

November 2012

At Brunning: People & 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: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brunning, Dennis (2012) "At Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 24: Iss. 5, Article 41.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6344>

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.

First for knowledge.

Recognized for 'Best Contract Options',
The Charleston Advisor Reader Awards 2011.

"For several years EBL has led the e-book aggregator market in extremely flexible licensing options for e-books." THE CHARLESTON ADVISOR, OCTOBER 2011.

Every EBL ebook is rentable, downloadable, mobile and simultaneously available.

Contact us to find out why EBL should be your first choice for ebooks
at info@eblib.com.



www.eblib.com

@Brunning: People & Technology

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

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Aux mots les citoyens!

A few weeks ago our newspaper declared it would adjust its access model, requiring fees for viewing much of it; it used the second page to make a plea for content partners. These citizen journalists would play a major role in populating its pages with local stories, especially those focused on neighborhoods. Presumably, this would intensify interest in how the paper connected with real-time issues. This news would not be charged as premium content. Like who would want to pay for the gossip of those across town?

This move is consistent with the decade decline of newspapers to preserve paid writing and editing staff but rebrand its Web version as a community forum.

Academic libraries seem to be following suit with demand or patron-driven book acquisition. And by turning over the task to users, we are at once saving money and targeting demand. What stronger connection could there be than the interest and demand of the vox populi enabled by technology to buy and read what they want rather than let someone else choose?

How's that going? Clearly newspaper printing presses and Websites are still running, creating some revenues — at least to stay the course. And if some library conference presentations can be believed, patron-driven models are costing their pro-

ponents less money. These savings are understood as an economic and moral accomplishment.

Newspaper editors and publishers do not like Web dynamics, either in writing, editing, or ad pricing. They are moving the good stuff behind pay-walls despite the chiding of leading news aggregators. It is a bold but necessary move to remain in business. They want to be more than a free community service.

Now that some libraries have outsourced selection to those keen on surfing our catalogs for "e stream" marc records, we reproduce, even without direct intent, the role of the newspapers volunteer reporter pool. Our collections are being built by volunteers who must devote time to cull our records for items that strike their need or fancy. Behind the PDA movement there seems no particularly-formed collection development policy or philosophy; rather, business objectives dominate in absence of any carefully crafted and equitable collection mission.

Sour grapes? Well, yes. Just like newspaper decision makers, we've turned an important task over to our users. Patron-driven acquisition is like reading a newspaper posted by our neighbors. Yes, money may be saved but a powerful tradition — our role as librarians — are undermined by a dynamic that contracts out to volunteers while at the same time costing

us more than well targeted dollars. Our users do not need this type of employment. Now there's a topic for our citizen journalists. Just what the heck are your librarians doing?

We turn this task over to our readers; it is like reading a newspaper posted by our neighbors. Yes, money is saved, but two powerful traditions are undermined by moves that contract out to volunteers, all the while still costing something. Now there's a topic for our citizen journalists, what are your local paper and library up to?

Your Links:

<http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/183295/naa-list-shows-news-paper-paywalls-typically-allow-11-free-articles/>

Self-Publishing 2.0

Well, it's got an ISBN...

Self-publishing, defined simply as writing, producing, and distributing a book without the benefit of a reputable publisher, is a growing industry. Once known and vilified as vanity publishing, self-publishing is taking center stage in the death of the book argument and the disrupted publisher.

continued on page 96

As many point out, self-publishing has always been part of book publishing. **Ranganathian** may have declared every reader a book, every book a reader. Even in early-20th century Indian bookstores and libraries there must have been the task of separating good books from the bad, or at the least, books that would not waste the time of the reader — presumably books vetted by those who knew good from bad or useful from the merely adorning.

Then and now a mark of achievement and value has always been to publish a book. It's a cultural as well as monetary thing. Culturally it's organized thought, expressed as clearly as writing and the writer is able. And the topic possesses timeliness, insight, answers and telegraphs a readership — an audience who will buy, read, discuss, and place the book in that wonderful spectrum and continuum we call knowledge.

For many years, authors, publishers, and librarians have avoided supporting vanity publishing. We worried about the quality defined by criteria such as authority, content value, and manufacturing. For librarians, the publishing industry capacity far exceeded our ability to buy, so we necessarily set the gold standard which did not include books developed outside our publishing system.

It's a colossal understatement to write that the internet and its publishing software have disrupted this model. Some 40% of **Amazon** print and eBook titles are published by non-traditional publishers. These publishers for a fee help an author edit, design and layout, and market (mainly online) their books and charge fees far less costly than traditional vanity publishers.

As a book buyer on the Web, you are tasked with identifying readable books and provided referral tools, social media tools, and paid reviewers, all of which are manipulated by customer algorithms. To peruse a book's content now — an art developed by librarians and bookstore denizens the world wide over — is

now sampling. Where's the whole book? It is now often oddly extracted abstracts glued together of title page, preface, and smattering of what the algorithm selects as a first chapter. If your introduction is written by a scribbling **Bill Clinton**, you've got nothing. Nothing.

As a result, it is really easy to buy real dogs. An almost dead giveaway is pricing. Books priced below \$2.99 suffer from many abuses, from simple formatting problems to lack of clarity, cohesiveness, and comprehension. 99 cents — well, forget about it. Frankly, you get what you pay for.

Kindle singles, little works culled from bigger works and priced accordingly — they are the exception. This is edited content from important writers. They read and price right — like a Kraft American Cheese single.

As big chain bookstores reduce their footprint, used bookstores may momentarily thrive as places to find quality books. In time, though, our eBooks, especially the self-published books which should have remained with **Amazon** and not in our accounts, will linger because who can or desires to delete crap from the cloud? That copy of *Fifty Shades of Gray*, a self-published success story, will forever remain part of our online account.

So with self-publishing becoming a popular, although stealth, mode of authentic publishing, what should be the librarian's take on this technology and business? As publishing becomes just software, just another set of algorithms, how do we maintain quality while at the same time remaining relevant?

Annals of Search: Seek and Ye Shall Find...

You have to go far back in recorded history to document the close relationship of the words "search" and "find." For millennia, one comes before the other in just about any language. Let's go with the easy one from the New Testament. In **Matthew's** gospel, **Jesus** says:

Matthew 7:7,8 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Now clearly, the message here is, as they say today, "results-driven." And although the stakes here are eternal salvation, one can easily bring the message down a few notches and apply it to the methods and goals of everyday life. It is what librarians do every day as part of reference and research. We know about finding what we search for.

When **Roy Tenant**, then at the **University of California** Department of Automation, popularized the notion that librarians search, users find, he inaugurated an era that set the librarian off from the end user. Although it was expressed in terms of preference, it was understood by those who heard it as brief therapy for what some thought hobbled the profession, especially a profession roiled by rapid change in library technology. **Tenant** was pushing the notion that our technology should help end users find exactly what they wanted. He argued librarians were content with technologies that retrieved as much as possible from the sources they indexed. For **Tenant**, that put the cart before horse.

For some, this didn't make sense from the get go. Anyone who worked a reference desk or consulted with students and faculty knew that their users were seeking many things, many of which were owned by the library, many that were not. Occasionally, they sought answers. In other cases, they sought the books and journals from which answers could be found. No matter what they found, seeking or searching logically came first.

As we move closer to the **2012 Charleston Conference**, it is good to review this. On Friday, just before Happy Hour, an esteemed panel of publishers, software vendors, and one library director, are pondering for our consideration, the search and find riddle. We hope no one will short-change us with **Roy Tenant's** old and odd bromide about search and find. The weather report is a bit sketchy. The abstract pitches the notion that since **Google's** IPO in 2004 the notion of "search" has dominated over the equally-important idea of "find." Pivoting on how we understand this, they suggest the future of libraries and the success of the search industry are up for grabs. Their flu shot: we think more about "find."

They may be on to something or nothing. We hope it's about how versed librarians and librarianship are in searching and finding rather than some post-**Tenant** tenant about two processes that are inextricably related and well understood by librarians.

Your Links:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/26/business/book-reviewers-for-hire-meet-a-demand-for-online-raves.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/technology/personaltech/ins-and-outs-of-publishing-your-book-via-the-web.html?pagewanted=all>

Your Links:

<http://pragmaticlibrarian.wordpress.com/2007/01/10/do-librarians-really-like-to-search/>
<http://www.katina.info/conference-program.php>