AMAZON SALES RANK – HOW TO UNDERSTAND IT

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To some, imprecise extent, you can gauge how well your book is selling by the sales rank under product details.

Categories

Amazon calculates a sales rank that is ***general*** for all books (currently at least 15 million). That rank shows how well your book is doing compared to all other books. The lower the number the

better.

In addition to the overall ranking, Amazon will calculate a rank based on the ***category*** into which your book falls; those categories come from metadata, which we identify to Ingram and Ingram identifies to Amazon—but, often, Amazon assigns a category that it decides upon unilaterally. These categories will be associated with niches. The smaller the niche, the easier it is to get a good ranking if you have a really good book.

For new books, the competition can be a little less daunting since it is only among books being released concurrently. Called ***hot new releases***, this ranking identifies books selling among the top 100 books in each category. It is a great way to get a book known at launch. After 30 days, a book is removed from the competition. We have had many books land in the top 100 in their categories, including #1. We had one book maintain its #1 status for all 30 days. Hot new releases top 100 books are not necessarily selling more books than others in Amazon’s inventory; to know that, authors would need to check the *general* ranking, but it does reflect better sales than others in that same category also recently released.

Sales

*General ranking*

Note that this sales rank changes by the hour and refers to how many copies of your book have sold in the past hour in comparison with all other books in stock. (You can always ask me for current sales stats on your book, but you can figure out a lot for yourself by looking at the Amazon numbers.)

Books with sales ranks higher than 500,000. These books are not selling, period.

Books with sales ranks below 500,000. These are selling for Amazon, i.e books that they purchased earlier and still have in inventory.

Books below 100,000. These are probably selling for you, as well as for Amazon.

Books without a sales rank. This generally means that your book is not in the top 15 million books that Amazon sells. Obviously, it is not selling at all at the moment, but that generally means it has not been selling any copies for months, if not for a year or more. Not having a sales rank is not a good sign.

*Category rankings*

Your book is usually selling a few copies if it is in the top 300 of an average-sized niche (category). If it is in the top 100 of an average-sized niche (category), it generally is selling well. (See the document, Interpreting Your Book Sales, at the Author Hub to understand what “selling well” means.)

Actual sales very much vary by category. Some categories have very few books, so the sale of 1-2 books can show up as a low number, like 50 or 60, sometimes even lower. If a category has a lot of books, then 1-2 book sales may show up as a ranking of 5,000 or 6,000. These numbers, like any other Amazon numbers, are relative, not absolute.

Books will fare better or worse, vis-à-vis sales ranks, depending upon their category. For example, here is a hypothetical case in which three books sell at the same rate but would end up with very different Amazon rankings:

Book A sells 50 copies in a month. It is in a category with 200 books, 80% of which sell 1-2 books a month. It will end up in the top 100, maybe even #1 over and over again.

Book B sells 50 copies in a month. It is in a category with 2 million books, 80% of which sell 1-2 books a month. It will not end up in the top 100. Perhaps the top 4000. Same number of sales as Book A. Same rate of sales of competing books as Book A. Different categories, greater competition.

Book C sells 50 copies in a month. It is in a category with 200 books, 120 of which are on the NYT bestseller list and sell 1-2 copies an hour. Book C will not end up in the top 100 because while the size of the category is low (as with Book A), the competition is high in terms of popular books puts it into the same level of greater competition as Book B.

Inventory and Sales

Sales ranking refers to books sold by Amazon to customers; it does not refer to books purchased by Amazon from publishers. Those two figures will rarely match. Even if the sales rank is quite low, if Amazon has inventory, publisher and author will not be getting payment for any sales because whatever is in inventory was purchased earlier. When inventory is depleted, Amazon has to purchase more. Amazon will not order more books (i.e. you will not have any sales) until inventory is sold out. So, if Amazon has made a decision to stock 30 books, it will purchase those 30 and not purchase any more until those 30 are sold out. If 15 are bought in one hour, the Amazon sales rank will dip really low, but that does not mean sales for the author because those 15 come out of the inventory of 30 already purchased earlier.

Amazon will stock in inventory the number of books it thinks it can sell in a reasonable amount of time; the algorithm is based on previous sales. So, sometimes a good book launch and slow follow-up sales can result in Amazon having a lot of stock for a long time, which means no additional book sales for you.

Check the information to the far right of the book image. It will generally tell you how many are still in stock. If the comment is “more on the way,” then likely Amazon has ordered 1-2 more. If the comment is “temporarily out of stock,” then they were caught by surprise and will adjust their algorithm in the future OR the book was recently backlisted. If it says simply “in stock,” then they are nowhere near the point of needing to order more.

Backlisted books will have an Amazon sales rank until inventory is depleted. Then, the book will be listed with links to used book sites. (Backlisted books are always available from us, and we always know the sales volume, with a slight accounting delay.)

How to reach a low number (good sales rank) on Amazon

The first month after your book is released, hustle like crazy to get sales. It is much easier to get into the top 100 of “hot new releases” because you are only competing with other books coming out that month, not with all book available on Amazon.

Concentrate your book sales into a short time period if you can. (If you are selling at a workshop, for example, or a public event, this is not all that hard to do.) Amazon rankings are updated hourly; a monthly sales level o,f 300 books will have a different sales ranking depending on the time period in which those books are sold; 300 books sold in one hour will register as greater sales activity than 300 sold across 24 hours or across 30 days.

Sell in narrow niches. It is more difficult to reach the top 100 in parenting books, religious books, or self-help books, for example, than to reach the top 100 in travel humor, dream interpretation, or European architecture.