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BookTok is seeing more young people embrace reading than ever before, translating into shops "full of teenagers and young adults" in a trend not seen since the heyday of J K Rowling and Harry Potter, according to Waterstones m.d. and Barnes & Noble c.e.o. James Daunt.

Speaking at The New Future conference on 28th January, hosted by the the Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri School for Booksellers in Italy, Daunt said the "thrilling" growth of BookTok had been encouraging more young people to buy from physical bookshops.

He said: "The market share for Barnes & Noble and for Waterstones for the bestsellers is enormous. We enjoy 50%, 60%, 70% market share on books like Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* (Bloomsbury). And we as a bookseller haven't enjoyed this kind of dominance of what is exciting in books since J K Rowling and Harry Potter. It is back to that kind of energy in our stores. Our challenge now is that we absolutely have to keep those customers, as we did with the Harry Potter generation. It stepped booksellers up and it stepped book sales up."

His retailers are adapting and changing to keep up with demand, expanding sections for Manga and graphic novels. There has also been a sudden interest in classic books. "These last three or four weeks in the United States, James Joyce's *Ulysses* has been a significant seller because on TikTok the kids are getting excited about it," Daunt said.

The shops themselves are getting in on the act and creating their own TikTok accounts. But to be successful, they need to be authentic, says Daunt. "We have generally found that the people with blue hair do better than the people with sensible haircuts," he joked. "It's about fun and enjoyment and enthusiasm and the people who do it brilliantly are of the same generation—it's our young booksellers and we let them get on it."

He said the pandemic has "dramatically" shifted booksellers forward. So while it is crucial to curate books and have beautiful shops for readers to visit and speak to booksellers, outlets must also embrace data and new technologies. "Many of the things we have done traditionally in our stores, we can now find a much bigger audience by doing them online, such as events, book clubs, talks, podcasts," he said.

Daunt added: "Certainly at Waterstones and Barnes & Noble, both very large booksellers, we have found harnessing and understanding the data that we get from our customers—what they are buying, if intelligently used, has become a hugely powerful tool to reinforce the connection that we have through our stores."

But he stressed: "All of this is to harness traditional skills of our shop-floor booksellers into an online world."

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