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Yoav Lorch Profile

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books, per subject, per event, or just personal choices, and house that list in a “shelf.” Then any reader can simply add the whole shelf, with all the books in it, to their library, and readers build their personal library by adding quality collections others have created. These “shelves” created by specialists, librarians, readers, teachers or other, e.g., the State Library of Kansas is using a shelf called Happy Gardeners, with nine quality gardening books to promote gardening <http://kslib.info/128/Digital-Book-eLending>.

ATG: *You say that in order to charge the user fairly, and pay the publishers and authors fairly, your incremental purchasing model requires that you monitor what everyone is reading. That will raise some privacy red flags for librarians. Your response?*

YL: The issue of privacy is often raised by libraries, and rightly so. Reading is an intimate, revealing activity, and many people would not like others to know what they are reading. We take this issue very seriously in **Total Boox**, and all personal information is not accessible at all. True, in order to provide the service we have to monitor what people are reading. We need it in order to charge the libraries and pay the publishers fairly, and to maintain the quality of service. If a patron buys a new device the experience is seamless. We duplicate the full personal library, and also avoid charging for parts already paid for. We only provide librarians and publishers with aggregate information, e.g., the number of people reading a book, how much has been read, etc., and any personal information is totally blocked.

ATG: *Assuming that you can ensure privacy, you are still accumulating a lot of data and related information. What are your plans for its use? Will you sell it to other vendors? Use it to improve services to you readers?*

YL: We are not selling and will not sell any personal information to anyone. We are in the process of building a personal recommendation system based on the reading done by every reader, and the level of engagement that occurs between readers and books. Once fully deployed it will provide superior personal reading suggestions, that together with our friction-free immediate-availability approach will establish a new standard for the industry.

ATG: *You’ve said that “ownership” of eBooks has become an issue of some contention between publishers and libraries. How does Total Boox address that contention? Do libraries own, subscribe to, or license content from Total Boox? Or are we talking about something else entirely?*

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against the grain
people profile

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Yoav Lorch

BORN & LIVED: Born in Jerusalem Israel. Lived mostly in Israel, four years in the U.S., one year in the UK, and travelled around for three years.

FAMILY: One wife, three daughters.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: A writer originally, entrepreneur eventually
IN MY SPARE TIME: Sea Kayaking, Congas.

FAVORITE BOOKS: A mélange of **Simenon, Franzen** and **Marquez**.

PHILOSOPHY: Happiness is just around the corner.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Buying the containers, the books, in digital format will become almost obsolete, like buying music CD’s today. All people will have access to all books. People will read a lot, pay just for the portions they actively read, and books will fulfill their cultural, educational and other roles in the best possible way. 🐘

YL: In the digital sphere the meaning of “ownership” is very confusing. It actually relates to certain types of licenses. If you buy an eBook on Kindle you cannot give it or lend it. But you still own it. If a library buys an eBook from a publisher they’d call it “ownership” just because the publisher doesn’t have the right to take it back, but still the library has to abide with “one-user-one-copy” etc. It is within reason to call “ownership” a situation where you are free to use something exactly the way you want to, and there are no limitations on how and when you can use it. In that sense the full catalog we provide libraries, now about 100,000 titles, is actually owned by the library, since the library can provide it to all its patrons, with no one-user-one-copy or any other limitation. Moreover, the books never disappear from the patrons’ devices which adds to the notion of “ownership.”

In our dialog with libraries we avoid the term “ownership” as it is far too unclear. We provide the service on an annual basis to the library, and the libraries can choose between two different modes. Many libraries fear that with our model patrons will read “through the roof,” and they will end up going over budget. For these libraries we provide a cap, and take the risk of “reading through the roof” on ourselves. With other libraries we just bill them monthly for the reading done by their patrons.

It’s important to note that paying for reading is extremely cost effective, and in general the cost of reading is only a small fraction of the price of the full collection.

ATG: *How are publishers and authors reacting to your concept? How many books are currently available in Total Boox? How many publishers are represented? Are any of the “Big Five” participating yet?*

YL: Publishers feel they are not realizing their full potential with libraries. They look at their extensive lists of books, and notice that not more than 5% of the eBooks they can

offer are ever bought by libraries, as libraries tend to spend most of their eBook budgets on a limited number of expensive best-sellers. So the publishers see us as a unique and potent channel for exposing their full lists to patrons, and providing the chance to be discovered and read to each and every title on offer.

Total Boox has around 100,000 titles, coming from over 250 publishers, and covering a very diverse array of subjects. We grow the content through a live dialog with librarians, and try to supply the types of books librarians feel the communities are interested in. At the moment we work only with established publishers, among them some well known names as **Workman, O’Reilly, Sourcebooks, Elsevier, Oxford University Press, F+W Media, Hay House Publications**, and many, many more.

We are in constant discussion with one or the other of the big five, and they eye us with great interest. It’s difficult to guess which one will be the first to work with us.

ATG: *How do you determine the pricing for your purchase-as-you-read model? If a library is interested in Total Boox, what will it cost them? Can you tell us how many libraries currently have Total Boox?*

YL: We do a wise guesstimate of what the library’s patrons will be reading in a year. Its based on the number of active card holders, the current number of “digitarians” (patrons actively reading eBooks) and on our experience with other libraries. Its always a surprisingly low figure given the breadth of our selection and the freedom of use. We then cap the library’s expense at this amount, and if patrons read over that it’s our problem, and we pay the publishers for the extra reading done.

ATG: *Being the driving force behind an innovative start up like Total Boox must be exciting, but also draining. How do you recharge your batteries? What fun activities*

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