

# epitome

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love every story

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## Executive Summary

Epitome is an adult romance imprint for Simon and Schuster (S&S) that focuses on marginalized voices; its list centers around authors and characters who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA, neurodivergent, and/or people with disabilities. Our titles include books in all adult romance subgenres, including contemporary, rom-com, historical, erotica, paranormal, sci-fi/fantasy, and romantic suspense. Epitome acquires and distributes original trade paperback print books as well as e-books.

The romance market has dramatically grown in the past few years, due to a need for self-care in the pandemic, the rise of romance in mainstream media, and the increased popularity of BookTok. Despite this growth, S&S does not have its own romance imprint, and the romantic fiction it does acquire is most produced by white authors, with only 2.5% written by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) authors in 2020. The romance audience is mainly female, and 23% of romance readers are people of color.

While adult romance competitors such as Berkley Romance/Jove, Forever, Avon, Harlequin, and Entangled acquire diverse books, Epitome will create a space wherein all resources can go toward supporting marginalized voices in the mainstream, promoting inclusivity in the genre at large, and exploring content that competitors don't tackle often. Should the imprint grow into the young adult sphere, Joy Revolution will be our only direct competitor.

Epitome has planned an ambitious go-to-market launch plan. The imprint's titles will reach our audience using direct-to-consumer book marketing tactics such as social media campaigns, Amazon Ad Services sponsored product placement, account co-op, and paid in-store placement, as well as librarian and bookseller awareness campaigns.

Employees will acquire and position a list of 3 books in year 1, growing to 20 books in year 5. Short-term goals include reaching the book sales laid out in my publishing schedule, achieved via extensive consumer brand awareness plan. Additional marketing goals include generating buzz through a bold launch party, creating social media and reaching 10,000 followers, and implementing librarian and bookseller awareness campaigns. Long-term, depending on viability, the imprint could grow to include young adult subgenres and more partnerships, for instance with We Need Diverse Books.

The imprint is set to break even in year 3. To be successful, Epitome requires \$1.5 million from the parent company.

## Market Backdrop

The romance genre is on the rise. The current industry climate and romance reader demographics present a hole in the market that Epitome has an opportunity to fill. Right now, S&S does not have a romance imprint, which is a mistake given what competitors in the Big 5 have accomplished. These factors and more necessitate the need for this imprint.

## Industry

A need for comfort and self-care, mainstream acceptance of romance in other forms of media, and the BookTok phenomenon have all contributed to romantic fiction's renaissance. In terms of demographics, romance readers are more diverse than other general fiction readers, and yet the percentage of BIPOC authors is still significantly lower than the percentage of BIPOC romance readers. This disparity presents a clear opportunity to fill a hole in the market while promoting unique and inclusive content.

## *The State of Romance in General*

According to the Romance Writers of America (RWA), romantic fiction is a billion-dollar industry<sup>1</sup>. Between March 2020 and March 2021, romance comprised 18% of overall adult fiction sales with 47 million combined print and e-book units sold, a 24% increase from the same period one year prior.<sup>2</sup> Statista shows that this increase accounted for a growth of 1.2 million in print unit sales (see Figure 1 below). More recently, NPD BookScan reported that, in 2021, print book sales in the genre rose 32%<sup>3</sup>, showing a steady increase since pre-pandemic times.

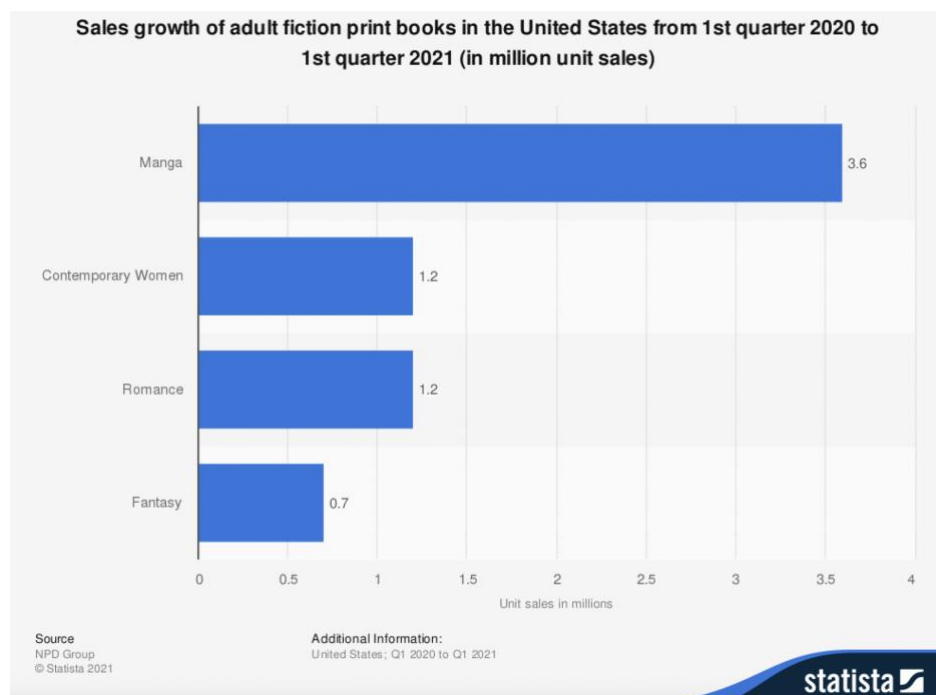


Figure 1: Book sales in the romance category increased by 1.2 million between the first quarters of 2020 and 2021<sup>4</sup>.

Escapism and the predictability of the romance novel structure have made the genre more popular during the Coronavirus pandemic: although a romance novel may fall into several subgenres and contain any number of tropes, the RWA maintains that “[t]wo basic elements

<sup>1</sup> Colyard, K.W. “Who Reads Romance Novels? Infographic Tells All.” *Bustle*. June 14, 2016. [Web](#).

<sup>2</sup> King, Rachel. “The Romance Novel Sales Boom Continues.” *Fortune*. Aug 21, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald, Moira. “Why Romance Novels, More Diverse Than Ever, Are Having a Moment.” *The Seattle Times*. Feb 10, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>4</sup> “Sales Growth of Adult Fiction Print Books in the United States from 1st Quarter 2020 to First Quarter 2021.” *Statista*. Apr 2021. [Web](#).

comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending<sup>5</sup>,” also known as a happily ever after (HEA). Such dependability and the guarantee of a neatly tied bow on the story have proven to be a form of self-care, “literary comfort food... that many readers craved in abundance during some very turbulent times<sup>6</sup>.” The uncertain ending of the pandemic and its indeterminate aftermath are sure to keep readers reaching for something happy and steadfast, which is why this upward trend in romance sales is likely to continue.

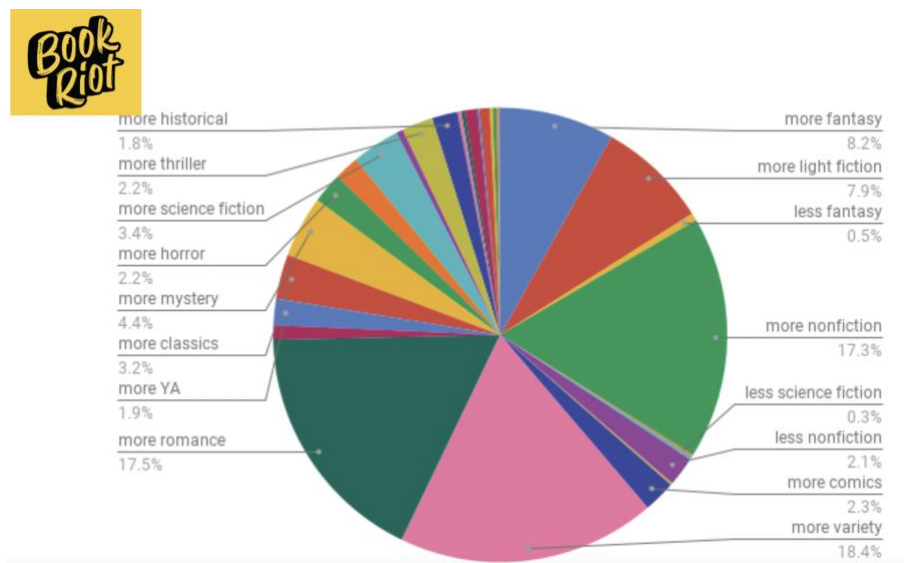


Figure 2: 17.5% of 5,117 respondents to the Book Riot Pandemic Reading Habits Survey said they read more romance<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, the immense growth of the genre overall (and, specifically, the historical subgenre in both print and e-book formats<sup>8</sup>) is fueled by other popular media, such as Netflix’s adaptation of Julia Quinn’s *Bridgerton*. In fact, after the adaptation premiered in December 2020, Quinn’s book series led romance sales in the first quarter of 2021<sup>9</sup>, with print book sales up more than 3,000% and e-book sales up 8,000% between January 2020 and January 2021<sup>10</sup>. Streaming

<sup>5</sup> About the Romance Genre.” Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>6</sup> King, Rachel. “The Romance Novel Sales Boom Continues.” *Fortune*. Aug 21, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>7</sup> “Pandemic Reading Habits Survey Results.” Book Riot. July 26, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>8</sup> “COVID-19 Lockdown Gives Romance a Lift, The NPD Group Says.” Nielsen Insights. Aug 19, 2020. [Web](#).

<sup>9</sup> “Adult Fiction Books Posted Highest Q1 Sales Since 2013, The NPD Group Says. Nielsen Insights. Apr 26, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>10</sup> “Bridgerton Infographic.” Nielsen Insights. May 24, 2021. [Web](#).

media putting romance in the mainstream (*Outlander*, *Virgin River*, *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*) has normalized it, made it part of the national conversation, and reduced the stigma behind enjoying the genre, thereby increasing demand.

The BookTok phenomenon has also contributed to the recent rise in romance in both the adult and young adult spheres<sup>11</sup>. Due to a large percentage of female users on TikTok seeking recommendations for the genre, which is disproportionately consumed by women<sup>12</sup>, romance titles like Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* and Elena Armas' *The Spanish Love Deception* (originally self-published but eventually picked up by S&S) are getting more attention<sup>13</sup>, yielding success for these titles and, once consumers have finished reading them, the author's other works and comparable titles. As one writer eloquently put it: "The protagonists of romance novels are largely women — and in a broader entertainment landscape that, until fairly recently, was largely focused on male protagonists, it's meaningful to dive into worlds where women's desires are taken seriously<sup>14</sup>."

Several factors have resulted in romance's recent success. Since the category is growing, I examined the genre's reader demographics to identify key opportunities in the market.

### *Romance Demographics and Opportunities*

Unsurprisingly, romance readership is mostly comprised of women, at 82%<sup>15</sup>, down from 84% one year earlier<sup>16</sup>, demonstrating that male readership is growing (most likely as a result of

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<sup>11</sup> Adult Fiction Books Posted Highest Q1 Sales Since 2013, The NPD Group Says. Nielsen Insights. Apr 26, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>12</sup> See [Romance Demographics and Opportunities](#).

<sup>13</sup> Chaudhry, Aliya. "How BookTok Is Changing Publishing with New Voices and Influence." *Observer*. Feb 03, 2022. [Web](#).

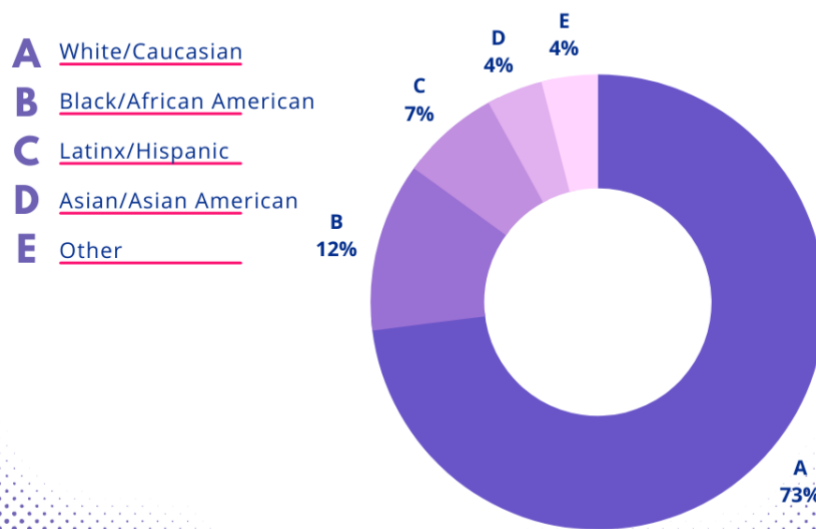
<sup>14</sup> Clark, Nicole. "How to get into romance books — and why you should." *Polygon*. Feb 14, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>15</sup> "The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America." From "About the Romance Genre." Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>16</sup> "Romance Readers by the Numbers." Nielsen Insights. May 26, 2016. [Web](#).

the proliferation of the genre in mainstream media). A 2017 survey<sup>17</sup> showed that 23% of romance readers are Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian/Asian American, (which is consistent with the findings of my Minimal Viable Product survey this year<sup>18</sup>, wherein 23.82% of respondents were not white). In other words, nearly a quarter of romance readers are people of color. Keep this statistic in mind as you continue reading.

## Romance Reader Ethnicity Demographics



(data via RWA)

Figure 3: The ethnic demographics of romance readers<sup>19</sup>.

Additionally, 11% of readers identify as “bisexual, pansexual, or other bi+ identity” or “gay or lesbian.” Moreover, 53% of romance readers are between 18 and 44 years old<sup>20</sup> (which, again, was consistent with the demographic of my MVP survey)<sup>21</sup>. This means that the majority of readers are Millennials and Generation Z – younger generations that are more multicultural.

<sup>17</sup> “The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America.” From “About the Romance Genre.” Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

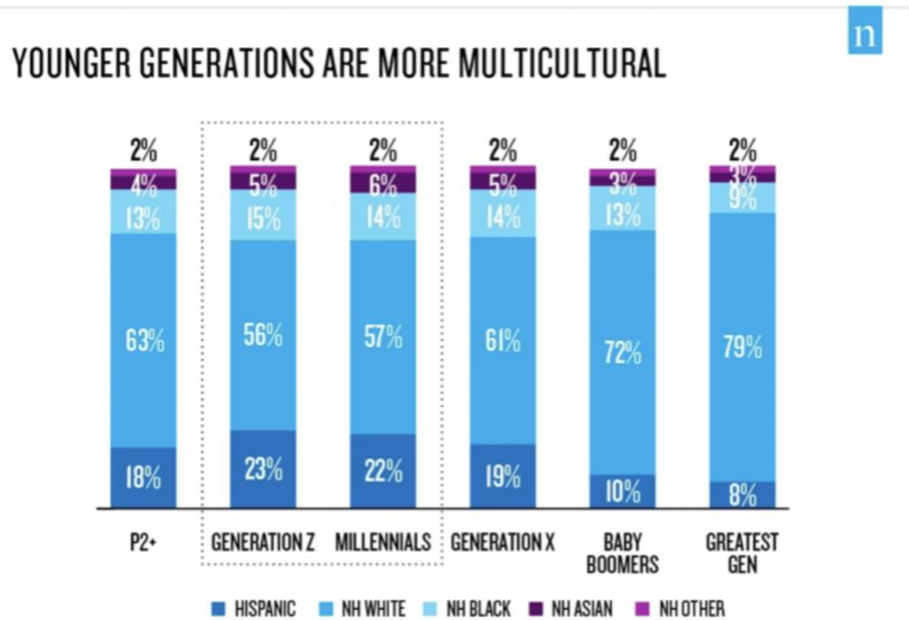
<sup>19</sup> Created in Canva using information from “The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America.” From “About the Romance Genre.” Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>20</sup> “Romance Readers by the Numbers.” Nielsen Insights. May 26, 2016. [Web](#).

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).



Since each generation is more diverse than the last, the multicultural representation in every type of media should also be growing over the years.<sup>22</sup>



Source: Nielsen NPOWER, % of average scaled installed, 1/15/2018, NH = Non-Hispanic

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Figure 4: Millennials and Generation Z are more multicultural than their generational predecessors<sup>23</sup>.

Leah Koch, co-owner of the Ripped Bodice, America’s first romance-specific bookstore, notes that younger readers are also more willing to read books about characters with experiences different from theirs: “The generation under 40 doesn’t care about the sexual orientation of the characters matching their own in the way that the older generation does. They’re more inclusive readers<sup>24</sup>.”

<sup>22</sup> Other consumer information: According to a Simmons brand catalyst report for Books: Romance/Erotica, the average household income of a romance reader is between \$60,000 and \$74,999. They lean “somewhat liberal” as far as political outlook; they live in a house, most likely in the Northeast census region. Their top brands include Clinique, Amazon Kindle, and Essie. Their top media brands include Barnes and Noble, All Recipes, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Star*.

<sup>23</sup> “Mass Appeal: A Look at the Cross-Cultural Impact of On-Screen Diversity.” Nielsen Insights. June 28, 2018. [Web](#).

<sup>24</sup> Kramer Bussel, Rachel. “A Wider Embrace: Romance Novels 2020.” *Publishers Weekly*. May 29, 2020. [Web](#).

The Ripped Bodice also annually publishes a State of Diversity report which aims to identify the percentage of books published by BIPOC authors in mainstream media. Their 2020 report (the most recent, due to the pandemic) found that only 12% of books published by leading romance publishers were written by BIPOC authors, which is an improvement over the prior year. Further, they found that, when counting all romance books published between 2016 and 2020, only 8.1% of them were written by BIPOC authors.

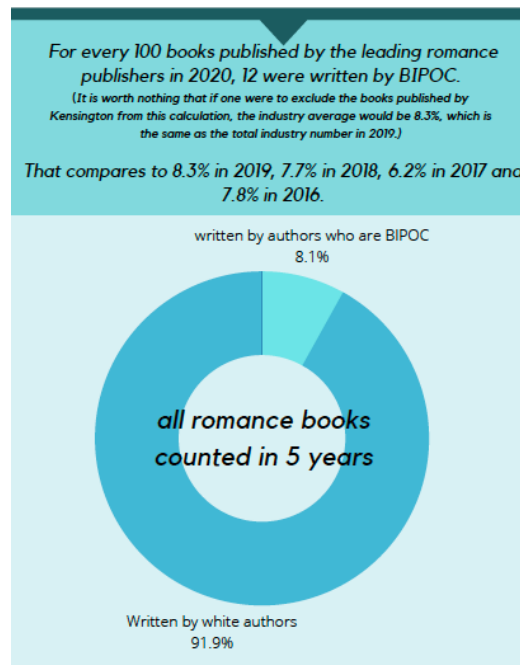


Figure 5: The Ripped Bodice found that only 8.1% of romance books in the last 5 years were written by BIPOC authors<sup>25</sup>.

Recall that over 23% of romance readers identify as BIPOC and you’ll immediately notice a need for change. This discrepancy demonstrates a clear hole in the market, as readers are being underserved. The imbalance presents the opportunity to create a space in mainstream romantic fiction wherein people from different intersections of marginalized background can see themselves represented<sup>26</sup> and marketed in mainstream media to the same degree as other books in the genre, all for a mass audience. That is the aim of Epitome, S&S’s new romance imprint.

<sup>25</sup> “The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing.” The Ripped Bodice. 2020. [Web](#).

<sup>26</sup> (Which I believe is valuable in of itself but was verified with my [MVP survey](#).)

## Competition

Previously, S&S had its own romance imprint, Crimson Romance, which was acquired in 2016 when S&S purchased Adams Media. In its 2017 State of Diversity Report, the Ripped Bodice stated that Crimson’s offerings were 29.3% written by BIPOC authors<sup>27</sup>, much more than most competitors and significantly improving S&S’s overall rating. However, the imprint closed in early 2018 due to “changing consumer reading habits and the continual evolution of the marketplace”<sup>28</sup>, presumably the emergence and market share competition of Kindle Unlimited<sup>29</sup>. Now, S&S’s BIPOC author percentage is *much* lower (see Figure 6 below). Frankly, we can do better, and this new imprint will help rectify this situation.

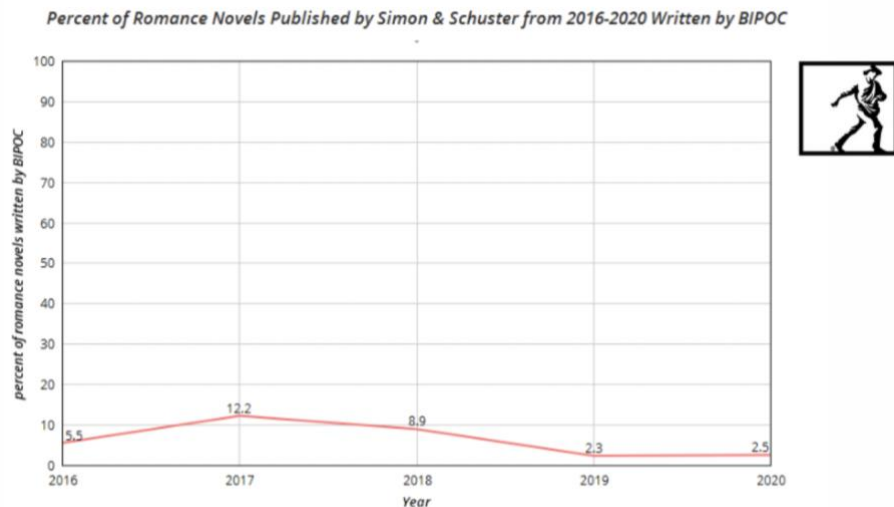


Figure 6: The percentage of Simon and Schuster’s BIPOC author-written romance novels in 2020 is only 2.5%<sup>30</sup>.

While S&S’s other imprints do acquire some romance titles, romance’s recent upswing suggests a need for S&S to allocate more resources toward acquiring into the genre and create a

<sup>27</sup> Flood, Allison. “Romance So White? Publishers Grapple with Racial Issues Amid Author Protests.” *The Guardian*. Mar 19, 2018. [Web](#).

<sup>28</sup> Milliot, Jim. “S&S Shuts Crimson Romance.” *Publishers Weekly*. Mar 15, 2018. [Web](#).

<sup>29</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster.

<sup>30</sup> “The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing.” *The Ripped Bodice*. 2020. [Web](#).

space to do so exclusively. Hence, Epitome: an imprint that publishes romance books in all subgenres exclusively by authors underrepresented in traditional publishing.

Epitome has several competitors in the Big 5 companies as well as independent publishers. For the purposes of this business plan, I considered the biggest competitors those at Big 5 publishers who publish original physical books, with a designated imprint or brand for adult romance specifically.

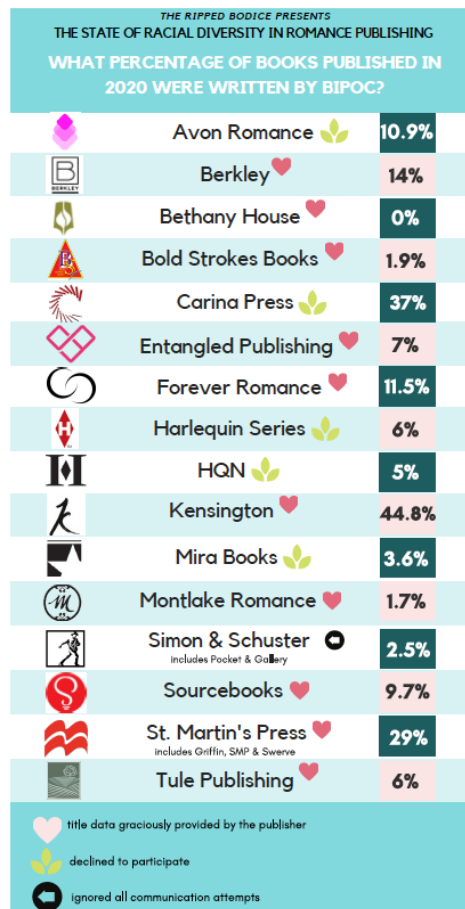


Figure 7: The Ripped Bodice presents the state of diversity by publisher or imprint<sup>31</sup>.

The main romance category competitors are Berkley Romance and Jove (PRH), Forever and Forever Yours (Hachette), Avon (HarperCollins), and Harlequin (HarperCollins, which includes the imprints Harlequin Series, HQN, Carina Press, and Mira Books, among others).

<sup>31</sup> “The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing.” The Ripped Bodice. 2020. [Web](#).

Secondary competitors include Entangled Publishing, Kensington Publishing Corporation, and Casablanca (Sourcebooks).

*Berkley/Jove (Penguin Random House)*

Penguin Random House reports that its sales in the genre increased by 50% in 2021<sup>32</sup>, making it a huge competitor in the romance field, due largely to its prolific romance offerings under Berkley, specifically Berkley Romance and Jove. PRH reports that in 2021 its romance books were “feminist and progressive, featuring protagonists from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, religions, body types, and gender and sexual preferences. The audience for romance has always been vast, so it’s fitting for the genre to expand and evolve in order to portray a diversity of experiences<sup>33</sup>.” PRH and Berkley have the right idea – expansion of diversity of all kinds is exactly what’s needed in the genre. However, in 2020, only 14% of the books Berkley published were written by BIPOC authors, so there’s still room for improvement as far as representing all voices.

Berkley is home to some of the biggest names in rom-com, including Emily Henry, Jasmine Guillory, and Helen Hoang, all bestsellers and, excluding Henry, BIPOC. Marquee authors like these lend Berkley a reputation for quality books. At the time of writing, Berkley publishes two books on the trade paperback *New York Times* bestsellers list (*The Love Hypothesis* and *People We Meet on Vacation*). Berkley also embraces genres popular with readers, for example, by acquiring and repackaging self-published works like *Ice Planet Barbarians* for the print-book reader.

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<sup>32</sup> Macdonald, Moira. “Why Romance Novels, More Diverse Than Ever, Are Having a Moment.” *The Seattle Times*. Feb 10, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>33</sup> “The Year in Books.” Penguin Random House. 2021. [Web](#).

Romance readers discover books on Instagram<sup>34</sup>, and Berkley has a strong following with 45,200. They have recently opened submissions to the masses, allowing them to search for works by writers without agented representation.

Berkley is publishing its first ace romance this year (*The Romantic Agenda*), and it has the opportunity to continue representing diverse sexual orientations more frequently. For example, the imprint's first trade paperback format female-female romance (*Something to Talk About*) was published in 2020<sup>35</sup>, and so there is plenty of room for more LGBTQIA content, especially where it intersects with the BIPOC experience. Berkley author Helen Hoang offers the brand both BIPOC and neurodivergent representation, which should be upheld with more authors who live this experience going forward. The imprint does publish more BIPOC authors than many Big 5 imprints (see Figure 7 above), but many of its lead titles (and therefore much of its marketing dollar allocations) go to white authors (for example, the *NYT* bestsellers listed above are by Emily Henry and Ali Hazelwood, both white).

Berkley does a wonderful job finding talented authors of diverse backgrounds who create quality content. Epitome will do the same, while adding elements of intersectional representation and using all its resources to champion books by underrepresented voices.

#### *Forever/Forever Yours (Hachette)*

Forever states its intent plainly: “We’re committed to publishing inclusive and diverse novels that reflect authentic experiences<sup>36</sup>.” This statement is comparable to Epitome’s mission, and Forever’s corporate webpage lists many BIPOC authors front and center, including rom-com authors Farrah Rochon and Farah Heron. Forever is home to the powerhouse Latinx author Abby

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>35</sup> Kramer Bussel, Rachel. “A Wider Embrace: Romance Novels 2020.” *Publishers Weekly*. May 29, 2020. [Web](#).

<sup>36</sup> “About Forever.” Read Forever. Hachette Book Group. Accessed Apr 04, 2022. [Web](#).

Jimenez, whose works are so popular that one of them (*The Happy Ever After Playlist*) will be adapted for film. Although Forever has visibly put much of its funding and energy behind BIPOC authors, Figure 7 above shows that 11.5% of the books it publishes are written by BIPOC writers, so there is still the possibility for progress.

Like Berkley, Forever also has an Instagram presence (34,000 followers) and an open submissions program, this time specifically for BIPOC writers. This stipulation drives home their mission to publish inclusive stories. This imprint is doing the work to make inclusivity visible; Epitome will further that goal by only publishing works featuring diverse characters in the lead and making that visible on book covers and online.

#### *Avon (HarperCollins)*

Avon is home to big names in BIPOC romance, such as Talia Hibbert, historical author Alyssa Cole, and newcomer Alexis Daria. It is also the home for other well-known authors Tessa Bailey, Sally Thorne (author of *The Hating Game*, recently adapted for film), and Meg Cabot. It has expansive historical romance offerings, with the *Bridgerton* series aiding its backlist sales. Avon's Instagram following is more than Forever's but still less than Berkley's, at 36,900.

Avon has the opportunity to mine popular self-published titles and repackage to add diversity to their content in terms of representation and genre. That is how Epitome plans to acquire its first titles and publish them within year 1.

#### *Harlequin (HarperCollins)*

Harlequin has long been the most iconic name in romance, originally for its bodice-ripping covers, but the brand has evolved to accommodate the modern audience. Its subgenres range from historical, contemporary rom-com, paranormal, romantic suspense, and young adult. Harlequin's Instagram following is huge, with an audience of 47,300.

Harlequin also launched the Harlequin Plus platform<sup>37</sup>, rivaling Kindle Unlimited's service, which for \$14.99 a month offers an e-book library as well as romantic movies and games. For those who prefer print books, users may select a print book bundle to be delivered to their home each month. This feature is innovative and unlike anything readily advertised by other Big 5 publishers.

Harlequin has several imprints that cater to specific segments of the romance reader population, in terms of demographic and format preference. Its imprint Carina Adores, for example, specifically publishes LGBTQ+ books in both e-book and trade paperback formats. Before it shut down in 2017, Harlequin's Kimani Romance imprint "feature[d] sophisticated, soulful and sensual African-American and multicultural heroes and heroines who develop fulfilling relationships as they lead lives full of drama, glamour and passion<sup>38</sup>." With the shuttering of that imprint, Harlequin considerably reduced its offerings of BIPOC authors, specifically African American authors<sup>39</sup>. Epitome will become a place in mainstream publishing where authors like Kimani's will be celebrated and marketed to mass audiences.

### *Entangled Publishing*

Entangled is an independent publisher that uses Macmillan's vast distribution to gain a larger audience<sup>40</sup>. Entangled publishes books in both the adult and young adult categories and is comprised of "thirteen imprints, with 42 titles appearing on the *USA Today* Bestsellers list and 14 titles on the *NYT* Bestsellers list<sup>41</sup>." Entangled Publishing has a respectable Instagram

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<sup>37</sup> "Get More of that Harlequin Feeling." Harlequin Plus. Accessed Apr 05, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>38</sup> "Harlequin Kimani Romance." Harlequin. Accessed Apr 05, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>39</sup> Ailworth, Erin. "Rallying Cry: Romance Publishing 2018." *Publishers Weekly*. Jun 08, 2018. [Web](#).

<sup>40</sup> "Macmillan and Entangled Sign Distribution Partnership." *Publishers Weekly*. Jan 08, 2013. [Web](#).

<sup>41</sup> "Entangled Publishing." Macmillan Publishers. Accessed Nov 01, 2021. [Web](#).



following at 13,800 and, with 7% of its 2020 titles written by BIPOC authors<sup>42</sup>, it also has room to grow in terms of racial diversity.

### *Kensington Publishing Corporation*

Kensington Publishing dominates the Ripped Bodice’s report, with 44.8% of its romance content written by BIPOC authors (see Figure 7 above), so I would be remiss to exclude them from the list of competitors. According to its website, “Kensington is considered a leader and innovator in such areas of publishing as African-American, cozy mysteries, westerns, and of course, romance<sup>43</sup>,” and Kensington uses PRH’s sales team to distribute its titles. The publisher has a following of 19,800 on Instagram and publishes in all genres, including romance and its subcategories.

### *Casablanca (Sourcebooks)*

Casablanca is an imprint of the independent publisher Sourcebooks and has 13,500 Instagram followers. Its website is one of the best among these competitors, allowing readers to discover books by beloved trope. It also lists all Book Club guides in a clearly visible tab, allowing readers to easily find materials to plan a successful discussion of a Casablanca title. However, the site is out of date, listing titles as “Coming Soon” that were published in Fall of 2021. Figure 7 shows that 9.7% of Sourcebooks’ romance content is written by BIPOC authors, but by browsing through their online catalog with the default sorting, I don’t see a cover featuring a person of color until page 3. Epitome’s cover designs will be entirely representative of people with different backgrounds.

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<sup>42</sup> “The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing.” The Ripped Bodice. 2020. [Web](#).

<sup>43</sup> “About Kensington Publishing: Our History.” Kensington Publishing Corporation. Accessed Apr 05, 2022. [Web](#).

### *More Competitors*

The Kindle Unlimited (KU) subscription service is a huge competitor, as 50.23% of respondents to my MVP survey said that they read more than 76 books per year, most of which are in the romance genre, and this subscription gives readers quick and easy access to a plethora of romance content. KU and services like it have also been cited as the reason for imprint closures, such as S&S Crimson and Harlequin Kimani, due to changes in consumer reading habits. However, “[t]he fact that the Big 5 publishing houses – Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster – haven’t really made any of their backlist available on KU seriously undermines it, considering their titles account for 60% of total US book sales<sup>44</sup>.” While Kindle Unlimited contains a plethora of content, it does not have the reputation for excellence that traditional publishing has.

Recently, many publishers have begun creating diversity-focused imprints<sup>45</sup>. However, the only one of these that concentrates on romance is PRH’s Joy Revolution, a young adult imprint. Since Epitome publishes only adult romance titles, it will have no direct competitor.

### Company Description

Epitome is S&S’s only romance imprint. Our tagline is “love every story,” the meaning of which is twofold: first, a promise that readers will love each title the imprint releases, and second, a reminder that every person’s journey of the heart is unique, important, and worthy of being told. The imprint’s mission is “To publish diverse and multifaceted romance novels that showcase the universality of love.” What that means is that Epitome is interested in publishing

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<sup>44</sup> “Most Interesting Book Stats of 2022.” The Literary Invertebrate. Blog. Jan 03, 2022. [Web](#). Statistic from Rosenblatt, Bill. “Why Ebook Subscription Services Will Finally Succeed in the Coming Decade.” *Forbes*. Jan 3, 2020. [Web](#).

<sup>45</sup> “Publishers Announce Plans for Dozens of New Imprints in 2020.” American Booksellers Association. Nov 24, 2020. [Web](#).

stories that represent every kind of person, especially looking at the intersections<sup>46</sup> of their identity which influence their unique point of view.

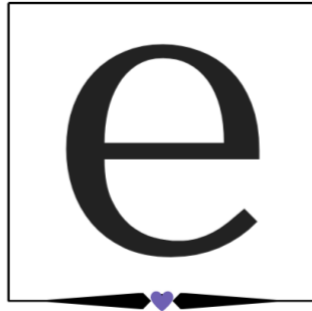


Figure 8: Epitome's colophon.

## Why Epitome Exists

While researching comparative titles for *What Happens in Rio*, one of my first-year lead titles<sup>47</sup>, I emailed the experts at The Ripped Bodice bookstore to ask for recommendations, since the internet yielded few results. I asked specifically for lesbian rom-coms released by a Big 5 publisher in trade paperback format, wherein both leads are women of color.

Co-owner Leah Koch replied<sup>48</sup>: The number of books she could think of that fulfilled all those criteria? Just one.

When allowing for a mass market paperback format instead, she could think of only one more. That means that there are only *two* print format female-female romantic comedies with two leads of color in the adult space published by big companies!<sup>49</sup> (At a minimum, this is a

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<sup>46</sup> Merriam-Webster defines *intersectionality* as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” Accessed Apr 9, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>47</sup> See [Content](#).

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix I: [Email to Leah Koch \(Co-Owner of The Ripped Bodice\)](#).

<sup>49</sup> I have since found one more comp title available in trade paperback format: *D’Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding*. Still, three comps to choose from isn’t great.

missed opportunity in the publishing world, since 92% of romance readers read print books, while 64% read e-books<sup>50</sup>.)

This sad fact alone should justify the need for Epitome, but I have more evidence: I conducted a survey in February 2022, wherein more than four hundred romance readers answered. 363 (77.4%) of respondents were white and 324 (65.99%) were heterosexual, but most still felt that there should be more representation, especially in terms of race, sexual orientation, and neurodivergence. Even respondents who hold the majority want to read about people unlike themselves. See Figures 9 and 10 below for details.

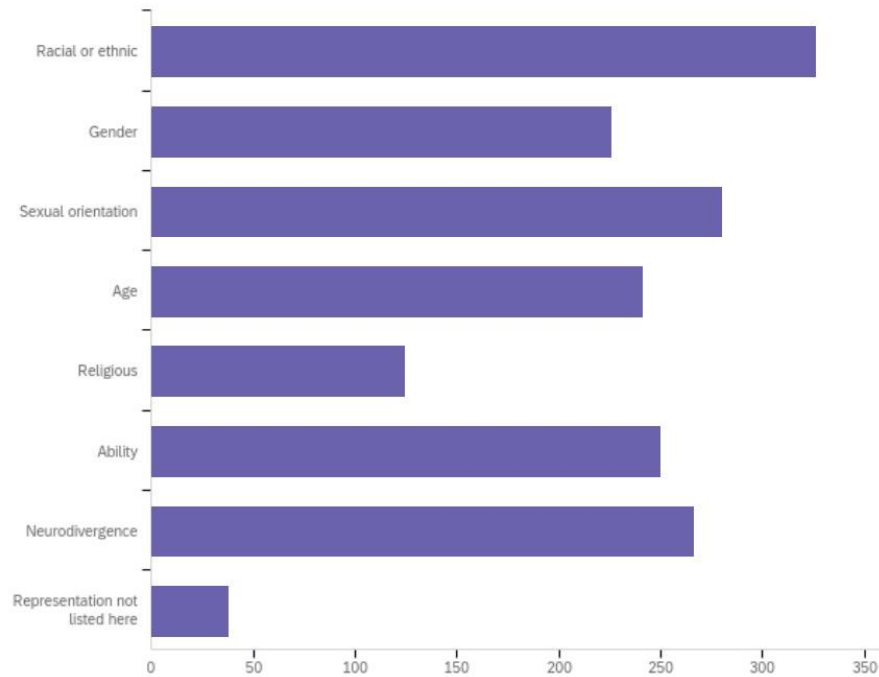


Figure 9: Responses to the following question:  
“What types of representation should there be more of in mainstream romance publishing? (Check all that apply.)<sup>51</sup>”

<sup>50</sup> “The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America.” From “About the Romance Genre.” Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

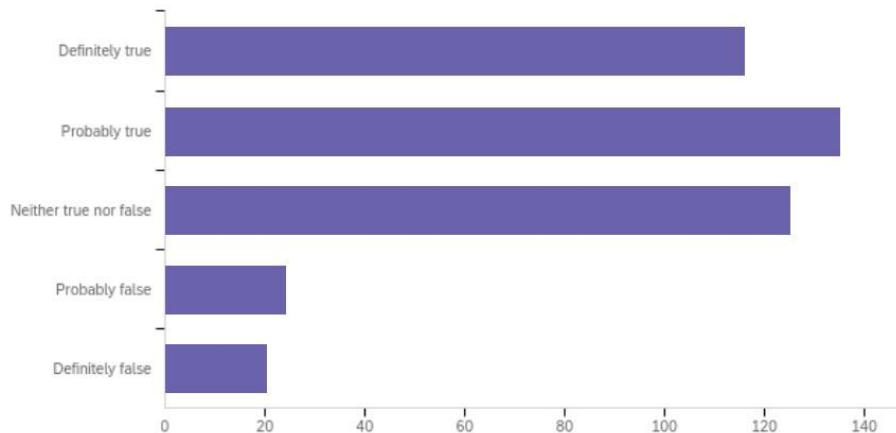


Figure 10: Responses to the following question:  
*"When choosing a book, representation of marginalized voices is important to me<sup>52</sup>."*

## Unique Value Proposition

Due to the proliferation of romance novels in the past few years, even non-romance imprints are acquiring in this category. While these competitors do also acquire diverse books, our imprint has a unique value proposition: Epitome is a space dedicated to telling diverse romantic stories so all romance readers can see themselves represented.

Having this designated space allows the imprint to focus on the intersectionality of different marginalized identities as well as explore content that often goes uncharted in traditional publishing but is more common in self-publishing. Epitome is also unique in that all its resources go toward promoting underrepresented authors.

Books published by Epitome feature unique characters with differences in regard to any combination of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, neurodivergence, socio-economic status, or religion. As stated above,<sup>53</sup> finding books about a particular marginalized identity (such as a lesbian of color with a partner who is also a woman of color) is

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>53</sup> See [Why Epitome Exists](#).

difficult in traditional publishing, so Epitome’s list is a place to broaden that representation to create more inclusive and representative content.

The imprint will also explore content that competitors don’t tackle often. For example, many respondents to the MVP survey stated that unconventional relationship structures such as polyamory<sup>54</sup> should be more normalized in mainstream publishing, which is why one of our first-year titles features a throuple. Other elements readers wish were more present in the genre include body size inclusivity, male points of view, interracial and multicultural romance, child-free-by-choice themes, older couples, and, critically, “own voices” authors<sup>55</sup>.

Importantly, Epitome seeks to make these stories mainstream, which entails marketing it to a mass romance audience rather than focusing on small segments. Epitome creates a space wherein all resources (including marketing dollars and publicity efforts) go toward promoting inclusive romance in the adult space.

## **Target Audience**

The primary target audience for the imprint is the romance reader, period. As one article aptly articulates:

“Though authors of color... hope for lasting change, many remain wary of traditional publishing after years of being disenfranchised or relegated to designated ‘diversity’ imprints. Those lines may have once served to create a place for works by authors of color, but today, many say, they unnecessarily segregate those books from mainstream romance<sup>56</sup>.”

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>55</sup> “#OwnVoices” is no longer the ideal term, because “[i]t is important to use the language that authors want to celebrate about themselves and their characters.” From Lavoie, Alaina. “Why We Need Diverse Books Is No Longer Using the Term #OwnVoices.” *We Need Diverse Books*. Jun 06, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>56</sup> Ailworth, Erin. “Rallying Cry: Romance Publishing 2018.” *Publishers Weekly*. Jun 08, 2018. [Web](#).

While Epitome’s secondary audience is the more niche, underserved audience (the 23% of romance readers who are minorities, for example, or the 11% who identify as LGBTQ+), a huge goal of the imprint is to make these stories mainstream and accessible, treating them not as a niche or an anomaly but as normal, because Epitome’s intersectional creators and the protagonists they write into existence *are* normal. To not market these books to all readers would be a detriment to Epitome’s mission. Another article puts it succinctly:

“What’s slowly changing...is how these books are being marketed. Until recently... publishers kept these books very segmented — marketing Black romances, for example, only to Black audiences, or gay romances only to gay audiences. ‘There wasn’t yet this general understanding that yes, you can market those to everybody, the same way you market books by white people or by straight people to everybody<sup>57</sup>.’”

The tertiary target audience is male readers, who account for 18% of romance readers<sup>58</sup> and one third of erotica audiobook listeners<sup>59</sup>. As one respondent of the MVP survey stated: “...romance novels need to be also marketed to men to help guide them in how they are treating women. So I would say more expansive marketing is missing. Romance is no longer for bored housewives.” By using mass channels to target a male audience in addition to the regular romance reader, Epitome will help proliferate, destigmatize, and normalize the genre in the mainstream.

More details regarding marketing lead titles can be found in a section below<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Macdonald, Moira. “Why Romance Novels, More Diverse Than Ever, Are Having a Moment.” *The Seattle Times*. Feb 10, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>58</sup> “The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America.” From “About the Romance Genre.” Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>59</sup> Wood, Heloise. “A Third of Erotic Audiobooks Downloaded by Men.” *The Bookseller*. Feb 13, 2018. [Web](#).

<sup>60</sup> See [Lead Title Marketing](#).

## Product Description

Epitome will publish 352-page trade paperback physical books with glossy covers as well as e-books. The cost of all our first-run trade paperback books will be \$17.99, like other recent S&S romance trade paperback originals (examples: *The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas, on-sale 02/21/2021; *Sari, Not Sari* by Sonya Singh, on-sale 04/05/2022; *Bluebird* by Genevieve Graham, on-sale 04/05/2022). I considered eventually raising the price to \$18.99 to keep up with the increased costs of production due to the pandemic, but Target will not sell any trade paperbacks priced over \$17.99. Therefore, because romance has a following in Target<sup>61</sup>, we decided to keep that price. Using this price and format as a guide, the cost of e-book editions for the same books will be \$13.99<sup>62</sup>. An additional revenue stream is subsidiary rights sales for foreign rights to other territories, for which I have assumed 5% of combined print and digital book sales<sup>63</sup>.

(Please note that, despite the fact that 35% of romance readers read audiobooks<sup>64</sup>, that format has not been included in the Epitome business proposal or financial modeling. This is because S&S's Audio division publishes and retains the sales for any audio works that are published by the company<sup>65</sup>.)

Epitome will publish romance novels from all adult subgenres, including contemporary, rom-com, historical, erotica, paranormal, sci-fi/fantasy, and romantic suspense.

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<sup>61</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster.

<sup>62</sup> E-book pricing assumption from the Pricing Assumptions sheet of the EB\_EA Assumptions Handout ([Appendix D, Sheet 1](#)).

<sup>63</sup> For more information on the revenue streams, see [Financials](#).

<sup>64</sup> "The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America." From "About the Romance Genre." Romance Writers of America website. Accessed Oct 30, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>65</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster.



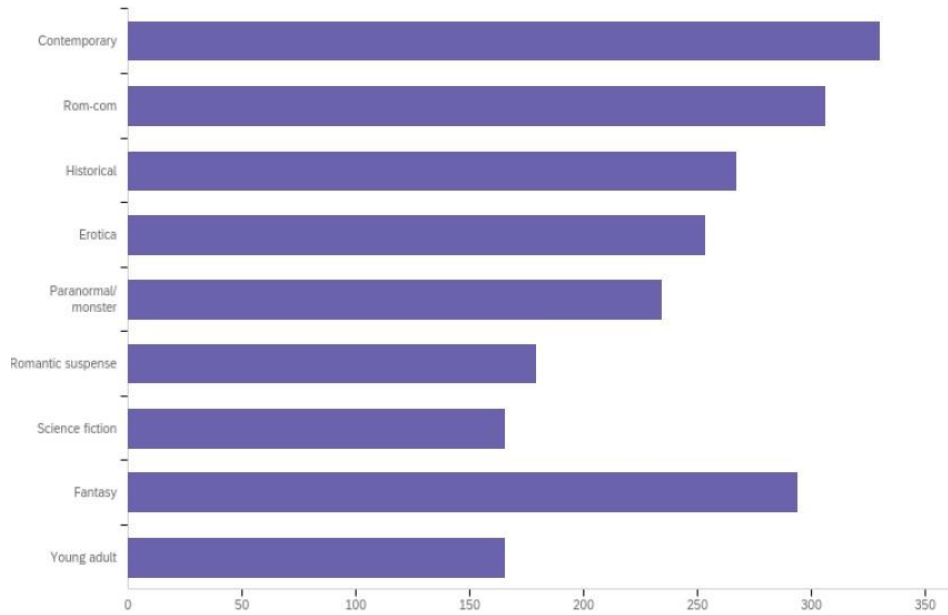


Figure 11: Responses to the following question: “Choose all of your preferred romance subgenres<sup>66</sup>.”

Rather than allocate a certain percentage of our list each year to a particular subgenre, Epitome will focus on quality writing and the representation of lead characters. For financial modeling, the products are grouped in categories based on sales projections<sup>67</sup>.

## Content

Epitome will publish three books in year 1, all acquired in year 0. All three titles were acquired with a three-book deal, ensuring content for years 2 and 3. In total, Epitome will publish five books in year 2, eight books in year 3, ten books in year 4, and twenty books in year 5. The full five-year publishing schedule is below.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>67</sup> See [Production Costs](#).

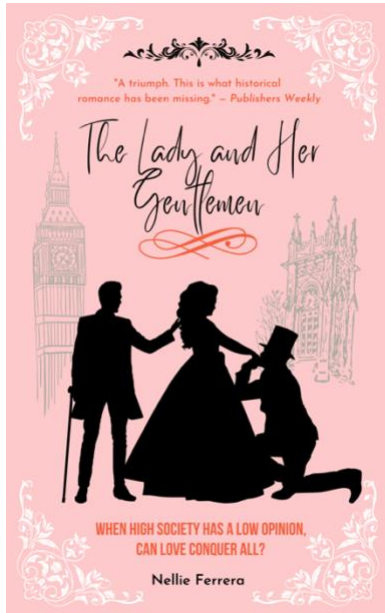
Book	Category	Publication Date	Release Year	Season	Acquisition Year
Book1	Mid seller	03/21/23	Year 1	Spring	Year 0
Book2	High seller	06/13/23	Year 1	Summer	Year 0
Book3	Mega bestseller	09/19/23	Year 1	Fall	Year 0
Book4	Low seller	01/09/24	Year 2	Spring	Year 0
Book5	Low seller	03/19/24	Year 2	Spring	Year 0
Book6	Mid seller	06/11/24	Year 2	Summer	Year 0
Book7	High seller	09/17/24	Year 2	Fall	Year 0
Book8	Mid seller	10/15/24	Year 2	Fall	Year 0
Book9	Low seller	01/14/25	Year 3	Spring	Year 1
Book10	Mid seller	03/11/25	Year 3	Spring	Year 1
Book11	Low seller	05/13/25	Year 3	Summer	Year 1
Book12	Mega bestseller	06/03/25	Year 3	Summer	Year 1
Book13	Low seller	06/10/25	Year 3	Summer	Year 1
Book14	Mid seller	08/12/25	Year 3	Fall	Year 1
Book15	High seller	09/16/25	Year 3	Fall	Year 1
Book16	Mid seller	10/14/25	Year 3	Fall	Year 1
Book17	Low seller	01/13/26	Year 4	Spring	Year 2
Book18	Low seller	03/10/26	Year 4	Spring	Year 2
Book19	Low seller	04/21/26	Year 4	Spring	Year 2
Book20	Low seller	05/12/26	Year 4	Summer	Year 2
Book21	Mega bestseller	06/09/26	Year 4	Summer	Year 2
Book22	Mid seller	06/23/26	Year 4	Summer	Year 2
Book23	Mid seller	08/04/26	Year 4	Fall	Year 2
Book24	Low seller	08/25/26	Year 4	Fall	Year 2
Book25	High seller	09/15/26	Year 4	Fall	Year 2
Book26	Mid seller	10/06/26	Year 4	Fall	Year 2
Book27	Low seller	01/12/27	Year 5	Spring	Year 3
Book28	Low seller	01/26/27	Year 5	Spring	Year 3
Book29	Low seller	02/09/27	Year 5	Spring	Year 3
Book30	Low seller	03/16/27	Year 5	Spring	Year 3
Book31	Mid seller	04/27/27	Year 5	Spring	Year 3
Book32	Low seller	05/04/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book33	Mid seller	05/18/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book34	High seller	06/01/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book35	Low seller	06/15/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book36	Mid seller	06/29/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book37	Low seller	07/06/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book38	High seller	07/20/27	Year 5	Summer	Year 3
Book39	Mega bestseller	08/10/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book40	Low seller	08/24/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book41	High seller	09/07/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book42	Low seller	09/21/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book43	Low seller	10/05/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book44	Mid seller	11/02/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book45	High seller	11/16/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3
Book46	Low seller	12/07/27	Year 5	Fall	Year 3

Epitome’s three year 1 lead titles are *The Lady and Her Gentlemen*, *What Happens in Rio*, and *Defy the Stars*<sup>68</sup>. These were chosen because of the popularity of their subgenres (see Figure 11 above) as well as their ability to embody underrepresented elements and themes

<sup>68</sup> For complete details on these three titles, see Appendix H: [Inaugural Year Title Tip Sheets](#).

indicated by respondents of the MVP survey. For an example of lead title marketing, see the Marketing section<sup>69</sup> below.

### *The Lady and Her Gentlemen*



Subgenre: Historical

On-Sale Date: March 21, 2023 (to coincide with *Bridgerton* season 3 release on Netflix)

Synopsis: A steamy historical romance in which a throuple in reimagined Regency England navigate the realities of societal expectations and propriety.

Elements That Address Responses to the MVP Survey<sup>70</sup>:

Polyamory (reverse-harem), non-monogamous relationships, Latinx author and lead characters, non-virgin main characters, socio-economic representation, physical disability representation, and “more spicy romances.”

Comp Titles: The best editorial comparative title I could find (namely, a polyamorous regency romance) is L. Rowyn’s *Arranging Paradise*<sup>71</sup> series, which is available through Kindle Unlimited. From traditional publishers, I chose to compare this book to those regency romances I could find in abundance, namely those between a man and a woman. They are:

- *Bringing Down the Duke* by Evie Dunmore (Berkley – Penguin Random House, TP format), released September 3, 2019. RTD Bookscan sales: 24,703.
- *A Lady’s Guide to Mischief and Mayhem* by Manda Collins (Forever – Hachette Book Group), released November 11, 2020. RTD Bookscan sales: 21,748.

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<sup>69</sup> See [Lead Title Marketing](#).

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>71</sup> Rowyn, L. “A Rational Arrangement.” GoodReads. Accessed Apr 11, 2022. [Web](#).

- *The Wisteria Society of Lady Scoundrels* by India Holton (Berkley – Penguin Random House), released June 15, 2021. RTD Bookscan sales: 17,623.

The average sales of these three titles is 21,358, and because Bookscan does not account for all bookstore sales, I am assuming at least 20% higher sales<sup>72</sup>, or approximately another 4,271 or so books. Given this information and the fact that most of these sales are for books not yet in backlist, the total print run will therefore be 35,000.

### *What Happens in Rio*



Subgenre: Contemporary romantic comedy

On-Sale Date: June 13, 2023

Synopsis: While on a trip to Rio de Janeiro to close her late mother’s estate, shy writer Deb falls for vivacious Carnival performer Karine, whose life could not be more different. Deb discovers her own identity and a swoon-worthy romance in this multicultural, body-positive, lesbian travel summer read.

Elements That Address Responses to the MVP Survey<sup>73</sup>:

More representation in race and sexual orientation, cross-cultural, international romance, diversity in setting, body size inclusivity, intelligent strong women, socio-economic representation, occupational variety, and “More realistic scenes about the female orgasm and what it takes to get there.”

Comp Titles: The only true editorial comps, provided by Leah Koch<sup>74</sup>, are:

<sup>72</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation with Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan, wherein she estimated that 80% of sales are reported to Bookscan.

<sup>73</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

<sup>74</sup> For full comp title criteria, see Appendix I: [Email to Leah Koch \(Co-Owner of The Ripped Bodice\)](#).

- *Meet Me in Madrid* by Verity Cole (Carina Press – Harlequin – HarperCollins, TP format), released October 26, 2021. Bookscan RTD sales: 673.
- *How to Find a Princess* by Alyssa Cole (Avon – HarperCollins, MM format), released May 25, 2021. Bookscan RTD sales: 3,154.
- *D’Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* by Chencia C. Higgins<sup>75</sup> (Carina Press – Harlequin – HarperCollins, TP format), released January 25, 2022. Bookscan RTD sales: 707.

Since these books have low sales (I assume due to little marketing and awareness), these comps are not indicative of *What Happens in Rio*’s sales potential. Instead, because we will heavily promote our year 1 titles, I used these romantic comedies as sales comp titles:

- *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* by Talia Hibbert (Avon – HarperCollins, TP format), released November 5, 2019. Bookscan RTD sales: 51,334.
- *While We Were Dating* by Jasmine Guillory (Berkley – Penguin Random House, TP format), released July 13, 2021. Bookscan RTD sales: 49,317.
- *The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas (Atria – Simon and Schuster, TP format), released February 8, 2022. RTD Bookscan sales: 67,215.

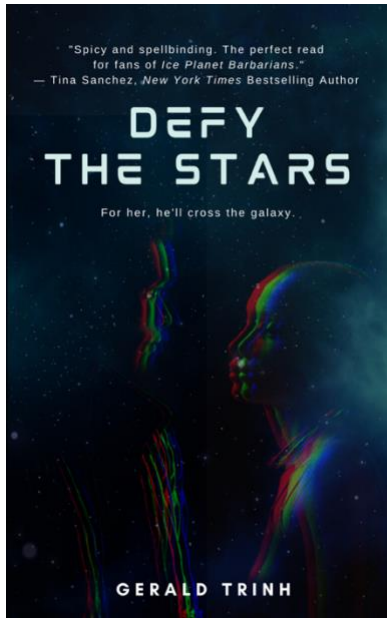
The average sales of these three titles is 55,955, and because Bookscan does not account for all bookstore sales, I am assuming at least 20% higher sales<sup>76</sup>, or approximately another 11,191 or so books. Given this information and the fact that most of these sales are for books not yet in backlist, the total print run will therefore be 75,000.

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<sup>75</sup> This title was not provided by Leah Koch but was discovered after our conversation.

<sup>76</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation with Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan, wherein she estimated that 80% of sales are reported to Bookscan.

*Defy the Stars*



Subgenre: Science fiction/ fantasy

On-Sale Date: September 19, 2023

Synopsis: An interplanetary *Romeo and Juliet* retelling starring Hien Vinh, son of the emperor of the planet Aeon, and Idryssa Findall, Hien's neurodivergent love interest who is also the princess of his enemy planet.

Elements That Address Responses to the MVP Survey<sup>77</sup>:

More representation in race, male POV, male writers, “Asian male leads,” cross-cultural, interracial, diversity in setting, focus on consent, “diverse own voices options,” and “interplanetary romance.”

Comp Titles: Editorially and tonally, Sarah J. Maas' *A Court of Thorns and Roses* is a perfect comparative title, but its sales make it impossible to use for a sales comp. Instead, I used these books for an approximation of sales:

- *How to Stop Time* by Matt Haig (Penguin Publishing Group – Penguin Random House, TP format), released June 11, 2019. Bookscan RTD sales: 47,950.
- *Ice Planet Barbarians* by Ruby Dixon (Berkley – Penguin Random House, TP format), released November 30, 2021. Bookscan RTD sales: 37,442.
- *Barbarian Alien* by Ruby Dixon (Berkley – Penguin Random House, TP format), released January 25, 2022. Bookscan RTD sales: 17,890.

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<sup>77</sup> See Appendix K: [Minimum Viable Product \(MVP\) Survey](#).

The average sales of these three titles is 34,427, and because Bookscan does not account for all bookstore sales, I am assuming at least 20% higher sales<sup>78</sup>, or approximately another 6,885 or so books. Given this information and the fact that most of these sales are for books not yet in backlist, the total print run will therefore be 50,000.

Note: Full fact sheets for all three titles are available in the appendices<sup>79</sup>.

## **Future Vision**

Epitome will include books with even more underrepresented characters and content in the future, as inspired by results of the MVP survey. For instance, in year 2, in addition to the sequels of the year 1 lead titles, Epitome will publish a paranormal romance by an indigenous author about a native protagonist with mental illness, as well as a fantasy romance featuring two trans leads, one of whom is hearing-impaired. In year 3, it will publish a second-chance rom-com about an interracial older couple who are already married and child-free by choice, in addition to a romantic suspense starring a gay Muslim protagonist and a love interest with multiple sclerosis. Year 3 will feature a gothic romance about a non-American immigrant male main character and love interest who is a woman in a STEM career. All these stories will be told by people who have lived the experiences of the main character, previously referred to as #OwnVoices literature<sup>80</sup>.

Series Epitome acquires, especially in the contemporary and historical subgenres, come with tremendous potential for *New York Times* bestsellerdom and book club selection. In years 5 and beyond, the marketing team will be tasked with developing book club guides to make titles

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<sup>78</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation with Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan, wherein she estimated that 80% of sales are reported to Bookscan.

<sup>79</sup> See Appendix H: [Inaugural Year Title Tip Sheets](#).

<sup>80</sup> Lavoie, Alaina. "Why We Need Diverse Books Is No Longer Using the Term #OwnVoices." We Need Diverse Books. Jun 06, 2021. [Web](#).

more appealing choices and enable readers to talk about the imprint's wonderful content more easily.

After year 5, depending on resources and ability to hire more staff, Epitome may grow to include a young adult editor to build a list and further our mission in the teen space. (While young adult books have more intersectional representation than in the adult sphere, there's plenty of leeway for further advancement.)

## Stakeholders

Epitome will serve each of our stakeholders, either in terms of financial or non-financial interests. The stakeholders are as follows: the parent company, Simon and Schuster; the imprint's employees; and our consumers, romance readers.

### **Parent Company**

S&S will gain its only imprint specializing in the wildly successful romance genre<sup>81</sup>, breaking even and turning profitable by year 3, according to financial projections<sup>82</sup>, which will prove that Epitome is a wise financial investment for S&S. The quality content Epitome publishes will earn accolades from both trade publications and consumers. Epitome's content will also increase the parent company's percentage of romance novels written by BIPOC authors, bringing it in closer proximity to its competitors. (As a reminder, S&S currently has one of the lowest percentages of BIPOC authors writing romance, at 2.5%, while all its Big 5 competitors outperform in this area. See Figure 12 below.) The uniqueness of the imprint will earn S&S positive publicity for prioritizing diversity in the adult romance space and give it a reputation for

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<sup>81</sup> See [The State of Romance in General](#).

<sup>82</sup> See [Financials](#).



extraordinary storytelling. Epitome will make S&S the go-to house for diverse, underrepresented, and intersectional voices in romantic fiction.

## Percent of Romance Novels Written by BIPOC

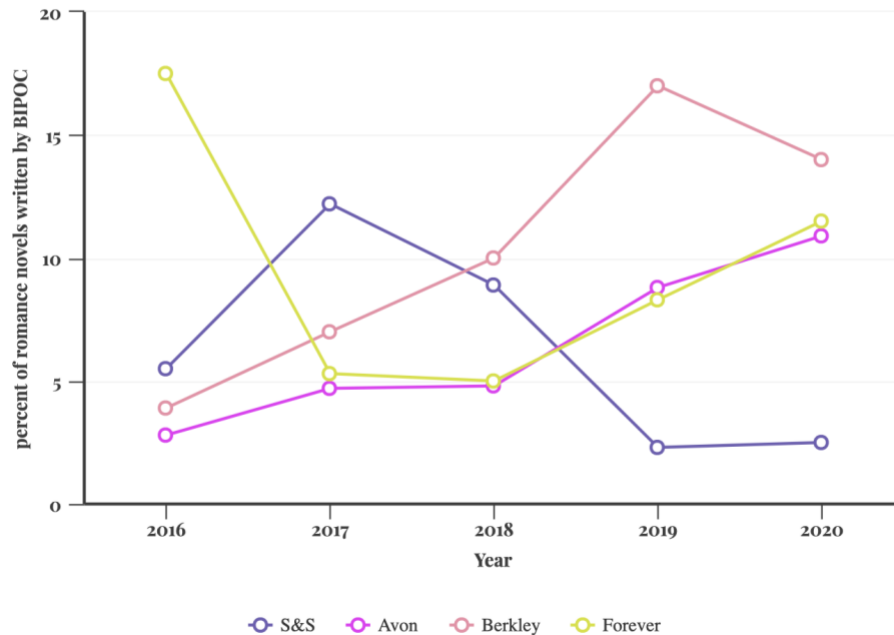


Figure 12: Simon and Schuster’s BIPOC author romance representation versus three of its Big 5 competitors<sup>83</sup>.

## Employees

Epitome offers employees an inclusive and collaborative work environment with wages competitive with the industry, including 30% taxes and benefits and a 3% raise per year<sup>84</sup>. Since we are part of S&S, employees will enjoy all the benefits the parent company has to offer, such as health insurance plans for same-sex domestic partners and family members, including medical, vision, and dental. Other benefits are flexible work from home options, paid time off,

<sup>83</sup> Graph created using Venngage with data from “The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing.” The Ripped Bodice. 2020. [Web](#). For complete competitor percentages, see [Competition](#).

<sup>84</sup> See [Staffing](#).

retirement plans, life insurance, hiring referral bonuses, and stock options in the umbrella company, Paramount<sup>85</sup>.

Because Epitome focuses on underrepresented voices, we will do our best to hire employees from all backgrounds to ensure an authentic reading experience for our audience. Additionally, diversity and sensitivity seminars taught by qualified trainers will be held monthly to ensure the work environment is harmonious, well-informed, and constantly improving.

## **Consumers**

As important stakeholders in the imprint's success, Epitome's consumers will also be served. The romance reader is well acquainted with tropes, plot devices routinely employed in the genre<sup>86</sup>, so what makes Epitome's books special is the unique points of view of their lead characters. Epitome's promise to readers is that we will publish high-quality romance novels about underrepresented characters that explore the universality of love. The books will be available in the formats they read most, for a price competitive with the marketplace.

## **Sales and Marketing Strategy**

Epitome has a broad sales strategy as well as comprehensive plans for marketing both the imprint's launch and each individual title. The budgets for both marketing plans are shown in the figure below.

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<sup>85</sup> Benefits obtained from "Careers at Simon & Schuster." Simon and Schuster Corporate Website. Accessed Apr 09, 2022. [Web](#).

<sup>86</sup> Carr, Susanna. "What is a Romance Trope?" Author's Personal Blog. Mar 11, 2020. [Web](#).

## Epitome Marketing Budgets

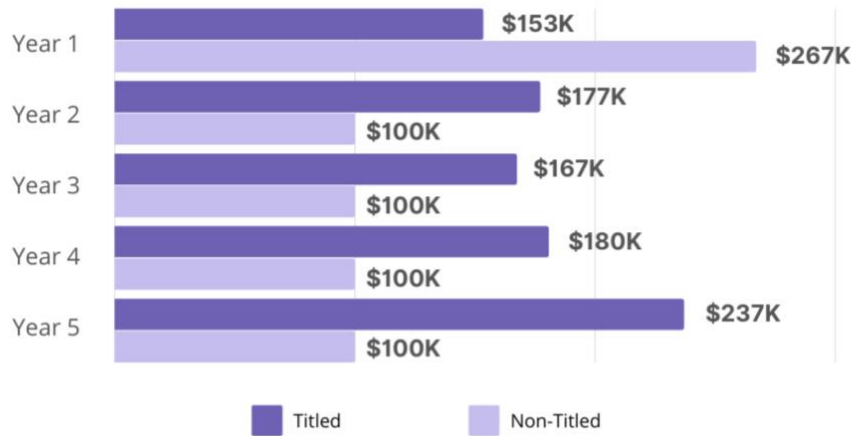


Figure 13: Epitome's Titled (Lead Title) and Non-Titled (T&E and Go-to-Market) marketing budgets<sup>87</sup>.

Epitome plans to market widely to reach a general audience and make romance (and especially diverse romance) mainstream. We will also take care to target our secondary audience, the underrepresented and marginalized audience members who now see themselves represented, which will entice authors to join our brand.

### Sales Strategy

Epitome's sales strategy will be very similar to other imprints in S&S's portfolio. Corporate allocations go toward funding salaries for S&S's central services sales team, whose relationships with B2B accounts will inform how they will best sell Epitome's books. The sales team will be able to properly position the titles based on what the sales team learns about marketing and publicity plans for the book. Since the year 1 titles are all by debut authors, they might be easier to pitch than an existing author: because there is no track record to refer to, the sales team can pick any comp title to help position the books. The sales pitches will be based on

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix A: [Income Statement](#).

their relationship with the buyer – knowing the history of the account, what they’ve purchased before, and how it sold<sup>88</sup>.

Sales will offer accounts a standard discount rate of approximately 50% and assume a returns rate of 25% for frontlist trade paperback titles and 15% for backlist titles<sup>89</sup>. The sales team will relay the publisher’s marketing plans for each book, suggest special editions for the title, and pitch the book for special promotions. For example, *What Happens in Rio* would be a great choice for the B&N Romance Book Club, a Summer Reading promotional table, or Black History Month and Pride Month placement. *The Lady and Her Gentlemen* would be great for a Books Like *Bridgerton* promotion or Latinx Heritage Month placement. *Defy the Stars* would be a great choice for a table themed around Asian American authors, and all of Epitome’s books would be great for Valentine’s Day promotions. Co-op pools will also be offered<sup>90</sup>. To signal to indie bookstores that the Epitome titles are going to be big, Epitome will pay for banner ads on Edelweiss to encourage sales (a worthwhile investment at only \$300 each).

Although I assume actual sales for each of the four categories in the financial model, we will announce a print run of 250,000 copies, a positioning statement that signals to the industry that we believe in our books<sup>91</sup>.

In terms of romance sales, especially contemporary romance, Amazon usually purchases the most books, then Barnes and Noble and Books-A-Million, independent bookstores (we’ll especially target romance specialty bookstores like The Ripped Bodice, Meet Cute, and Love’s

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<sup>88</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation with Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan.

<sup>89</sup> The discount and returns rates assumptions based on information from Multimedia Financial Analysis II, NYU Spring 2022 (Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster).

<sup>90</sup> More about planned co-op pools can be found in [Lead Title Marketing](#).

<sup>91</sup> Actual print runs have been assumed by category, which are based on comps. For more information, see [Production Costs](#).

Sweet Arrow), Target (especially for debuts and rom-coms), and then wholesalers which distribute to libraries<sup>92</sup>.

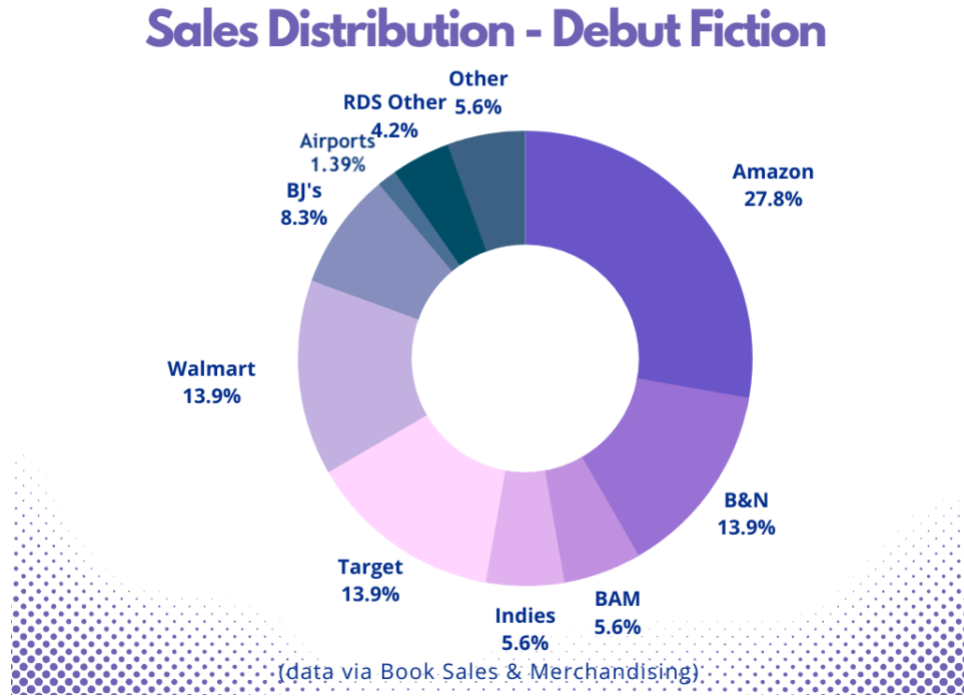


Figure 14: Proportions of sales distribution for debut fiction<sup>93</sup>.

## Go To Market Plan

Epitome’s financial model includes non-titled marketing for each year, which contains the staff travel and entertainment (T&E) expense, assumed at 5%<sup>94</sup> of staffing costs. Complete non-titled marketing budgets can be seen below.

Table 1: Non-titled marketing budgets for years 1–5.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
\$266,978	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000

The imprint has an extensive launch marketing plan for year 1, which is why the budget is more than doubled for years 2 through 5. The year 1 (go-to-market) budget is split as follows.

<sup>92</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation with Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan.

<sup>93</sup> For more information about distribution assumptions, see Appendix J: [Distribution Grid](#).

<sup>94</sup> T&E assumptions from “Overhead Expense Notes,” Multimedia Financial Analysis II, NYU Spring 2022, class 4 (Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster).

# Go-to-Market Budget

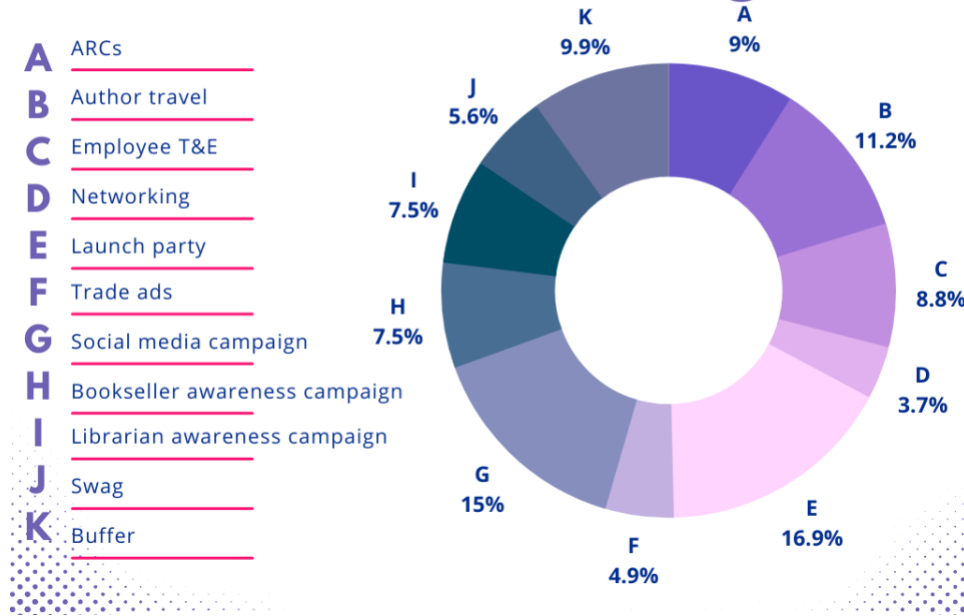


Figure 15: The imprint's non-titled marketing budget allocations<sup>95</sup>.

## Goals

As of now, the publishing landscape includes few high-selling titles by authors of color with other identity intersections (such as LGBTQIA, disability, neurodivergence). I believe a large part of this misfortune is due to poor marketing and lack of consumer awareness. Epitome's strategy is to market our titles the way other imprints market romance by white authors: extensively and to everyone. As one article pertinently states:

“But, like being shelved in the black section, black authors also believed that being part of a segregated line limited their sales, cutting them off from readers of other races who might also enjoy their work. Some former Harlequin authors even alleged that Kimani had been given separate and unequal treatment by the publisher: less marketing, fewer chances for authors to promote their books<sup>96</sup>.”

<sup>95</sup> For the source of my marketing estimates and full budget breakdown, see Appendix F: [Marketing Budgeting](#).

<sup>96</sup> Beckett, Lois. “Fifty Shades of White: The Long Fight Against Racism in Romance Novels. *The Guardian*. Apr 04, 2019. [Web](#).

We aim to change that, and 100% of our resources will go toward making these authors visible. With the financial backing of a Big 5 company and an inflated marketing budget, we hope to help normalize romantic fiction about diverse, marginalized, and intersectional protagonists.

The overall goal of the launch marketing plan is to create excitement in the eyes of consumers as well as booksellers and librarians, and to announce ourselves to agents who will submit manuscripts to us in the future. The marketing and publicity teams are responsible for the channels through which Epitome will reach these audiences. Specific marketing responsibilities include maintaining the imprint's corporate IT-created website and launching an imprint newsletter and social media channels (especially community-based visual media like Instagram and TikTok). The marketing team intends to obtain 10,000 followers on Instagram by the beginning of year 2<sup>97</sup>.

### *The Plan*

The imprint's launch marketing plan includes trade advertising, a consumer social media campaign, bookseller and librarian awareness campaigns, concentrated networking efforts, and a splashy launch party.

The imprint will pay for placement in major trade publications. For instance, we will create a designated announcement email for distribution through *Publishers Weekly* (approximately \$6,000<sup>98</sup>), which will include our mission statement, why our imprint is important, who our authors are, and links to galley giveaways. (We plan to pay for this placement, but of course, we will pitch our press release through *PW* as well, because free media would be even better.) We will pay for similar designated newsletter ad space in Shelf

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<sup>97</sup> See Appendix G: [Instagram Mockup](#).

<sup>98</sup> This cost estimate is based off a conversation with Brian McLendon, Vice President, Associate Publisher, and Marketing Director of Grand Central Publishing and Twelve at Hachette Book Group.

Awareness (also estimated at \$6,000). An example of that inaugural year announcement is shown below.

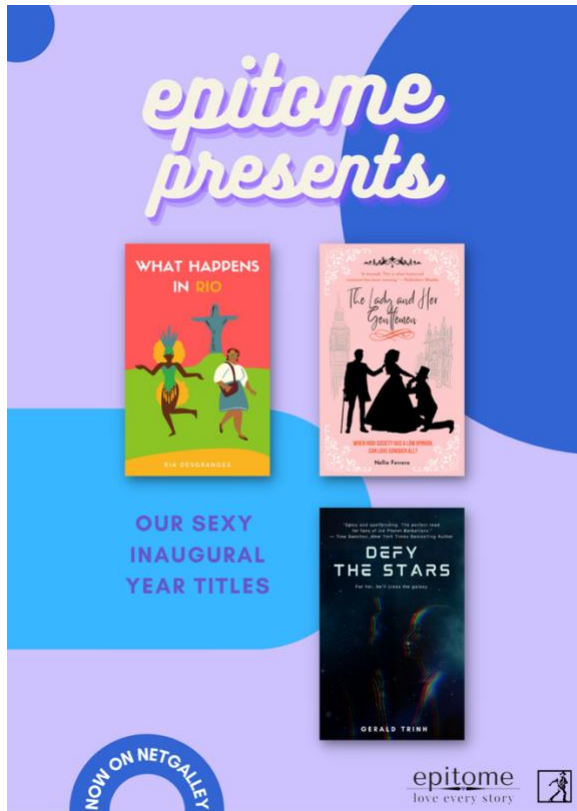


Figure 16: Epitome's Shelf Awareness announcement.

To increase consumer awareness of the imprint and our upcoming offerings, we will launch a social media campaign for the brand. We will pay for sponsored and native ads on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, we will pay influencers of all mediums (including book influencers but also bakers, painters, woodworkers, and glass artists) to promote our content in any way they see fit, including recreating our covers with their art.

Our imprint's bookseller and librarian awareness campaigns will consist of staff and

author presence at major bookselling and librarian events, such as the American Bookseller Association and American Librarian Association conferences. Epitome will also have a presence at trade shows (such as RWA conventions and sci-fi conventions [for that subgenre]) and sponsor diverse writing conventions, such as Romance Slam Jam, Black Ink Conference, One Love Reunion, and Spring Fling Writers Conference. We will send our staff to networking dinners with booksellers and librarians in big cities for a personal touch. We will also reach out to independent bookstores by creating swag boxes that include galleys of all year 1 titles and sending them to 20 handpicked booksellers.



Notably, a large part of our go-to-market plan is a huge media launch cocktail party. This party will be an opportunity to create positive press around the brand while networking. We will invite the authors of our year 1 titles, agents, and the press to enjoy promotional items, cocktails themed around the books, and branded wine (see Figure 17<sup>99</sup>). We will create photobooth



Figure 17: An example of branded wine labels to be displayed at the media launch party.

backdrops ideal for earned media, and since at least one of our authors is a social media sensation<sup>100</sup>, posts created at the party create buzz around the imprint and what we do. We will amplify these posts on the newly created Epitome social media accounts with links and QR codes to GoodReads giveaways, chipping away at that marketing goal. This party will be a huge event and will likely garner a publicity story in trade

publications, therefore amplifying our paid marketing efforts.

Please note that title ARCs, promotional items, and author travel and entertainment to events are all included in the imprint’s launch budget, since these items also go toward promoting Epitome at large. Additional allocations have been set aside for networking with agents throughout the year, such as going out to business meals, and as a buffer in case any expense goes over budget.

## Lead Title Marketing

The titled marketing budget for the first five years can be seen below.

Table 2: Titled marketing budgets for years 1–5.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
\$153,422	\$177,093	\$167,391	\$180,664	\$236,942

<sup>99</sup> Created using Zazzle.

<sup>100</sup> Fake author Ria Desgranges, the fictional author of *What Happens in Rio*. See Appendix H: [Inaugural Year Title Tip Sheets](#).

Although ordinarily a book’s marketing budget is 3% of sales revenue, that budget did not allow Epitome to properly show off our amazing assets, and so the budget was raised considerably per year, adding at least \$100,000 to each annual budget.

In year 1, this budget will be split evenly among the three titles. In every subsequent year, the budget will be split proportionately among titles according to sales expectations, which have been spelled out in the publishing schedule above<sup>101</sup> via sales category.

Each book’s budget will be allocated according to the figure below.

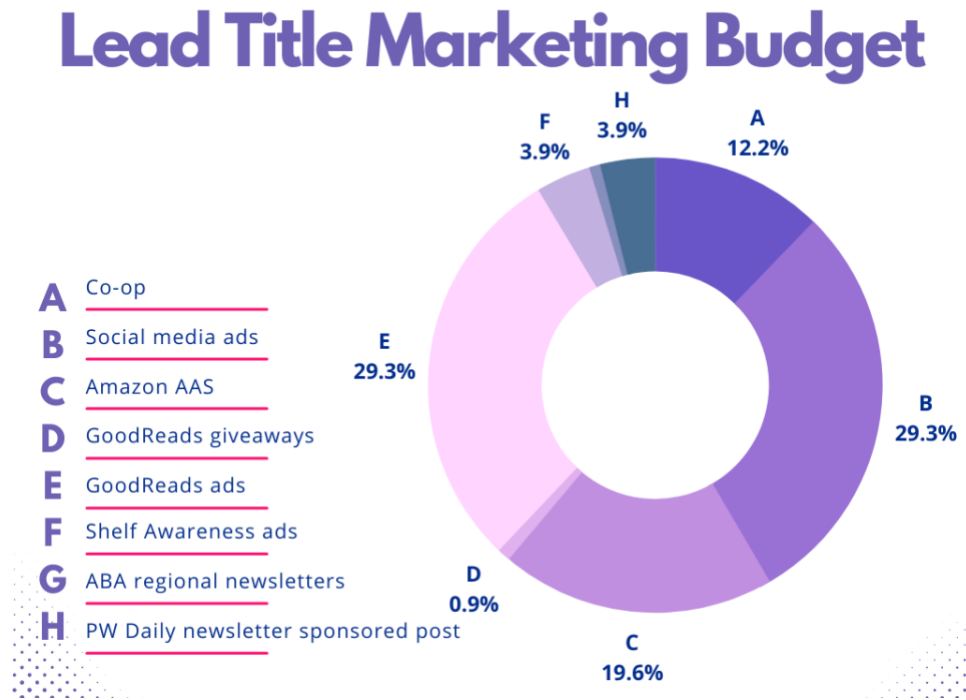


Figure 18: Lead title marketing budget allocations. Note that author travel, ARCs, and giveaway items are part of the overall imprint budget<sup>102</sup>.

An example of a lead title’s full marketing plan can be seen below.

<sup>101</sup> See [Content](#).

<sup>102</sup> For full budget breakdown, see Appendix F: [Marketing Budgeting](#).

## *Goals*

Our main goal is to get on the *New York Times* Bestseller list in the first weeks of publication. The marketing team will therefore use strategies (outlined below) to increase sales.

In addition to sales, we want this book to be loved by its early readers. We will spend energy making sure that the book gets into readers' hands in exchange for reviews that should translate into positive buzz and pre-orders. Another piece of this objective is to reach 5,000 GoodReads To-Be-Read (TBR) shelvings before the on-sale date.

We also want librarians to embrace this title, with the ultimate goal of landing on the Library Reads list during the month of release. For this goal, we will focus on pre-publication librarian outreach. In addition to librarians, we will reach out to booksellers in hopes of creating buzz and awareness for future handselling and landing on the Indie Next list.

Our final objective involves acclaim in the form of starred reviews at *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, or similar trade publications.

## *Pre-Publication Marketing*

In the months leading up to release, we will deploy many pre-publication marketing strategies in service of the aforementioned goals. First and foremost, we will take out title-specific ads in trade publications including Shelf Awareness, NetGalley, and *Publishers Weekly* to increase awareness of this book in the industry, including to booksellers and librarians. We will also pay to place the book as a Publishers Marketplace buzz book to add visibility to the title.

To create more bookseller buzz, we will bring the author (and bound galleys for giveaway) to the American Bookseller Association Winter Institute conference. The author will have a meet-and-greet signing with the booksellers. We will also pay for book-branded banners on Edelweiss to signal to indies that the book is going to be big and encourage pre-sales. Additionally, we will have staggered e-book giveaways on Edelweiss, and we will update the book's Edelweiss page to include social media graphics, banner ads, and a letter from the author in the color scheme of the cover. Bound galleys will also be mailed to 400 independent bookstores as part of the ABA Monthly Box and sent to 20 specific influential booksellers from S&S's database along with a copy of the author's letter.

We will begin our library marketing campaign pre-publication as well. We will mirror our Winter Institute efforts at the American Library Association Midwinter Meeting as well as the ALA Annual Conference & Exhibition by bringing ARCs and swag in the form of bookmarks and totes, and the author will meet the librarians for a dinner meet-and-greet. To serve this part of the market, we will also have staggered NetGalley e-book giveaways (the staggering will promote a steady stream of reviews).

To reach our audience directly, we will employ a blogger and social media influencer campaign in the months leading up to publication. This campaign includes rebranding the author's social media with new banners to mirror the look of the book's cover. Additionally, the author will promote the book on their website, newsletter, and all their social media, as well as utilize their network of romance writer friends and colleagues, who will post for their comparable fanbase. We will send these romance authors advance reading copies, as their promotion will go a long way in creating enthusiasm, because their readers know and trust their recommendations.

We will amplify these posts as well as the content created by the author and influencers from BookTok and Bookstagram on the Epitome and S&S social media platforms. Romance influencers like @romanticallyinclined (Kate LeBeau), @readsromance, @talk\_about\_swoon, and @meetyournewfavoritebook, and YouTuber @remarkablylisa will be sent swag boxes that include the ARCs; videos of the unboxings will be amplified on social media.

We will launch an early reader review campaign that includes widespread distribution of advanced copies. This campaign will entail four GoodReads giveaways of physical galleys in the months leading up to publication as well as one Kindle giveaway to automatically tie



Figure 19: An example of a book tote for lead title marketing promotion.

into Amazon's review system. Entries to this giveaway will automatically be shelved as TBR, hence chipping away at our goal of 5,000. This early reader review campaign will also involve Amazon Vine and Book Riot giveaways to increase reviews.

We will launch a pre-order campaign wherein buyers can submit a copy of their receipt for a signed bookplate as well as the bookmarks and tote bags we created for the conferences listed above. We will also partner with indie romance bookstore The Ripped Bodice for folks to order signed copies, which will be mutually beneficial.

<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Created using PlaceIt.net.

## *Launch Marketing*

During launch, we will deploy our national advertising campaign. This plan will include targeted online advertising through Amazon Advertising Services, focusing on a Sponsored Products campaign that utilizes manual and negative targeting. We will also use Sponsored Display advertising to generate Kindle lock-screen ads for consumers who regularly purchase contemporary romance using their e-reader. We will advertise with banner and box ads on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook as well as continue promotion on *Publishers Weekly*, Shelf Awareness, Edelweiss, NetGalley, and GoodReads.

Our GoodReads campaign will include a GoodReads Recommends advertisement from another popular romance author to their fans, again to use the trust they have with their readers to show them a book that they will truly enjoy. All the folks who shelved the book as TBR (either intentionally or because of a giveaway entry) will automatically be sent notification that the book is available for purchase on the on-sale date. Additionally, we will send a GoodReads personal selection mailer to readers who gave similar books 4 or 5 stars.

To target as many readers as possible (as the goal is to make diverse romance mainstream), the author will appear at book festivals and romance-specific festivals (such as national and regional RWA festivals) as well as embark on a 5-city tour in key markets to encourage sales. The author will also appear at virtual author events wherein they partner with other romance authors to create buzz and awareness from their existing audiences (such as Instagram Live: In Conversation events<sup>104</sup>). To target our secondary, more niche audience, the author will also appear at more focused literary festivals, such as the BIPOC Book Festival.

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<sup>104</sup> For an example of Epitome's Instagram promotion of such an event, see Appendix G: [Instagram Mockup](#).

The social media campaign of the author and their romance author network will continue through launch, as will paid social media posts by book influencers on Instagram and TikTok.

We will use the publisher, imprint, and author's websites and e-newsletters to push features and reviews of the book to consumers, and we will continue to amplify social media.

To encourage our accounts to promote the book at this stage of its life, we will use co-op pools and send promotional bookmarks and tote bags for giveaway with purchase. We will also pay for store endcap placement, ensuring that bookstore browsers of general fiction are able to discover the title.

### *Bestseller Phase Marketing*

Assuming the book reaches its full potential and becomes a *New York Times* bestseller, we will employ further marketing strategies. For example, we will reconfigure the metadata and keywords on Amazon to include important search terms like "bestseller," "popular commercial books," and "best romance novels." This change will increase discoverability for the book.

We will create new banners and logos for the author's and publisher's social media and websites that include the bestseller label as well as all starred review accolades. We will use these new graphics as we again advertise on NetGalley, Edelweiss, and GoodReads.

Additionally, we will send 200 copies of the book to the Once Upon a Book Club subscription box and amplify the unboxing videos via social media. We will also reach out to book clubs and, eventually, make the reading group guide available online to promote discussion and sales.

### *Longtail Marketing*

As the book becomes older, we will utilize long-term marketing initiatives to keep its promotional momentum.

For example, we will further adjust the keywords to include longtail terms such as “books for mom” and “books for Hallmark movie fans.” Also, the e-book will be promoted for a deep discount for holidays such as Christmas and Valentine’s Day. After year one, the e-book will also be discounted for Mother’s Day. Additionally, because many authors have signed multi-book deals, we will use that opportunity to both promote an e-book discount as well as a buy-one-get-one half off promotion at Barnes and Noble and Books-A-Million.

### **Operating Plan**

As a book imprint of a Big 5 publisher, Epitome will be part of S&S’s existing operational infrastructure, including workspaces, shared service employees, fixed assets, printing, and distribution. This section lays out how corporate allocations will be spent, which staff are specific to the imprint, key activities, key partnerships, and production costs.

As a general timeline, a book is acquired in a particular year; its pre-launch marketing, publicity, design, and sales occur the following year; and publication/on-sale occurs two years after acquisition. However, in an effort to quickly release books for an eager market, the timeline for books released in years 1 and 2 have been accelerated, with acquisitions, editing, marketing, and publicity for those titles all occurring in year 1.



## Overheads and Corporate Allocations

My financial model assumes that 20% of total revenue goes toward corporate allocations<sup>105</sup> of the parent company's rent and utilities of the Rockefeller Center building, distribution and warehousing, tech services, and S&S's central services staff. During Epitome's first five years, we plan to lean on the parent company's support staff to save on costs during start-up<sup>106</sup>. Additionally, S&S distributes its own books, included in the overhead costs; Epitome will use this resource as well as the printers S&S utilizes to simplify and streamline costs and processes.

The imprint has few fixed assets of its own: most belong to the parent company and go on the S&S income statement rather than on Epitome's. The parent company will supply all fixed assets (including desks, chairs, and phones), except for six MacBook Pro laptops priced at \$1,299<sup>107</sup> and one industrial color printer priced at \$1,949<sup>108</sup> for the team. The financial model also assumes that office supplies will cost the imprint \$1,000 per employee per year. Additionally, the imprint has allocated sizable funds to the travel and entertainment (T&E) expenses, which will account not only for actual travel to and from conferences and networking with and entertaining agents, but also the imprint's start-up non-titled marketing<sup>109</sup>.

## Staffing

The aforementioned overhead costs include allocations for S&S's non-imprint support staff, including human resources, digital/technology, legal, finance, accounting, production,

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<sup>105</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster.

<sup>106</sup> See [Staffing](#).

<sup>107</sup> Price of MacBook Pro 13.3" Laptop at Best Buy. Accessed Mar 15, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>108</sup> Price of HP M755Z Color Laserjet Enterprise 700 MFP Printer (Reconditioned) at Copy Faxes. Accessed Mar 15, 2021. [Web](#).

<sup>109</sup> See [Go To Market Plan](#).

managing editorial, including sensitivity readers, sales, and distribution staff. During the first five years of the imprint, these allocations will also pay for S&S’s art/design team.

The full imprint staffing plan can be seen in the following organization chart.

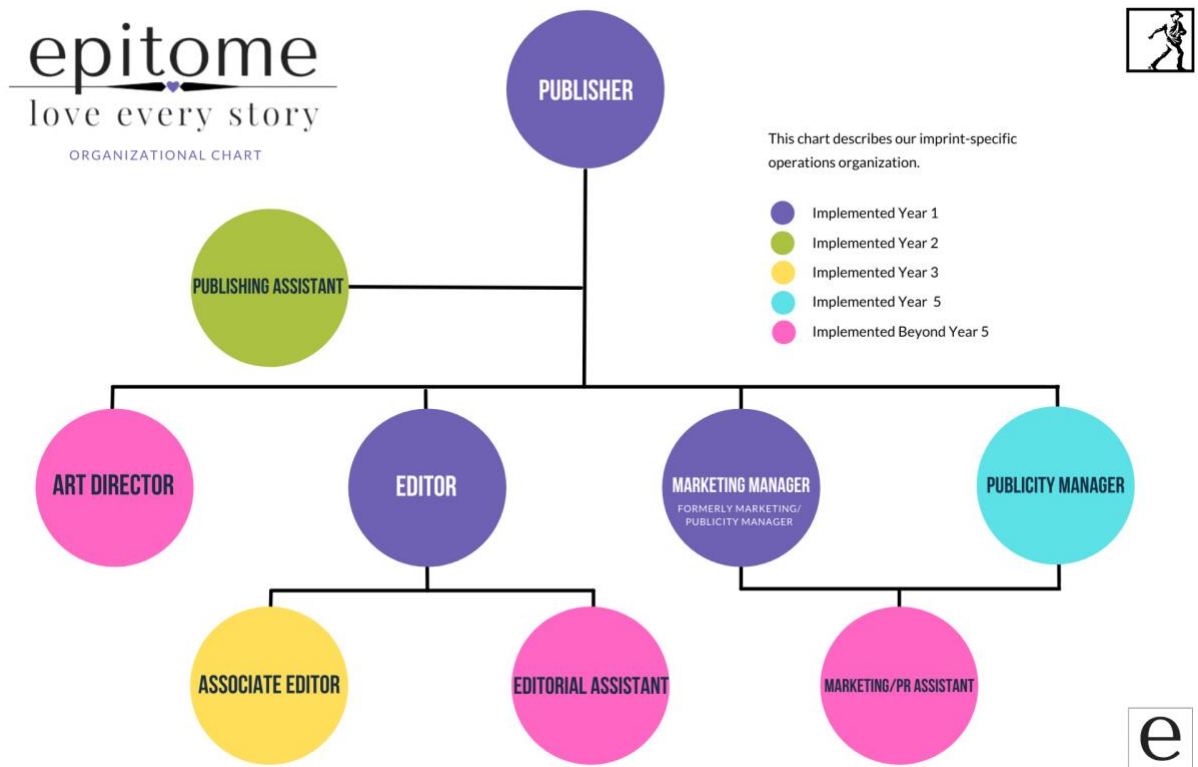


Figure 20: Epitome's staffing plan for years 1–5.

At inception (year 0), Epitome will have three full-time imprint-specific employees – the Publisher, the Editor, and the Marketing/Publicity Manager – who will be responsible for acquiring the imprint’s first three titles<sup>110</sup>, to be published in year 1; promoting the imprint; and heavily marketing the imprint’s first titles.

In year 2, to prepare for the launch of titles in years 3 and 4, Epitome will hire a Publishing Assistant, who will report directly to the Publisher but will assist as needed in editorial and marketing/publicity tasks. We feel this addition is necessary since we also plan to

<sup>110</sup> While the imprint does not yet exist, as existing “employees” of Simon and Schuster, the publisher and editor will be able to acquire these projects in year 0.

hire an Associate Editor in year 3, significantly increasing our published titles-per-year from ten in year 4 to twenty in year 5. The Marketing/Publicity Manager will be reclassified in year 5 to the Marketing Manager, when Epitome hires a full-time Publicity Manager due to consistent title volume.

After year 5, the growth plan includes hiring an imprint-specific Art Director to hone the imprint’s brand, as well as supporting Editorial and Marketing/Publicity Assistants to ensure the best quality books and successful marketing and PR launches.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Publisher	\$300,000	\$309,000	\$318,270	\$327,818	\$337,653
Editor	\$85,000	\$87,550	\$90,177	\$92,882	\$95,668
Marketing Manager <i>(formerly Marketing/Publicity Manager)</i>	\$85,000	\$87,550	\$90,177	\$92,882	\$95,668
Publishing Assistant	-	\$60,000	\$61,800	\$63,654	\$65,564
Associate Editor	-	-	\$70,000	\$72,100	\$74,263
Publicity Manager	-	-	-	-	\$85,000
<b>Total Staffing Cost</b>	<b>\$470,000</b>	<b>\$544,100</b>	<b>\$630,424</b>	<b>\$649,336</b>	<b>\$753,816</b>

Figure 21: Years 1–5 staffing costs. Fully loaded salary includes 30% taxes and benefits; accounts for 3% raise per year<sup>111</sup>.

## Key Activities

In year 1 of operations, Epitome will have four key activities: acquisition, editing, networking, and marketing. Since the imprint will be brand new, significant effort will be concentrated on networking with local agents, as well as booksellers and librarians at conferences, to create brand awareness and excitement for the upcoming season. This networking, especially with agents, will tie directly into acquisitions of future titles, most likely by debut authors, ensuring that submissions are on-brand and of high quality. Because the three year 1 titles have already been chosen in year 0, the Editor will acquire five books for release in year 2, or eight for that year, and ten books to be released in year 3. Once acquired, the Editor

<sup>111</sup> Staff salaries and benefits assumptions from “Overhead Expense Notes,” Multimedia Financial Analysis II, NYU Spring 2022, class 4 (Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster).

will begin shaping the books released in years 1 and 2 with the authors. The Marketing/Publicity Manager will launch media plans not only for the first two years' titles but for the imprint itself<sup>112</sup>. The central services art/design teams will create covers and layout pages for the titles going on sale in years 1 and 2. Non-imprint sales staff will pitch the books up to six months ahead of their on-sale date.

In year 2, five of the titles acquired in year 1 will go on sale. Epitome will grow to include the acquisition and editing of two additional titles, or ten total for the single Editor, which will go on sale in year 4. Networking by the Publisher will also continue. The Marketing/Publicity Manager will oversee the key activities of pre-launch marketing and publicizing for the titles acquired in year 1. The newly-hired Publishing Assistant will help keep all of these tasks on track by coordinating and performing administrative duties. During this year, S&S's central services art/design teams will create covers and layout pages for the titles that will go on sale in year 3. Non-imprint sales staff will pitch the books up to six months ahead of their on-sale date.

In year 3, eight titles acquired in year 1 will go on sale. Epitome will hire an Associate Editor to acquire and edit ten more books, or twenty total for the imprint, which will go on sale in year 5. The Marketing/Publicity Manager will create and carry out marketing and publicity campaigns for the ten titles acquired in year 2, to be published in year 4. Central service art/design teams will create covers and layout pages for the titles acquired year 2, which will go on sale in year 4.

In year 4, the ten titles acquired in year 2 will go on sale. Epitome's two editors will continue to acquire and edit ten books apiece, or twenty total for the imprint, to go on sale in

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<sup>112</sup> See [Go To Market Plan](#).

year 6. The Marketing Manager/Publicity Manager, with the aid of the Publishing Assistant, will create and carry out marketing and PR campaigns for the twenty titles acquired in year 3, to be published in year 5.

In year 5, the twenty titles acquired in year 3 will be published. The editors will continue to acquire and edit twenty books for the imprint, to go on sale in year 7. The marketing and publicity departments will be split this year, as the additional twenty titles acquired in year 4 will need more resources behind them to make them a success on the market. The Marketing Manager will create and carry out marketing campaigns for the twenty titles acquired in year 4, to be published in year 6; the Publicity Manager will also create and carry out PR plans for these titles.

### **Key Partnerships**

As an imprint under S&S, Epitome's parent organization and its central service departments are important partners. Additionally, S&S Audio will transform the fantastic content we provide into the growing audiobook format, providing readers with a new way to experience them, and retain those sales.

Epitome will also partner with indie bookstores for pre-order campaigns, for example romance bookstores The Ripped Bodice, Meet Cute, and Love's Sweet Arrow. We will also partner with the Once Upon a Book Club subscription box, sending copies to be distributed by the service and then amplifying unboxing videos via social media.

Although Epitome has already acquired its three first year titles and their sequels, we hope to eventually partner with organizations that serve marginalized authors and writers of color; for example: Latinx in Publishing, Hurston/Wright Foundation, Asian American Arts

Alliance (A4), and LAMBDA Literary. In the future, should Epitome grow into the teen space, we would partner with We Need Diverse Books.

## Production Costs

Because all our books are in the romance genre, and subgenre acquisition will vary by year, Epitome has decided to group our products into four separate categories by sales numbers.

- The “Low seller” has projected trade paperback gross sales of approximately 10,000 (6,500 frontlist and 3,500 backlist)<sup>113</sup> and e-book sales of 5,000<sup>114</sup> (3,250 frontlist and 1,750 backlist), using RTD BookScan sales from romance title *Fight or Flight* by Samantha Young.
- The “Mid seller” has projected trade paperback gross sales of approximately 28,000 (18,200 frontlist and 9,800 backlist) and e-book sales of 14,000 (9,100 frontlist and 4,900 backlist), using RTD BookScan sales from romance title *Ice Planet Barbarians* by Ruby Dixon.
- The “High seller” has projected trade paperback gross sales of approximately 48,000 (31,200 frontlist and 16,800 backlist) and e-book sales of 24,000 (15,600 frontlist and 8,400 backlist), using RTD BookScan sales from romance title *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* by Talia Hibbert.
- The “Mega bestseller” has projected trade paperback gross sales of approximately 75,000 (48,750 frontlist and 26,250 backlist) and e-book sales of 37,500 (24,375 frontlist and 13,125 backlist). This sales estimate came from averaging the sales

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<sup>113</sup> Assuming that gross sales are split by 65% frontlist and 35% backlist. This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster.

<sup>114</sup> E-book sales projections from the Digital Sales Assumptions sheet of the EB\_EA Assumptions Handout ([Appendix D, Sheet 2](#)).

for romance novel *The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas (RTD Bookscan sales of 67,215) and *It Happened One Summer* by Tessa Bailey (RTD Bookscan sales of 90,720).

To estimate plant costs, I assumed all books would contain 352 pages and have glossy covers with no additional inserts. The flat plant cost then comes to \$11,429.60.<sup>115</sup> I also estimated a \$200 flat rate for e-book production conversion cost. Full edition cost estimates as well as the author advance range for each category can be seen below.

Table 3: Edition costs per category<sup>116</sup>.

Category	Projected Printing	Edition Cost	Cover Design Cost	Total Edition Cost
Low seller	10,000	0.96	0.1150	\$1.01
Mid seller	35,000	0.77	0.0850	\$0.86
High seller	50,000	0.75	0.0800	\$0.83
Mega bestseller	75,000	0.73	0.0750	\$0.81

Table 4: Advance range per category<sup>117</sup>.

Category	Advance Low	Advance High <sup>118</sup>
Low seller	\$35,000	\$50,000
Mid seller	\$65,000	\$85,000
High seller	\$100,000	\$125,000
Mega bestseller	\$160,000	\$200,000

<sup>115</sup> Plant cost projections from the Adult Plant Costs sheet of the Production Scales Handout ([Appendix E, Sheet 2](#)).

<sup>116</sup> Edition cost projections from the Adult Edition Costs sheet of the Production Scales Handout ([Appendix E, Sheet 1](#)).

<sup>117</sup> This assumption is based off a conversation I had with Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster, using S&S data for sales estimates for TP original fiction with sales in the range I specified for each of my categories.

<sup>118</sup> Financials have been calculated based on the Advance High value.

## Financials

Given an initial investment of \$1.5 million, Epitome will break even in year 3. This section explains the imprint’s sales mix and revenue streams, costs of goods sold, overhead costs, and projected gross profit margins.

The following policies inform Epitome’s modeled financials, including the income statement,<sup>119</sup> balance sheet,<sup>120</sup> and cash flow statement<sup>121</sup>. Epitome will use straight-line depreciation and first-in-first-out (“FIFO”) inventory calculations. The Accounts Receivable policy will be to collect all owed moneys within 60 days, and the Accounts Payable policy will be to pay all moneys owed within 30 days.

As previously mentioned,<sup>122</sup> Epitome will have three revenue streams: print book revenue, digital e-book revenue, and subsidiary rights revenue. The table below shows that, although all three streams rise steadily every year, the proportion of each in the sales mix stays consistent. A visual representation of the same information can also be seen below, in Figure 22.

*Table 5: Annual sales mix for each of Epitome's three revenue streams.*

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Print Book Sales	\$646,383	\$725,776	\$1,315,601	\$1,580,547	\$2,686,593
% of Total Revenue	55%	56%	56%	56%	56%
Digital Book Sales	\$467,689	\$510,671	\$930,756	\$1,108,259	\$1,878,133
% of Total Revenue	40%	39%	39%	39%	39%
Subsidiary Rights Sales	\$55,704	\$61,822	\$112,318	\$134,440	\$228,236
% of Total Revenue	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Total Revenue	\$1,169,776	\$1,298,269	\$2,358,675	\$2,823,246	\$4,792,963

<sup>119</sup> See Appendix A: [Income Statement](#).

<sup>120</sup> See Appendix B: [Balance Sheets](#).

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix C: [Cash Flow Statement](#).

<sup>122</sup> See [Product Description](#).





# Revenue Streams

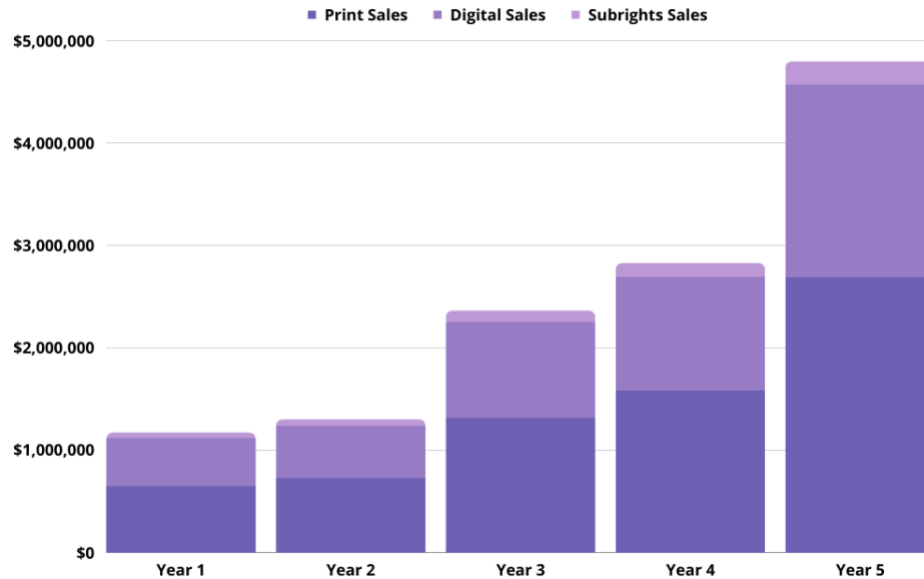


Figure 22: A visual representation of revenue streams per year.

Recall that Epitome will release a different number of titles annually as we grow during these early years, with three books in year 1, five books in year 2, eight books in year 3, ten books in year 4, and twenty books in year 5 (this doubling is due to acquisitions from a second editor; the imprint should continue publishing twenty books per year beyond year 5). As you see, revenue grows each year, and print sales are the largest part of overall revenue, at 55–56%. Although I assume that digital sales units will be approximately 50% of print sale units<sup>123</sup>, the cost differential (\$17.99 list for trade paperback versus \$13.99 list for e-book) means that revenue from e-book sales accounts for around 40% of revenue. I have assumed that subsidiary rights sales (for foreign rights or media rights) will average to approximately 5% of revenue per year.

<sup>123</sup> E-book sales projections from the Digital Sales Assumptions sheet of the EB\_EA Assumptions Handout ([Appendix D, Sheet 2](#)).

Because the number of books published each year grows, so does the Cost of Goods Sold. An overview can be seen in the table and visual representation of the same information (Figure 23).

Table 6: Epitome's Costs of Goods Sold years 1–5.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Production Expenses	\$113,564	\$147,842	\$255,186	\$311,545	\$569,466
Author Costs	\$266,821	\$319,718	\$591,333	\$796,666	\$1,682,806
Titled Marketing	\$153,422	\$177,093	\$167,391	\$180,644	\$236,942
Freight	\$32,319	\$36,289	\$65,780	\$79,027	\$134,330
<b>Total COGS</b>	<b>\$299,305</b>	<b>\$361,224</b>	<b>\$1,079,690</b>	<b>\$1,367,903</b>	<b>\$2,623,544</b>

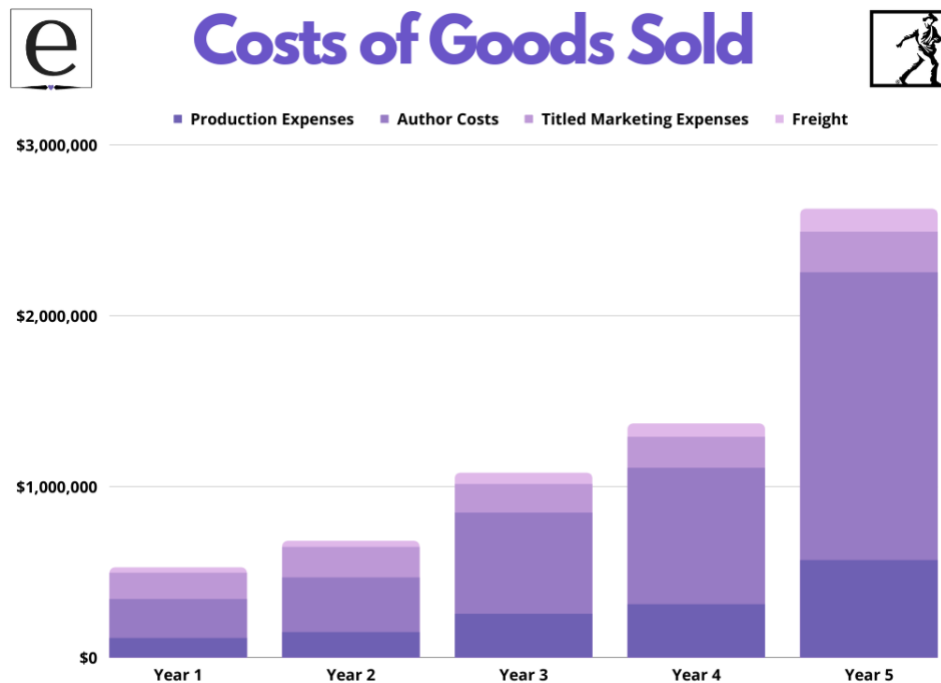


Figure 23: A visual representation of Cost of Goods Sold per year.

Production expenses understandably increase with the number of books expected to sell, and author costs also grows annually as the number of books per year increases. For author advance information as well as edition and plant costs, see the Operating Plan above<sup>124</sup>. Titled

<sup>124</sup> See [Production Costs](#).

marketing costs (labeled “advertising expenses” in the income statement<sup>125</sup>) have been increased from S&S’s usual 3% of print and e-book revenue, as I didn’t feel those were enough funds to properly make an impact in the industry<sup>126</sup>. The freight rate has been raised from the default 3% to 5% to account for supply chain issues due to pandemic and the war in the Ukraine.

Below you’ll find a tabular overview and visual representation of Epitome’s annual overhead costs.

Table 7: Epitome’s overhead costs years 1–5.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Delivery Services	\$10,000	\$35,000	\$50,000	\$75,000	\$100,000
T&E / Marketing	\$266,978	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Office Supplies	\$3,000	\$4,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$6,000
Salaries and Benefits	\$470,000	\$544,100	\$630,423	\$649,336	\$753,816
Corporate Allocations	\$233,955	\$259,654	\$471,735	\$564,649	\$958,593
<b>Total COGS</b>	<b>\$983,933</b>	<b>\$942,754</b>	<b>\$1,257,158</b>	<b>\$1,393,985</b>	<b>\$1,918,408</b>

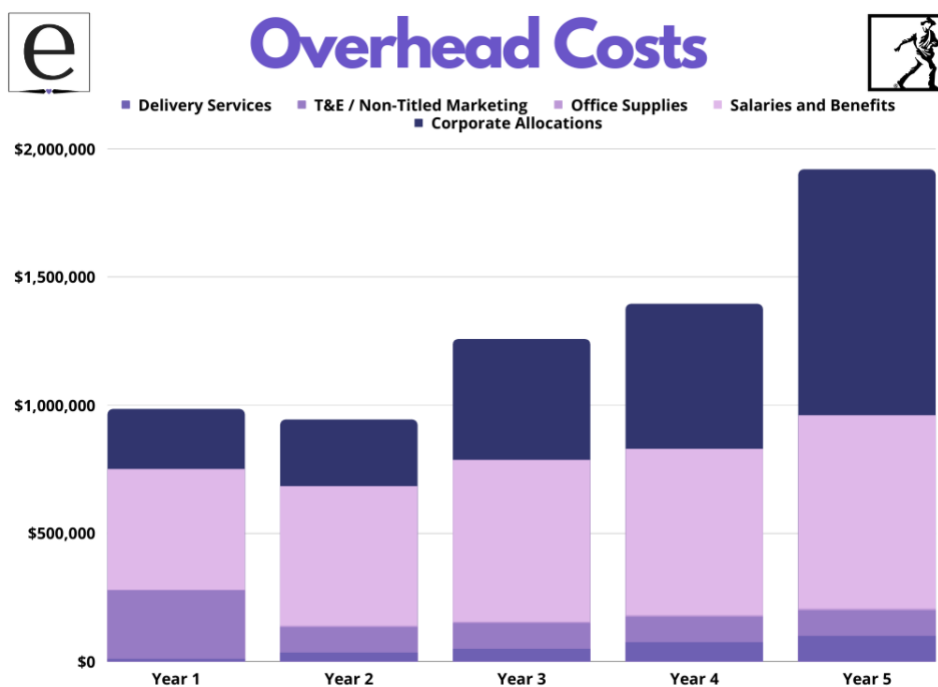


Figure 24: A visual representation of overhead costs per year.

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix A: [Income Statement](#).

<sup>126</sup> See [Lead Title Marketing](#).

For every year except year 1, corporate allocations make up the biggest portion of overheads at 20% of total revenue, which go toward rent, utilities, warehousing, tech services, and S&S's non-imprint staff. The next biggest overhead expense is personnel, with benefits equaling 30%<sup>127</sup> included in the listed salaries. Epitome's travel and entertainment (T&E) and non-titled marketing has been marked up considerably to account for launch marketing and networking<sup>128</sup>. The income statement includes a line item for delivery services, which consist of the cost to ship ARCs and galleys, a separate charge from marketing<sup>129</sup>. The smallest portion of overhead cost includes office supplies, which have been estimated at \$1,000 per employee (this charge is so tiny that it barely presents in the visual above).

As you see from the below bar graph, all these assumptions have Epitome set to break even by year 3.

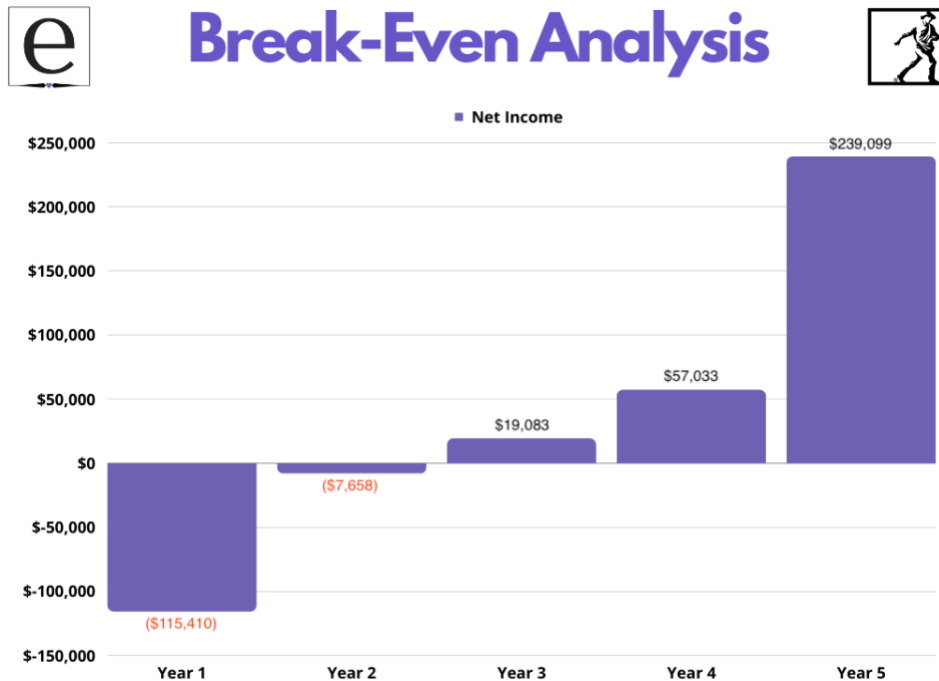


Figure 25: Epitome will break even by year 3.

<sup>127</sup> See [Staffing](#) for all positions, salaries, and benefits.

<sup>128</sup> See [Go To Market Plan](#).

<sup>129</sup> Delivery services estimated by comparing to another S&S imprint.

In year 1, the imprint will yield negative net income, at -\$115,410. In year 2, the imprint almost breaks even, but it isn't until year 3 that net income becomes positive, at \$19,083. As shown in Figure 25, the net income steadily increases each year, and by year 5, the imprint will earn \$239,099. The expectation is that the net income will continue to gradually increase as the imprint and its content and authors become more well-known.

Epitome's gross profit margin at the end of year 5 is 45%, which exceeds the financial goal of achieving a 40% margin. The gross profit margin starts high in year 1 at 74%, but this is because the imprint will release far fewer titles in year 1. By year 5, the imprint will be publishing its full capacity of titles (consistently twenty titles per year), which will continue for the foreseeable future, so the 45% margin should stay stable and consistent beyond these projections. This margin is comparable to a different S&S women's fiction imprint, which in 2021 achieved a gross profit margin of 42.4%, meaning that Epitome will be as profitable as other successful brands in S&S's portfolio.

The year 5 inventory turnover rate is 57.6, meaning that inventory is replaced nearly 58 times per year. The return on investment (ROI) by year 5 is 15%, meaning that 15% of the investment is converted to profit by year 5. Since an ROI of 7% or above<sup>130</sup> is considered a good investment, I will reiterate that Epitome is worthwhile not only in terms of content but as an investment opportunity for S&S for only \$1.5 million.

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<sup>130</sup> Guy Birken, Emily and Curry, Benjamin. "Understanding Return On Investment (ROI)." Apr 14, 2021. *Forbes*. [Web](#).

## Conclusion

Epitome is a sensible investment for Simon and Schuster. Not only will the imprint monetarily profit quickly, but it will allow S&S to profit from romance's recent resurgence and increase its reputability in terms of BIPOC author representation.

Financial key performance indicators include breaking even by year 3 and reaching a gross profit margin at or greater than 40%. Epitome is currently forecasted to reach these goals with its publishing schedule. Additional key performance indicators include increasing S&S's percentage in The Ripped Bodice's State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing report, receiving critical acclaim and positive reviews, creating social media and obtaining 10,000 followers on Instagram, and reaching 5,000 To-Be-Read shelvings on GoodReads.

With the plans laid out in this business proposal, Epitome will be well on its way to achieving all these goals and becoming a major player in romance publishing.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Income Statement

<b>Income Statement</b>					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Print Book Sales	\$646,383	\$725,776	\$1,315,601	\$1,580,547	\$2,686,593
Digital Book Sales	467,689	510,671	930,756	1,108,259	1,878,133
Subrights Sales	55,704	61,822	112,318	134,440	228,236
<b>TOTAL SALES</b>	<b>1,169,776</b>	<b>1,298,269</b>	<b>2,358,675</b>	<b>2,823,246</b>	<b>4,792,963</b>
<u>Costs of Goods Sold</u>					
Production Expenses	\$113,564	\$147,842	\$255,186	\$311,545	\$569,466
Author Costs	226,821	319,718	591,333	796,666	1,682,806
Advertising Expenses	153,422	177,093	167,391	180,664	236,942
Freight	32,319	36,289	65,780	79,027	134,330
<b>COGS</b>	<b>299,305</b>	<b>361,224</b>	<b>1,079,690</b>	<b>1,367,903</b>	<b>2,623,544</b>
Gross Profit	870,471	937,044	1,278,984	1,455,343	2,169,419
	74%	72%	54%	52%	45%
Delivery Services	10,000	35,000	50,000	75,000	100,000
T&E / Non Titled Marketing	266,978	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Office Supplies	3,000	4,000	5,000	5,000	6,000
Salary and Benefits	470,000	544,100	630,423	649,336	753,816
Corporate Allocations	233,955	259,654	471,735	564,649	958,593
Total Overhead	983,933	942,754	1,257,158	1,393,985	1,918,408
EBIDTA	(113,461.86)	(5,709.53)	21,826.59	61,358.04	251,010.39
Depreciation	1,948.60	1,948.60	1,948.60	1,948.60	1,948.60
EBIT	(115,410.46)	(7,658.13)	19,877.99	59,409.44	249,061.79
Interest Exp	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
EBT	(115,410.46)	(7,658.13)	19,877.99	59,409.44	249,061.79
Taxes	0.00	0.00	795.12	2,376.38	9,962.47
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>(\$115,410)</b>	<b>(\$7,658)</b>	<b>\$19,083</b>	<b>\$57,033</b>	<b>\$239,099</b>

## Appendix B: Balance Sheets<sup>131</sup>

### Starting Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$1,500,000	A/P	\$0
A/R	\$0	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	\$0		
Prepaid Expenses	\$0		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	\$0	Retained Earnings	\$0
Less: Accum Dep	\$0	Capital Stock	\$1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	\$0		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>

### Year 1 Ending Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$1,208,835	A/P	\$81,994.39
A/R	\$194,963	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	\$10,096		
Prepaid Expenses	\$44,896		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	\$9,743	Retained Earnings	(\$115,410)
Less: Accum Dep	\$1,949	Capital Stock	\$1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	\$7,794		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,466,584</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,466,584</b>

### Year 2 Ending Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$1,146,174	A/P	\$78,563
A/R	216,378	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	32,913		
Prepaid Expenses	54,184		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	9,743	Retained Earnings	(123,069)
Less: Accum Dep	3,897	Capital Stock	1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	5,846		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,455,494</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,455,494</b>



### Year 3 Ending Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$895,692	A/P	\$104,763
A/R	393,112	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	46,123		
Prepaid Expenses	161,954		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	9,743	Retained Earnings	(103,986)
Less: Accum Dep	5,846	Capital Stock	1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	3,897		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,500,777</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,500,777</b>

### Year 4 Ending Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$823,997	A/P	\$116,165
A/R	470,541	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	67,540		
Prepaid Expenses	205,186		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	9,743	Retained Earnings	(46,953)
Less: Accum Dep	7,794	Capital Stock	1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	1,949		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,569,213</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,569,213</b>

### Year 5 Ending Balance Sheet

ASSETS		LIABILITIES	
Cash	\$560,784	A/P	\$159,867
A/R	798,827	Note Payable	\$0
Inventory	98,872		
Prepaid Expenses	393,532		
		OWNER'S EQUITY	
Gross Fixed Assets	9,743	Retained Earnings	192,147
Less: Accum Dep	9,743	Capital Stock	1,500,000
Net Fixed Assets	-		
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,852,014</b>	<b>TOTAL L+OE</b>	<b>\$1,852,014</b>

<sup>131</sup> Assumptions: 1) A/R: Assuming DSO of 60 days, equaling 6 collection periods. 2) A/R: There will be no A/R at the start. 3) A/P: Based on making monthly payments. 4) Prepaid Expenses: 15% of COGS per year. 5) Cash = "Capital Stock" from cash flow statement = initial investment from S&S.

## Appendix C: Cash Flow Statement

		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Net Income		(\$115,410)	(\$7,658)	\$19,083	\$57,033	\$239,099
Plus non-cash charges		\$1,949	\$1,949	\$1,949	\$1,949	\$1,949
= operating cash flow		(\$113,462)	(\$5,710)	\$21,031	\$58,982	\$241,048
+ Sources						
	A/P	\$81,994	(\$3,432)	\$26,200	\$11,402	\$43,702
	Capital Stock	\$1,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
		\$1,581,994	(\$3,432)	\$26,200	\$11,402	\$43,702
- Uses						
	A/R	\$194,963	\$21,415	\$176,734	\$77,429	\$328,286
	Invt	\$10,096	\$22,817	\$13,210	\$21,418	\$31,331
	F/A	\$9,743				
	Ppd Exp.	\$44,896	\$9,288	\$107,770	\$43,232	\$188,346
		\$259,697	\$53,520	\$297,714	\$142,078	\$547,963
= Net Cash flow		\$1,208,835	(\$62,662)	(\$250,482)	(\$71,694)	(\$263,213)
=Accumulated Cash Flow		\$1,208,835	\$1,146,174	\$895,692	\$823,997	\$560,784

## Appendix D: EB\_EA Assumptions Handout

From Multimedia Financial Analysis II, NYU Spring 2022, class 4 (Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster).

### *Sheet 1: Pricing Assumptions*

	Physical	eBook
<b>Adult EB Pricing Assumptions</b>		
Match the Lowest Physical Format Price with the eBook Price Below.		
Use the prices below as the start of the range		
Ex: HC prices at \$28 would be \$14.99, because it higher than \$27.99, but lower than \$30.99		
HC	\$19.99	\$10.99
HC	\$21.99	\$11.99
HC	\$23.99	\$12.99
HC	\$25.99	\$13.99
HC	\$27.99	\$14.99
HC	\$30.99	\$16.99
HC	\$35.99	\$19.99
TP	\$9.99	\$7.99
TP	\$10.99	\$8.99
TP	\$12.99	\$9.99
TP	\$13.99	\$10.99
TP	\$15.99	\$11.99
TP	\$16.99	\$12.99
TP	\$17.99	\$13.99
TP	\$19.99	\$14.99
TP	\$20.99	\$15.99
TP	\$21.99	\$16.99
TP	\$23.99	\$17.99
TP	\$24.99	\$18.99
MM	\$7.99	\$7.99
MM	\$8.99	\$8.99
MM	\$9.99	\$9.99

Sheet 2: Digital Sales Assumptions

<b>Adult eBook &amp; eAudio Gross Sales Units Assumptions:</b>			
The %s below are off of the primary physical format gross sales units			
<u>Genre</u>		<u>EB Sales %</u>	<u>EA Sales %</u>
<b>Nonfiction Categories</b>			
	General Nonfiction	15%	20%
	Celebrity Memoirs/Essays	15%	40%
	Non-Celebrity Memoir	15%	10%
	History/Biography	25%	20%
	Self-Help	10%	45%
	Business	10%	35%
	Mind/Body Spirit	10%	25%
	Parenting	5%	20%
	Health & Fitness	10%	15%
	Cookbooks	5%	none
<b>Fiction Categories</b>			
	General Fiction	30%	15%
	Female Thrillers	35%	10%
	Literary Fiction	30%	10%
	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	30%	20%
	Romance	50%	15%

## Appendix E: Production Scales Handout

From Multimedia Financial Analysis II, NYU Spring 2022, class 4 (Kristal Batanjany, Finance Director, Simon and Schuster).

Sheet 1: Adult Edition Costs<sup>132</sup>

Page Count	Adult Edition Costs												
	Trade Paper												
	5,000	7,500	10,000	12,500	15,000	17,500	20,000	25,000	35,000	50,000	75,000	100,000	250,000
128	0.50	0.47	0.43	0.40	0.36	0.33	0.29	0.27	0.25	0.23	0.21	0.19	0.17
160	0.58	0.54	0.51	0.47	0.44	0.40	0.37	0.35	0.33	0.31	0.29	0.27	0.25
192	0.65	0.62	0.58	0.55	0.51	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.40	0.38	0.36	0.34	0.32
224	0.73	0.69	0.66	0.62	0.59	0.55	0.52	0.50	0.48	0.46	0.44	0.42	0.40
256	0.80	0.77	0.73	0.70	0.66	0.63	0.59	0.57	0.55	0.53	0.51	0.49	0.47
288	0.88	0.84	0.81	0.77	0.74	0.70	0.67	0.65	0.63	0.61	0.59	0.57	0.54
320	0.95	0.92	0.88	0.85	0.81	0.78	0.74	0.72	0.70	0.68	0.66	0.64	0.62
352	1.03	0.99	0.96	0.92	0.89	0.85	0.82	0.79	0.77	0.75	0.73	0.71	0.69
384	1.10	1.07	1.03	1.00	0.96	0.93	0.89	0.87	0.85	0.83	0.81	0.79	0.77
416	1.18	1.14	1.11	1.07	1.04	1.00	0.97	0.95	0.93	0.91	0.89	0.87	0.85
448	1.25	1.22	1.18	1.15	1.11	1.08	1.04	1.02	1.00	0.98	0.96	0.94	0.92
480	1.33	1.29	1.26	1.22	1.19	1.15	1.12	1.10	1.08	1.06	1.04	1.02	1.00
512	1.40	1.37	1.33	1.30	1.26	1.23	1.19	1.17	1.15	1.13	1.11	1.09	1.07
544	1.48	1.44	1.41	1.37	1.34	1.30	1.27	1.25	1.23	1.21	1.19	1.17	1.15
576	1.55	1.52	1.48	1.45	1.41	1.38	1.34	1.32	1.30	1.28	1.26	1.24	1.22
608	1.63	1.59	1.56	1.52	1.49	1.45	1.42	1.40	1.38	1.36	1.34	1.32	1.30
640	1.70	1.67	1.63	1.60	1.56	1.53	1.49	1.47	1.45	1.43	1.41	1.39	1.37
672	1.78	1.74	1.71	1.67	1.64	1.60	1.57	1.55	1.53	1.51	1.49	1.47	1.45
704	1.85	1.82	1.78	1.75	1.71	1.68	1.64	1.62	1.60	1.58	1.56	1.54	1.52
736	1.93	1.89	1.86	1.82	1.79	1.75	1.72	1.70	1.68	1.66	1.64	1.62	1.60
<b>Cover Design</b>													
Gloss	0.1250	0.1200	0.1150	0.1100	0.1050	0.1000	0.0950	0.0900	0.0850	0.0800	0.0750	0.0700	0.0650
Matte	0.1500	0.1450	0.1400	0.1350	0.1300	0.1250	0.1200	0.1150	0.1100	0.1050	0.1000	0.0950	0.0900
<b>Inserts</b>													
B/W 8-16 Page	0.4	0.3900	0.3800	0.3700	0.3600	0.3500	0.3400	0.3300	0.3200	0.3100	0.3000	0.2900	0.2800
4/C 8-16 Page	0.55	0.5400	0.5300	0.5200	0.5100	0.5000	0.4900	0.4800	0.4700	0.4600	0.4500	0.4400	0.4300

<sup>132</sup> Costs associated with print runs of Epitome's four sales categories have been highlighted in yellow.

Sheet 2: Adult Plant Costs<sup>133</sup>

<b>Adult Plant Costs</b>				
	<u>Hardcover</u>		<u>Trade Paper</u>	
	1st Format	2nd Format	1st Format	2nd Format
Copyedit/Proofread	15.00	4.50	15.00	4.50
Composition	15.00	5.50	15.00	5.50
Text Prep	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Misc.	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
<b>Subtotal Fees Per Page</b>	<b>31.05</b>	<b>11.05</b>	<b>31.05</b>	<b>11.05</b>
Jacket Art/Design	5,000.00	1,000.00	4,000.00	1,000.00
Interior Design	2,000.00	-	2,000.00	-
Jacket Prep	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00
Binding Die	50.00	50.00	-	-
<b>Subtotal Flat Fee</b>	<b>7,550.00</b>	<b>1,550.00</b>	<b>6,500.00</b>	<b>1,500.00</b>
<b>Optional</b>				
8 page b/w insert	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00
8 page 4/c insert	1,200.00	1,200.00	1,200.00	1,200.00
<b>Examples</b>				
	32	8,543.60	1,903.60	7,493.60
	352	20,879.60	7,839.60	19,829.60
(with 2 8 page 4/c inserts)				

<sup>133</sup> To calculate plant costs for the trade paperback format, multiply the number of pages by the subtotal fees per page and add jacket prep costs.  
 (352 pages x \$31.05 per page) + \$500 jacket prep = \$11,429.60.  
 Note that since Epitome uses in-house art and design, the freelance jacket/art design and freelance interior design fees do not apply.

## Appendix F: Marketing Budgeting

From Book Marketing and Branding, NYU Spring 2022, class 6 (Brian McLendon, Vice President, Associate Publisher, and Marketing Director of Grand Central Publishing and Twelve at Hachette Book Group).

### Budgeting: What does it cost?

Placement	Cost	Impressions
Shelf Awareness	\$1,800	85,000
Shelf Awareness for Readers	~\$2,000	850,000
PW Daily newsletter sponsored post	~2,000	45,000
Bookshop.org onsite and newsletter banners	\$5,000	2,500,000
ABA regional eblasts	\$200-\$400	varies
<i>New York Times Book Review</i> , full page	~\$25,000	855,000
<i>Washington Post</i> , half page	~\$12,000	1,350,000
LiveIntent, programmatic newsletter banners	\$10,000	1,500,000
Google Display Network advertising	\$5,000	1,500,000
CNN half day takeover	~\$40,000	5,000,000
CNN onsite banners and video ads	~\$20,000	3,400,000
Fox News onsite banners and video ads	~\$15,000	2,300,000
Goodreads emails, banners, and newsletters	\$15,000	450,000
Goodreads giveaway	\$119	N/A
Politico, run of site banners	\$10,000	800,000
WashingtonPost.com, banners and newsletters	\$10,000	600,000
<i>New Yorker</i> newsletters	~\$15,000	600,000
Bookbub ebook deal	~\$5000-\$10,000	80,000
Amazon AAS	\$10,000	2,000,000
Social Media ads (FB, IG, YouTube, TikTok)	\$15,000	1,200,000

Percentages of my year 1 marketing budgets are based on these numbers:

Titled			Non-Titled		
	Cost	Percentage		Cost	Percentage
Co-op	\$6,264	12.25%	ARCs	\$24,000	8.99%
Social media ads	\$15,000	29.33%	Author T&E	\$30,000	11.24%
Amazon AAS	\$10,000	19.55%	Employee T&E	\$23,500	8.80%
GoodReads giveaways	\$476	0.93%	Networking	\$10,000	3.75%
GoodReads ads	\$15,000	29.33%	Launch party	\$45,000	16.86%
Shelf Awareness ads	\$2,000	3.91%	Trade ads	\$13,000	4.87%
ABA regional newsletters	\$400	0.78%	Social media campaign	\$40,000	14.98%
PW Daily newsletter	\$2,000	3.91%	Bookseller campaign	\$20,000	7.49%
Budget per title	\$51,140	100%	Librarian campaign	\$20,000	7.49%
			Swag	\$15,000	5.62%
			Buffer	\$26,478	9.92%
			Total budget	\$266,978	100%

## Appendix G: Instagram Mockup

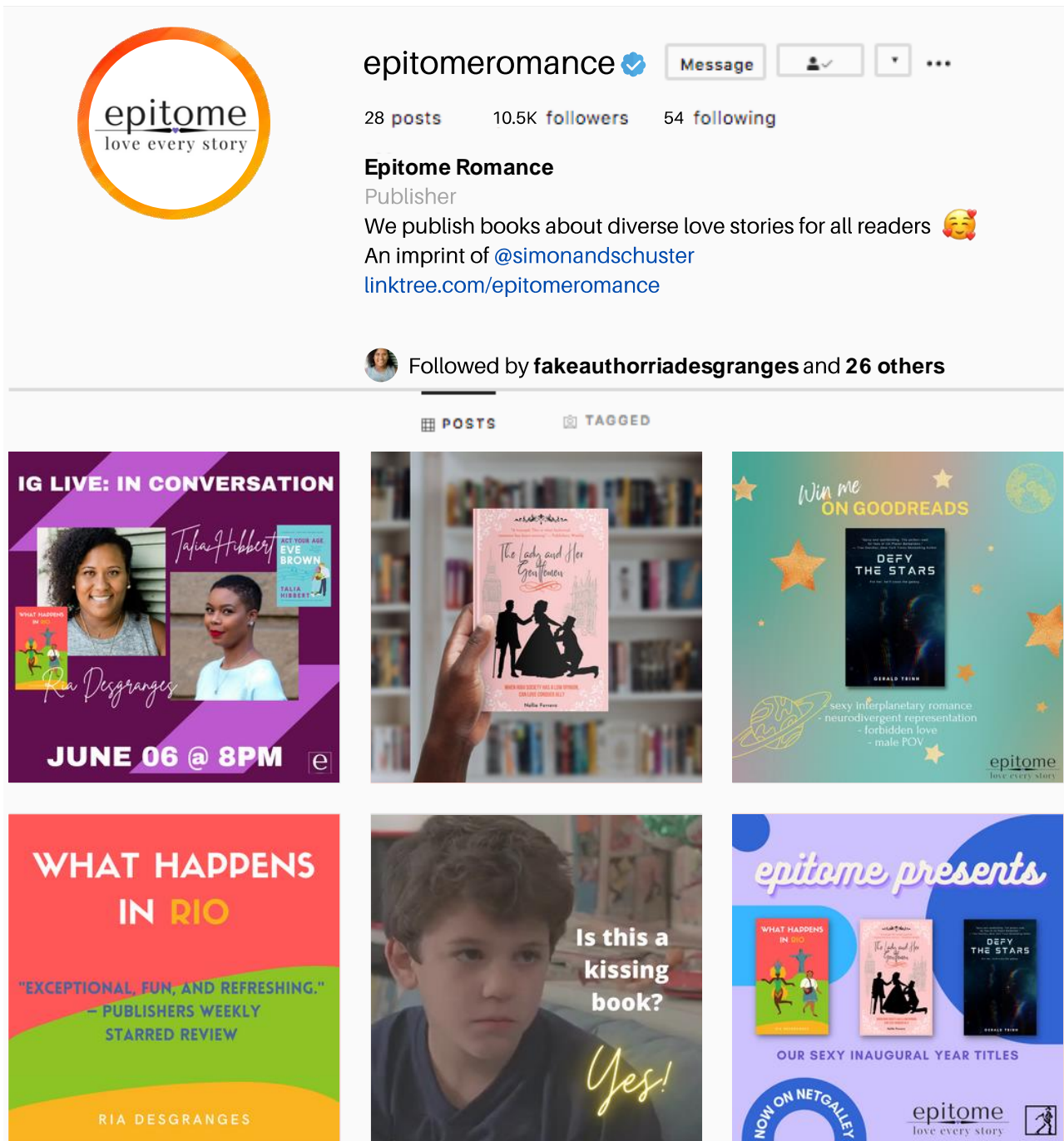


Figure 26: A mockup of the imprint's Instagram, after achieving its marketing goal of acquiring 10K followers.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>134</sup> All graphics created with Canva. All images from Canva, except for Talia Hibbert's headshot and thumbnail of *Act Your Age, Eye Brown*, which came from the author's site, and the still of Fred Savage from *The Princess Bride*. The image of the male figure on the *Defy the Stars* cover came from Shutterstock; I found the S&S logo on Google.



## Appendix H: Inaugural Year Title Tip Sheets

### MARCH 2023 BOOK FACT SHEET

epitome  
love every story

## *The Lady and Her Gentlemen* by Nellie Ferrera

04/26/2022



#### TAGLINE

When high society has a low opinion, can love conquer all?

#### HANDLE

“You cannot carry on this way, with two gentlemen!” my mother said. “It is not proper.”  
“I do not wish to be proper, I wish to find love. And if we all love each other with as much fervor as our hearts will allow, then society be damned.”

#### DESCRIPTION

It is Lucia Quintanilla’s duty to marry, and as a beautiful young woman out in society, she has her pick of every available gentleman. But when two suitors earn her favor – and each other’s – Lucia is at odds with societal expectations and her own heart.

Lord Henley Hornbrook and Socrates De León have been friendly for years, but their relationship reaches new heights when, at Lord Hornbrook’s annual ball, they make Lucia’s acquaintance. Their chemistry is undeniable, but in a society where monogamy is the norm, rumors fly, reputations are tarnished, and tough choices must be made. The throuple must decide whether to risk ostracization or sacrifice the ones they love.

Complete with steamy carriage rides and impassioned duels, *The Lady and Her Gentlemen* is a fresh take on a classic that you’ll never want to end.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nellie Ferrera is a lover of romance and scholar of the Georgian era. She enjoys taking hot baths and rock climbing and is an avid fan of the WNBA. She lives in Houston, Texas with her two loving partners.

**AUTH. INSTAGRAM ID:** @fakeauthornellieferrera

#### MARKETING PLANS

- Virtual Author Tour: Instagram Live events in conversation with popular historical romance authors, such as Beverly Jenkins, Alyssa Cole, and Evie Dunmore
- Bookseller outreach at Winter Institute and through the ABA Monthly box
- Librarian outreach at ALA Midwinter Meeting and through NetGalley giveaways
- Amazon Books hero image ad; sponsored algorithm optimization for recommendation to users; Kindle lock screen advertisement
- Extensive reader review campaign including staggered ARC giveaways on Amazon Vine, Book Riot, GoodReads, and romance conventions
- Preorder campaign including signed bookplates; signed copies exclusively through our partner The Ripped Bodice

#### IMPORTANT NOTES

**SEXY HISTORICAL FICTION.** The reimagined Regency setting with a modern twist is sure to delight fans of *Bridgerton*!

**UNCONVENTIONAL RELATIONSHIP STRUCTURE.** Few traditionally published books tackle polyamory, giving readers something new in a genre saturated by tropes.

**LATINX AND INTERRACIAL.** All three leads are people of color, including our Latina lead, ensuring that more folks will see themselves represented!

**FIRST IN A SERIES.** Book 2, *Improper*, will be released in Spring 2024!

#### QUOTES / REVIEWS

“A triumph. This is what historical romance has been missing.”

--- *Publishers Weekly*

#### PUBLICITY PLANS

##### BEFORE ON SALE

- Pitch to *New York Times* Book Review
- Pitch to *Publishers Weekly*
- Pitch op-ed to *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Vulture*
- Social Media campaign through romance author network, author’s writing group, and author’s scholarly community

##### LAUNCH WEEK

- Pitch to Morning Shows: *The View*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*
- Media Reviews: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Buzzfeed Books*, *Kirkus*
- Influencer Outreach: Kate LeBeau (@romanticallyinclined); @readsromance; @talk\_about\_swoon; @meetyournewfavoritebook
- Podcasts: *Smart Podcast*, *Trashy Books*; *Fated Mates*; *Steam Scenes*; *Shelf Love*; *Smart Women Read Romance*; *Regency Romance Podcast*, *Tea and Strumpets: A Regency Romance Review*, *And Then They Fucked*
- Pitch to Book Clubs: Belletrist, Between Two Clubs, Book of the Month, GMA Book Club, Reese’s Book Club

#### Order Cutoff Date

FEB 21 2023

#### On Sale Date:

MAR 21 2023

#### US/Can:

\$17.99

#### Format/Sub:

ORIGINAL TRADE

PAPERBACK BOOK

#### ISBN:

1-5000-0000-0

#### ISBN-13:

978-1-5000-0000-0

#### BISAC Category:

ROMANCE /

Historical / Regency

ROMANCE /

Polyamory

ROMANCE /

LGBTQ+ / Bisexual

ROMANCE /

Multicultural &

Interracial

FICTION /

Disabilities & Special Needs

#### Trim Size:

5 3/8" x 8 1/4"

#### Pages:

352

#### Editor:

Rice, Sammy

#### Auth. Residence:

Houston, TX

#### Exclusive Terr:

US, CAN, P

#### 1st Serial Right:

Yes

#### Available In:

eBook, Audiobook

#### Announced Print:

35,000

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**COMPARABLE TITLES**

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<b>PUB MONTH</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>PUBLISHER</b>	<b>PRICE</b>	<b>RTD SALES</b>	<b>SOURCE</b>
09/19	9781984805683	Bringing Down the Duke	Evie Dunmore	TP	Berkley / PRH	\$16.00	24,703	Bookscan
11/20	9781538736135	A Lady's Guide to Mischief and Mayhem	Manda Collins	TP	Forever / HBG	\$14.99	21,748	Bookscan
04/21	9781982160876	To Love and to Loathe	Martha Waters	TP	S&S / Atria	\$16.99	7,651	Bookscan
06/21	9780593200162	The Wisteria Society of Lady Scoundrels	India Holton	TP	Berkley / PRH	\$16.00	17,623	Bookscan
09/21	9781538736142	A Lady's Guide to Mischief and Mayhem	Manda Collins	MM	Forever / HBG	\$8.99	3,969	Bookscan

**What Happens in Rio by Ria Desgranges**

04/26/2022



**HANDLE**  
Worlds and cultures collide in this hilarious and groundbreaking rom-com by social media sensation Ria Desgranges!

**DESCRIPTION**  
Writer Deborah Moore has always kept to herself - easy enough when all her small-town neighbors ever talk about is how her mom left Deb and her dad fifteen years ago. But when her mother suddenly dies in Brazil, Deb is forced to leave her comfort zone, and her country, to connect to herself, her family, her culture, and a side of her mother that she never knew.

Little does Deb know that it's Carnival in Rio, where she meets Karine, Karine is a mysterious and vivacious performer with entirely different values and secrets of her own, and Deb is completely enamored.

But Deb must choose: should she stay on the straight and narrow, or trust herself and embrace her inner desires?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ria Desgranges is a RITA award winner, world traveler, and Brooklyn native. After becoming a BookTok sensation, she gained media attention for the travel hacks she learned researching her sapphic debut novel, *What Happens in Rio*. She lives in Williamsburg with her partner and two chow puppies, Paw-Paw and Chin-Chin.

**AUTH. INSTAGRAM ID:** @fakeauthorriadesgranges  
**MARKETING PLANS**

- Virtual Author Tour: Instagram Live events in conversation with popular authors, such as Talia Hibbert
- Bookseller outreach at Winter Institute and through the ABA Monthly box
- Librarian outreach at ALA Midwinter Meeting and through NetGalley giveaways
- Amazon Books hero image ad; sponsored algorithm optimization for recommendation to users; Kindle lock screen advertisement
- Extensive reader review campaign including staggered ARC giveaways on Amazon Vine, Book Riot, and GoodReads
- Preorder campaign including signed bookplates; signed copies exclusively through, our partner The Ripped Bodice

**IMPORTANT NOTES**

**AUTHOR FOLLOWING.** Ria Desgranges has over 100K followers on BookTok! This following is a built-in audience to market the book and future Epitome titles.

**AFRO-LATINA LESBIAN REPRESENTATION.** The author and both leading characters are intersectional, creating authenticity and representation where there previously was none!

**BODY POSITIVE.** Readers want body-size inclusivity, and Desgranges gives it to them in curve-loving spades!

**BOOK CLUB POTENTIAL.** The fresh and fun perspective as well as the deep themes of the book are on trend with the national conversation, making it perfect for discussion with friends.

**FIRST IN A SERIES.** *Land Down Under*, book 2 in the Sapphic Sightseer series, will be published in Summer 2024!

**QUOTES / REVIEWS**

“Exceptional, fun, and refreshing.”  
--- *Publishers Weekly* starred review

**PUBLICITY PLANS**

**BEFORE ON SALE**

- Pitch to *New York Times* Book Review
- Pitch to *Publishers Weekly*
- Pitch op-ed to *Cosmopolitan* and *Vulture*
- Social media posts and/or author takeover on other popular romance authors' Instagram accounts: Elena Armas, Helen Hoang, Jasmine Guillory, Emily Henry, Ali Hazelwood, Abbi Jimenez, Talia Hibbert, Christina Lauren.
- TikTok campaign aimed at the author's 100K+ followers

**LAUNCH WEEK**

- Media Reviews: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Buzzfeed Books*, *Kirkus*
- Influencer Outreach: Kate LeBeau (@romanticallyinclined); @readsromance; @talk\_about\_swoon; @meetyournewfavoritebook
- Podcasts: *Smart Podcast*, *Trashy Books*; *Fated Mates*; *Steam Scenes*; *Shelf Love*; *Smart Women Read Romance*; *Sex and Psychology*
- Pitch to Book Clubs: Belletrist, Between Two Clubs, Book of the Month, GMA Book Club, Reese's Book Club

**Order Cutoff Date**  
MAY 16 2023  
**On Sale Date:**  
JUN 13 2023  
**US/Can:**  
\$17.99  
**Format/Sub:**  
ORIGINAL TRADE  
PAPERBACK BOOK  
**ISBN:**  
1-5000-0000-0  
**ISBN-13:**  
978-1-5000-0000-0  
**BISAC Category:**  
ROMANCE / African  
American & Black  
ROMANCE/  
LGBTQ+ / Lesbian  
ROMANCE /  
Romantic Comedy  
ROMANCE /  
Multicultural &  
Interracial  
AFRICAN  
AMERICAN &  
BLACK / Romance  
**Trim Size:**  
5 3/8" x 8 1/4"  
**Pages:**  
352  
**Editor:**  
Rice, Sammy  
**Auth. Residence:**  
Brooklyn, NY  
**Exclusive Terr:**  
US, CAN, P  
**1st Serial Right:**  
Yes  
**Available In:**  
eBook, Audiobook  
**Announced Print:**  
75,000

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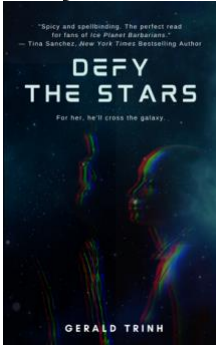
**COMPARABLE TITLES**

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<b>PUB MONTH</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>PUBLISHER</b>	<b>PRICE</b>	<b>RTD SALES</b>	<b>SOURCE</b>
11/19	9780062941206	Get a Life, Chloe Brown	Talia Hibbert	TP	HarperCollins / Avon Books	\$15.99	51,334	Bookscan
02/20	9780062909879	The Worst Best Man	Mia Sosa	TP	HarperCollins / Avon Books	\$15.99	18,387	Bookscan
02/21	9780778311027	Honey Girl	Morgan Rogers	TP	HarperCollins / Harlequin / Park Row	\$16.99	36,393	Bookscan
07/21	9780593100851	While We Were Dating	Jasmine Guillory	TP	PRH / Berkley	\$16.00	49,317	Bookscan
02/22	9781668002520	The Spanish Love Deception	Elena Armas	TP	S&S / Atria	\$17.99	67,215	Bookscan

**Defy the Stars by Gerald Trinh**

04/26/2022



**Order Cutoff Date**

AUG 22 2023

**On Sale Date:**

SEPT 19 2023

**US/Can:**

\$17.99

**Format/Sub:**

ORIGINAL TRADE  
PAPERBACK BOOK

**ISBN:**

1-5000-0000-0

**ISBN-13:**

978-1-5000-0000-0

**BISAC Category:**

ROMANCE / Science  
Fiction

ROMANCE /  
Multicultural &  
Interracial

SCIENCE FICTION /  
Romance

SCIENCE FICTION /  
Alien Contact

FICTION / Asian  
American

**Trim Size:**

5 3/8" x 8 1/4"

**Pages:**

352

**Editor:**

Rice, Sammy

**Auth. Residence:**

New Orleans, LA

**Exclusive Terr:**

US, CAN, P

**1st Serial Right:**

Yes

**Available In:**

eBook, Audiobook

**Announced Print:**

50,000

**TAGLINE**

For her, he'll cross the galaxy.

**HANDLE**

Star-crossed lovers, warring planets, alien lifeforms, and mind-melding holograms make Gerald Trinh's "epic and scintillating" (*Kirkus*) debut one for the ages.

**DESCRIPTION**

Sister planets Aeon and Astra have been at war for centuries. Any fraternization between the two results in immediate extermination.

Hien Vinh is the son of the emperor of Aeon, a title that affords him the privilege of mind-melding, a form of communication that fuses likeminded souls.

Although usually a way Hien whiles away the time, a catatonic state finds him accidentally melded with Idrysa Findall, the princess of adversary Astra, and Hien is never the same.

Idryssa is promised to the alien General of Ether, a planetary vessel that promises to end the wars after their wedding two weeks hence. But Hien won't let her go without a fight.

Full of otherworldly love scenes and heroic bloodshed, *Defy the Stars* is a new take on a classic that will leave your heart pounding for more.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Gerald Trinh** is a part-time poet and full-time English teacher in New Orleans, Louisiana. His mother, a self-published romance author, taught him to love romance novels, and he's honored to finally have written one of his own.

**AUTH. INSTAGRAM ID:** @fakeauthorgeraldtrinh

**MARKETING PLANS**

- Virtual Author Tour: Instagram Live events in conversation with popular authors, such as David Yoon
- Bookseller outreach at Winter Institute and through the ABA Monthly box
- Librarian outreach at ALA Midwinter Meeting and through NetGalley giveaways
- Amazon Books hero image ad; sponsored algorithm optimization for recommendation to users; Kindle lock screen advertisement
- Extensive reader review campaign including staggered ARC giveaways on Amazon Vine, Book Riot, GoodReads, and science fiction conventions
- Preorder campaign including signed bookplates; signed copies exclusively through, our partner The Ripped Bodice

**IMPORTANT NOTES**

**ROMEO AND JULIET IN SPACE.** The classic trope of forbidden love gives romance readers a familiar element to catapult them into Trinh's imaginative new world!

**TRENDING GENRE.** Success of the *Ice Planet Barbarians* series proves that alien romance and interplanetary love are on the rise.

**ASIAN MALE POV AND NEURODIVERGENT REPRESENTATION.** The two leads both have identities underrepresented in traditional romantic publishing, giving *Defy the Stars* a unique value proposition!

**BEAUTIFUL WRITING.** Trinh's lyrical writing style transcends and elevates the genre while giving romance fans plenty of steam.

**FIRST IN A SERIES.** *Stars Are Fire*, a romantic intergalactic *Hamlet* retelling, will be released in Fall 2024!

**QUOTES / REVIEWS**

"Spicy and spellbinding. The perfect read for fans of *Ice Planet Barbarians*."

--- Tina Sanchez, *New York Times* Bestselling Author, @fakeauthor\_tinasanchez

**PUBLICITY PLANS**

**BEFORE ON SALE**

- Pitch to *New York Times* Book Review
- Pitch to *Publishers Weekly*
- Pitch first serial to *Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*
- Pitch op-ed to *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*
- Social Media campaign through romance author network and author's writing group

**LAUNCH WEEK**

- Media Reviews: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Buzzfeed Books*, *Kirkus*
- Influencer Outreach: Kate LeBeau (@romanticallyinclined); @readsromance; @talk\_about\_swoon
- Podcasts: *Smart Podcast*, *Trashy Books*; *Fated Mates*; *Steam Scenes*; *Shelf Love*; *Smart Women Read Romance*; *Sex and Psychology*, *Sword and Laser*
- Pitch to Book Clubs: Belletrist, Between Two Clubs, Book of the Month, GMA Book Club, Reese's Book Club

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**COMPARABLE TITLES**

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<b>PUB MONTH</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>PUBLISHER</b>	<b>PRICE</b>	<b>RTD SALES</b>	<b>SOURCE</b>
05/18	9780316341677	Strange the Dreamer	Laini Taylor	TP	HBG / LBYR	\$14.99	44,171	Bookscan
06/19	9780525522898	How to Stop Time	Matt Haig	TP	PRH / Penguin	\$17.00	47,950	Bookscan
11/21	9780593546024	Ice Planet Barbarians	Ruby Dixon	TP	PRH / Berkley	\$16.00	37,442	Bookscan
01/22	9780593546031	Barbarian Alien	Ruby Dixon	TP	PRH / Berkley	\$16.00	17,890	Bookscan
01/22	9781728231761	Electric Idol	Katee Robert	TP	Sourcebooks / Casablanca	\$14.99	37,451	Bookscan

## Appendix I: Email to Leah Koch (Co-Owner of The Ripped Bodice)

From: Sammy Rice [sammyrice@nyu.edu](mailto:sammyrice@nyu.edu)

Date: April 7, 2022, at 8:08 PM

To: The Ripped Bodice [do-not-reply@indiecommerce.com](mailto:do-not-reply@indiecommerce.com) using the contact form at

<https://www.therippedbodice.com/contact>

Subject: Looking for comps

Hello! I'm an NYU student, and my capstone project is proposing a new romance imprint for a Big 5 company. I was having trouble finding a particular kind of book - could you please tell me if you have recommendations that fit these criteria?

-published by a Big 5

-comes in TP format

-rom-com

-FF

-leads are both women of color

It feels like there should be a few books that fit, but I'm not having great luck.

Thank you so much for your help!

---

From: Leah Koch [leah@therippedbodice.com](mailto:leah@therippedbodice.com)

Date: April 8, 2022, at 5:02 PM

To: Sammy Rice [sammyrice@nyu.edu](mailto:sammyrice@nyu.edu)

Subject: Re: [Contact Us] Looking for comps

Hi Sammy,

There *should* be dozens of options but of course there aren't. The issue is the BOTH leads part. To my knowledge, Meet Me in Madrid by Verity Lowell is the only book that meets ALL of your criteria.

How to Find a Princess by Alyssa Cole meets all of them except<sup>135</sup> is not in trade paperback.

there may be some YA options but that is not my area of expertise.

Good luck with your project!

Leah Koch

she/her

Owner, The Ripped Bodice Bookstore

[leah@therippedbodice.com](mailto:leah@therippedbodice.com)

---

<sup>135</sup> *Sic*

## Appendix J: Distribution Grid

Excerpted from Book Sales and Merchandising, NYU Spring 2022, class 9 (Jennifer Gonzalez, President of Sales, Macmillan).

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Fiction</b>
<b>Category</b>	<b>Debut</b>	<b>Brand Author</b>	<b>Everyday Book</b>	<b>Literary</b>
<b>Print Run</b>	250,000	750,000	40,000	40,000
<b>Amazon</b>	10,000	40,000	2,500	5,000
<b>B&amp;N</b>	5,000	15,000	2,500	2,000
<b>BAM</b>	2,000	5,000	500	500
<b>Indies</b>	2,000	4,000	1,000	1,000
<b>Target</b>	5,000	20,000	5,000	0
<b>Walmart</b>	5,000	25,000	1,500	0
<b>BJ's</b>	3,000	4,000	0	0
<b>Costco</b>	0	25,000	0	0
<b>Sam's</b>	0	12,000	0	0
<b>Airports</b>	500	5,000	1,000	500
<b>RDS Other</b>	1,500	15,000	1,000	0
<b>Other</b>	2,000	30,000	0	4,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>13,000</b>



## **Appendix K: Minimum Viable Product (MVP) Survey**

### Background

Between February 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:38pm and February 15<sup>th</sup> at 1:17am, I collected 445 responses to my Qualtrics MVP survey. I was able to collect 35 responses on my own, and afterwards reached out to a popular book influencer (Kate LeBeau, @romantically\_inclined on Instagram, with 18.5K followers) for advice as to where to post my survey for maximum results; she graciously offered to post my link in her Instagram story as well as her Facebook page on February 11<sup>th</sup>, which she did at 4:54pm, after which the majority of users responded.

Not every question was “required,” and responses that were in progress when the survey closed did record partial answers, so each question does not necessarily have 445 responses.

### Results

The majority of respondents (407) were between the ages of 18 and 44: 59 people were between 18 and 24; 226 people were between 25 and 34; and 122 people were between the ages of 35 and 44.

The majority of respondents (363) were white; unsurprisingly, the majority (425) were female. The majority (324) were also heterosexual. 93.81% did not identify as disabled; 73.62% did not identify as neurodivergent.

There was no clear majority in terms of users’ relationship status: 46.19% were married and 38.11% were single. There was no majority in terms of household income either. 65.59% of respondents had 0 children living in their household.

The majority of respondents (215) read 76 or more books in a year, with the majority reading 81% to 100% exclusively in the romance genre. While all subgenres of romance seemed popular, contemporary, rom-com, fantasy, and historical were ranked highest.

36.08% responded that they read e-books, and 28.74% read paperbacks. As far as where users acquire romance books, 20.39% said Amazon.

Unsurprisingly, most respondents (308) said that publisher/imprint is not a huge factor in choosing a new book. Most respondents (251) did say that representation of marginalized voices is a positive factor when choosing a new book to read, though.

The question “What types of representation should there be more of in mainstream romance publishing?” yielded high marks in all choices.

The most common answers for the price a user was willing to pay for a physical book were “\$20 – \$22.99” (57); “\$15 - \$17.99” (56), and “\$18 - \$19.99” (50). The most common answer for the price a user was willing to pay for an e-book were “\$3 - \$4.99” (93), “\$5 – \$7.99” (79), and “\$8 – \$9.99” (72).

Instagram was the most popular social media platform by far with 391 votes, but that is a biased answer, since the link that got most users to my survey was posted on Instagram.

The open-ended question “What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?” was by far my favorite, because it truly gave me insight as to what folks want to see. Many suggested plus size representation, polyamorous and non-traditional relationship structures, male-centered stories, interracial love stories, less obvious happily ever afters (HEAs), and socioeconomic representation.

Notably (because it justifies the need for my imprint), users citing the need for diverse voices to write the books and diverse publishers to do them justice editorially and marketing-wise struck me. One user summed up my intent succinctly: romance publishing is missing “Diverse authors receiving support and press.” My imprint of course will put 100% of resources toward this goal.

## Shortcomings of the Survey Itself

I'm a publishing student with little experience in survey design or statistics. The Qualtrics survey-building tool was easy enough to navigate for basic functionality, but there are many features of which I am not well-versed.

As I got results back, I noticed flaws in my questions and answers.

For example, anywhere I included an "Other" option, I should've given respondents the option to write in an answer in order to gain further insights. As an inexperienced Qualtrics user, I didn't realize that was an option until my survey was already live.

Additionally, for the question "Choose one or more ethnicity with which you identify," I used Qualtrics' supplied "ethnicity" template answers, which didn't include "Latinx/Hispanic" as an option, most likely because that designation is often a separate question in demographic surveys. The fact that I did not verify that this was an option on my survey was a huge oversight on my part, which I believe resulted for the 42 "Other" responses. I feel terrible about my negligence here, as "othering" people is the opposite of the goals of my proposed imprint.

For the question "Where do you get your romance books?" I should've included Big Box Stores as an option.

I also thought of a few other questions that might've proven useful, such as

- Geographic location;
- An open-ended question for what users believe to be overused or overhyped in the genre;
- A question about the importance of body-positive representation.

Full survey questions and answers are below.

# MVP Survey

Romance Imprint Capstone Survey  
February 15th 2022, 1:36 am EST

## Age - How old are you?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Under 18	1.57%	7
2	18 - 24	13.26%	59
3	25 - 34	50.79%	226
4	35 - 44	27.42%	122
5	45 - 54	5.84%	26
6	55 - 64	1.12%	5
7	65 - 74	0.00%	0
8	75 - 84	0.00%	0
9	85 or older	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	445

## Gender - Choose one or more gender with which you identify:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Female	95.29%	425
2	Male	2.69%	12
3	Transgender	0.45%	2
4	Non-binary or gender fluid	1.57%	7
5	Gender not listed here	0.00%	0
6	Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	446

## Age - How old are you?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How old are you?	1.00	6.00	3.26	0.86	0.74	445

## Ethnicity - Choose one or more ethnicity with which you identify:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	White	77.40%	363
2	Black or African American	3.41%	16
3	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.85%	4
4	Asian	8.32%	39
5	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.43%	2
6	Other	8.96%	42
7	Prefer not to answer	0.64%	3
	Total	100%	469

## Sexual Orientation - Choose one or more sexual orientation with which you identify:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Asexual	3.46%	17
2	Bisexual	16.70%	82
3	Pansexual	5.09%	25
4	Homosexual	1.02%	5
5	Heterosexual	65.99%	324
6	Queer	4.68%	23
7	Orientation not listed here	1.83%	9
8	Prefer not to answer	1.22%	6
	Total	100%	491

Disability Status - Do you identify as disabled?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you identify as disabled?	1.00	3.00	1.96	0.25	0.06	436

Disability Status - Do you identify as disabled?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	5.28%	23
2	No	93.81%	409
3	Prefer not to answer	0.92%	4
	Total	100%	436

Neurodivergence - Do you identify as neurodivergent?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you identify as neurodivergent?	1.00	3.00	1.76	0.46	0.21	436

Neurodivergence - Do you identify as neurodivergent?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	25.00%	109
2	No	73.62%	321
3	Prefer not to answer	1.38%	6
	Total	100%	436

Marital Status - What is your marital status?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your marital status?	1.00	7.00	2.23	1.17	1.36	433

Marital Status - What is your marital status?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Single	38.11%	165
2	In a domestic partnership	11.78%	51
3	Married	46.19%	200
4	Widowed	0.00%	0
5	Divorced	2.08%	9
6	Separated	0.92%	4
7	Prefer not to answer	0.92%	4
	Total	100%	433

Children - How many children under 18 live in your household?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many children under 18 live in your household?	1.00	5.00	1.63	0.98	0.95	433

Children - How many children under 18 live in your household?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0	65.59%	284
2	1	12.01%	52
3	2	17.32%	75
4	3	3.93%	17
5	4	1.15%	5
6	5+	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	433

What is your annual household income?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your annual household income?	1.00	12.00	7.64	3.61	13.02	422

What is your annual household income?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Less than \$10,000	6.40%	27
2	\$10,000 - \$19,999	4.50%	19
3	\$20,000 - \$29,999	6.64%	28
4	\$30,000 - \$39,999	5.69%	24
5	\$40,000 - \$49,999	9.72%	41
6	\$50,000 - \$59,999	4.98%	21
7	\$60,000 - \$69,999	7.82%	33
8	\$70,000 - \$79,999	8.53%	36
9	\$80,000 - \$89,999	5.21%	22
10	\$90,000 - \$99,999	5.45%	23
11	\$100,000 - \$149,999	17.30%	73

What is your annual household income?

#	Answer	%	Count
12	More than \$150,000	17.77%	75
	Total	100%	422

Books/ Year - How many books do you usually read in a year?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many books do you usually read in a year?	1.00	10.00	8.01	2.56	6.56	428

**Books/ Year - How many books do you usually read in a year?**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0-5	1.64%	7
2	6-10	3.27%	14
3	11-15	3.50%	15
4	16-20	4.67%	20
5	21-30	5.84%	25
6	31-40	6.78%	29
7	41-50	8.18%	35
8	51-60	9.11%	39
9	61-75	6.78%	29
10	76+	50.23%	215
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>428</b>

**Romance Books/ Year - Of the books you read annually, approximately what percentage are in the romance genre?**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0% - 10%	2.57%	11
2	11% - 20%	3.74%	16
3	21% - 30%	5.14%	22
4	31% - 40%	5.37%	23
5	41% - 50%	6.31%	27
6	51% - 60%	4.67%	20
7	61% - 70%	6.31%	27
8	71% - 80%	13.79%	59
9	81% - 90%	20.56%	88
10	91% - 100%	31.54%	135
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>428</b>

**Format - How do you prefer to read? (Check all that apply.)**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Physical book hardcover	14.97%	151
2	Physical book paperback	28.74%	290
3	Ebook	36.08%	364
4	Ebook - serialized	4.36%	44
5	Audiobook	15.86%	160
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1009</b>

**Romance Books/ Year - Of the books you read annually, approximately what percentage are in the romance genre?**

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Of the books you read annually, approximately what percentage are in the romance genre?	1.00	10.00	7.61	2.62	6.89	428

**Subgenre - Choose all of your preferred romance subgenres:**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Contemporary	15.05%	330
2	Rom-com	13.95%	306
3	Historical	12.18%	267
4	Erotica	11.54%	253
5	Paranormal/ monster	10.67%	234
6	Romantic suspense	8.16%	179
7	Science fiction	7.52%	165
8	Fantasy	13.41%	294
9	Young adult	7.52%	165
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2193</b>

**Acquiring Books - Where do you get your romance books? (Check all that apply.)**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Chain bookstore	13.49%	221
2	Independent bookstore	11.97%	196
3	Amazon	20.39%	334
4	iBooks	2.75%	45
5	Other online retailers	4.95%	81
6	Audible	5.92%	97
7	Other audiobook retailers	1.95%	32
8	Kindle Unlimited	14.77%	242
9	Library	14.29%	234
10	Wattpad or similar platform	2.38%	39

Acquiring Books - Where do you get your romance books? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
11	Borrow from friends	4.03%	66
12	Other	3.11%	51
	Total	100%	1638

Publisher Importance - When choosing a book, the publisher/imprint is important to me.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Definitely yes	1.87%	8
2	Probably yes	4.45%	19
3	Might or might not	21.55%	92
4	Probably not	34.89%	149
5	Definitely not	37.24%	159
	Total	100%	427

Favorite Imprints - If yes, what are your favorite publishers or imprints? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
	Total	100%	62

Publisher Importance - When choosing a book, the publisher/imprint is important to me.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	When choosing a book, the publisher/imprint is important to me.	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.97	0.93	427

Favorite Imprints - If yes, what are your favorite publishers or imprints? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Berkley or Jove (PRH)	22.58%	14
2	Avon (HarperCollins)	25.81%	16
3	Forever or Forever Yours (Hachette/Grand Central)	16.13%	10
4	Montlake (Amazon)	3.23%	2
5	Swoon Reads (Macmillan)	11.29%	7
6	Casablanca (Sourcebooks)	4.84%	3
7	Entangled Publishing	4.84%	3
8	Publisher not listed here	11.29%	7

Other Imprint - If not listed, please provide your favorite romance imprint or publisher.

If not listed, please provide your favorite romance imprint or publisher.	
Self-published	
Silver Wing Press	
Gollanz	
Carina Press	
no	



Representation impor - When choosing a book, representation of marginalized voices is important to me.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	When choosing a book, representation of marginalized voices is important to me.	1.00	5.00	2.28	1.07	1.15	420

Representation - What types of representation should there be more of in mainstream romance publishing? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Racial or ethnic	18.62%	326
2	Gender	12.91%	226
3	Sexual orientation	15.99%	280
4	Age	13.76%	241
5	Religious	7.08%	124
6	Ability	14.28%	250
7	Neurodivergence	15.19%	266
8	Representation not listed here	2.17%	38
	Total	100%	1751

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Quantity of options available by these minorities. I can usually find a few, but not many and it makes it challenging to be a diverse reader, even when that is my intention.
Health representation
I'm not sure.
Overcoming serious problems in a relationship. Problems are usually outside the relationship, they solve them together. But I really wanted to find a book about a couple overcoming an affair, and didn't find any.
Atheists
Male authors
I read an article once that said how one sexual assault survivor used romance novels to help her heal from her trauma because romance novels always emphasize consent. I think romance novels need to be also marketed to men to help guide them in how they are treating women. So I would say more expansive marketing is missing. Romance is no longer for bored housewives.
Women who neither have nor want children

Representation impor - When choosing a book, representation of marginalized voices is important to me.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Definitely true	27.62%	116
2	Probably true	32.14%	135
3	Neither true nor false	29.76%	125
4	Probably false	5.71%	24
5	Definitely false	4.76%	20
	Total	100%	420

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Nuanced masculinity
Quality
interracial romances
More plus size romance where it's not a problem that they are plus sized. For example the character knows that they're plus sized and is comfortable with it. It's isn't a finally loving your body or a major issue .
More non traditional relationship structures like Polyamory or chosen family dynamics
Diverse authors receiving support and press
Nothing that I can think of.
Female mcs who have sexual encounters. More often than not shes either a virgin or has had very limited encounters but the male mc is a manwhore. I'd like to see a book where she is the one having commitment issues, not the other way round. Plus why are all the geek girls uncool. I know so many nerds who indulge in makeup and party as well. Non white ethnicities especially Indians are given very stereotypical roles, there are other diversities such as bengalis who are never included. There are no to little female dommes. And if by fluke there is a virgin hero, he becomes a sex savant in two pages, how is that possible? These are only few which are coming to my mind.

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
lots. the big romance presses are still pretty tone deaf and i personally have issues with some of the "exemplary" neurodiv representation out there. also race is underaddressed even when it is present. also WAY TOO MANY CHILDREN not everyone has a desire for babies and it can be truly offputting.
Financial/socioeconomic diversity
Mental health (ptsd, addiction, ED, etc)
Authenticity
Romance novels about already married couples. Falling in love is easy, it's more interesting how people fight to stay together
Being happy alone
Correct portrayal of women and their life
Characters with disabilities
Body diversity

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Intelligent strong women.

Realistic body types

Queer romance written by own voices rather than hetero women writing gay male stories. Also, diverse PUBLISHERS so we get better stories than fetishized nazi/sheikh/genocide cringe "romance".

In heterosexual romance, there is a lack of female leads who are 1) bisexual 2) have a history of relationship trauma (sexual/physical/emotional) that is not used as a suspense plot line where another man saves them or shows them 'what they really deserve' and instead it should show the work she has done on herself and the way she approaches entering a healthy relationship with clear communication, boundaries, and exceptions. We need to normalize healthy romantic and platonic relationships and how to have them. 3) main female characters who live with chronic illness - I have MS and the only characters I have seen with it are parents/parental figures who need caregivers or die; when there are lot of people living with it and having much different experiences.

Variety in kinks/tropes. Variety in sexual orientation and partners. Lots of F/M not a lot outside of that.

Loud, vocal credit to the romance genre for propping up the publishing industry for years

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Cross cultural

Not enough lesbian or F/F pairings thought that's changing slowly.

Characters who don't want kids or marriage but seeking monogamous relationship

There is a definite lack of self-awareness that makes the tropes feel overused. I just finished a book that read like it was going to break the fourth wall but never did and it was just so refreshing to read and made the story more fun even though it was completely formulaic.

Diversity

Diversity in authors

Diversity in setting

spectrum of relationship structures and spectrum of sexual experiences portrayed in a positive light

A proper crossover space (like what New Adult failed to be!) so YA readers can find a bridge between the two

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Just diversity

good plots r rare now a days :P

Diverse own voices options

There's a big jump in reverse harem with F+MM(+) which can include MM pairing but I have yet to see one where there's also another woman or non-binary in the mix

I think books where someone is different but it's not a big deal. For example, there's no massive coming out for a character. They're out, they're accepted, normal life. Or where it's not "oh I'm Deaf, people don't get me I don't get me blah blah" - maybe they're Deaf or hearing impaired and they're settled in it or their community accepts it.

More diverse authors/voices

More steam. It's treated as such a taboo thing, especially female pleasure. It shouldn't be.

Mental health

Unique story elements, could be driven by publishers or just authors being inspired by each other but there is always a common theme in popular books at one time or another. Authors generally do a great job at spinning it to there style but it can still feel repetitive when reading a large amount of books.

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Diverse marketing

N/a

Mote books related to be published for ya and/or people from other religions, where they can be conservative and go along with their beliefs, from the characters to the content of the story. I'm not referring about publishing a book that talks about religion or anything, just a books that has a protagonist that is, for example, christian and how she falls in love with a guy following while developing a story in a conservative way.

Good disability rep

Variety in love interests. Not everyone wants the sixpack

I didn't see Latina/Hispanic as an ethnic option. Maybe I missed it. That is me too. Also white Latina.

N/A

dry Humour

Women living in their 30s who are happy and not "starting over" after a trauma, divorce, etc.

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Hardcover options, international translations, better cover designs

True body size inclusion

I'm not really sure because I do see people trying to include all types of people, so we can't condemn them from trying

Chronic pain representation

The male "lead" being a middle aged divorcee with kids who divorced because his 1st wife lacked vision and ambition so is now also looking for a smart capable, ambitious middle aged woman

Older couples (40+ years)

Good copy editing/proofreading

I think "mainstream" romance isn't super relevant anymore and Kindle Unlimited has just about everything you could hope for

There's a huge gap between what publishers think romance readers want and what romance readers think. Just look at Indy books and how they have been dominating the industry for years. Those authors are providing what romance readers actually want. Really engaging and unique stories with smut. I don't know why publishers think we all want cute rom-coms that fade to black

### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

#### What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

Open communication, sexual education, and more stem/video game character fields

International availability - a lot of the Australian imprints lack any real romance genre. Also listing the incorrect genres (eg calling love stories with no hea as romance)

I'd like to see more books with main characters with disabilities.

Child free by choice, more willingness to find alternative goals/aspirations for women, uncommon professions, and not comparing women as if one option is better than the other

Comedy

More poly relationships - without a fetishising element.

As a larger individual, I think sometimes fat MCs are either super comfortable in their skin or super insecure, but we lack characters of a larger size who fall in between. That doesn't necessarily make for a compelling narrative, but it would be nice to see larger characters size sort of glazed over in a way that smaller characters description of size is. You don't see smaller characters being described in romantic scenes with phrases like "her small bosom" but fat characters always have a comment about the size of their breasts, for example.

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Physical Diversity
More realistic scenes about the female orgasm and what it takes to get there.
Plus size rep
All kinds of body types
if you consider mainstream as with a publisher, then romance is missing. They are cutting numbers that they publish.
Own voices writers
A generalized rating system like for films and TV
Definition behind some romance sub genres, diversity
Stories where people aren't always millionaires
Specifically indigenous voices - and especially in romance. They are SO hard to find still. I've only found one indigenous romance author and she was self published.

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Age and Size inclusivity (i.e. not every heroine being a 25 year old size 2)
More diverse kinks
Characters with sexual history (divorce, kids, etc) there's a lot of it in real life, why not books?
I really would like to see more confident female
Mental illness
More spicy romances
Overweight male characters/dad bods. Male characters with disabilities or physical differences (my husband has lymphangioma on his face/neck and it break my heart that there are no characters like this. All perfect, chiselled, sports plays/weight lifters, etc.)
more realistic characters who reflect the diversity of our world
Culturally diverse books
Male body diversity

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
non-traditional relationships
Different body types on all genders
Plus sized heroes (men and women)
Age: 30+ stories of romance and adventure
Diversity of popular books
More diverse authors
Characters who are powerful in ways that are non-physical
books can be interesting/have a good plot and the characters can have healthy communication skills. Relationships dont have to be toxic to be interesting. It is definitely getting better but so many of the most popular romance novels are SUPER toxic.
Good plus sized female lead characters
Need more plus size rep

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Im not really a mainstream reader. I like the kinky shit.
Occupational variety
Content listings ("trigger warnings")
Body type inclusion.
Books where Muslim girls don't have to let go of their values/take off their hijab to "get the guy"
AGING/OLD PEOPLE AS MAIN CHARACTERS
I wish it was easier to see and find own voice authors for nerodivergence and LGBTQA+
Plots that do not include marriage/pregnancy as HEA
Actual real women, not boons and bad assery
Basic stuff here and there in the stories
There's a little focus on people who do not drink alcohol or characters who are non drinkers

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Middle and lower class incomes. Why is everyone so rich?
Spiritual
Larger humans
N/a
Respect from readers of other genres
Happily ever afters that don't involve marriage and children
Fat people!
More 'out' male readers
Plus size physical type and average-looks on covers
Queer voices writing queer romance
Acceptance

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Fat rep
even playing field for independently published works outside of trad publishers
positive representations of realistic polyamory
Different HEA: there don't always have to be babies
A wider diversity of body types as well. Also I would personally love to see some romances include book club questions/discussion guides in the back because many of them deal with relatable characters and important themes that are works that discussing/thinking about.
variety
N/A
Indie authors
There's a huge market for queer romance that's mostly independently pubbed, would love mainstream to pick up more LGBTQ+ stuff

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Male writers
Unsure
More fat/plus-size representation
More diverse authors!
Anything that isn't heterosexual white and somewhat Christian is "niche" or "unusual"
A Marie diverse collection of voices.
Older main characters, 40+; married to each other main characters
Effective marketing for the books they do publish that tell the stories of marginalized groups
Religious fiction that isn't Christian, disability rep, wider range of ethnicities (I'm Arab-American but not Muslim, for example, so I don't tend to see myself in stories much).
Focus on consent

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Women in STEM
Poly romance, or anything where there isn't just one male and one female acting as if no other relationship ever existed for them.
Older MCs, so many are in their 20s or early 30s
Na
I just want to read and don't want to hear from "social justice" warriors who bitch about "representation", but don't spend their free time volunteering in the community. I don't care what anyone else reads, I support everyone reading the weirdest things they can get their hands on; but the online bitching for representation is shallow and lacks any substance.
More books with characters that are child-free, discussing being child-free
Mixed race couples
More interracial romances
plots that don't revolve around finding your "forever" person (some great loves might just be temporary and that's okay!)

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Body dysmorphia/shapes/sizes
Male POV
Asian male leads
Diversity of size

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Consent, discussion on STI and protection
A roll of things. I mean there's no cap on creativity. But I love that there's so many different ways for people to put there out there and prefer getting books from other places than a mainstream publishers.
More Big Beautiful Bodies in both hero and heroine
Respect for the genre itself.
Non-virgin MCs
Representation from people that grew up in a non western culture - while yes there are definitely books about people from other cultures and religions, a lot of them are very westernized/caucasian in nature. Like girl goes to Italy meets hot Italian man instead of girl from (non western country) falls in love with person. It would make the romance genre that more romantic depicting people falling in love from all walks of life
Financial backing despite it being one of the largest growing and lucrative genres
Diverse photography covers: accurate representation of the characters

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?

What else do you think is missing from mainstream romance publishing?
Friends/Friendships
Adult fantasy romance being considered "real" literature
International romance
Interplanetary romance
N/A
Queer authors writing queer stories (instead of straight cos women writing "gay" m/m romance rife with inaccuracies, misogyny, abusive dynamics, and heteronormativity.
The perception of romance as something female and it being a negative quality
Interracial relationships
series where the protags take more than one book to get together (not series where every installment focuses on another couple)
Non-monogamous romance

Physical Cost - The most I'm willing to spend on a physical book is:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The most I'm willing to spend on a physical book is:	1.00	15.00	8.58	3.16	10.00	415

Physical Cost - The most I'm willing to spend on a physical book is:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	\$0 - \$2.99	1.20%	5
2	\$3 - \$4.99	0.48%	2
3	\$5 - \$7.99	2.41%	10
4	\$8 - \$9.99	4.10%	17
5	\$10 - \$12.99	7.47%	31
6	\$13 - \$14.99	10.36%	43
7	\$15 - \$17.99	13.49%	56
8	\$18 - \$19.99	12.05%	50
9	\$20 - \$22.99	13.73%	57
10	\$23 - \$24.99	9.40%	39
11	\$25 - \$27.99	7.95%	33

The most I'm willing to spend on an ebook is:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The most I'm willing to spend on an ebook is:	1.00	15.00	3.68	2.05	4.19	415

The most I'm willing to spend on an ebook is:

#	Answer	%	Count
12	\$28 - \$29.99	0.00%	0
13	\$30 - \$32.99	0.24%	1
14	\$33 - \$34.99	0.00%	0
15	\$35+	0.24%	1
	Total	100%	415

Physical Cost - The most I'm willing to spend on a physical book is:

#	Answer	%	Count
12	\$28 - \$29.99	5.06%	21
13	\$30 - \$32.99	3.37%	14
14	\$33 - \$34.99	1.20%	5
15	\$35+	7.71%	32
	Total	100%	415

The most I'm willing to spend on an ebook is:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	\$0 - \$2.99	10.84%	45
2	\$3 - \$4.99	22.41%	93
3	\$5 - \$7.99	19.04%	79
4	\$8 - \$9.99	17.35%	72
5	\$10 - \$12.99	15.18%	63
6	\$13 - \$14.99	7.47%	31
7	\$15 - \$17.99	3.37%	14
8	\$18 - \$19.99	1.20%	5
9	\$20 - \$22.99	1.69%	7
10	\$23 - \$24.99	0.72%	3
11	\$25 - \$27.99	0.24%	1

Other Genres - Other than romance, what genres do you read? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Contemporary	7.95%	208
2	Literary	4.70%	123
3	Bookclub fiction	2.87%	75
4	Historical fiction	6.57%	172
5	Science fiction	6.08%	159
6	Fantasy	10.16%	266
7	Horror	2.45%	64
8	Paranormal	4.39%	115
9	Dystopia	4.74%	124
10	Mystery	6.38%	167
11	Thriller	5.50%	144

Other Genres - Other than romance, what genres do you read? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
12	Classics	6.04%	158
13	Young adult	8.25%	216
14	Biography	2.52%	66
15	Memoir	4.20%	110
16	Poetry	2.71%	71
17	Short stories	3.13%	82
18	Comics	3.25%	85
19	Graphic novels	5.58%	146
20	Other not listed here	2.52%	66
	Total	100%	2617

Social Media - Which social media platforms do you use on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply.)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	TikTok	9.34%	128
2	Twitter	8.47%	116
3	Instagram	28.54%	391
4	Facebook	16.86%	231
5	Snapchat	6.57%	90
6	LinkedIn	4.45%	61
7	Twitch	1.39%	19
8	YouTube	14.60%	200
9	Pinterest	7.96%	109
10	Other not listed here	1.82%	25
	Total	100%	1370