2017

At Brunning: People and Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What we Do

Dennis Brunning
Arizona State University, dennis.brunning@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Brunning, Dennis (2017) "At Brunning: People and Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What we Do," Against the Grain: Vol. 26: Iss. 6, Article 45.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6980

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Some Thoughts on Polling ...
from page 57

practice session before I went off to Charleston. It was beyond valuable to get their feedback and suggestions. It’s also crucial to test out the mechanics of whichever polling tool you’re using; it’s better to work out the glitches in practice and with a group of colleagues or friends than during the presentation itself. Ask them to bring a variety of devices for responding.

• Plan for interactive dialogue with your audience. Once the results start rolling in, the discussion will flow, so presenters will need to act as both moderators and facilitators.

• Start with an open-ended “test” question before getting into the meat of your presentation. This will allow everyone to test out the response mechanics and can act as an icebreaker. We asked, “where is everyone from?”

• Select questions that could be deemed controversial or debatable. These will be more likely to provoke lively discussion.

Don’ts:
• Plan for too many questions. We had a 45 minute session and planned for 9 questions. We ended up speeding through the last few because they spurred such terrific, expansive discussion.

• Wait until the day of your presentation to test out the functionality in real time. The polls may display differently to your audience than they displayed in creation mode.

• Be surprised if one or more attendees has issues with responding. In any scenario in which we’re relying on technology, anything can (and probably will) go wrong for at least one person in your audience. If you have the ability to do some quick troubleshooting, go for it, but don’t let your presentation be derailed by temperamental devices. If someone is having trouble responding digitally, ask them to speak out.

Utilizing live polling in a conference presentation setting requires you to wear a variety of hats. This kind of presentation must be dynamic, fast-paced, well-organized, and presented by those who are confident in engaging an audience for an extended period of time. Presenters will go beyond mere participation and will need to prompt their audience for input, ask follow-up questions, solicit alternative viewpoints, provide clarification on questions and answers, quickly summarize audience responses, encourage networking, and ultimately know when to move on to the next question. Active participation is fun and stimulating, but there must be an element of learning.

Our biggest takeaway from live polling at the Charleston Conference was that this will greatly change the dynamic of the traditional “session.” Instead of the usual format of “let me tell you about what we did at our library and then you ask questions if we have time” (and there’s nothing wrong with this format), live polling puts the power into the hands of the audience. The session becomes something more like “tell us what you did think/feel and then let’s discuss immediately.” The most valuable and memorable presentations I’ve attended in my admittedly short five years in the profession have been those that engage the audience in the discussion throughout, instead of in a rush for questions at the end. Our polling sessions were not the most well-attended of the conference, but we saw more connections made, tough questions asked and answered, and camaraderie over shared struggles than we saw in others. Contributing to a body of knowledge is empowering in a way that absorbing information is not. Not all presentations or instruction sessions will be appropriate for live polling, but we are absolutely sold. In an era when Powerpoint seems to be going the way of the VCR, why not shake things up a bit?

Author’s Note: To participate in the survey questions from this session, and to view updated results from online participants, visit the ATG NewsChannel at http://www.letters.against-the-grain.com/2014/12/poll-a-palooza/ — EG

@Brunning: People & Technology

At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by Dennis Brunning (Director, The Design School Library, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Guide for the Perplexed:
Where Books Gather

How awesome that one of our storage centers might be located in an industrial area by a river. We could then say, in honesty, truth, and a smile, that our books “gather by the river.” An even better image would be storage built above, around, a stream. Architects, in higher end design, love this — and we could say, “and a river runs through it.”

Unfortunately, lame humor cannot cope with the sadness the trend toward off-site storage evokes. Call librarians gatekeepers, out of need we were; what we kept safe, sound, dry, and within reach warranted gatekeeping.

Not any longer. Stack locations are often “off-site.” Storage solutions are library conversations. Check out my pal Jeff Carriigo’s presentation. With Emory University librarians Lars Meyer and Charles Spornick held a great session at the Charleston Conference on a partnership in building a Harvard-style off-site storage for all of Georgia Tech’s print collection and a million or so books from Emory.

It’s a great plan that lays out putting all Georgia Tech books in storage plus one million Emory titles as well. Knowing Jeff and his colleagues, I can’t imagine anything but an exemplary execution. It’s fascinating to listen to how books are boxed by size and placed in “cubes” which rest on pallets. Cooled to a constant fifty degrees. A true academic Amazon.

And with its completion and startup, one more storage location will join the ever-growing directory of such facilities off-loading the print book to somewhere else.

Besides giving us a new meaning of “cool books,” permanent irrevocable book storage also ushers us into a flipped vision of Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451. Bradbury depicts a world where it wasn’t Big Brother so much as Little Sister who through technology and mass exploitation relieved a stressed society from its intellectual toil. Of course, the book was old school, a relic of the past, and

continued on page 59
Against the Grain / December 2014 - January 2015 <http://www.against-the-grain.com>


First, we clear up the big question. We don’t find out how Google works in the sense of the secret sauce that makes the search engine the best. By the end of two hundred pages, we’ve no doubt Google is good. The authors stop just short of writing that Google is the Internet, the Internet is Google.

The authors, Eric Schmidt, Google’s former CEO, and another guy, Jonathan Rosenberg, were almost early employees, brought in at the turn of the century to guide the Stanford startup to profitability. They were Google’s adopted parents, one a geeky leaning chief officer for Sun Microsystems and Novel — that would be Eric Schmidt — the other a marketing/PR fellow, well-known by Google’s early venture capitalists as someone who could bring light and order to Sergey Brin and Larry Page’s graduate student brilliant, creative, and unruly creation.

How Google Works is mostly anecdote and insight into how to leverage technological genius into money. There is nothing about how Google search works so well or even how Google might evolve from a virtual advertisement serving company — a dazzling billion-dollar annual success — and a technological company so big and dominant it has set limits on its own growth. At its best, Google Works is good reading for MBA types. The authors elaborate the idea of the smart creative, the young computer engineer, long on code, short on communication, who needs freedom, fun, large salaries, and high amounts of trust.

If there is a Google way it is to let smart creatives launch quickly, iterate, and accept failure as another form of success. These and other insights — the peer review hiring that includes intensive and many interviews integrated with testing may seem a bit familiar to librarians — but the best insights belong to the astute reader. Much isn’t said, and here there is insight.

Google will celebrate its 20th birthday in 2018. Since the early millennium when Google “monetized” search by creating AdWords where keywords retrieve links to Websites as well as links that serve up commercial ads and AdSense, a sophisticated syndicating system to place ads on other Websites and share in the combined revenue, Google has little to show for its technological success. Over 97% of its growing revenues come from ads; all else, the self-driving cars, Google + (social media), Google Drive, Apps and Docs (suite of MS Office-like products and cloud services), none of these account for Google’s high operating margins.

How Google will handle itself with little growth in new products is a topic that would have made How Google Works an excellent book whose insights would have been transformative. What works in the book is just a breezy, coy style and content which elevates the rhetoric that normally characterizes communiques from the Googleplex.

Perhaps Larry and Sergey never told Eric how Google works — that is, really works. We call it the new normal. Nothing is normal about indecision.

Share — is it an act of giving or confessing? I admit a social ignorance in how often and to whom I should like, share, follow, tweet. What am I sharing?

Reach out — memorable lyric hook by the Four Tops and Dionne Warwick evoked the saving power and grace of love, now gratuitously used in one-speak, now “owned” by those who want us to know they’ve poked you or maybe sent an email.

Ingest — this gastroenterological metaphor has got to go. It suggests we are feeding the machine when, in fact, the machine is neither hungry nor needs food.

Amazon’s Valuation — shareholders are creeping up on Jeff Bezos like the living dead. Amazon’s not shown a profit ever, and they spend, spend, spend to bring us cheap everything. There is no Moore’s law in retail, and everyone’s showcasing Amazon for better buys anywhere.

Big Data — we are keen, almost desperate, to bring Big Data into the library. If we put money down, we need a better pitch than “it’s all data.” The more we reify, the more we lose sight of our core strength — the world documented by research, creativity, and thought.

Mid-Decade Zeitgeist


First, we clear up the big question. We don’t find out how Google works in the sense of the secret sauce that makes the search engine the best. By the end of two hundred pages, we’ve no doubt Google is good. The authors stop just short of writing that Google is the Internet, the Internet is Google.

The authors, Eric Schmidt, Google’s former CEO, and another guy, Jonathan Rosenberg, were almost early employees, brought in at the turn of the century to guide the Stanford startup to profitability. They were Google’s adopted parents, one a geeky leaning chief officer for Sun Microsystems and Novel — that would be Eric Schmidt — the other a marketing/PR fellow, well-known by Google’s early venture capitalists as someone who could bring light and order to Sergey Brin and Larry Page’s graduate student brilliant, creative, and unruly creation.

How Google Works is mostly anecdote and insight into how to leverage technological genius into money. There is nothing about how Google search works so well or even how Google might evolve from a virtual advertisement serving company — a dazzling billion-dollar annual success — and a technological company so big and dominant it has set limits on its own growth. At its best, Google Works is good reading for MBA types. The authors elaborate the idea of the smart creative, the young computer engineer, long on code, short on communication, who needs freedom, fun, large salaries, and high amounts of trust.

If there is a Google way it is to let smart creatives launch quickly, iterate, and accept failure as another form of success. These and other insights — the peer review hiring that includes intensive and many interviews integrated with testing may seem a bit familiar to librarians — but the best insights belong to the astute reader. Much isn’t said, and here there is insight.

Google will celebrate its 20th birthday in 2018. Since the early millennium when Google “monetized” search by creating AdWords where keywords retrieve links to Websites as well as links that serve up commercial ads and AdSense, a sophisticated syndicating system to place ads on other Websites and share in the combined revenue, Google has little to show for its technological success. Over 97% of its growing revenues come from ads; all else, the self-driving cars, Google + (social media), Google Drive, Apps and Docs (suite of MS Office-like products and cloud services), none of these account for Google’s high operating margins.

How Google will handle itself with little growth in new products is a topic that would have made How Google Works an excellent book whose insights would have been transformative. What works in the book is just a breezy, coy style and content which elevates the rhetoric that normally characterizes communiques from the Googleplex.

Perhaps Larry and Sergey never told Eric how Google works — that is, really works. We call it the new normal. Nothing is normal about indecision.

Share — is it an act of giving or confessing? I admit a social ignorance in how often and to whom I should like, share, follow, tweet. What am I sharing?

Reach out — memorable lyric hook by the Four Tops and Dionne Warwick evoked the saving power and grace of love, now gratuitously used in one-speak, now “owned” by those who want us to know they’ve poked you or maybe sent an email.

Ingest — this gastroenterological metaphor has got to go. It suggests we are feeding the machine when, in fact, the machine is neither hungry nor needs food.

Amazon’s Valuation — shareholders are creeping up on Jeff Bezos like the living dead. Amazon’s not shown a profit ever, and they spend, spend, spend to bring us cheap everything. There is no Moore’s law in retail, and everyone’s showcasing Amazon for better buys anywhere.

Big Data — we are keen, almost desperate, to bring Big Data into the library. If we put money down, we need a better pitch than “it’s all data.” The more we reify, the more we lose sight of our core strength — the world documented by research, creativity, and thought.