

PUBLISHING NOW

Should you change genre to fit a trend or stick with your favourite? Kathleen Whyman asks the publishers

A few years ago I could see this going for a fortune, but publishers aren't buying this genre at the moment.' This was the feedback I received a few years ago from an agent for my novel. Not exactly what I wanted to hear.

At the time, the bookshops were full of the likes of *Gone Girl*, *Girl on a Train* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. But this wasn't my genre, so what could I do about it? Completely change my style of writing and hope the 'Girl' trend was still selling by the time I'd finished, or hold tight for the tides to turn and try again?

The former was risky, as it can take up to two years for a book to be released once a publisher has bought the rights. And that's before the time it's taken me to plot, research, write and rewrite the novel. Also, as psychological thrillers aren't my natural style of storytelling, there's a very high chance it'd be a load of rubbish.

Before taking a gamble, I turned to the publishing industry for advice.

Savvy sales

The kind of author you want to be, your reasons for writing and your financial circumstances can all affect your decision.

Phoebe Morgan, editorial director at Trapeze, feels that if you're happy to write to the market and heed advice from publishers, it's worth paying attention to trends.

'If nothing else, it's interesting,' she says. 'But if you're someone who wants to stick to their own storyline and keep their book as much a part of them as possible, then trends are perhaps less relevant. Both are very valid ways of being. If you rely on writing for

your living and are focused on sales, then it's a savvy move to listen to what's selling and what's not. If it's more of a side project or labour of love, you can afford to write what you want. Hopefully people will buy it anyway, but you might have to face the fact that the publisher is less able to guarantee big sales.'

Nia Beynon, director at Boldwood, says that writing to a commercial hook, of which following trends can be one route, can be very advantageous.

'Not only will it help when pitching to agents or publishers, but it's absolutely crucial to the marketing strategy further down the line,' she says. 'It will help ensure that there's a clear target readership, allowing for more focused, effective campaigns.'

Brand awareness

Stacey Donovan, director at Hallmark Publishing, US, also believes that it can be worth writing to fit a trend.

'But only if you find that personal connection and joy of creating within the trend,' she says. 'If you're phoning it in, readers can tell, and the book's going to be flat. As an author, you have to know what your brand stands for. Four or five years from now, will that trendy book still make sense in your body of work? If it will, and if you're a fast writer, then go for it.'

Leodora Darlington, publishing executive at Bookouture, advises against trying to do too many things with one book if you're writing commercially.

'Trying to sell a historical sci-fi thriller romance is going to be much harder than selling something with a clear hook,' she says.

Katrin Lloyd, commissioning editor at



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Accent Press, thinks it's advisable to be aware of which genres are trending, even if it's not the genre you're writing in.

'This knowledge of what's hot in the publishing world is definitely something to use to your advantage when writing your synopsis,' she says. 'If you can grab a publisher's interest by linking your work with something that's trending right now, you're already halfway there.'

However, she also believes that the most important thing is to write what you're passionate about.

'Trends come and go, but writing about something you love is always a powerful thing,' she says.

Be natural

Hannah Smith, editorial director at Head of Zeus (*Aria*), also believes you should remain true to your writing style.

'Never try to incorporate something that doesn't naturally fit into your brand or story,' she says. 'It can make your story come across as unauthentic and it'll be clear to the reader and publisher that you're writing to the trend.'

This strategy is echoed by Katie Seaman, editor at Ebury.

'When writing, first and foremost be authentic. Write the book you want to write and always have your reader in mind. The best books take readers on a journey and make us care about the characters, no matter what genre and regardless of trend.'

With all of this in mind, I've decided against shoehorning my style to fit a trend and, instead, to stick with the genre that I'm happiest writing. Hopefully it'll be popular again soon. And if it isn't, there's always this piece of advice from Charlotte Brabbin, commissioning editor at HarperFiction.

'Sometimes editors just love discovering a novel that feels completely different to anything that's out there. It might defy genre, and that's its USP. So don't be afraid to experiment and be as creative as you like.'



Phoebe Morgan



Nia Beynon



Leodora Darlington