

2014

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: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



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

Recommended Citation

Brunning, Dennis (2014) "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.

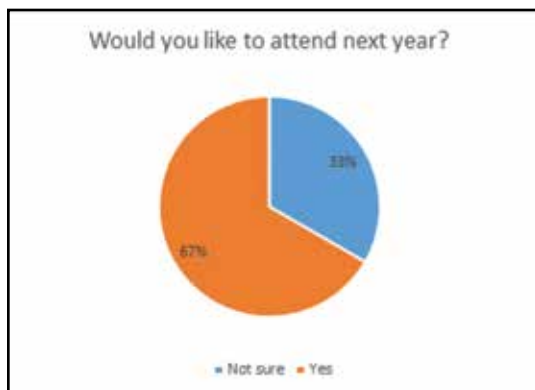
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6980>

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.

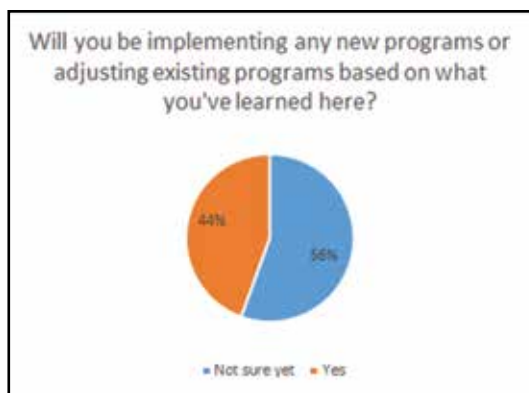


Don'ts:

- 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 information sharing 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 commiseration 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.against-the-grain.com/2014/12/poll-a-palooza/>. —EG

@Bunning: 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.bunning@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 Carrico'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

needed to be torched. **Jeff's** facility, I believe, comes equipped with state-of-the-art sprinkler system.

In another session, this one on "what faculty think about libraries," hosted by **Arizona State University's** next UL, **Jim O'Donnell**, one young physics professor faculty liked books for other subjects but not in his area of particle physics. A social science researcher and excellent writer talked of her efforts to "MacGyver" solutions to books her library didn't have. And a classicist spoke eloquently and poetically of the need for books and the library in his intellectual and emotional life.

In this era, our online times, books gather less in familiar places like shelves in our home and office, shelves at our library, or bookstores in our neighborhood. They are also digital files that flow in sine waves over wires and the broadcast air; they are ones and zeros translated into meaning held in electronic aspic.

Books packed in cubes, books irrelevant, books beloved, books sought after like a PI searching for a lost heir. How do we juggle all of these objects; what's the trick?

We read books. Nothing is more experiential than reading. We read to know, to find out, to answer, and to entertain ourselves.

When we talk about reading and when we talk about great reading, no better author comes to mind than **James Joyce**. A collection of short stories and three novels, most of which is a set piece of an artist's journey through autobiographical space and time freezing the Irish soul in words forever captured between covers of books.

Remember your own reading and know that **Joyce** exhausted literature. Insert any great or important-to-you writer where we've place **Joyce**; it's still true. Our authors added to our lives by our reading books. Collectively, across all formats, books contain our reading which makes up us.

Bezos and **Jobs** got ahead of libraries and reset where books gather. Now it isn't clear or certain where that precisely is. Data points to steady but not exploding growth in overall eBook sales and revenues; more data shows steady sales in print. Broadly, readers enjoy and seek all book formats. It's up in the air if the reading public has reached the saturation point for electronic formats.

Librarians seem dead set on making room in our gathering places for new core purpose like creative work spaces. Space in library buildings has become non-library space. We claim that our users don't care. Doing so, we've severely discounted those who do.

For every user who doesn't notice or care where the books gather, there are those who do. Or there are those who are confused. A guide for the perplexed would be a **Ranganathan** consideration of reader and book — not necessarily the artifact and machine but how intimate and close that relationship is and our task of making sure it happens for every reader a book, every book, a reader.

Let's Book: *How Google Works* by Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg, Grand Central Publishing, 2014.

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 geek 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 revenues, **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 **Serge** never told **Eric** how **Google** works — that is, really works.

Meh 2014

Life Hacks — well, tips are always welcome, especially the those that pay off in money or new skills and expertise. But all this advice bubbling on the Web. We need hacks for the hacks.

Gridlock — in Congress, gridlock in our lives, gridlock as permanent human condition.

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 org-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

Catching whiffs of the future in the detritus of the past...

Facebook at Workit's happening in 2015. Remarkably it took almost a decade for the gloves to come off and the real WTF match of the titans to begin. All hail and bow down to the INCREDIBLE MIGHTY ZUCK.

Net Neutrality: We need a good concept to describe the other side of free. I don't know about you, but my neighbors drain our cable loop with Netflix, Hulu, and name-of-the-day streaming media service.

Wikipedia Library: An astonishing effort through the Wikimedia Foundation to up the quality of Wikipedia writing and editing through library resources.

I Shot the Sheriff Award to the person(s) who killed "ublishing." Library publishing is a worthy pursuit. This neologism isn't. What next — "pibrarians?"

Uber God View: This might be meh if it weren't so in the face zeitgeist. At a conference of **Uber** employees, an **Uber** honcho, demonstrated a beta version of the **Uber** app that allowed real-time tracking of other **Uber** customers. The room cheered but not the rest of us. You don't have to be religious to sense the hubris of this "do it because we can" stunt by this driven startup. What next, hidden cameras in the backseat, catch **Jaylo** and **Ben** hooking up on the down-low. Nah, they got their own **Uber**...

Kickended: Venetian artist and Kickstarter user, **Silvio Lorusso**, started this Website that searches Kickstarter for failed Kickstarter campaigns. He found 10% receive no funding and 40% receive enough to meet their goal amount. It serves as a great counterweight to overly enthusiastic media reports of successful Kickstarters. Kickends reminds us that success is mostly an outlier; successful projects cover failures. 🍷