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Not That Kind of Publisher: How NovelRank and BookScan can benefit small publishers' marketing and promotions

Geoff Wallace
Graduate research paper

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Research Question: "How can NovelRank be used for more than simply tracking the ranking of a given title in the Amazon ecosystem, but rather identifying sales trends across a group of titles? For a group of titles of your choosing, what kinds of sales trends can be identified using this method? How do the trends identified using NovelRank for this group of titles compare to the trends that can be identified using Nielsen BookScan?"

Intro

Unlike other media industries, publishing's sales are seldom transparent. With book sales reports by marketing-research companies offered at prohibitive fees, and big players like Amazon limiting what, if any, sales data they release, small and independent publishers miss out on potentially game-changing information that could improve their marketing strategies and sales predictions. But there are tools available—NovelRank.com and Nielsen BookScan—that can deliver publishers this much-needed information at a cost considerably lower than other outlets. By developing a sales-tracking methodology using these programs, I hope to offer publishers not an ultimate tool but a more advanced tool to help them tackle their marketing needs.

This is a data-driven paper focused on tracking book sales using NovelRank and Nielsen BookScan. It seeks to answer the following questions: How can NovelRank be used for more than simply tracking the ranking of a given title in the Amazon ecosystem, but rather identifying sales trends across a group of titles? For a group of related titles, what kinds of sales trends can be identified using this method? How do the trends identified using NovelRank for this group of titles compare to the trends that can be identified using Nielsen BookScan? And, crucially, how can the NovelRank-BookScan tracking methodology be used to benefit publishers?

Sales-tracking options and previous NovelRank research projects

As with previous sales-tracking projects, for this paper I used NovelRank and Nielsen BookScan to track, compare, and analyze book sales in the US. Nielsen BookScan—or just BookScan as I'll refer to it from here on—covers up to 75% of retail book sales in the

US. However, it does not cover sales on Amazon.com, nor does it cover ebook sales made through any vendor. As a counterpoint to BookScan, NovelRank only tracks transactions on Amazon; crucially, this includes ebooks. Both sites provide the user with detailed reports. BookScan provides multiple sales reportages: one for the lifespan of a title, one for its first eighteen weeks of sales, another for a span of previous dates ranging from four to thirteen weeks prior to the current date; it also provides a complex system of sales comparisons I won't mention in this paper except for the title-comparison report, which allows the user to compare the first eighteen weeks of sales for up to four titles.

NovelRank, on the other hand, is more DIY: it only begins tracking a title once a user—any user—inputs an Amazon URL or ASIN into the NovelRank site's search feature. If the title in question is already tracked by NovelRank, the site directs the user to the appropriate page; if not, NovelRank creates a new tracking page. NovelRank will continue to track data for this specific title for eighteen months; if not accessed during this period, the tracking page becomes dormant. However, if enough users frequent the page, the title will be tracked indefinitely; dormant pages can be reactivated as well, leaving gaps in reportage but keeping the entire record otherwise alive. NovelRank provides its free users¹ with three reports²: hourly Amazon sales estimates, monthly Amazon sales estimates, and hourly Amazon sales-rank reports. Of the three, the sales-rank report is the only report that's truly accurate—the other two are (under)estimates, though they are accurate to varying degrees, which I will explain later on. It's worth noting that, given a title with a long NovelRank tracking history, these reports can contain *tons* of data—upwards of 10,000

¹ Users who pay for NovelRank's subscription service, NovelRank Pro, are afforded more report and tracking options. At \$99/year, however, NovelRank Pro is a bit too expensive for this grad student's wallet.

² Each report is a downloadable .csv file.

unique numerical entries across a single spreadsheet—so even if some elements are estimated, they’re still highly detailed estimates. Concurrently, *some* estimate of Amazon’s sales is better than *no* estimate, and few other free book sales-tracking services offer NovelRank’s sophisticated search features at such a low cost—thus the reason I continue to use it for publishing research.

I’ve employed NovelRank and BookScan in three previous sales-tracking research projects. Each project sought to discover different uses and limitations of both tracking sites; the results were not always what I’d expected nor hoped for.

- The first project utilized NovelRank to measure Amazon sales in attempt to uncover an influence between a title’s appearance on the *New York Times* bestsellers list and increased sales on Amazon following this appearance; a total of thirty titles were followed for roughly two weeks. Much of the data did not correspond, and the results were negative³.
- In the second project, I used NovelRank to measure ebook sales on Amazon following a title’s appearance on ebook promotional site BookBub. I followed thirty titles, most of them serial titles, for up to two weeks, noting improvements in sales following BookBub’s plug, and observed elevated sales continued for as long as a month after the promotional period ended.

³ At the time, I was unaware of previous research conducted by Dan Lubart, formerly of sales analytics company Iobyte Solutions. During research in 2011, Dan found ebook titles in the top 100 on Amazon and B&N.com tended to stay in the top 100 longer than their print counterparts, possibly indicating that “eBook purchases are more influenced by bestseller lists than print” (Lubart 2011). Alan T. Sorensen’s essay “Bestseller Lists and Product Variety” (2007) and its deconstruction of the NY Times’ bestseller list—with its failings and shortcomings in comparison to BookScan—was also insightful.

- For the third project, I expanded my aims. Focusing on new translations printed in the US⁴, I chose the University of Rochester’s extensive translations database as my primary dataset. Since this yielded over 1800 titles, I ran the titles’ ISBNs through Amazon’s advanced search feature and chose the titles with the most reviews, reasoning that a higher number of reviews correlated to a higher volume of sales⁵. The resultant seventy titles were entered into NovelRank, producing 180 NovelRank entries across multiple formats⁶ and eventually resulting in thirty-four NovelRank reports. After analyzing the data, I ultimately found that sales of translations in the US are increasing, that Amazon (and its translation imprint, AmazonCrossing) is a driving force behind this increase, and NovelRank’s data on Amazon’s sales trajectories seemed to match BookScan’s sales trajectories. However, this round of research felt incomplete—with only thirty-four reports from over 180 entries, there were too many holes in the data and too little overlap between NovelRank and BookScan. And yet I now had 180 NovelRank entries waiting for future use, so I chose to continue following translations and reuse the data from the third project on a fourth project.

In search of research similar to my own

⁴ That is titles originally written in a foreign language, translated into English, and published in the United States.

⁵ Research conducted by Chevalier and Mayzlin suggests that “an improvement in a book’s reviews leads to an increase in relative sales at that site,” so I believe that so long as the reviews are not negative, correlating a higher number of reviews to a higher number of sales is a reasonable assumption (Chevalier 2006).

⁶ Each Amazon URL (or ASIN) has its own entry and thus its own page on NovelRank. One book will typically yield three NovelRank entries—one for hardcover, one for paperback, and one for Kindle ebook. More popular books can produce many more NovelRank entries; Stieg Larsson’s *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, for example, could produce three entries for hardcover print runs, four entries for paperback print runs, two entries for mass-market paperbacks, five entries for audio editions, one entry for an unknown edition, and one entry for a Kindle edition for a total of sixteen separate NovelRank entries.

Initially, as I was updating my methodology for this next sales-tracking project, I sought out but was unable to locate any studies similar to the research I had completed using NovelRank and BookScan. Although there were more than a few studies employing BookScan to track sales of titles, I generally didn't find any studies that used more than one sales-tracking site or service in the course of their research—or, if I did find relevant studies, the statistics of the research conducted by the second company in question were not made available in the article. Often, these other companies were marketing-research or publishing-industry firms such as Mintel, Bowker, and Key Note, and provided their industry reports elsewhere at exorbitant costs⁷. Other articles, such as Laing and Royle's "Bookselling Online: An Examination of Consumer Behavior," included details taken from marketing-research corporations that also track book sales, but these details were typically not relevant to my purposes.

In the articles I read that did openly mention sales figures, much of the sales reporting came from big houses or booksellers themselves. For example, in "Ten years of e-books: a review," Linda Bennett cites sales figures for ebooks from different booksellers, but these figures all come directly from Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Waterstone, and Bloomsbury—no sales-tracking site was used (Bennett 227). In what seemed like a small breakthrough, a Publishing Technology article, "What Nielsen Bookscan data tells us about ebook sales cycles & the ebook plateau," posed several questions about the reliability of the publishing industry's ebook sales records, but failed to follow through with any answers. This led me to a recent presentation from Jonathan Nowell, Nielsen BookScan president, on ebooks' impact on publishing, but all ebook sales data contained in the slideshow was

⁷ Certainly I would better understand book retailing on the internet if I could afford Key Note's £575 (\$869) report!

gathered by PubTrack Digital, formerly a Bowker sales-data entity purchased by Nielsen⁸, and not available to the public (Publishers 2013).

But what the public—or at least the writing public—does seem to have is a lot of thoughts about NovelRank. Not finding any academic literature on NovelRank.com (but lots on novel-ranking methodologies in the hard sciences), I dug through blogs and message boards and found many of the people writing about NovelRank were independent authors complaining about the site’s tracking service⁹. In a forum for erotica authors on absolutewrite.com, authors generally weighed in against NovelRank, stating that it’s “prone to give you heart failure” as it reported anywhere from one-tenth to one-third of the authors’ actual sales (Maryn). However, most of the message board’s posters published through Kindle Direct Publishing, meaning most of them had access to Kindle Direct Publishing’s sales figures which, as Lurig notes on NovelRank’s FAQ page, should always be viewed as more accurate and favored over any sales estimates from NovelRank (Lurig 2012). Furthermore, I viewed the authors’ accounts of NovelRank’s underreporting as an encouraging sign—its underestimations of Amazon sales seemed to present an advantage.

As I clicked my way farther and farther into Google’s search results, I noticed more authors’ sites that used a NovelRank widget to track sales of their books, found more indie authors and author-support sites promoting NovelRank, and eventually I found something relevant to my own research on the blog of a YA/Fantasy writer, Arthur Slade. Slade is a Canadian independent author, and in June of 2011, he posted an entry to his blog where he

⁸ Apparently the purchase of PubTrack Digital gave Nielsen “the ability to measure e-book sales in the U.S. and U.K.,” and Nielsen incorporated PubTrack Digital into its book-tracking platform—which includes BookScan, but BookScan’s general lack of sales records of ebook titles doesn’t seem to reflect this acquisition (Publishers 2013).

⁹ Although there weren’t hundreds of web pages swarming with anti-NovelRank commentary, there were too many too list within the body of the essay. More examples can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

briefly detailed using Amazon, NovelRank, and BookScan to track sales of his tenth book, *Jolted* (Slade).

In May 2011, *Jolted* was nominated for a YA award in Florida, and while using Author Central, Amazon's sales-tracking program for authors, Slade noticed his book sales had shot up in Florida and Louisiana and used BookScan to confirm the jump (Ibid). At this point, Slade's methodology, however whimsical, is virtually the same as mine, except that instead of Amazon's live-updated sales map of the US, I have BookScan's list of city-by-city, direct-market-access sales that only updates once per week. Slade indicated that he liked having access to both BookScan and Amazon because the two together "showed the sales in the 'ground' stores [and the sales] in the 'virtual' store that is Amazon"; he also used NovelRank as a third source to overlap and/or check up on his Amazon sales (Ibid).

While I don't have access to sales-tracking services connected directly to Amazon (e.g., Author Central), and although searching for research related to my own yielded few constructive results, it prompted me to further reconsider how best to improve my data sets in absence of a third means of tracking sales.

Methodology, round 4

My primary methodological goal for this iteration of research, project 4, was simple: eliminate as many gaps as possible between NovelRank's data and BookScan's data. Although in previous projects I compared data sets primarily from the more distant past, thanks to the NovelRank data set I'd created during project 3, I now had a set of approximately six hundred NovelRank spreadsheet reports that ran virtually parallel in time with BookScan's reports.

Regarding what I consciously intended to resolve through project 4, there were two central questions from project 3 that I felt hadn't been resolved: whether sales trajectories for Amazon and BookScan really were similar, and the degree to which NovelRank's extended sales estimates differed from BookScan's concrete sales data. (Any other results were certainly welcome.) Due to BookScan's option to view the past thirteen weeks of a title's sales, I chose to examine the same time span in NovelRank. For this purpose, monthly sales-estimate reports from NovelRank would be sufficient, and I chose not to download daily sales-estimate reports or Amazon rank reports, thus reducing the amount of data I needed to input and wade through.

Before beginning, I also contemplated using data from 2015 titles in translation. Given the short time-span of this project, however, I didn't have adequate foreknowledge to begin creating NovelRank entries far enough in advance to provide useful reports—I would've needed to begin gathering them before I'd even known I was going to work on project 3. I did persevere, however, and located titles in translation that were published in 2015 and had high reviews on Amazon, but again, these titles' generally short time on the market did not generate sufficient data on NovelRank, and some of the titles were absent from BookScan as well, so I elected to use my previously gathered data for titles in translation from 2008–2014.

Drawing ISBNs from project 3's title database, one by one I found their entries on NovelRank, downloaded the apropos reports, cross-referenced these points of information with BookScan's entry, and built a new database. Due to bizarre, ghost-in-machine-esque problems with my original Excel spreadsheet, I started from scratch and created an admittedly less-colorful but still complete spreadsheet using Google Sheets; should I

further develop this methodology, it is crucial that the technology and software used be as simple, up to date, and efficient as possible. Excluding the loss of the Excel spreadsheet, building the database took time: I estimate inputting NovelRank and BookScan sales data for one title (with three formats) took 8–10 minutes. I arranged and designed the spreadsheet to make data easy to interpret; in addition to general publication information about each book, spreadsheet columns indicate the following:

- The date when BookScan began tracking a title
 - This is usually the title's original publication date
- The title's total sales as tracked by BookScan
- The date when NovelRank began tracking a title
 - This is usually when I first gathered data for project 3 in Feb. 2015
- The title's total sales estimates as tracked by NovelRank
- The past thirteen weeks of sales (i.e., recent) as tracked by BookScan
 - This roughly corresponds to sales from 1/31/15–5/1/15
- The past thirteen weeks of sales estimates (i.e., recent) as tracked by NovelRank
 - This roughly corresponds to sales from 1/31/15–5/1/15
- Kindle sales estimates as tracked by NovelRank
- Number of Amazon reviews the title had at two separate dates
 - Feb. 2015 and late April 2015

Some titles do not have iterations in all all formats, especially titles published by Amazon's imprints (Brilliance and AmazonCrossing). A few titles are missing entries for either or both BookScan and NovelRank. These entries were possibly nonexistent, somehow incorrect in BookScan or NovelRank's system, or were actually for other non-US editions of the title in question. To avoid creating a confusing tangle of numbers, I have typically listed a title's year of publication only for its first edition (which is found off to the left in the first purple column). Most titles have hardcover as their first listed format, while others have trade paperback listed first instead. This is due to the trade paperback being

released first, the trade paperback having better sales, or the hardcover being a large-print edition. I have occasionally excluded some titles' editions due to extremely small/nonexistent sales records. Lastly, I have included BookScan and NovelRank sales data for one non-translated title at the bottom of the spreadsheet; I will explain its purpose later.

Analysis

The most obvious finding from all this data...is the most obvious finding: BookScan has recorded far more sales for these titles than NovelRank—12,811,146 compared to NovelRank's estimated 278,074. Given BookScan's longer time tracking sales—and its higher accuracy versus NovelRank's intentional underestimations—this was to be expected, and there is no reason to believe NovelRank would come up with bigger numbers for a mega-bestseller like *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. Yet these are possibly the least intriguing sets of numbers on this spreadsheet.

Examining the columns of recent sales, some interesting trends begin to develop. Looking at hardcovers first, we see that titles with fairly low sales on BookScan—*The Hypnotist* [row 98], *The Troubled Man* [row 101], and *The Absent One* [row 135] for example—actually have higher sales estimates on NovelRank. Sometimes the difference is small, yet other times it's considerable: BookScan reports zero sales for *The Museum of Innocence* [row 48], but NovelRank reports 30; the trend seems to disappear as the titles get newer. One possible cause: as people purchase books on Amazon, the site might recommend comp titles that are older than what someone might find in a physical bookstore, where shelf space is limited and priority often given to newer titles.

As we linger over the recent-sales columns, another similar trend takes shape. Whereas NovelRank tends to show higher sales of older hardcover titles than BookScan, BookScan tends to show considerably higher paperback sales than NovelRank. Again, the difference can be quite stark: BookScan reports 6291 recent paperback sales of *1Q84* [row 90], while NovelRank only estimates 359 sales. Similarly disproportionate ratios can be found in the entries for *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out The Window and Disappeared* [row 116], *The Art of Hearing Heartbeats* [row 120], *The Dinner* [row 142], and *The Son* [row 170], and the occurrence of this trend seems to increase as the titles get newer. Without even tallying BookScan's recent paperback sales, it's easy to tell its sales reportage far outpaces NovelRank's paperback sales estimates. In lieu of an explanation, while it's impossible to guess how many paperbacks Amazon actually sells, it's probable that more paperbacks are purchased at physical points-of-sale: in grocery stores, in airports, in retail wholesalers (such as Costco or Sam's Club), in brick-and-mortar stores, and so on.

Speaking specifically to trends in sales of translations in the US, we can see that translated titles from Scandinavian and Romance-language countries tend to sell well in America¹⁰. We can also see that there hasn't been a truly titanic bestselling title in translation since Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* in 2010; however, with over ten entries on this list, Jo Nesbø's prolific mysteries and their sales are not to be underestimated either.

Underestimated sales brings me to another finding—perhaps the most important finding of this project. One of the primary reasons I began using NovelRank was so I could

¹⁰ Or selling well on Amazon.com, considering this database is built on the translated titles with the most Amazon reviews.

track Amazon's seemingly untrackable ebooks, and with project 4, I finally have the parallel datasets with which to compare Amazon's estimated ebook sales with other BookScan sales in attempt to fill in some sales gaps. Some titles have sold a tremendous number of ebooks—and, again, these are underestimated sales—*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* [row 4], *The Hangman's Daughter* [row 62], *Apocalypse Z* [row 119], and *The Glassblower* [row 166]. In some instances, and especially with Amazon Brilliance and AmazonCrossing titles¹¹, these ebook sales estimates dwarf the same title's actual sales as reported by BookScan, or else provides a much fuller picture—thus demonstrating that relying solely on BookScan can potentially sell a publisher's title short.

Although I was not able to answer whether Amazon and BookScan have similar sales trajectories, I believe I have definitively shown differences between NovelRank's sales estimates and BookScan's actual sales—and these differences form the core of the NovelRank-BookScan methodology.

Application: The NovelRank-BookScan methodology as a tool for publishers

Using the NovelRank-BookScan methodology offers small and independent publishers more than just a clearer crystal-ball view into Amazon's murky sales records. By providing a more complete view of the whole publishing picture, publishers can potentially improve title-by-title marketing strategies, sales forecasting, and publicity campaigns. To elucidate this point, I'd like to offer a case study involving a real, recent book, and a real-yet-anonymized, noteworthy indie publishing house.

¹¹ Amazon Brilliance and AmazonCrossing titles on this spreadsheet: *Apocalypse Z*, *Last Train to Istanbul*, *The Corpse Reader*, *Dark Days*, *The Glassblower*, and *Rain Girl*.

On September 30, 2014, Random House Publishing Group published media wunderkind Lena Dunham's first memoir, *Not That Kind of Girl*, in hardcover and ebook formats; Dunham was paid a reported \$3.5 million advance for the book (Publishers 2014). Sensing an intriguing research opportunity, I created a NovelRank tracking entry for Dunham's memoir a few days before its release and, following the launch, checked BookScan's sales charts once a week. Equally intrigued, Marissa Yvonne-Mork also started following sales of Dunham's memoir via BookScan. A notable figure in the publishing world, Yvonne-Mork runs a successful independent publishing house in Denver, Colorado. As October surged forward, Dunham's memoir picked up steam, selling nearly 38,000 hardcover copies its first full week as reported by BookScan. Yet over the coming weeks, *NTKoG's* sales began steadily dropping, eventually selling just less than 7000 copies per week by week twelve (i.e., mid-December) (See Appendix).

During these weeks of *NTKoG's* declining sales, Yvonne-Mork paid great attention to BookScan while laughing at the apparent folly of Random House's acquisitions agents—by Yvonne-Mork's estimates, Random House would need to sell 500,000 copies of Dunham's memoir to recoup the \$3.5-million advance. Ignoring how cultural capital gained when a big brand (such as a publishing house) aligns itself with a mega-popular celebrity can trump the profit margins of said celebrity's product—and ignoring the then-upcoming holiday buying season any potential future paperback and/or mass-market editions of *NTKoG*—Yvonne-Mork's prediction isn't without merit: as an indie publisher (of literary fiction and memoirs) with a budget much smaller than Random House, purchasing the rights to a book that needed to sell half a million copies to break even sounded like financial suicide—a fate that BookScan's sales reportage seemed to support.

Yet as I followed *NTKoG* along on NovelRank, I discovered there was more to the story. Although *NTKoG*'s hardcover sales estimates also dropped on NovelRank, the drop was not so steep, and the hardcover sold more than 1800 estimated copies in both November and December of 2014¹². *NTKoG*'s Kindle performance fared better, selling an estimated 2489 copies in November and an estimated 1938 copies in December. Taken altogether, that's over 8000 copies that Yvonne-Mork didn't know about (to say nothing of the novel's equally impressive Amazon sales in Germany). And as I continued watching NovelRank, things only seemed to improve for Dunham. As of May 1st, 2015, the hardcover edition of *NTKoG* has yet to drop out of Amazon's top 1200, and during those first twelve weeks of sales, it never left the top 150 and peaked at number 1; likewise, the Kindle edition of *NTKoG* has yet to drop out of Amazon's top 3500, and during that same first twelve weeks, it never left the top 500.

Applying rough financial math to NovelRank's sales estimates yields the following arresting numbers:

<u>Edition</u>	<u>NR est. (12-wk)</u>	<u>Gross sales¹³</u>	<u>NR est. (total)¹⁴</u>	<u>Gross sales</u>	<u>Total sales</u>
HC	7,826	\$132,964	10,903	\$183,388	\$316,352
Kindle	8,488	\$93,283	13,970	\$153,530	\$246,813
Combined	16,314	\$226,247	24,873	\$336,918	\$563,165

¹² For additional NovelRank data on sales estimates of Dunham's book, please see the relevant NovelRank sales reports.

¹³ Both editions of *Not That Kind of Girl* were initially priced at \$16.99 for hardcover and \$10.99 for Kindle ebook on Amazon (Camel). Currently, the hardcover edition is \$14.67, while the Kindle edition is \$12.59; I have used \$16.82—reported as the average price by Amazon-price tracking sites—in calculating the gross sales for the remaining hardcover sales (Ibid). Because Amazon's pricing history for Kindle titles is not available to the public, I do not know when the digital edition's price change occurred; for these calculations, I have used the original \$10.99 price.

¹⁴ As of May 1, 2015.

Bearing in mind NovelRank underestimation increases as a title approaches #1 on Amazon, actual sales of *NTKoG* on Amazon are considerably higher (Lurig 2012)¹⁵. Although there is currently no way to know by exactly how much NovelRank underestimates Amazon's sales, even if the actual Amazon sales of *NTKoG* were ten percent higher than NovelRank's estimates, that's an additional \$56,317 in gross sales. All told, considering that Yvonne-Mork is also in the market of publishing memoirs, the knowledge provided by NovelRank could've benefited her predictions for Dunham's book—as well as any predictions for similar memoirs her own company planned to publish.

There is a smaller-scale flipside to this case study as well. To demonstrate, I'll anonymize another real publisher. Pelican Press is a small independent publisher run out of Portland, Maine. They've recently published a YA novel, *Doom Golfers in Love*, to modest acclaim and financial success, yet one thing surprised them—the ebook edition outsold the paperback edition. This outcome ran contrary to the expectations of their marketing department, who relied solely on comp-title sales data from BookScan. However, if Pelican's marketing team had access to those comp titles on NovelRank, they would've found that these titles perform very well as ebooks on Amazon. Given this knowledge, the marketing team would've changed their marketing plan and launched a larger promotional campaign for the *Doom Golfers'* ebook edition; they also would've reworked their P&L to produce fewer print copies and possibly charge more for the ebook.

¹⁵ NovelRank's creator, Mario Lurig, states that NovelRank underestimates sales as the title's ranking improves on Amazon, indicating sales estimates of books selling at "a low volume (less than 100 copies a month)" are likely accurate within 1%, and thus NovelRank's degree of underestimation increases beyond that point (Lurig 2014). NovelRank entries for high-selling titles such as Dunham's book carry a sort of warning: "Sales Estimates [sic] are underestimated and actual sales may be much higher."

Avenues for future research

After several iterations of exploring book sales with the NovelRank-BookScan combo, I believe this research method would be most useful in tracking new releases. Previous rounds demonstrated that NovelRank's data is less applicable when it doesn't correspond with BookScan's data, and the information-rich elements from NovelRank's lengthy multipart reports— especially the Amazon hourly sales tracking—are more immediately parsable when applied to contemporary BookScan data. There's an inherently greater speculative value in tracking new releases as well, as I outlined in the previous section on marketing advantages.

Additionally, I would like to refine this research process into a methodology that all publishers can use. One of the roadblocks to developing such a methodology is the time required to collect data—gathering and cross-collating sales numbers from both sites is particularly tedious¹⁶. To that end, automating any part of the process in some way—via scripting, an application, a Unix macro, and so on—would greatly decrease the time required to gather data. Becoming an Amazon Affiliate or Amazon Web Services Technology Partner are other options: affiliates and technology partners have the opportunity to use Amazon's APIs¹⁷ to develop programs that automate different processes on Amazon.com, and these programs can also be used for other purposes. Part of this process led to the creation of the NovelRank site, and perhaps it could lead to me developing my own sales-tracking site.

¹⁶ I lost some ten hours of work when MS Excel crashed and deleted sixty lines from an older version of the spreadsheet included with this essay.

¹⁷ An application programming interface (API) is a set of tools, preprogrammed routines, and other elements necessary for a user—such as a software engineer—to build software programs.

I've observed NovelRank entries for newer titles tend to include data from more Amazon domains (i.e., more countries), and utilizing NovelRank to gather and compare book sales data from international cross-sections to potentially outline multinational and cross-cultural sales trends is one of my longest-term goals.

Using NovelRank offers a detailed glimpse into Amazon's sales and, in turn, provides publishers with a better means of understanding a book's *total* sales in the US—and through future sales-tracking research, I would like to continue expanding that view into more than just a glimpse.

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Appendix



New List	Compare Titles
NOT THAT KIND OF GIRL: A YOUNG Author: DUNHAM LENA Format: Hardcover Publisher: RANDOM HOUSE Release Date: 09/01/2014 Price: 28.00 RTD Sales: 252168	NO SOY ESE TIPO DE CHICA Author: DUNHAM LENA Format: Trade Paperback Publisher: PLANETA PUBLISHING/CDS Release Date: 02/01/2015 Price: 17.95 RTD Sales: 24

Weeks From Release	Units	%	Units	%
1	0		0	
2	1		0	
3	5	400	0	
4	7	40	2	
5	49	600	3	50
6	37,432	999	4	33
7	24,604	-34	7	75
8	22,097	-10	1	-86
9	14,865	-33	2	100
10	13,778	-7	2	0
11	10,568	-23	2	0
12	8,342	-21	1	-50
13	6,965	-17		
14	8,731	25		
15	9,194	5		
16	11,669	27		
17	17,555	50		
18	17,640	0		

1. First twelve weeks sales for *Not That Kind of Girl* as tracked by BookScan¹⁸. (Note: The first five weeks were actually prior to the book's actual release on Sept. 30, 2014.)

¹⁸ In order to activate the line graph on BookScan, you must use the the Title Compare function; I added the Spanish-language edition of Dunham's memoir for humor.