



# PRESS RELEASE

## Uncovering Audiobooks

The Audiobook Publishing Association (APA) is pleased to announce the results of the first major market research study on the British audiobook market in recent years. In 2006 the APA commissioned Book Marketing Ltd (BML) to undertake a research study, the aim of which was “*to provide information to better understand the actual and potential market for audiobooks, with the aim of increasing sales through the development of product and marketing strategies and tactics.*”

The study by BML was undertaken in two stages:

1. Quantitative research among a 2,000-person sample of the general public, representative of adults in Britain, to establish who is and isn't buying audiobooks, and their habits, preferences and views on audiobooks.
2. Qualitative research comprising focus groups of adults who were non-users or buyers of audiobooks (but who were book readers) to discover in greater depth why these potential audio consumers aren't buying or listening to audiobooks.

The research demonstrated that there is huge potential for growth, with only 8% of British adults having listened to an audiobook in the last 12 months, and most of those listeners listening to fewer than five titles in that time.

One of the most important issues that arose from the qualitative stage of the research was the public's perception of audiobooks. The most usual, immediate, association of the term “audiobook” is “talking books for the blind”, with secondary relations to the elderly/infirm, and for the very young (pre- and early readers).

### **Key issues that arose from the research include:**

- Two thirds of listeners prefer the CD format, while cassette and download are each preferred by approx 15%. Downloads do seem to increase the attractiveness of audiobooks to non-listeners, especially to younger people: they're assumed to be cheaper and more portable.
- Non-listeners generally considered listening only via CDs or cassettes but were reasonably keen on downloads when suggested. However, issues remain over the difficulty of bookmarking an audiobook, the possibility of disks/cassettes breaking or being lost, and the packaging being fragile – all areas where books were considered to be better.
- Non-listeners tend to see audiobooks as competitive to printed books and the radio; they are viewed negatively in comparison to books, especially when compared to paperback prices.
- There is a poor understanding of the concept of abridgement, with concern about the nature of the abridgement, both in terms of what and how much is left out, and whose choice it is.

- Non-listeners seem most likely to use audiobooks for: listening while driving or on other journeys; listening while doing housework/DIY or while relaxing at home/on the beach; a way to catch up on books not read.
- Approx 70% of adults users listen to fiction (especially crime/thriller, both popular and classical), approx 25% to TV/radio-related audio titles, approx 20% to children's fiction and approx 50% to non-fiction (especially biography and history). However, non-listeners believed the range of audiobooks to be narrow and were very surprised by the breadth of titles available when shown a selection.
- Nearly half of all audiobooks listened to are *bought* by the adult listener, while 40% are *borrowed* (libraries, friends) and just one in eight are *received as presents*, indicating that gift-buying is a relatively untapped market. Interestingly, while many adults view audiobooks as suitable gifts for children (especially pre-school, early readers), very few feel they can give them to people who they do not know already listen to them.
- Non-listeners felt audiobooks tend not to be very visibly displayed in bookshops, they aren't sold in supermarkets, and are generally much less available and promoted than books by retailers, both on the high street and internet.

Non-listeners were asked how audiobooks could be made more attractive. The suggestions they gave were very specific:

- a. Make audios more visible: better, more prominent displays, available in more outlets (including supermarkets), integrate audiobooks into promotions, better signposting to audiobooks from printed books (or integrate the sections so that both formats of a title are available in the same place).
- b. Make them more price-competitive with paperbacks, and have the normal offers available for the audio format too.
- c. More and better promotions, in shops and online, e.g. samples in shops and giveaways.
- d. Provide listening posts, or emphasise and increase the availability of samples online. Consumers want to try before they buy.
- e. Improve rental conditions, so that they can be borrowed for a longer time (e.g. from libraries): have an audiobook rental system similar to LoveFilm.
- f. Promote as storytelling for children, e.g. library events.

This market research clearly demonstrated that audiobooks simply aren't on the public's radar and therefore visibility is an obvious issue. Many people really do not understand how the audiobook proposition actually works, and need to be shown the possibilities of the products – and, of course, the fabulous range of titles available.

Jo Forshaw, Chair of the APA says:

*“Book research leaders BML have given us a wonderfully detailed overview of what the public thinks of our product. The simple answer is that it rarely thinks about it at all. Whilst that tiny recognition factor could be seen as a problem, I prefer to see the invisibility as a hugely exciting challenge. It's not often you find a corner of any industry, not just publishing, so massively underdeveloped and the sheer potential of audio is breathtaking.”*

**For further information, please contact the APA administrator  
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