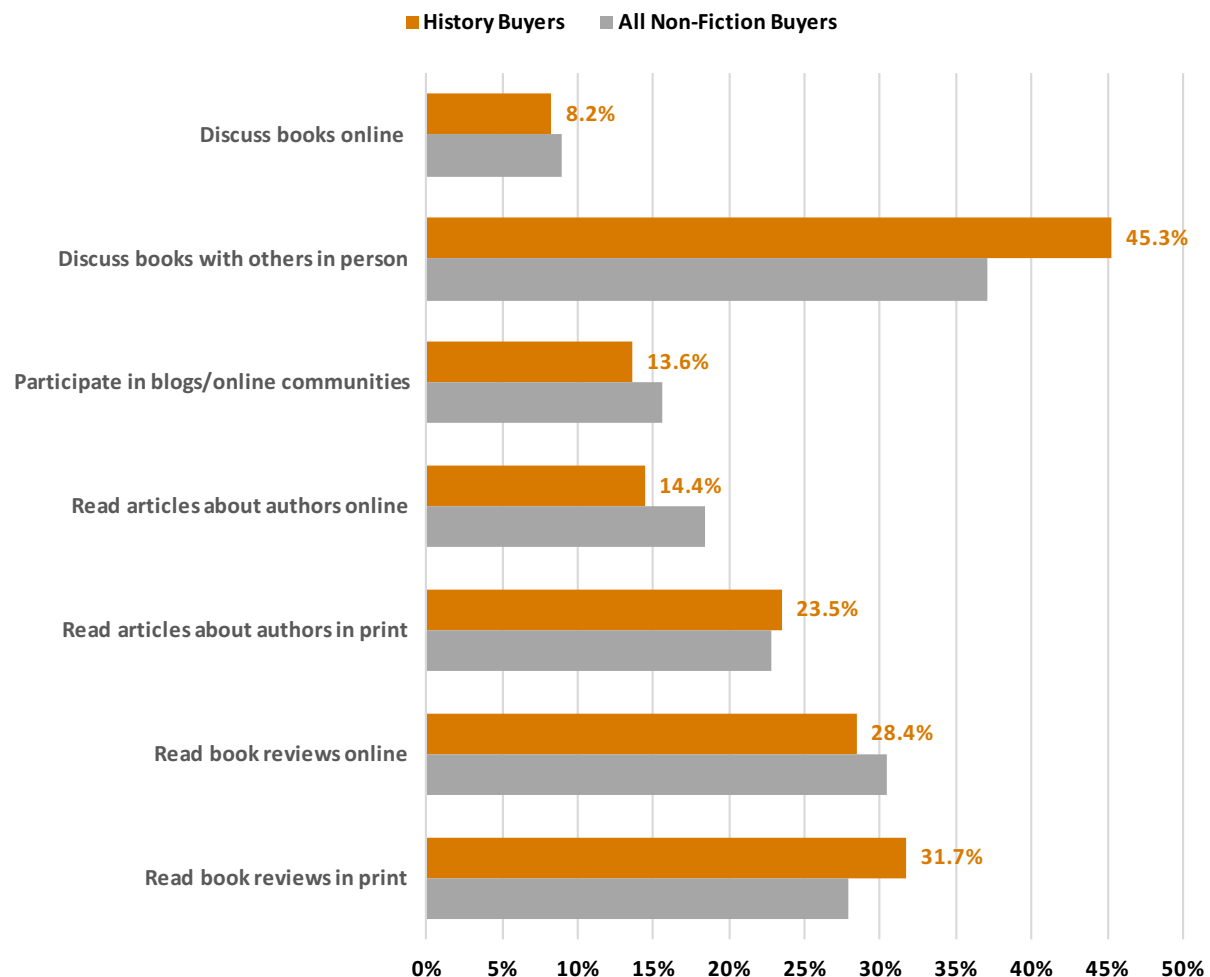
## Use of Social Networks



In which of the following social networks, communities, or sharing sites do you currently participate? (Please select all that apply.) (N History=243 respondents, 526 responses; N All Non-Fiction=3,047 respondents, 5,424 responses)

History buyers lean towards offline activities, with a higher tendency to watch traditional television, go to the cinema, and listen to music on CD/vinyl. Meanwhile, we see slightly lower participation in online shopping, online gaming, and watching television on a device.

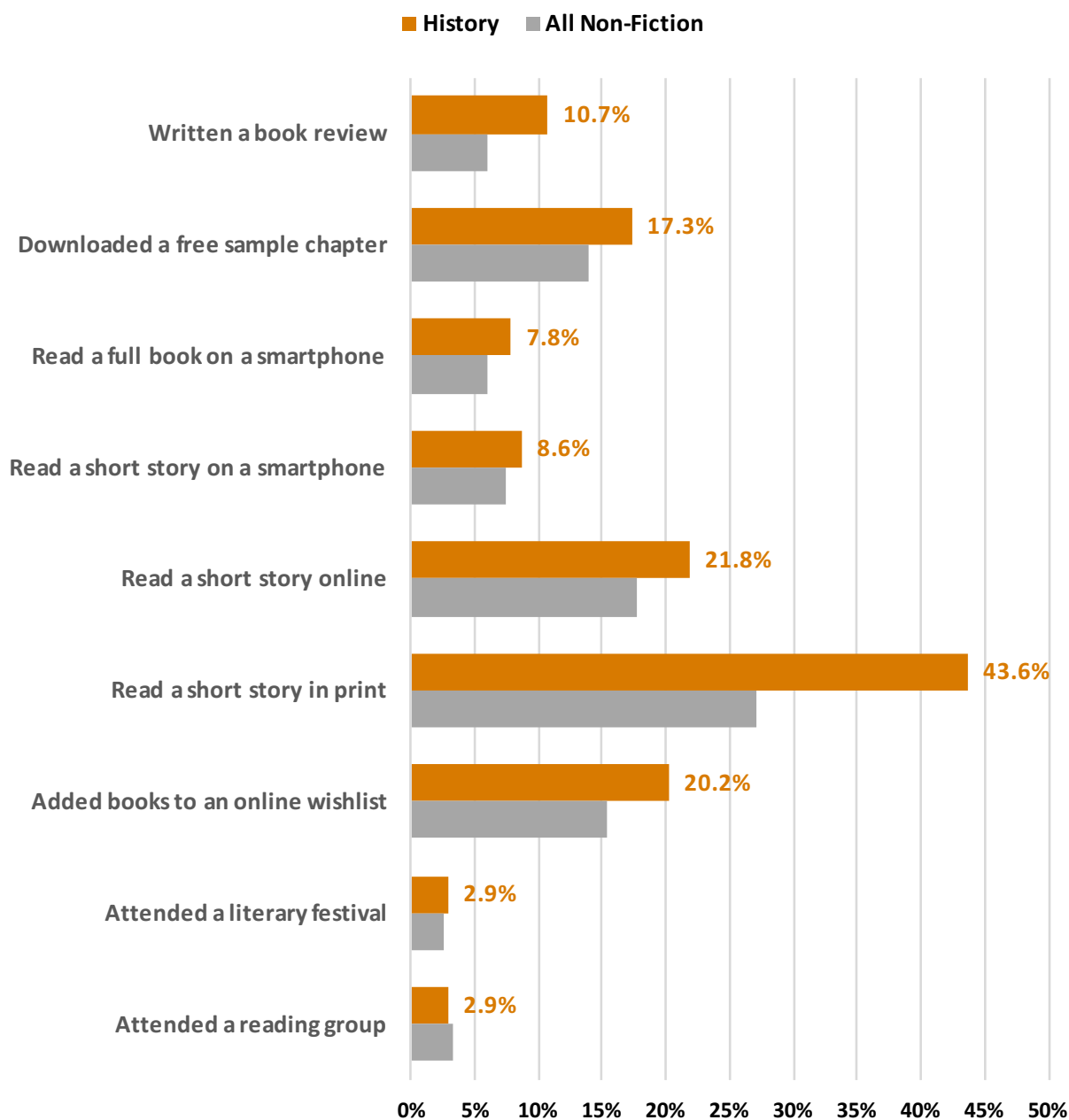
## Activities Participated in Monthly



*Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (Please select all that apply.) (N History=243 respondents, 713 responses; N All Non-Fiction=3,047 respondents, 9,014 responses)*

While we find lower online engagement with the above activities, we also find that History buyers are very engaged in many book-related activities, both online and offline, with higher than average participation in writing book reviews (11%), downloading sample chapters (17%), and adding books to an online wishlist (20%).

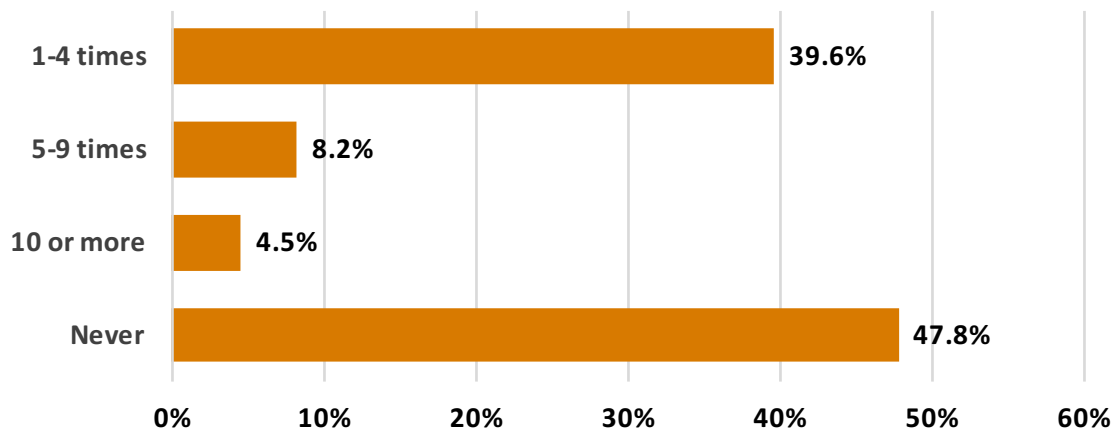
## Activities in Last 12 Months



*Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months? (Please select all that apply.) (N History=243 respondents, 364 responses; N All Non-Fiction=3,047 respondents, 3,386 responses)*

Public library use is high among History book buyers, with 52.3% having used their public library, either in person or online, in the last month. Of those users, 40% used the library between 1 and 4 times during that time period.

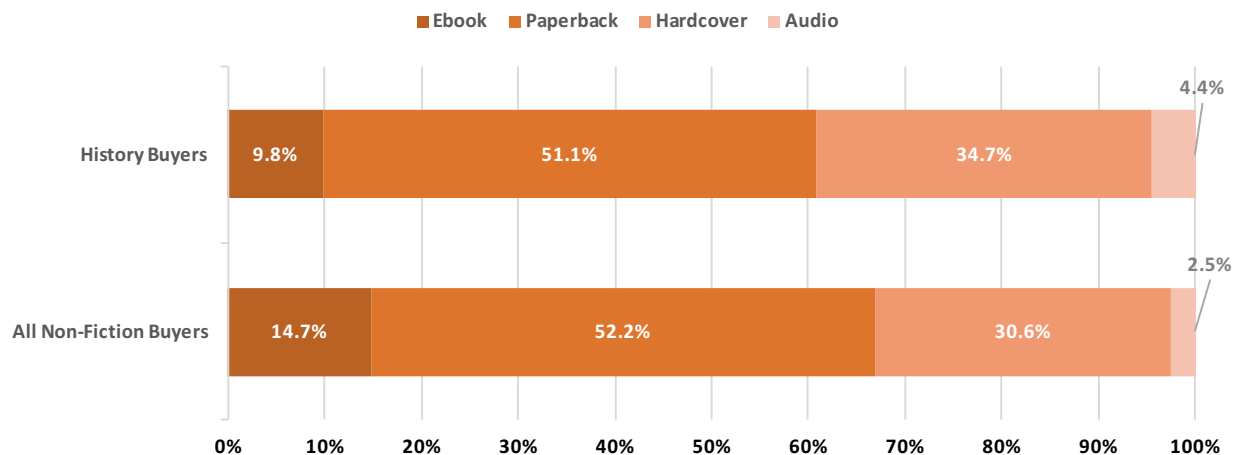
## Use of Public Library



*How many times have you visited the public library (online or in person) in the last month? (N=245)*

When it comes to looking at the purchase of History books by format, we find that the preference for paperbacks is almost identical to the average Non-Fiction buyer. We also find that ebook purchases are slightly lower than average (10%) and, conversely, hardcovers are slightly higher (35%).

## Format Distribution

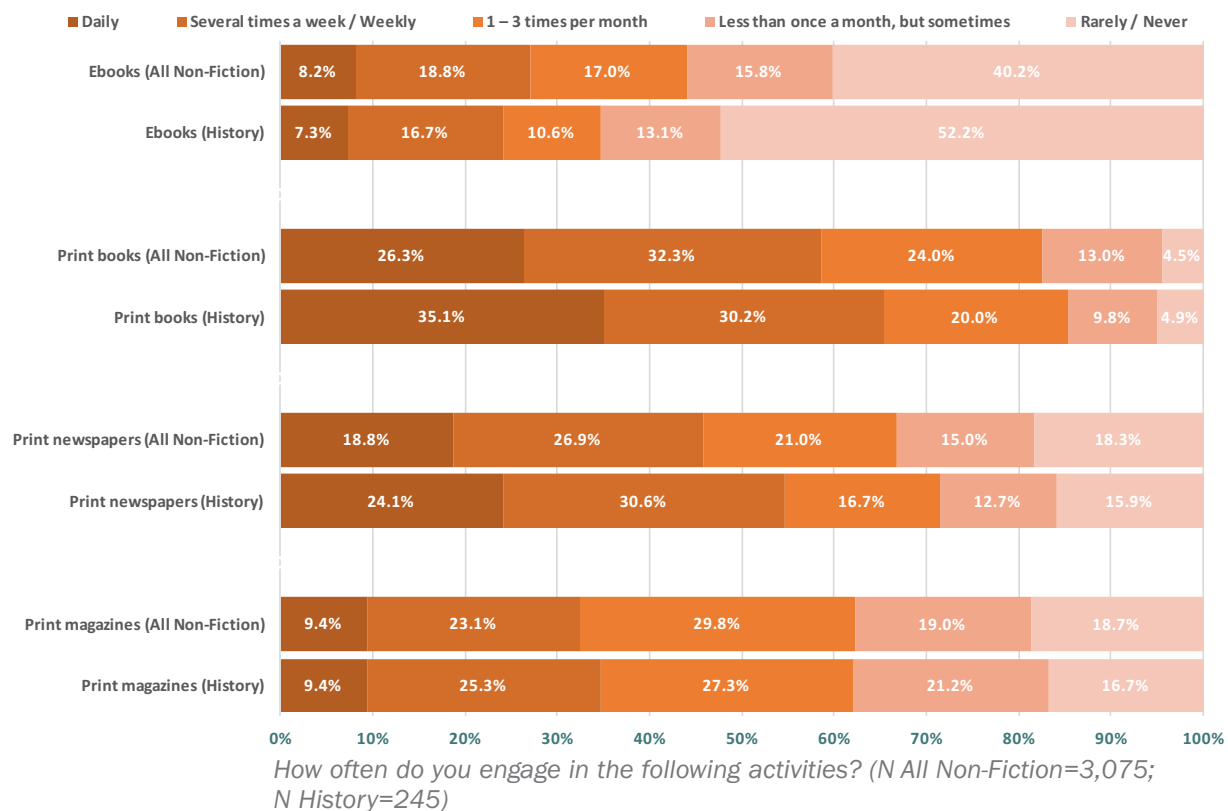


*What format is the book you purchased? (N History=317 purchases; N All Non-Fiction=3,832 purchases)*

The graph below looks not at whether History buyers participate in specific activities but rather the frequency at which they participate. For example, of all History buyers who read ebooks, 7.3% of them read ebooks daily; of all History buyers who read print books, 35% of them read print books daily, significantly higher than the average Non-Fiction buyer at 26%. Note that reading ebooks and print books here does not necessarily refer to reading History books, but just reading books generally.

This data demonstrates a predisposition towards print, as the History buyer reads both print books and print newspapers at a higher frequency than the average Non-Fiction buyer.

## Reading Frequency

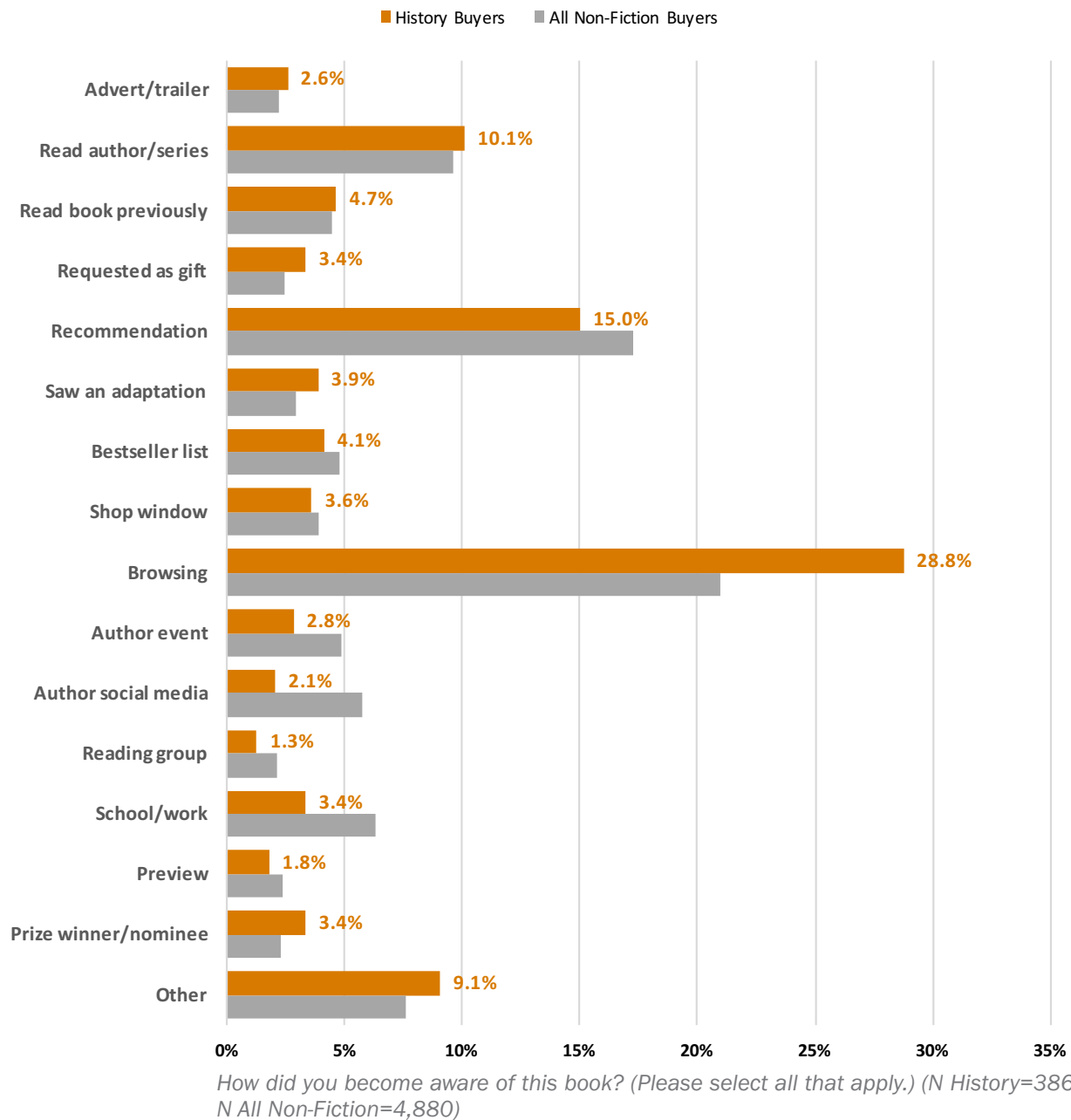


How do History book buyers find out about books? Browsing is, by far, the most significant way that History book buyers discover their purchases (29%). While recommendation is next on the list (10%), this is still lower than the average Non-Fiction buyer.

There are a number of ways that History book buyers differ from the average Non-Fiction book buyer:

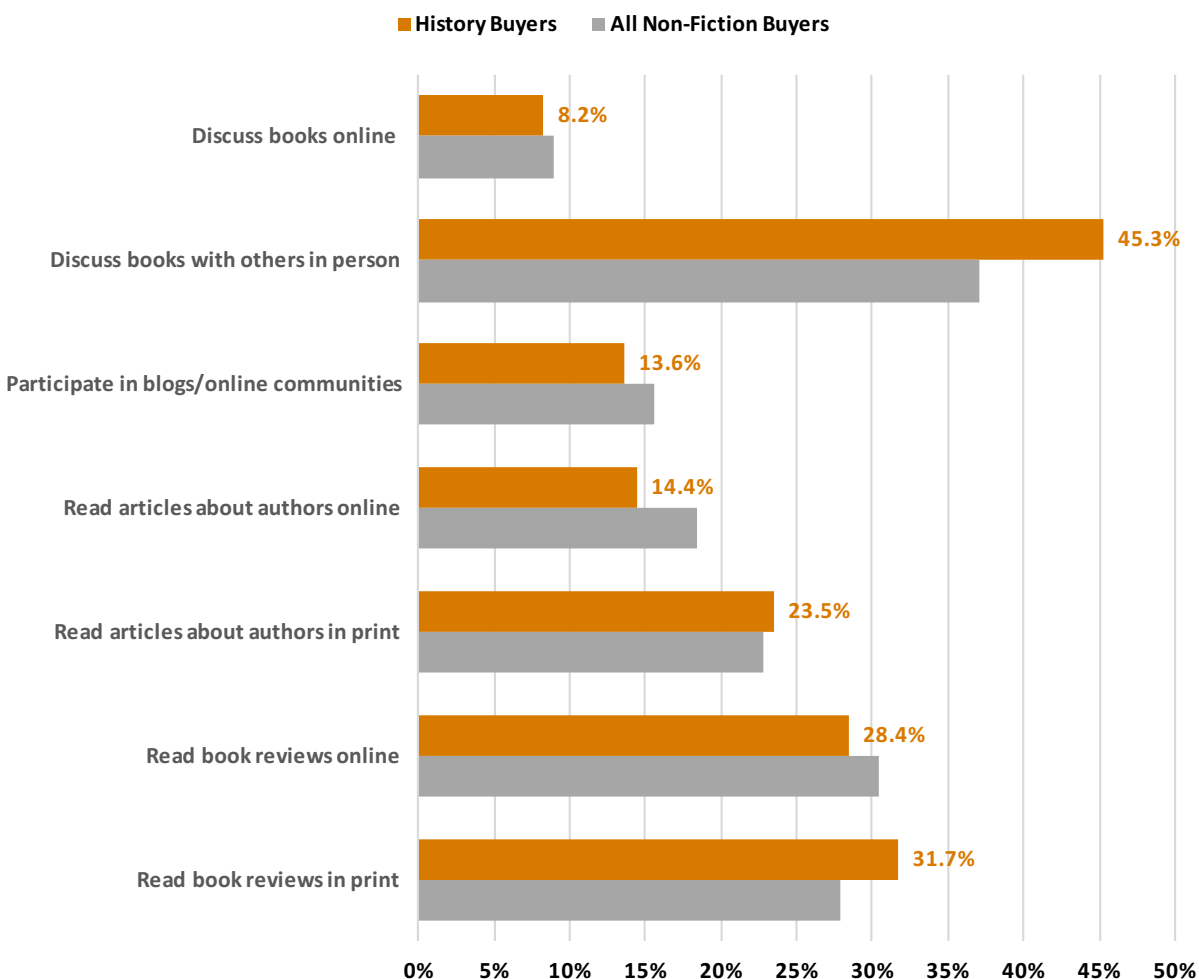
- Author social media (2%) and author events (3%) are both lower for History buyers.
- The purchase of a History book after seeing an adaptation is slightly higher (4%).
- Purchasing the book because it was a prize-winner (3%) is slightly higher than the average Non-Fiction buyer.

## Awareness



History buyers like to talk about their reading endeavours, at least in person. Just over 45% of History book buyers discuss books with others in person but they are less likely than the average Non-Fiction book buyer to participate in blogs or online book communities.

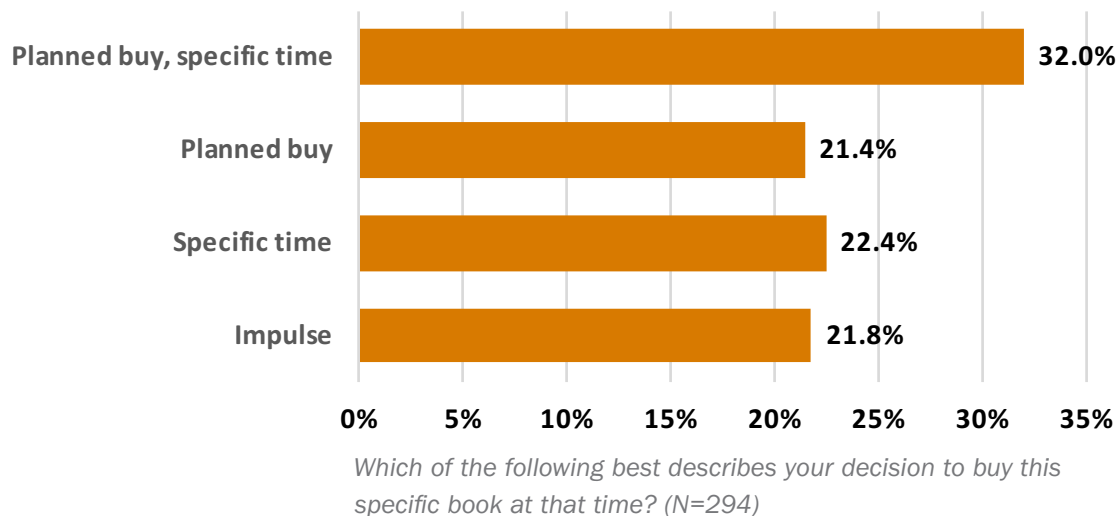
## Book-Related Activities Participated in During Prior Month



*Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (Please select all that apply.) (N History=243 respondents, 401 responses; N All NF=3,047 respondents, 4,900 responses)*

When it comes to making purchases, the majority of History buyers are planners, with 32% of purchases fully planned. This means that they not only plan to buy a specific book but they also plan to purchase that book at a specific time. That being said, 22% of History buyers made a completely impulsive purchase, meaning that they were not planning to buy that book, or any book, at the time of purchase.

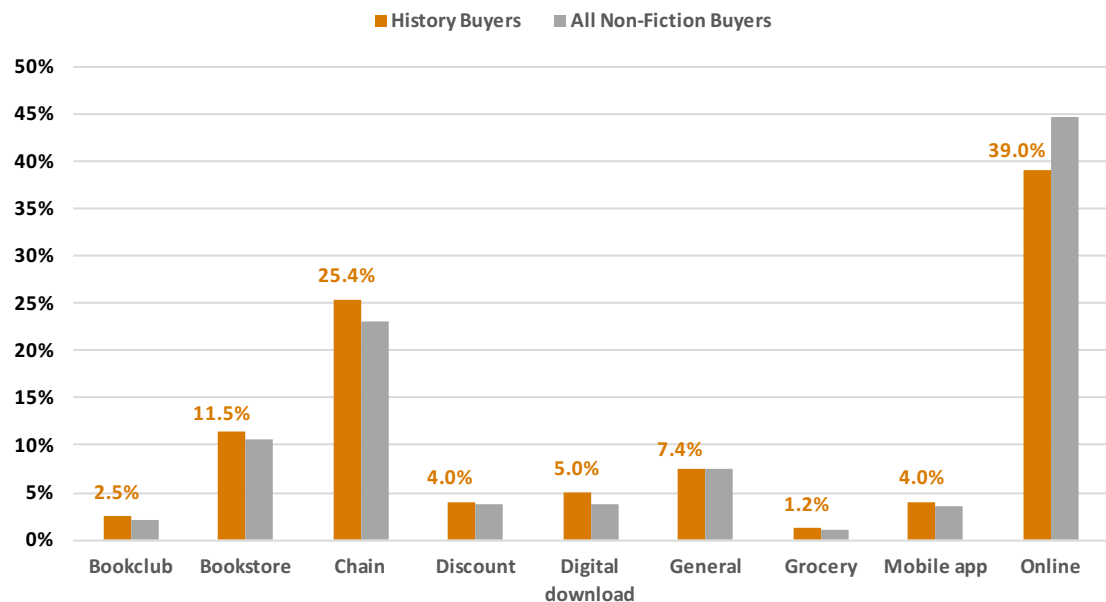
## Impulse vs. Planned Purchase



When we combine digital download, online, and mobile app purchases, together they account for 48% of all History purchases. While mobile app and digital download purchases are slightly higher than the average Non-Fiction book buyer, we find that general online purchases are notably lower.

Perhaps because of a wider selection of content, both chain stores and bookstores represent a higher portion of History book buyers' purchases.

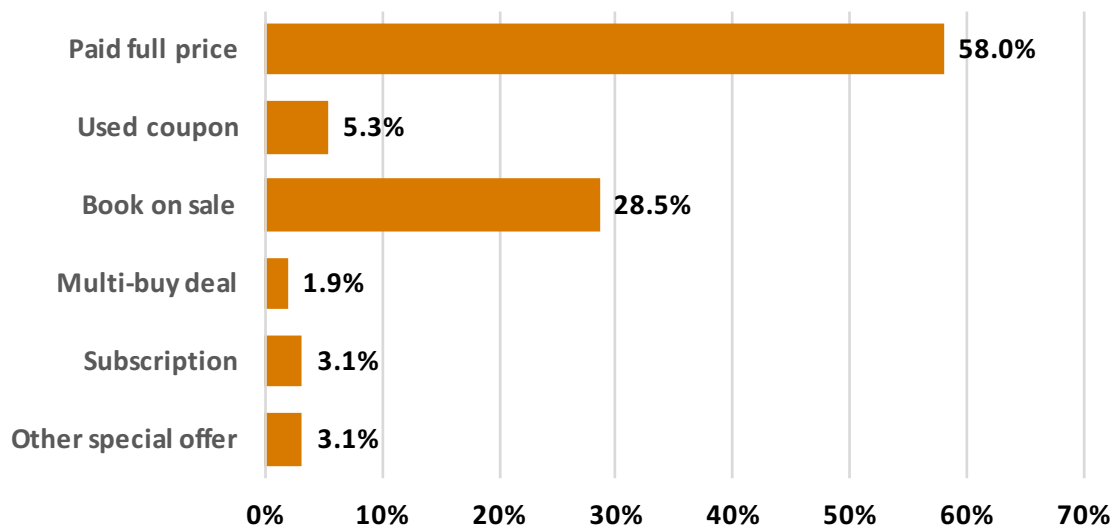
## Purchase by Channel



How would you describe where you bought this book? (N History=323; N All Non-Fiction=3,913)

The majority of History book purchases were paid at full price (58%) while 29% were purchased on sale.

## Discounted Pricing



*Did you buy the book at full price or did you buy it at a special price or offer?*  
(N History=319)

Using BiblioShare, BookNet Canada's bibliographic database, the average list prices for History books published in 2016, broken out by format, are as follows:

## List Price

| Hardcover | Paperback | Ebook   | Audiobook |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| \$67.90   | \$33.86   | \$21.76 | \$21.93   |

When we asked respondents what price they paid for their History books, we found that most prices were notably reduced from the list prices above, in particular for hardcover books. Two things to keep in mind are: 1) these numbers are based on buyers' potentially unreliable recollections of what they paid, and 2) retailers often offer consumers discounts off the full retail/list price.

## Selling Price

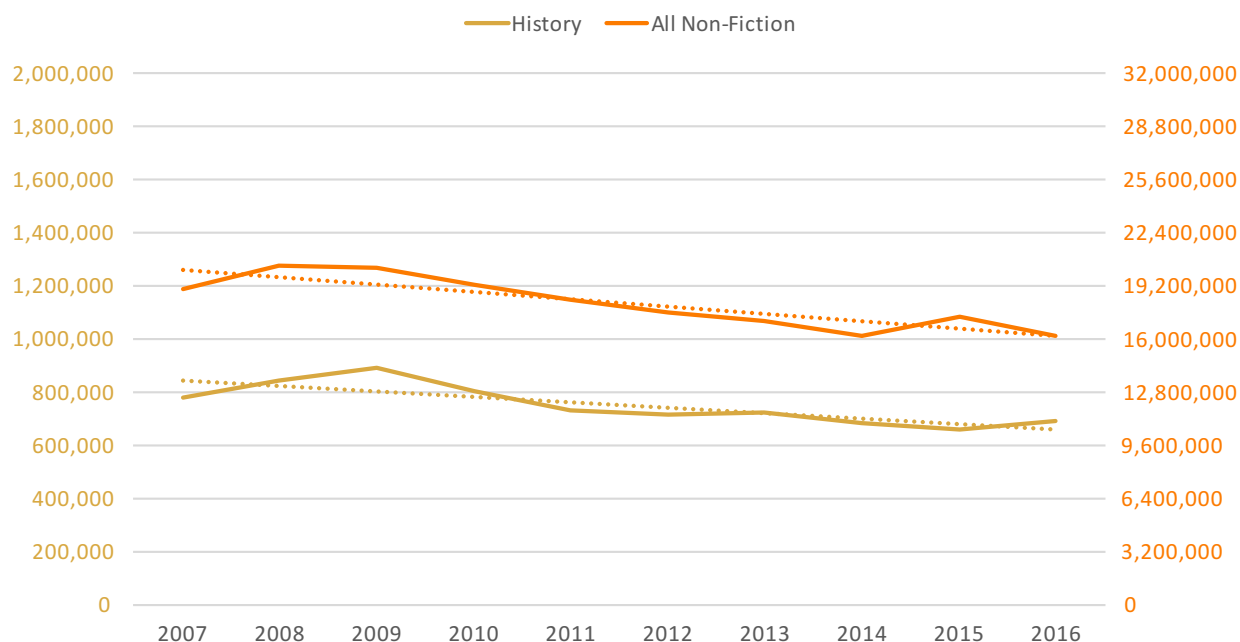
| Hardcover | Paperback | Ebook   | Audiobook |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| \$25.25   | \$19.47   | \$14.67 | \$10.52   |

*How much did you pay for this book (before tax)?* (N History=304 purchases)

# Sales Analysis of the History Category

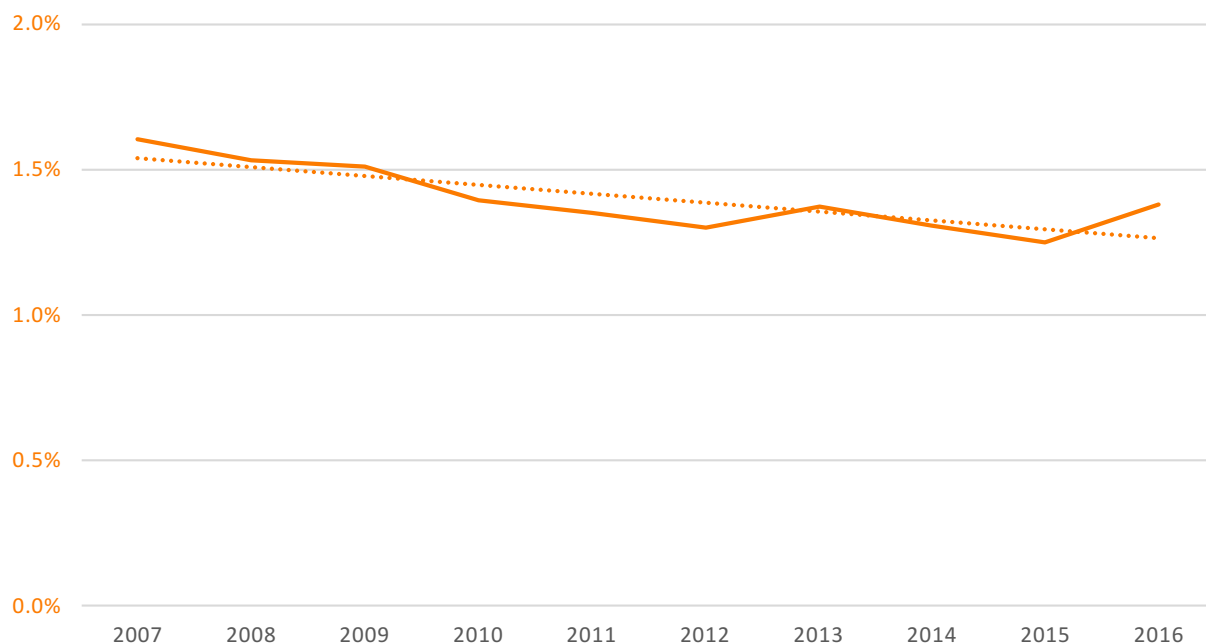
BNC SalesData has tracked the sale of print books in the Canadian trade market for more than 10 years. Looking at the sale of History books across this 10-year period, we see a slight but notable annual decline in the volume of print books sold.

## Volume Sold



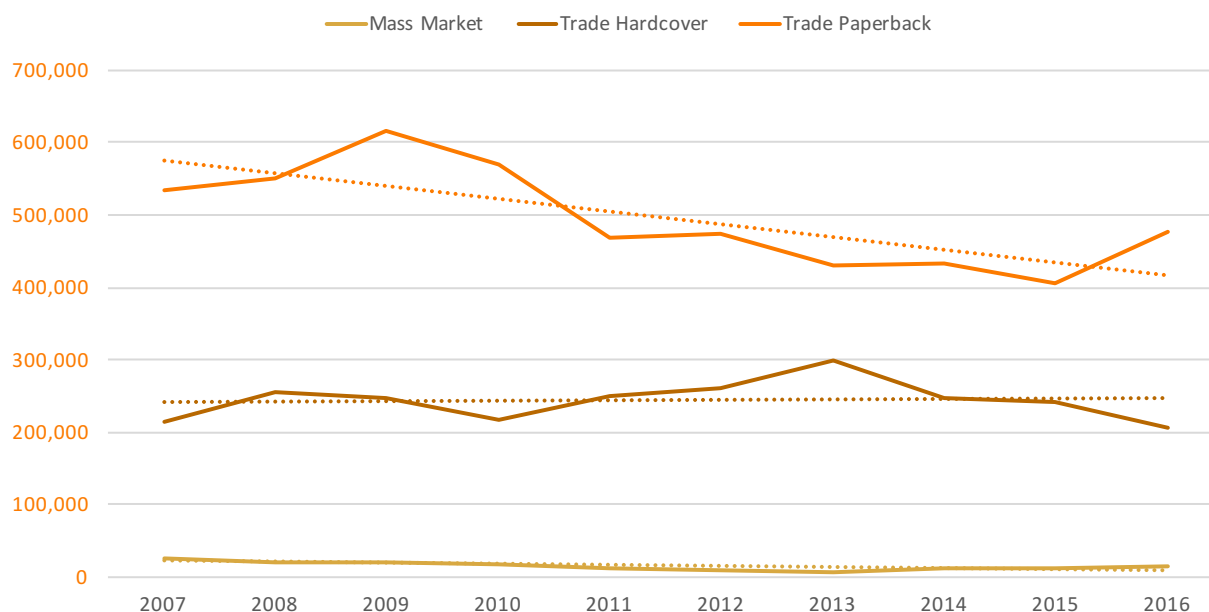
Market share looks at what percentage of the market is “owned” by a particular category. Again, looking at the print market only, we find that market share for History has been declining over the past 10 years. It is interesting to see an upturn in 2016, when market share landed at just under 1.5% of the market. There were a few big titles released in 2016, including *The Nazi Officer's Wife* by Edith H. Beer and Susan Dworkin and *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari.

## Market Share



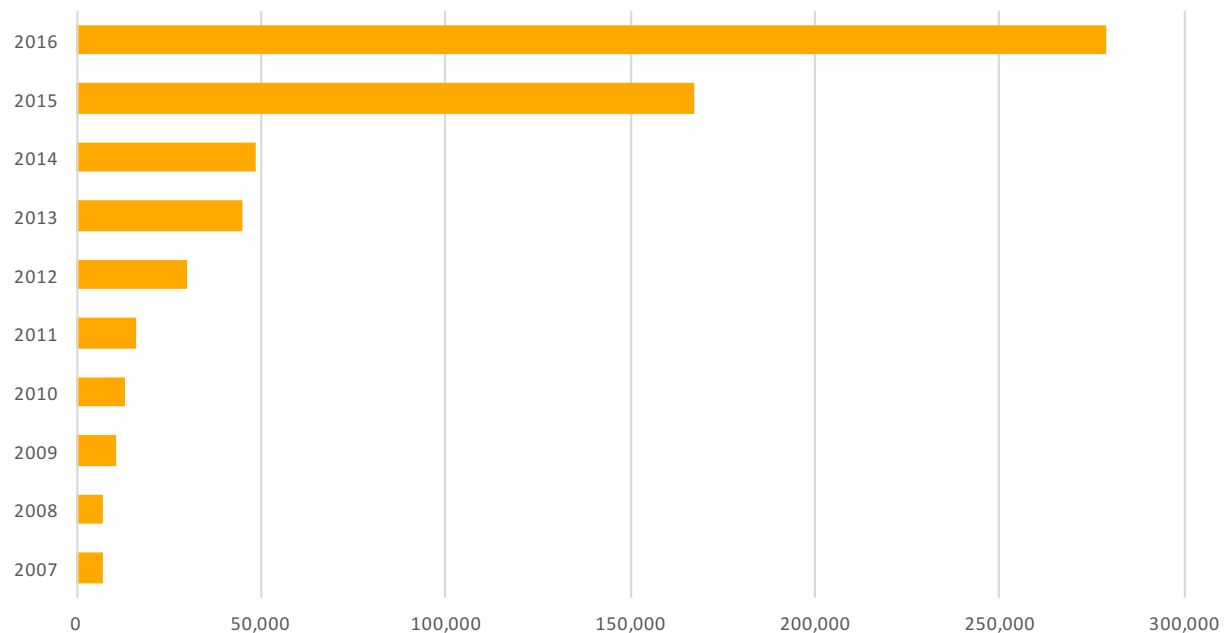
When it comes to breaking down sales by print format over the past 10 years, we find a notable decline in trade paperback. In many other categories over this same period, we have seen a reduction in mass market sales that is likely attributable to those readers moving to digital formats. For History, it is possible that, with mass market being a very small part of this category, we are seeing a shift to digital from trade paper instead. Overall, Canadian consumers really began purchasing ebooks in 2009/2010, and much of this purchasing has been focused in the 'genre' fiction subjects: Mystery, Romance, Fantasy, and Science Fiction.

## Sales by Format



The graph below breaks out units sold in 2016 by each book's year of publication. This allows us to take a look at how a category may be either frontlist or backlist heavy. In the case of History, sales of 2016 titles are notably higher than for titles published in previous years, which indicates strong frontlist sales.

### Volume of History Titles Selling in 2016 by Publication Year



The top 10 bestselling History authors in Canada for 2015-2016 are:

1. Yuval Noah Harari
2. Erik Larson
3. Susan Dworkin and Edith H. Beer
4. Thomas King
5. Margaret MacMillan
6. Ben Macintyre
7. Caroline Moorehead
8. Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
9. Nathaniel Philbrick
10. Charlotte Gray

Perennial bestsellers refer not to the top-selling books (i.e., books that have sold the most) but rather the most consistent bestsellers, year over year. The perennial bestsellers listed here were identified by searching for titles that ranked well every year from 2013 to 2016. If you are building a History section in a bookstore, these are the tried and true titles from the last four years. To be included on this list, a History title had to rank within the top 300 for each of the four years — a rank threshold that was determined by how widely we had to search to compile a list of 30 titles.

## Top 30 Perennial Bestsellers

| Title                                           | Contributor                    | ISBN          | Publisher                | Format | List Price | Pub Date   |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------|------------|------------|
| Escape from Camp 14                             | Harden, Blaine                 | 9780143122913 | Penguin Publishing       | TP     | \$22.00    | 26-03-2013 |
| Killing Jesus                                   | O'Reilly, Bill; Dugard, Martin | 9780805098549 | Henry Holt & Co          | HT     | \$34.50    | 24-09-2013 |
| The Great Escape                                | Barris, Ted                    | 9781771022729 | Dundurn                  | HT     | \$33.99    | 05-10-2013 |
| Civilization                                    | Ferguson, Niall                | 9780143122067 | Penguin Publishing       | TP     | \$25.00    | 30-10-2012 |
| In the Garden of Beasts                         | Larson, Erik                   | 9780307408853 | Crown/Archetype          | TP     | \$23.00    | 01-05-2012 |
| Double Cross                                    | MacIntyre, Ben                 | 9780307888778 | Crown/Archetype          | TP     | \$22.00    | 14-05-2013 |
| Into the Silence                                | Davis, Wade                    | 9780676979206 | Knopf Canada             | TP     | \$22.95    | 02-10-2012 |
| A Thousand Farewells                            | Ayed, Nahlah                   | 9780143170464 | Penguin Canada           | TP     | \$24.00    | 21-05-2013 |
| The Second World War                            | Beevor, Antony                 | 9780316023757 | Little Brown & Co        | TP     | \$26.00    | 07-05-2013 |
| The Swerve                                      | Greenblatt, Stephen            | 9780393343403 | W. W. Norton & Co, Inc   | TP     | \$22.95    | 04-09-2012 |
| The Lost City of Z                              | Grann, David                   | 9781400078455 | Knopf Doubleday          | TP     | \$19.95    | 26-01-2010 |
| Collapse                                        | Diamond, Jared                 | 9780143117001 | Penguin Publishing       | TP     | \$27.00    | 04-01-2011 |
| Empire of the Summer Moon                       | Gwynne, S. C.                  | 9781416591061 | Scribner                 | TP     | \$20.00    | 10-05-2011 |
| Iron Curtain                                    | Applebaum, Anne                | 9780771007644 | McClelland & Stewart     | TP     | \$22.00    | 13-08-2013 |
| Area 51                                         | Jacobsen, Annie                | 9780316202305 | Little Brown & Co        | TP     | \$21.00    | 01-05-2012 |
| Bloodlands                                      | Snyder, Timothy                | 9780465031474 | Basic Books              | TP     | \$23.00    | 02-10-2012 |
| The Ascent of Money                             | Ferguson, Niall                | 9780143116172 | Penguin Publishing       | TP     | \$24.00    | 27-10-2009 |
| 1493                                            | Mann, Charles C.               | 9780307278241 | Knopf Doubleday          | TP     | \$23.95    | 24-07-2012 |
| The Last Crusade                                | Cliff, Nigel                   | 9780061735134 | HarperCollins Publishers | TP     | \$21.99    | 28-08-2012 |
| Gulag                                           | Applebaum, Anne                | 9781400034093 | Knopf Doubleday          | TP     | \$25.95    | 09-04-2004 |
| Operation Mincemeat                             | MacIntyre, Ben                 | 9780307453280 | Crown/Archetype          | TP     | \$17.00    | 05-04-2011 |
| Agent Zigzag                                    | MacIntyre, Ben                 | 9780307353412 | Crown/Archetype          | TP     | \$17.00    | 12-08-2008 |
| Pierre Berton's War Of 1812                     | Berton, Pierre                 | 9780385676489 | Doubleday Canada         | TP     | \$29.95    | 01-11-2011 |
| The Tudors                                      | Meyer, G. J.                   | 9780385340779 | Random House             | TP     | \$20.00    | 01-03-2011 |
| 100 Mistakes That Changed History               | Fawcett, Bill                  | 9780425236659 | Penguin Publishing       | TP     | \$17.00    | 05-10-2010 |
| Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World | Weatherford, Jack              | 9780609809648 | Crown/Archetype          | TP     | \$21.00    | 22-03-2005 |
| Sniper Elite                                    | Maylor, Rob; Macklin, Robert   | 9781250010469 | St. Martin's Press       | TP     | \$24.99    | 07-08-2012 |
| Band of Brothers                                | Ambrose, Stephen E.            | 9780743224543 | Simon & Schuster, Inc    | TP     | \$20.00    | 06-09-2001 |
| Penguin History of Canada                       | Bothwell, Robert               | 9780143050322 | Penguin Canada           | TP     | \$28.00    | 30-10-2007 |
| Dictionary Of Newfoundland and Labrador         | Young, Ron                     | 9781895109344 | Downhome Publishing, Inc | TP     | \$19.95    | 01-08-2006 |