



# BOOK RETAIL FOOTPRINT

Openings, Closures, & 2026 Shape

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Where Book Retail Is Headed Next: 2026 Edition

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Book retail is showing renewed physical-store activity, but this is not a simple “bookstores are back” story.**

RetailStat Location data shows bookstore openings outpacing closures in the current 2026 pipeline, with more than 70 openings tracked against 27 closures. The activity is concentrated around select operators, markets, and store formats, with Barnes & Noble accounting for nearly 60% of openings.

The bigger story is not just that bookstores are opening. It is how and where they are opening. New activity is showing up through more flexible store formats, market-specific openings, relocations, and mid-box opportunities that better fit the way people shop and use retail centers today.

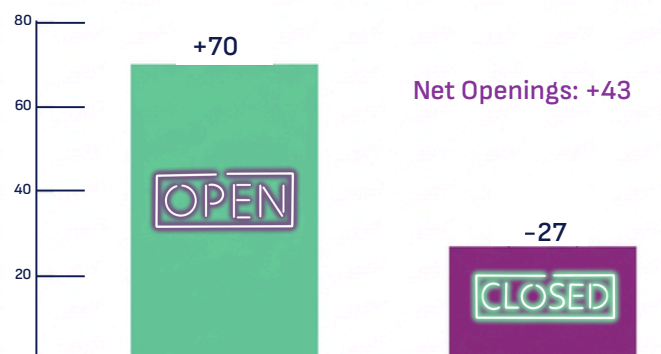


Note: The ROC database tracks store openings and closures as they are identified or announced. It does not represent a complete census of retail activity nationwide. Instead, the dataset provides a directional view of industry patterns and helps illustrate where retailers are expanding, where closures are occurring, and how store networks are evolving. The strength of the dataset lies in identifying patterns, revealing where expansion is occurring, which sectors are growing, and how retailers are adjusting their store portfolios in response to shifting market conditions.

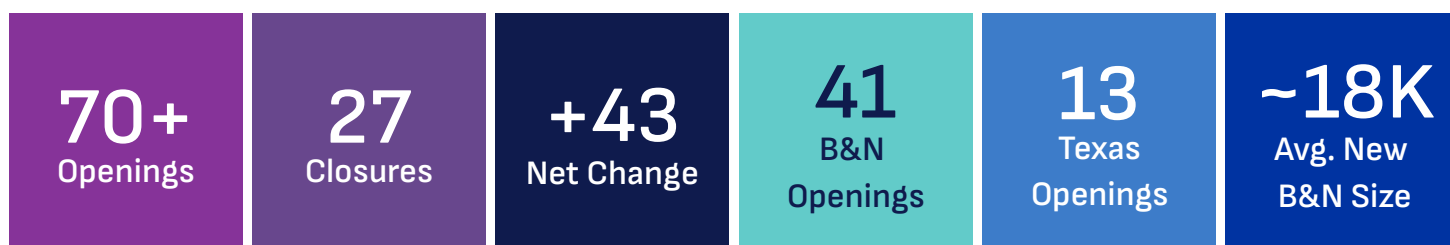
## KEY FINDINGS

- **Bookstore openings are outpacing closures.**
  - RetailStat is tracking more than 70 bookstore openings against 27 closures for 2026, resulting in a net gain of more than 40 locations.
- **Large-chain activity is concentrated.**
  - Barnes & Noble accounts for 41 openings, making it the clearest driver of large-chain movement.
- **Texas leads bookstore opening activity.**
  - RetailStat is tracking 13 bookstore openings in Texas, making it the top state for activity.
- **Formats are becoming more flexible.**
  - Disclosed Barnes & Noble openings average roughly 18,000 square feet, placing many new stores in a more adaptable mid-box range.
- **This is selective growth, not expansion everywhere.**
  - Books-A-Million and Half Price Books show more limited movement, reinforcing that the trend is not evenly spread across every chain.

2026 Bookstore Openings vs. Closures



## BOOKSTORE ACTIVITY RETAILSTAT IS TRACKING



The numbers point to renewed physical-store activity, but they also show why the trend needs to be viewed carefully. This is not a broad expansion wave across every bookstore operator. It is a selective footprint shift, with Barnes & Noble driving the largest share of activity and other operators showing more limited movement.

That concentration matters. It suggests that current bookstore growth is tied less to a category-wide rebound and more to operators with a clear store strategy, available real estate opportunities, and confidence in specific trade areas.

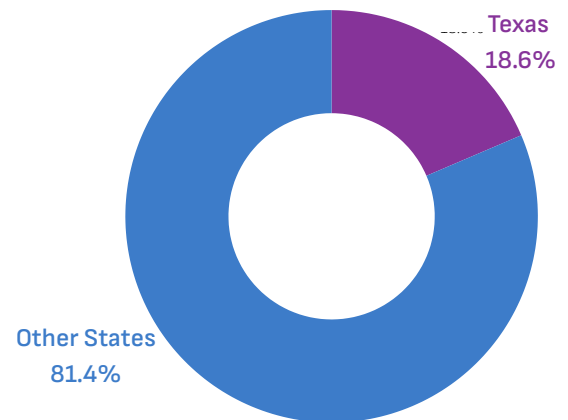
## WHERE BOOKSTORE ACTIVITY IS SHOWING UP

### The geography is a major part of the story.

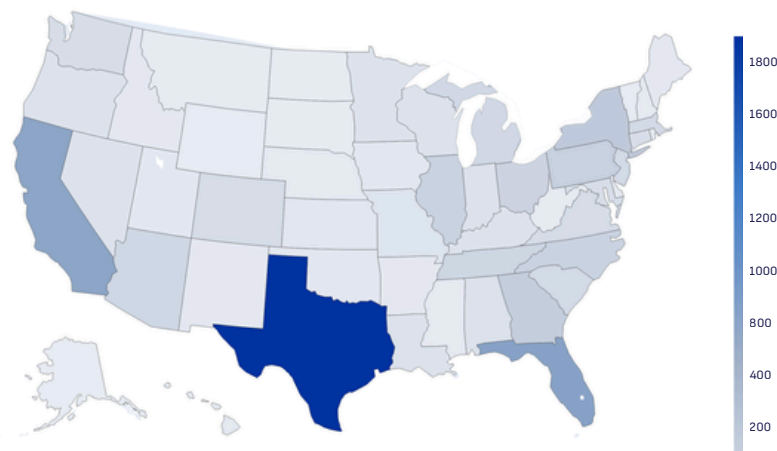
Texas leads all states in the current 2026 activity, with 13 bookstore openings tracked by RetailStat. That represents nearly 1 in 5 openings. But the activity is not limited to one state. RetailStat is also tracking bookstore openings and related activity across California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, and other markets.

This suggests a targeted strategy rather than a uniform national rollout. Operators are choosing markets where the combination of local demand, available space, and surrounding retail activity makes the physical bookstore model more viable.

### Texas Leads Bookstore Activity



### Total Retail Store Activity by State (Openings + Closures, 2026)



Broader ROC activity is highest in large retail markets, but bookstore openings show a more specific concentration, with Texas leading the category.

## WHAT THIS SIGNALS

Bookstore openings can point to more than category momentum. They can also signal:

- Strong local trade areas
- Available mid-box space
- Centers with enough traffic to support browsing and repeat visits
- Markets where operators see room for physical store growth
- Locations where books, gifting, coffee, and lifestyle retail can work together

The activity is especially important because bookstores are no longer relying on the same large-format model that defined the category decades ago.

## THE FORMAT SHIFT

One of the most important changes in book retail is the size and flexibility of new stores.

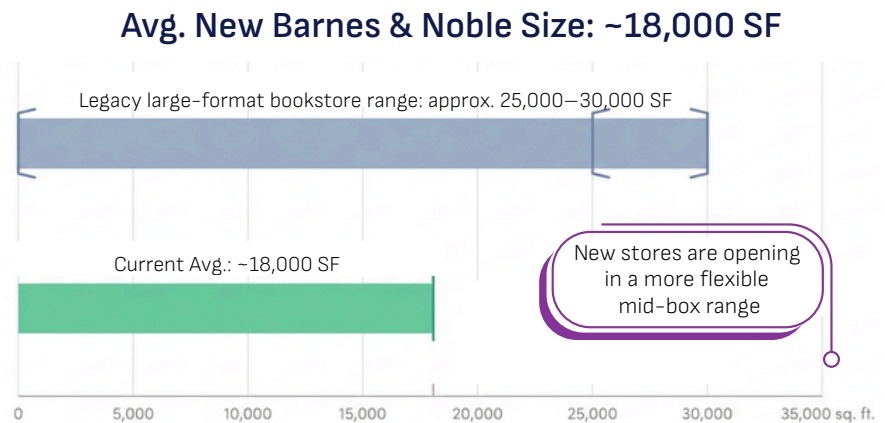
Disclosed Barnes & Noble openings in RetailStat's current tracking average roughly 18,000 square feet. That puts many new locations in a mid-box range, rather than the oversized bookstore formats that once dominated the category.

This shift gives operators more flexibility. A smaller or more right-sized footprint can make it easier to enter suburban centers, lifestyle centers, mall environments, mixed-use developments, and other locations where a larger bookstore may not have worked.

## WHY SMALLER FORMATS MATTER

Smaller and more flexible stores can help operators:

- Reduce occupancy costs
- Enter a wider range of centers and trade areas
- Localize inventory and merchandising
- Create a more curated shopping experience
- Fit into stronger co-tenancy environments



The result is a bookstore model that looks less like a return to the past and more like an adaptation to current retail conditions.

## OPERATOR CONCENTRATION

Barnes & Noble is the clearest driver of large-chain bookstore activity in the current pipeline. RetailStat is tracking 41 Barnes & Noble openings for 2026, representing nearly 60% of the bookstore openings identified.

Books-A-Million and Half Price Books show more limited movement in the current data. That reinforces the larger point: this is selective growth, not expansion spread evenly across every chain.

The category is moving, but the momentum is concentrated.

This distinction matters because a category can show growth without every operator expanding at the same pace.. The real insight comes from understanding which operators are moving, where they are moving, and what their location decisions may say about the broader market.



## THE BIGGER TAKEAWAY

Bookstore activity is becoming a useful retail signal again.

Not because every bookstore chain is expanding everywhere, but because the openings that are happening show where operators see enough demand, available space, and local traffic to make physical bookstores work.

For teams watching retail real estate, market planning, tenant movement, or competitive activity, the bookstore category offers a clear example of how mature retail concepts can evolve. The old model is not simply coming back. The footprint is changing.

RetailStat Location helps surface these changes across retail categories, showing where stores are opening, closing, remodeling, relocating, and shifting at the market level. That means users can see not only which stores opened or closed, but where activity is picking up, which operators are driving it, and what that movement may suggest about a market.

## WHAT TO WATCH NEXT

Book retail is moving again, but selectively. The strongest activity is not spread evenly across every chain or every market. It is concentrated around specific operators, right-sized formats, and trade areas where physical bookstores still make sense.

That makes bookstore activity worth watching. These openings can help show where operators see demand, where mid-box space is being reused, and where mature retail categories are adapting rather than disappearing. RetailStat Location helps surface these shifts across retail categories, showing not just which stores opened or closed, but where activity is picking up, which operators are driving it, and what that movement may suggest about a market.

[Explore RetailStat Location Data](#)

[Take a Demo](#)

## SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on RetailStat Location data, including Retail Openings & Closings activity with effective dates in 2026. Counts reflect bookstore-related openings, closures, remodels, and related store activity identified in RetailStat tracking as of May 5, 2026.

Records were reviewed to focus on bookstore retail activity and exclude concepts where “book” appeared in the name but the business was primarily categorized outside bookstore retail, such as restaurant or bar concepts. Store counts, square footage, and operator-level activity are based on RetailStat Location and POI data where available. Public reporting was used as supporting context for broader bookstore industry momentum, including Barnes & Noble’s announced 2026 expansion plans and recent coverage of independent bookstore activity.

RetailStat ROC data is directional and reflects activity identified or announced through RetailStat tracking. It should not be interpreted as a complete census of all bookstore openings and closures nationwide.

Sources: RetailStat POI Data, RetailStat Retail Openings & Closings, company announcements, and public reporting from CNN Newsource/USA Today, Reuters/Financial Times, Bloomberg, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, and the American Booksellers Association.

