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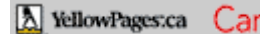
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NEWS STORY

Reading goes retro on the Web

Victoria-based online bookseller Abebooks generates up to 15,000 sales a day

Michael McCullough
 Vancouver Sun

Tuesday, July 08, 2003

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix may be a new release, but it's already working its magic on the used book market.

According to Abebooks.com, the Victoria-based Internet marketplace for used booksellers, sales of used Harry Potter books spiked 300 per cent in June. About 3,000 pre-owned Potters changed hands during the month, said Abebooks spokesperson Marci Crossan.

The asking prices range from a dog-eared 45-cent paperback of Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets to a set of the first four books signed by author J.K. Rowling and listed by a Chicago bookstore for \$50,000 US.

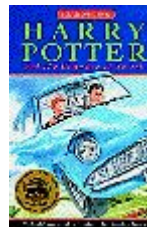
A signed first edition of Order of the Phoenix has already turned up on Abebooks' United Kingdom site for \$9,486. In



(Ernest Hemingway)



(J.D. Salinger)



(Harry Potter novel)

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fact, 272 of the Potters sold in June represented the new book in the series. As Crossan noted, most of them would be signed copies. Because Rowling does so few book signings -- and those mostly for charity -- signed copies of her books carry quite a premium for collectors.

All five Harry Potter volumes turned up in Abebooks' list of the top 10 best-sellers last month.

The monthly list provides an intriguing glimpse into social trends, Crossan said.

Founded in 1996 by Web designer Keith Waters and four Victoria booksellers, Abebooks provides an online sales venue for some 11,000 used bookstores and home-based booksellers for fees ranging from \$25 to \$300 US a month, depending on the number of titles listed. Today it lists 45 million books, generating between 10,000 and 15,000 sales a day.

"It's actually a more accurate picture of what people are really reading" than new best-seller lists, Crossan said. While new books are often used for gifts and represent only what's in print, Abebooks' sales track raw interest among readers.

During the war in Iraq this spring, for example, sales of teen mystery novels such as the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series increased 120 per cent. Anecdotal evidence from booksellers and buyers indicated baby boomers were searching out the literature of their teen years for their kids, Crossan said. In a time of uncertainty, they were seeking plots with clear solutions.

It's easier to explain the popularity of other used bestsellers. Right now all the Dr. Atkins low-carb diet books are hot, Crossan said. Anything by Virginia Woolf took off with the release and Oscar nomination of the movie *The Hours*. And sales of *East of Eden* shot up when Oprah Winfrey picked the John Steinbeck classic for her book club.

mmccullough@png.canwest.com

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FOR COLLECTORS ONLY

Rare books listed on Abebooks.com, values in Canadian dollars:

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (U.K. first edition signed by author) \$9,486.63

Hardy Boys first title, *The Tower Treasure* (1957, by Franklin W. Dixon) \$3,765.55



Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat* (1957 first edition) \$17,408.31

Margaret Atwood, *The Circle Game* (1964 first edition) \$7,365.05

Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time* (first edition, 1924) \$223,214.64

Sir Isaac Newton, *Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica*, 1687
\$301,297.59

Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (a presentation copy inscribed, 'To Sam, / with affection, gratitude, and hope / of many lucky voyages for you / and the "Old Man" from Malcolm April '47') \$ 22,321.46

Irma Rombauer, *The Joy of Cooking* (1931 first edition cookbook)
\$4,686.85

Charles Jacques Huault de Montmagny, *Fur Trading Certificate* (one of the earliest know fur trade permits, signed in Fort Saint Louis Quebec, 1646)
\$16,069.20

Charlotte Brontë, *Personal Letter*, 1849 (to her publishers, discussing Anne Brontë's health: 'My sister has been something worse since I wrote last; her chief sufferings consist in the harassing cough and a sense of languor.') \$31,250.05


Jack Kerouac, *Letter*, 1950 (letter signed with typed pages on untitled short story) \$24,773.36

J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (1961 signed first edition) \$100,432.53

Ran with fact box "For collectors only", which has been appended to the end of the story.

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