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

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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>

Where the Wild Things Are eBooks in 2013

What would we do without the **Pew Research Center**? In the saga that is growth and decline in the disrupted world of the Internet, they provide much needed data for what's happening online. Without **Pew** surveys, bloggers and journalists would have nothing. NOTHING.

Well, not exactly. While **Pew** surveys the public, other more commercial data crunchers are adopting and adapting their audience research methods to evaluate users and use more accurately for their commercial accounts. Taken together these surveys help map what's going on in our reading habits, especially how we read.

Since **Amazon** introduced Kindle in 2008, **Pew** and **Nielson** surveys have shown a steady increase in the use of e-readers, purchase of e-editions of books, and growth in the use of reading apps on a variety of computing devices. A tipping point was reached in 2011 when **Amazon**, never terribly open about sales figures, reported first edition purchases of e-editions surpassed those of hardcover. It meant that there were enough Kindles, customers, and Kindle editions to turn upside down the traditional model of expensive hardcover release followed by paperback editions. In a flat industry and flat economy, eBooks showed promise.

This raised a few eyebrows in the publishing industry. It meant that eBooks were challenging growth in the consumer trade market. Even if the writing wasn't on the wall, that wall had been tagged.

In 2013, with data gathered from the 2012 retail year, we are again confronted how wild this world is. In sales, **Nielson Bookscan** reports that decline in overall print book sales has stabilized at 9% of total revenues — the same decline observed in 2011. In opinion, **Pew** surveyed book readers and found that 89 percent of regular book readers report they've read a print book within the last year, while only 30 percent said that they had read an eBook in the same time period.

Friend of libraries, **Nicholas Carr**, author of *The Shallows* — a book about how the Internet is making us dumb — has an interesting take on this in a *WSJ* piece. In an extremely non-Fahrenheit 451 spirit, **Carr** feels that the last few years the early adopters made their move on the e-reader and eBook, especially in light reading of consumer fiction. By definition, these are the “most disposable of books,” so why not buy them in the most disposable way?

Another type of reader, **Carr** argued, buys and reads differently:

“Readers of weightier fare, including literary fiction and narrative nonfiction,

have been less inclined to go digital. They seem to prefer the heft and durability, the tactile pleasures, of what we still call “real books”—the kind you can set on a shelf...”

Carr concludes we have to consider that reading — and the publishing that supplies it — serves many purposes and that the **Gutenberg Revolution** is still the one going on albeit with a digital chapter. In 2013 academic publishers may tact into the eBook's fickle breeze.

Your Links:

<http://pewinternet.org/Presentations/2013/Jan/ALA.aspx>

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Libraries-patrons-and-ebooks.aspx?list=1>

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2414068,00.asp>

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323874204578219563353697002.html?mod=WSJ_Books_LS_Books_5

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/richard-adams-blog/2011/jan/28/amazon-kindle-ebook-paperback-sales>

<http://www.ciscopress.com/store/ebook-formats/>

<http://www.nicholasgcarr.com/>

Beall Street Blues

Recently librarians have been in the legal news. They've received letters from lawyers representing publishers. **Dale Askey**, a librarian at **McMaster's University** in Ontario, Canada, is being sued for alleged damages to the reputation and profits of a Canadian scholarly publisher. Another, **Jeffrey Beall** who coined the term “predatory open-access publishers” and manages a Website devoted to identifying whom he thinks fits this description, has been sternly asked in an attorney's letter, to stop what he is doing to the attorney's client, an open-access publisher.

Mr. Beall and **Mr. Askey** have not said much publicly which is smart and what their legal advisers have told them.

For a moment the library Web community lit up with anger, chagrin, fear, and advice for these potential defendants. Overall, the mood was shock.

Askey's case revolves around whether a librarian can write in a public forum negatively about a publisher's products. A publisher, **Edward Mellen Press** felt libeled by a blog post. Liability aside, some of this publisher's authors expressed concerned that their writing and qualifications might have been damaged by the negatively reviewed company. They considered

their writing good and the publisher did what all publishers do: it published good writing.

The problem may be the review went beyond literary or product criticism to a general indictment of the publisher. The claim wasn't that just one product or a few were bad but all the books published were bad. Guilt by association.

Mr. Beall's predicament is that an open access publisher doesn't like being listed on **Beall's** list of predatory open access publisher. This list appears on **Mr. Beall's** blog with criteria and comment on why the publisher is listed.

We sense the publisher doesn't see an even playing field when such lists are on the public Web. And it may revolve around the word “predatory.” This is not a nice or unemotional word and **Beall** probably chose it for its lack of nuance. When you have a predator in your midst you call the cops, pull out your weapon, protect your family. You take on strength because the predator is focusing all energies and efforts at preying on the weak.

Now many publishers support critical reviews in their journals. These reviews warn us about products or services we should not engage because we risk some problem. These are usually about product quality, misinformation about what the product does, or its general price to whatever we buy it for value.

Perhaps **Mr. Askey** and **Mr. Beall** should publish in higher quality publications like *American Libraries* or *Library Journal*. Or even *Consumer Reports*. They should avoid the “everything goes” side of the new media — the blogs and the reading community. A good editor could make either of them bullet-proof in this battle for quality in academic publishing.

Your Links:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/15/another-publisher-accuses-librarian-libel>

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/08/academic-press-sues-librarian-raising-issues-academic-freedom>

Across the Carpet and into the Stacks

I love the stacks, I don't know why; I don't get there often. Roaming the stacks is what I may want to do as my last act. Or if heaven is as we imagine, I want heaven to be a library with infinite rows of shelves and even more books. Nothing would go overdue and the acquisition budget would be bottomless.

I don't know exactly where our library's building is. I may have been told but it makes as much sense to me as knowing exactly where an **Amazon** or **Wal-Mart** warehouse is. It may

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@Brunner: People & Technology from page 54

be just down the street; I may pass it every day in my commute.

We've delivered many books and journals to off-site storage or what we call High-Density Storage. I recall we had a naming contest and I guess this won. Or our suggestions were, unlike Google's, suggestions that simply didn't click.

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That a book be plucked out of the pile our memory, a memory recorded in digital database zeros and ones, ought to grant that book a new shelf life. We ought to lend the book in perpetuity to its ardent re-discoverer, no matter what rank or status on campus, so he or she will have books near to them again. Yes, create a shadow shelf network in the offices and rooms of our users, a Napsterish peer-to-peer storage system.

I've always suspected the big gun libraries that lent many of their books to Google for scanning into the Google Library Project, did so for housekeeping and not scholarly reasons. They needed to make room for more books



or fewer books and more space for learning, tutoring, teaching, and refreshment centers. Once you have scanned copy you can index it and once you index it you can store it and once you compare with other similar databases of holdings, you can weed it.

No matter how horrific or unpleasant Mao's reeducation programs must have been because they were secret, brainwashing, and framed in the logic of doing what was right, these present-day efforts of moving the books away from shelves, may feel to some of us like a reeducation effort. What once was our comfortable world of library shelves teeming with books, deep in scholarly journals, and piled with government documents, has become the clinical environment of searching a database for an online copy, while never having to take the walk up the stairs and into the stacks.

I've just returned from the PS call number range, my arms stacked with a pile of present-day American authors. Six or so novels and poetry books from writers I remember as important to me as life itself. Their magic is one with their content, their publishers, their font, their words and my own giddy feeling that I've read them, the words have endured, and my experience of them is that walk down the book aisles with the expectation that I will find more and more and just need to reach out...

I've yet to find an online equivalent to this simple and direct experience. Let's create an app for that. 🐼

Rumors from page 53

last week! I understand from a report recently released by Publishing Technology at the LBF that the number of publisher-owned online communities is set to more than double over the next two years. The study was conducted by Bowker Market Research, a service of ProQuest affiliate Bowker and included U.S. and UK publishers across trade and academic sectors. The full results are available now on the publishingtechnology.com/blog at <http://web.mail.comcast.net/zimbra/h/search?si=0&so=0&sc=37175&st=message&id=1479866&xim=1&action=view>.

Just learned. Mr. Richard Abel died peacefully at home on April 17, at 6:30 am. He had been enduring heart failure for several months. Mr. Abel ("Dick") was 87 years old. He is survived by his wife Kathy and his two daughters, Kit and Cori, and five grandchildren. Dick was the founder of Richard Abel & Co., best known perhaps for developing automated Approval Plans for academic libraries in the 1950s thru 1974. The assets of the Abel Company were acquired by Blackwell's in 1975. According to his wishes, Dick will be buried in a wooden casket, there will be no funeral, and no memorial service is planned. (Information provided by Don Chvatal, who requests that former employees of the company contact him to provide their email and physical addresses. Former employees will be listed in a monograph that will re-publish Dick's history of the Richard Abel Company. To be published by Against the Grain, the book will be edited by Katina Strauch and Scott Smith and include personal reminiscences by others who knew Mr. Abel. As one of Dick's last requests, former employees are to receive complimentary copies. Contact: Don at 503-309-2589 or <don.chvatal@ringgold.com>.) 🐼