

Catch Word #114 –To sell like hotcakes**Transcript**

- Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.
- Maura: And your pal Maura.
- Harp: Here at Culips English Learning Podcast.
- Maura: And don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that C-U-L-I-P-S.com. There you can become a member and when you become a member, you have access to our transcripts for all our episodes, more detailed explanations of the expressions we use, and also quizzes for every episode.
- Harp: Exactly. And also like us on Facebook because there's a lot of fun stuff going on there.
- Maura: Yeah. **Drop us a line**, say hi. We'll be happy to hear from you.
- Harp: We will.
- Maura: Now, today's episode is a Catch Word episode and that is where we look at different natural English expressions and we give you explanations for them, we talk about synonyms, and we also do some examples for you.
- Harp: Yes. So today, we're looking at expressions that mean that something is in great demand, that something is really popular, people really want this.
- Maura: Right. So all of today's expressions have to do with something that's very popular and that people are buying a lot of.
- Harp: Should we get started?
- Maura: Let's get started. What is our first expression?
- Harp: Our first expression is **to sell like hotcakes**.
- Maura: Right. **To sell like hotcakes**.
- Harp: Yes. **To sell like hotcakes**.
- Maura: So, we use this expression to describe something. We would say "It is **selling like hotcakes**." Or "It was **selling like hotcakes**."
- Harp: Yes. So when you have something that is really popular and people are buying it really quickly and buying a lot of it and it's really popular, you can use this expression, **selling like hotcakes**.

- Maura: Right. Now, hotcakes... Hmm, what are hotcakes?
- Harp: Hotcakes are pancakes.
- Maura: Right. So *hotcakes* is just another word for pancakes and it's not used as often as *pancakes*. *Hotcakes* is a bit of an older word.
- Harp: Yeah. Most people say pancakes, but they mean the same thing.
- Maura: Right. So, if we imagine that in the past, at a special event like a fair or some kind of community gathering, there would be a person who was making hotcakes and selling them and they were very popular. So lots of people would buy them, they were in high demand. Well, that's where the origin of this expression is supposed to have come from.
- Harp: OK. That makes sense.
- Maura: Right. So now we can use this expression, ***selling like hotcakes***, to talk about a whole variety of items. And usually this expression is not used to talk about food.
- Harp: Yeah. It's usually an object, not food.
- Maura: Right. So this expression originated from the popularity of hotcakes, or pancakes, and now we use this expression to talk about some kind of item that people love and they buy a lot of.
- Harp: Yes. Should we give an example?
- Maura: Let's do it.

- Harp: I'm so excited.
- Maura: What?
- Harp: I just bought the new iPad.
- Maura: Oh wow. I'm surprised you were able to get one of those.
- Harp: Yeah. There was a big lineup. I had to wait almost an hour and half outside the store before I even got in to buy one.
- Maura: Yeah. Those things are ***selling like hotcakes***.
- Harp: I know. I think they're sold out now.
- Maura: I wouldn't be surprised.

Maura: Now there is an example where a new gadget, a new piece of technology, is very popular with people.

Harp: Yes. And I think this is very true. I would never wait in a lineup for it, but I know people love it and people wait in lineups and they really do go really fast.

Maura: That's for sure. When there's a new version of an iPad or an iPhone that comes out, people really do **line up around the block** and they really do **sell like hotcakes**; people buy them until most stores sell out.

Harp: Yeah. They're very popular.

Maura: So, do you wanna give another example with **selling like hotcakes**?

Harp: I definitely wanna give another example.

Harp: Hello?

Maura: Hey, did you buy the tickets to the Madonna concert?

Harp: No, not yet. I was gonna do that later today.

Maura: You should do it right away, because I heard they're **selling like hotcakes**.

Harp: Oh, really? OK, I'm gonna do it right now. We really need to go to this concert. It's gonna be amazing.

Maura: OK. call me back when you know you've got them.

Harp: OK. I'll do that. Bye.

Maura: So, there is an example where concert tickets were **selling like hotcakes**.

Harp: That was a fun example. We sounded like we were excited.

Maura: Well, it's true that when something is really in demand, and they're selling fast, you do—you have to buy them right away, or you might miss your chance.

Harp: Yeah, for sure. And you don't want to miss your chance.

Maura: Right. So, that was the expression **to sell like hotcakes**.

Harp: Yes. Let's move on to our next expression. Our next expression is **to fly off the shelves**.

Maura: Right. **To fly off the shelves**. And this expression is just like **to sell like hotcakes**. It means that people buy this item often or they buy a lot of it. It's something that is really popular and in demand.

Harp: Yeah, exactly. So if you imagine a store and the shelves and you see something flying off it, it's moving so quickly, people are just buying all of them, you can understand this expression.

Maura: Right. This expression, also like **to sell like hotcakes**, is not usually used to talk about food. It's used to talk about other kinds of products that you might see on a shelf, but not normally food.

Harp: Should we give an example with this expression?

Maura: All right. Let's give an example of a popular toy that really did **fly off the shelves** a few years ago.

Harp: Let's do it.

Maura: I think we need to put more **Tickle Me Elmos** out.

Harp: Really? What do you mean? I just put 40 up there.

Maura: Well, they're already gone. Those things are **flying off the shelves**.

Harp: People are in love with these **Tickle Me Elmos**.

Maura: They gotta get their kids what they want for Christmas.

Harp: OK. I'll go put some more on the shelves.

Maura: Now there is a true-life example of a children's toy that was really popular a few years ago at Christmas.

Harp: Yeah. I remember people were crazy about trying to get this toy for their kids.

Maura: Yeah. It was the toy that everyone wanted. It was definitely in demand, so these expressions are perfect for that situation.

Harp: Yeah. Really, the **Tickle Me Elmo** was a simple toy. You touched it and it made giggling noises and it shook a little bit, but it was just **flying off the shelves**.

Maura: Yup, for sure. I think almost every year at Christmas there's a new popular toy that flies off the shelves.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: All right. Let's give one more example.

Harp: Let's do it.

Harp: Hey, what are you doing tonight?

Maura: I'm really excited because I'm going to see ***The Hunger Games***.

Harp: Oh, really?

Maura: Yeah. I read the book, so now I'm really excited to see the movie. It looks like it's gonna be good.

Harp: Yeah. Since the movie came out though, the books are just **flying off the shelves**.

Maura: Yeah. I think the movie made the books even more popular.

Harp: Yeah, that often happens.

Maura: You can borrow my copy if you want.

Harp: Sure. I think that's a good idea. I've heard a lot of good stuff about it.

Maura: And there is another example with, this time, books that are **flying off the shelves**.

Harp: Yeah. And ***The Hunger Games*** is a new movie that just came out.

Maura: Right. And it's based on a book called ***The Hunger Games*** and it's actually part of a trilogy. It's young adult literature, so it's written for teenagers in mind and it's a pretty fun story. So if you haven't heard of it, you might be interested in reading it.

Harp: OK. I think I'll try to read it.

Maura: Yeah, check it out. Now, we looked at **to sell like hotcakes**, and **to fly off the shelves**. We have one more expression that we can use to talk about a product that is in demand.

Harp: So our last expression is **they can't make them fast enough**.

Maura: Right. **They can't make them fast enough**.

Harp: Maura, what does this expression mean?

Maura: Well, this expression really means just what it says; that the people who make the product can't make it fast enough. Because there's such a high demand, as soon as they make it, people buy it. So they can't even **keep up** with the demand.

Harp: Yes. And with this expression you can talk about food products.

Maura: Right. So you can use this expression to talk about regular products but you can also use it to talk about food. And this is different from the first two expressions that would sound a bit unnatural if you used them to talk about food.

Harp: Yes. And this expression, **they can't make them fast enough**, has a lot of variations. But we'll talk about those in the Learning Materials.

Maura: Right. So we're giving you the example, **they can't make them fast enough**, but there's a lot of different ways that you could use this expression. So, make sure, if you're a member, to check out the Learning Materials so you can find out how we can change this expression around a little bit.

Harp: Yes. So when something is really popular and it's in demand, you can use the expression **they can't make them fast enough**.

Maura: And sometimes people even use this expression as an exaggeration. Maybe the people who are making the product do make them fast enough and people can still buy them but they just use this expression to mean that something is very popular and it's in demand.

Harp: Yes, exactly.

Maura: OK. Now, let's give you an example with this expression.

Harp: Let's do it.

Harp: Have you tried one of the cupcakes from the new bakery down the street?

Maura: Well, I tried because I've heard they're so good, and I went last weekend but they were sold out. I couldn't get one.

Harp: That's because they're delicious. **They can't make them fast enough.**

Maura: They must be really popular because I went on Saturday morning and they already didn't have any left.

Harp: It's because they're so delicious. You need to try to go and get one.

Maura: Yeah. I'm gonna try again later this week.

Harp: Good plan.

Maura: In that example, we used the expression ***they can't make them fast enough***. And in this case, we're talking about the people who make the cupcakes at the new place.

Harp: Yeah. And in this example, they actually couldn't make them fast enough. People were buying them too fast.

Maura: Right. They actually sold out their cupcakes because they were so delicious. Now I'm **craving** a cupcake.

Harp: I already had a cupcake today.

Maura: OK. Now we'll give you an example where we're using this expression to exaggerate and to show that something is very popular.

Harp: All right.

Harp: Hey, did you buy the new Lady Gaga CD?

Maura: **You betcha** I did. I got it the very first day that it came out.

Harp: Oh, that's great. It's super popular. They can't make them fast enough.

Maura: I know. Everyone wants one. It's a pretty fun album.

Harp: Yeah. I've heard it. Sounds really good.

Maura: And in that example, we were talking about Lady Gaga's CD. Of course, in this situation, the people who make the CDs actually can make them fast enough, but this expression was used just to show that the CD was very popular and very much in demand.

Harp: You know, the funniest thing about this example is that no one really buys CDs anymore.

Maura: I know. It's interesting. CDs really only were popular for, **what**, 20 years or so? And now people get their music on the Internet a lot of the time.

Harp: Yeah. You know, I miss CDs, where you had pictures of the band and you could see the lyrics.

Maura: I am a bit sad when I see record stores closing because of it. But **what can you do?**

- Harp: **What can you do?**
- Maura: OK. So let's go over the expressions we talked about one more time.
- Harp: All right. Well we started with ***to sell like hotcakes***.
- Maura: And then we looked at ***to fly off the shelves***.
- Harp: And our last expression was ***they can't make them fast enough***.
- Maura: And remember, there are lots of variations with that last expression. So make sure to check out our Learning Materials.
- Harp: Yes. And you can find the Learning Materials on our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. You just have to become a member.
- Maura: And if you're on Facebook, you can like our page and say hi to us there. Now, Harp, can I go get a cupcake?
- Harp: Yes. You can.
- Maura: OK. We'll talk to you guys later. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

To drop someone a line

To drop someone a line means to contact them by writing to them. In today's world, this usually means writing them an email. The expression comes from the act of writing, where you would write a "line," meaning a string or sentence of words.

Sometimes people also use the phrase **to drop someone a line** to mean to communicate in ways other than writing, such as calling or texting.

In this episode, before Harp and Maura start to talk about the episode's topic, they tell you to like them on Facebook, or **drop them a line**, and they'll be happy to hear from you. What they are inviting you to do is to contact them. The way they are using the expression is very casual, so it doesn't mean you can only contact them by writing to them. They are using this expression to mean all sorts of forms of communication, like Facebook or Twitter, as well as email.

To sell like hotcakes

To sell like hotcakes is an expression used when something sells a lot very quickly. If there is a new video game that a store sells out of very quickly and in very large amounts, you could say that the game **sold like hotcakes**.

The origin of this saying is not known for sure, but it is believed to be related to the fact that during the 19th century, churches would have bake sales and charity functions to raise money for the church and the community, and they would make and sell hotcakes. Hotcakes were a common name for pancakes, and these hotcakes were very popular and would sell out very quickly.

This expression is only used when there is a large amount of one item, like how there were a lot of hotcakes in the bake sales in the 19th century. For example, if there were a garage sale and there were a lot of different items, you would not say that they **sold like hotcakes**, even if all the items sold quickly. This is because at a garage sale the items being sold are usually all different. There are not many copies of one item. In order for us to use the phrase **to sell like hotcakes**, there has to be a lot of one item that sells out very quickly.

To line up around the block

When a group of people are waiting for something, they usually form a lineup. A *lineup* is a group of people standing in a row who are all waiting for something. You can see lineups every day. There are lineups for the bus, at the grocery store, and at the bank.

To line up is a verb, which simply means to form a lineup (a noun).

Sometimes, when there is a very long lineup of people waiting for something, people might say that they are **lined up around the block**. A *block* is a term that is used to mean a group of houses or stores between two streets or intersections.

Imagine you are walking straight along a street named Queen Street. You come up to an intersection with a street named John Street. You keep walking along Queen Street to the next intersection with a street named King Street. The group of houses or stores between John Street and King Street that you walked by on Queen Street would be called a *block*.

A block is a casual measurement, since not all intersections are the same distance from one another. The word *block* usually refers to the distance between two major or important intersections. So, if there is a lineup that stretches one of these blocks, it must be a very long lineup.

To line up around the block means to wait in a line that is so long that it is long enough to fill a city block and go around it, too!

People use this expression casually, and sometimes as an exaggeration. A lineup may be really long, and someone may say there is **a lineup around the block** when really it's not quite that long. It just means a very, very long lineup.

To fly off the shelves

This expression is a lot like *to sell like hotcakes*, because it means that something sells very quickly and in a large amount. The two expressions can both be used to describe things that sell quickly, but we usually only say that an item flies off the shelves when we are actually talking about something that is on a store shelf.

To sell like hotcakes can also be used to talk about something that is not on a store shelf. For example, if we are trying to get tickets to a concert by purchasing them online, only to find out they sold out in two minutes, we could say that they sold like hotcakes. We wouldn't say that they flew off the shelves, because the tickets were never on store shelves.

The expression **to fly off the shelves** means that things are being bought from shelves so quickly that it is almost like they are flying off, they are going so fast.

Tickle Me Elmo

In this episode, Maura and Harp use the example of a toy that was very popular in the 1990s, a toy called **Tickle Me Elmo**. In 1996, a toy company produced a toy that was based on a character named Elmo from the popular children's show Sesame Street.

The toy would giggle when you tickled its belly. It became very popular very quickly. It was so popular that at Christmas, parents were actually fighting each other in the stores to get one for their children. Some parents were so desperate that they actually paid thousands of dollars for the toy, which only cost thirty dollars in the store!

There was such a demand for these toys that there weren't enough of them for everyone who wanted one. As soon as the shelves were stocked with **Tickle Me Elmos**, they would be bought very, very quickly. So, it could be said that **Tickle Me Elmos** were flying off the shelves. It could also be said that people lined up around the block to buy **Tickle Me Elmos**. And saying that they sold like hotcakes would also be correct.

The Hunger Games

Similar to Tickle Me Elmo, **The Hunger Games** is a product that got very popular very quickly. **The Hunger Games** are a series of books aimed at teenagers. The series became popular with adults too, and soon the books became so popular that a movie was made based on the book.

The movie became just as popular as the books, and maybe even more popular. People lined up around the block for tickets to see the movie.

Here's another good example of when and how to use the expressions *to fly off the shelves*, *to sell like hotcakes* and *to line up around the block*.

Since the movie is still in the theatre, it cannot be said to be flying off the shelves or to be selling like hotcakes, because seeing a movie in a theatre is not something that you can pick up and buy from a store and take home. People did, however, line up around the block to get these tickets, so it's OK to use this expression here.

But, the books that the movie was based on are actual items you can pick up and hold, and they are actually on store shelves. So you can say that the books sold like hotcakes or that they were flying off of the shelves.

They can't make them fast enough

Another expression people use to talk about how quickly an item sells is **they can't make them fast enough**. When a company can't keep up with the amount of an item that people want, we can say that **they can't make them fast enough**, meaning that the factory or place that makes the items can't make them as quickly as people want to buy them.

People use this phrase very casually, and it doesn't always mean that a company literally can't make enough of an item for everyone. It can also mean that the product sells so quickly that it's difficult for a store to keep it on the shelves, because as soon as they put more up for sale, they sell out.

This expression is a casual way to say that something is so popular that the demand for it is larger than the amount there is.

As we talk about in this episode, there are many variations of this expression. The part that always stays the same is *to make fast enough*. But we can say, *he can't make them fast enough*, *she couldn't make them fast enough* or *we couldn't make it fast enough*. All of these can be used to talk about different situations when a product is very popular.

To keep up

To keep up means to sustain or to match up to something. Sometimes you might hear somebody tell someone else **to keep up** the good work. This means that they are telling the person to maintain their high level of work, or to continue whatever it is they are doing to achieve their good results.

Another use is when you hear someone say that someone couldn't **keep up** with something (or someone). For example, imagine a marathon where two runners are very close, but one runner just couldn't match the other runner's speed. In this example, we could say that the slower runner couldn't **keep up** with the faster runner.

To keep up is a popular way of saying to match or to maintain the pace or level of something. In this episode, Maura uses **to keep up** to explain the expression *they can't make them fast enough*. She says, "The people who make the product can't make it fast enough. Because there's such a high demand, as soon as they make it, people buy it. So they can't even **keep up** with the demand."

Here, Maura is using **to keep up** to mean that the people who make the product cannot maintain or match the pace of the people buying the product.

To crave

A craving is a sudden urge or desire for something specific, usually something to eat. A lot of people get **cravings** for sweet foods like chocolate, and it is common for pregnant women to get weird **cravings** like pickles with ice cream.

Sometimes **cravings** have no obvious cause, but sometimes you can get **a craving** from hearing about or seeing a certain food.

To crave something simply means to have **a craving** for it. In this episode, Maura starts **to crave** cupcakes after she and Harp talk about the cupcakes that a new bakery down the street sells. Maura gets the desire for a cupcake after talking and thinking about it, so she says she is **craving** one.

Sometimes people use the verb **to crave** very casually to talk about something other than food. For example, sometimes people will say they are **craving** a movie, which means they really want to go see a movie. This is not a very common usage, though. Most often, the expression **a craving** is restricted to food.

You betcha

The expression **you betcha** is a casual way of saying *you bet I*. Normally, the verb *to bet* means to gamble money on something in the hopes of winning more money. Buying a lottery ticket or going to a casino are activities that involve people betting their money so that they can possibly win more money.

In casual conversation, *to bet* means to strongly believe something, as though you believe it so much that you would be willing to bet money on it being true. For example, if your brother is always late and you're supposed to meet him somewhere, you could say "I bet he'll be late again" to mean that you are almost certain that he'll be late, although you still don't know for sure.

The expression **you betcha** is used to stress or emphasize how strong your response is. In other words, instead of saying a simple yes to a question, some people will say **you betcha** to emphasize the strength of their yes.

Some other common ways of emphasizing the response yes when you are very excited or positive about something are:

You got it!
Of course!
For sure!
Definitely!

What

Sometimes you might hear someone say **what** in the middle of a sentence. It sounds like they are interrupting their sentence to ask a question, but then they quickly answer their own question with an estimate or guess and continue talking.

What can be a rhetorical expression, which means that even though it seems like a question, it is not really something that needs a response from someone else. Usually, people will use this expression before they guess or estimate some kind of number.

For example, in this episode, we hear Maura use it when she and Harp are talking about CDs and how long they were popular. Maura says, "CDs really only were popular for, **what**, 20 years or so? And now people get their music on the Internet a lot of the time."

Maura is estimating or guessing how long CDs were popular for as she's speaking, so she pauses in her sentence and says **what**. It's almost like she's asking herself how long CDs were popular for, and then answers her own question. That is exactly what is happening when people use this expression before they guess something. They are asking themselves how long, or how much, or how many, and then they answer their own question.

What can you do?

What can you do is used in casual conversation to mean that a situation is out of your control, and you can't do anything to change it so you have to accept it. It's a rhetorical expression, which means that even though it seems like a question, it's not really something that needs a response.

This expression is used more as a statement when you don't want to accept something, but you know that you have to because you can't do anything about it. In this episode, Maura and Harp discuss how sad it is when record stores have to close because nobody buys CDs anymore. Maura says to Harp, "**What can you do?**" to express her feeling that although it's not nice, they have to accept it because they can't do anything about it.

Here's another example with this expression:

Beth: How did you do on the exam?

Peter: Not well. I was up all last night sick to my stomach and couldn't study at all.

Beth: Oh no. Maybe they'll let you redo the test if you tell them what happened.

Peter: No, they clearly said that there's no possibility of retaking that exam. Oh well, **what can you do?** That's just the way it is. I'll have to make up the grades some other way.

Quiz

1. Which of the following does NOT mean that something is selling quickly and in large amounts?

- a) It's flying off the shelves.
- b) It's faster than a cheetah.
- c) It's selling like hotcakes.
- d) They can't make them fast enough.

2. What are hotcakes?

- a) heated beds
- b) warm pies
- c) cooked bananas
- d) pancakes

3. What is a lineup around the block?

- a) a line of people waiting that's the length of one city block or more
- b) a line of people waiting for the subway
- c) a group of university students after their final exam
- d) a very short line of people waiting for something

4. Which of the following is an example given in this episode of something that flew off the shelves?

- a) Ken and Barbie dolls
- b) a free pancake breakfast
- c) Tickle Me Elmo
- d) CDs in record stores

5. Which of the following is the expression *you betcha* a casual replacement for?

- a) You bet him.
- b) You should bet.
- c) You bet.
- d) I bet.

6. What is a craving?

- a) a mild case of the flu
- b) eating hotcakes
- c) another word for *sale*
- d) a sudden desire, usually for food

Answers:

1.b 2.d 3.a 4.c 5.c 6.d