

FUZZY MATH AT AMAZON

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One of our ArcheBooks authors sent me an email recently stating that their book's rankings on Amazon.com went from over 500,000 up to around 250,000. They were ecstatic, believing that the only way for this to be possible was for their book to have sold at least a quarter of a million copies. In reality they had sold two (2) copies the previous day -- that's right only two.

It's logical to think that if books are moving up in sales ranking, at Amazon or any online retailer that publishes such statistics, that to move ahead of other books, if those other books are selling even one copy, then your book must be selling one more than that; and so if you move up 250,000 rungs on the ladder, you must have sold that many books. Unfortunately, that isn't how those numbers work.

You see, according to *Nielson Bookscan*, less than 2% of all titles sold in a year ever sell over 5,000 copies. Yes, of the more than a million unique titles sold each year, of which less than 200,000 are new titles, over 98% of them never sell more than 5,000 copies. In fact, if you notice some of the bestseller list numbers, only a handful of them at a time ever sell in the thousands in a day a week or even a month (Harry Potter notwithstanding).

When it comes to Amazon, their rankings are computed DAILY. They reflect how many books were sold, comparatively to all of their 2.5 - 3.0 million titles, for the day before. On that basis, after you get past the top 25 titles, or even the top 100, you are talking about books selling only a few copies a day, if any. So on the day your book sells two copies, it leaps ahead of all the other titles on Amazon that only sold one or none.

So until your book starts selling on a consistent basis, generating numbers daily, you're never going to see your Amazon ranking get into the three or even four digit range, and therefore the number you see, usually in the hundreds of thousands or millions, is *irrelevant*. And on any day that your book doesn't sell a copy, everyone else's books who sold at least one copy jump ahead of you.

Now, there are some folks out there who are convinced that Amazon can be "gamed" to their advantage by understanding the principle described above. That is, writers are encouraged to get 50 relatives, friends and neighbors to all buy a copy of their book on the same day. And sure enough, the following day, the book's ranking improves dramatically, jumping ahead of all the other titles that sold less than 50 copies on that particular day. The thought here is that if the ranking jumps high enough, it will then be seen on the "top seller" lists at Amazon, and therefore people who browse the bestseller lists will then see it and perhaps buy it, and if enough buyers do that, it will hold its high ranking and perhaps even improve it and continue to be seen and continue to sell.

While that scenario isn't impossible to happen, what is certain to happen is that if less than 50 people buy the book the next day, that wonderful ranking goes away, and the book drops down to the big numbers from whence it came.

The Bottom Line is:

If you see your Amazon ranking jump into the top 100, *that* means a lot of people are buying your book. However, if you see it go from 1,500,000 to 400,000, it means you probably sold a few. And you only look very foolish berating your publisher about the million books you thought you sold.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Gelinas is the founder, Publisher and Editor-In-Chief of ArcheBooks Publishing Incorporated, (www.archebooks.com), as well as the author of many novels. He is a frequent public speaker and teaches and lectures on writing and publishing.

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