

It's the stuff around the stuff that's important!

Contextualised Readers' Advisory, Intelligent Bundling and the 'Remix' Reader

Planet Context



As our reading renaissance rages on, 'Contextualised' readers' advisory strategies offer public libraries a means by which they can make a major leap beyond the anachronistic 'read-alike' or 'reading list' book recommendation model, so prevalent on the social web. 'Reading Maps' or 'Paths' distinguish themselves from the all too familiar book recommendation landscape by presenting fuller reading experiences for their audiences.

The Holy Trinity of 'Library', 'Reader' and 'Story' intercept in new and exciting ways through these contextualised products, representing the highest expression of our derivative creativity, and forging new knowledge networks of interrelated data through the medium of information visualisation.

Content, data, literary works... none exist in blissful isolation; their point of reference for their audiences is the **context** in which they are to be found. It is not overstating the case for readers' advisory services to make the claim that "more valuable than content is the stuff that surrounds it".¹

"...no work, no idea, stands alone... but all that's good and true things are networks, ecosystems..."²

Peekaboo I see you



Applying 'The Principle of Least Effort'³ which explains the dominance of passivity in human information-seeking behaviours, libraries should ideally be offering suites of contextualised advisory products which deliver 'satisficing'⁴ rewards for their communities; that is, satisfaction obtained with minimal effort expended.

Libraries application of contextualisation is an acknowledgement that while readers will often want to know more about the world of a literary work, they will be less enthusiastic about traversing an exhausting text-heavy labyrinth of subject headings, 'see also' references and occasional read-alike suggestions to get there.

The addition of relational content to the original work, (constituting a 'sleeve'⁵) enhances its discoverability in a cluttered landscape. Once found, there should be an offer for the reader a lavish buffet of the often complex connections that exists across content.

"...fundamentals of the reading experience remain...the innovation lies in finding new ways of presenting that experience..."⁶

The 'Remix' reader



In this digitally-fuelled and thrilling remix culture, readers' advisors are presented with a tremendous opportunity to become 'savvy aggregators' of an universal data glut. As David McCandless⁷ affirms, "data is the new soil": a fertile ground for nurturing information-rich products.

The skill set required to perform in this arena is challenging enough; its equal is to be found in the reading behaviours the 'Remix Reader'⁸ must also acquire. The objective of this reader type goes beyond production of a single book review (which little cares about people's engagement with a story beyond a narrow task-fulfilment role).

Deconstructing a book, then reassembling the world of that tome by intelligently bundling various resources together is indicative of the highest level in the 'Hierarchy of Readers': the 'Remix Reader', capable of finding common strands and assembling content from multiple sources to create new works.

"...in order for us to truly create and contribute... we have to be able to connect countless dots..."⁹

A new path



Mapping the internal world of a book and then proffering reading itineraries beyond it, of 'Organising & Clustering' and 'Focussing & Magnifying'¹⁰ the content of that world, then engaging in a process of recombining that information into a package for consumption by readers charts a relatively new (or at least, seldom spied) path in readers' advisory productivity amongst public libraries in this part of the world.

Yet such contextualised products present libraries with the means by which to manage enormous information sets, minimise cognitive overload for the reader, and heighten the discovery of bold and original connections across the collection. Beneficially, the abundance of niche materials, occupying a library collection's 'long tail', can be mined for inclusion, offering new entry points to a wealth of resources that may have otherwise remained undiscovered.

By such means the library can flex its superstore muscle and deliver the personalised touch of a neighbourhood local.

"...a perfect duty for librarians: creating connections among materials to inspire users."¹¹

Here be treasure



Introduced by Neal Wyatt in 2006, Reading Maps were designed to reinvigorate the reading experience while building the collective intelligence of library staff. Their utilitarian value was instantly recognisable, symbolising a brave new world of readers' advisory design. Utilising the combinatorial creativity of librarians, Reading Maps could become emblematic showcases of the best in reading resources and expertise that the library had to offer.

... A 'people in dialogue' approach adds a social layer with readers afforded the opportunity to work on the design build process as well as proffering commentary.

Design build considerations are critical to the 'Accessibility' and 'Usability' of these tools. Observing John Maeda's 'Laws of Simplicity'¹² (that "simplicity and complexity need each other"), libraries can make the apparently complex consciously available via this format.

Once found, the reader will recognise in these contextually enhanced products, that indeed, here be treasure.

"They offer patrons the best of the library in terms of resources, expertise, and imagination."¹³

Exemplars of...



...everything

An elementary introduction to 'Contextual Readers' Advisory', this session will outline its importance for public libraries who are serious about expanding the relevancy of their readers' advisory capabilities, present selected examples of contextual readers' advisory and examine the powerful tools which can be deployed to benefit the library's diverse 'reading tribes', with an emphasis on 'Reading Maps'.

Key design build principles and a professional development strategy will be introduced, drawing upon Paul's work with Public Library Services (State Library of South Australia). Initiated in 2012, this collaboration aims to boost readers' advisory performance through the utilisation of contextual readers' advisory strategies.

This is a revivification of a key mission for librarians: that as our communities enjoy a lifetime's journey through the stories that they read, we can partner them as exemplars of everything that betters that journey.

Librarians become "...curiosity Sherpas who lead us to things we didn't know we were interested in..."¹⁴

Notes

Bookmark 1 - Planet Context

1 Mike Walsh, *Futuretainment: yesterday the world changed, now it's your turn*, Phaidon Press, 2009, p219.

2 Maria Popova, 'Networked knowledge and combinatorial creativity' at <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2011/08/01/networked-knowledge-combinatorial-creativity/>

Bookmark 2 - Peekaboo I see you

3 Andrea Resmini & Luca Rosati, *Pervasive information architecture. Designing cross-channel user experiences*, Elsevier, 2011, p119.

4 'Satisficing': a term coined by economist Herbert Simon, in Andrea Resmini & Luca Rosati, *Pervasive information architecture. Designing cross channel user experiences*, p120.

5 'Sleeve': a term coined by futurist Mike Walsh, in *Futuretainment: yesterday the world changed, now it's your turn*, p219.

6 Piers Blofeld in 'The Bookseller' (UK) 17 June 2011, p12.

Bookmark 3 - The 'Remix reader

7 'David McCandless: The beauty of data visualization' at http://www.ted.com/talks/david_mccandless_the_beauty_of_data_visualization.html

8 Derek Neighbors at <http://derekneighbors.com/2012/01/hierarchy-of-reading/>

9 Maria Popova 'Networked knowledge and combinatorial creativity' at <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2011/08/01/networked-knowledge-combinatorial-creativity/>

Bookmark 4 - A new path

10 Andrea Resmini & Luca Rosati, *Pervasive information architecture. Designing cross-channel user experiences*, Elsevier, 2011, p155.

11 Michael Casey & Michael Stephens 'It's fine to drop Dewey' in *Library Journal*, July 2009, Volume 134, No12, p19.

Bookmark 5 - Here be treasure

12 Andrea Resmini & Luca Rosati, *Pervasive information architecture. Designing cross-channel user experiences*, Elsevier, 2011, p158.

13 Neal Wyatt, 'Whole collection readers' advisory' at <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6383011.html#>

Bookmark 6 - Exemplars of...everything

14 Maria Popova 'Networked knowledge and combinatorial creativity' at <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2011/08/01/networked-knowledge-combinatorial-creativity>