

The London Book Fair 2009

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Introduction

The May/June 2009 edition of *CL* contained the first of a series of articles contributed by staff members of the City of Cape Town: Library and Information Services who are involved in the project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to develop Cape Town's Central Library into a world-class centre of excellence.

In her article, Brenda Kyle described events leading up to her attendance at the first of a number of sponsored trips to international book fairs, and of her experiences at the Bologna Children's Book Fair in March 2009.

The London Book Fair

Literally three weeks after returning from Bologna, it was time to head off to England for the London Book Fair held at the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre from 20-22 April 2009.



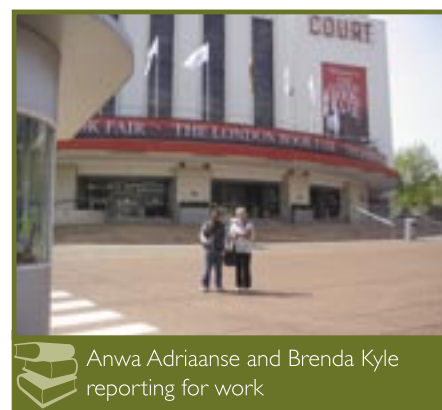
The Russian stand

This time I was accompanied by Anwa Adriaanse, principal librarian: Technical services, responsible for running the acquisitions, cataloguing and processing staff needed to pull off the technical support functions for a project of this scale.

With 1900 exhibitors from 60 countries, London's is an even bigger fair than Bologna, although the more compact design of the Earl's Court venue made it feel less of a physical challenge on the feet! Not all of the exhibitors were publishers - there were also many printers, literary agents and logistics companies, and where my

overall impression of Bologna was of publishing as a creative, artistic endeavour, in London it was business, business, business. Possibly this was a result of the deepening global recession and growing concerns over the future of publishing over the next five years, but most of my conversations and contacts dealt with the nitty-gritty of how to publish, market and sell books in a challenging commercial environment.

In many ways this served my purpose. In Bologna I had met many people exhibiting the most wonderful books and media, but quite often when I asked them how I could get their publications to South Africa, they simply didn't know! There, the people manning the stands were usually from the creative and editorial divisions of the publishing houses; in London there was a far greater presence of marketing staff, book wholesalers, distributors, shippers and import and export agents, and I was able to establish some useful new sources of supply that will enable us to lay hands on material not usually available in South Africa.



Anwa Adriaanse and Brenda Kyle reporting for work

There was also a huge emphasis on future developments in publishing, in particular on digital publishing and its implications, and there was a keen sense that change is looming, that the world of books as we know it will change in the not too distant future, and that book professionals need to start understanding what this is going to mean to them, whatever their role in the world of publishing. Unfortunately (for I am an old-fashioned lover of books on paper), this inevitably will include librarians like ourselves.

On the Sunday afternoon after our arrival in London, Anwa and I attended a seminar called *Strategies for digital publishing in a time of uncertainty*. It concentrated on trends in America where book shops are experiencing sharp declines in sales, reading and literacy levels are falling, and publishers are competing in a market where consumers are increasingly turning to new sources of information and recreational media which they expect to be able to access in very different ways to those we know and understand.


Hand-held device

All this having been said, I had my first experience of reading a book on a hand-held device, with both Amazon's Kindle and the Sony Book Reader available for visitors to try out. It wasn't as nasty an experience as I feared, and certainly a more acceptable alternative than trying to read off the tiny screen of a PDA.

Author events

However, not everything was about electronic publishing! We were able to attend several author events at the PEN Literary Café, where we saw reassuringly recognisable literary 'names' talking about reassuringly familiar book-related topics. Amongst those I saw were Lisa Appignanesi, the ebullient Umberto Eco, William Boyd (whose African background has always given his books a particular resonance for me), and



 William Boyd during an author event

James Patterson who spoke most interestingly about his involvement in children's literacy. His belief is that school-related reading often puts children off reading, and certainly does not position reading as a preferred leisure-time activity. Amongst the projects he is running is a web site called *readkiddoread* which

lists only books that he believes have real child appeal across a range of age levels, and with all kind of add-ons for children, parents, librarians and teachers (see www.readkiddoread.com).

Every year the London Book Fair showcases the publications and associated business and cultural activities of a particular country, generally one whose publishing output is not readily available to the

book buying market. This year it was India which has the largest English speaking population in the world, and publishes in at least 24 other languages. Even minority languages like Marathi and Urdu have at least 50 million speakers! Amongst the best writers of Indian origin that I saw were Amit Chaudhuri and Anita Nair.

Most excitingly, next year (2010) South Africa is going to be the Market Focus country, and this is going to be an invaluable opportunity for our local publishers to get in front of the world's biggest players. I wish I could be there again to experience this ... better start saving ...

Favourite London experiences

Far from being a huge, overwhelming City I was amazed by how uncrowded the central part of London was, even in the bright sunny weather we enjoyed throughout our stay - so lucky! While there are masses of busses and taxis, private cars are few in the City - everything thus feels wide open, clean and orderly.

Anwa and I really took to the busses, and made ourselves conspicuous by ruthlessly clawing small children out of the way so we could sit upstairs, at the front ... Seriously, it was a great (and relatively inexpensive) way to see a fair amount of this beautiful city of handsome buildings, extensive parks and ubiquitous history and culture.


On Sunday morning we took a circuitous route (by bus!) from West Kensington up through the city to St Paul's Cathedral. And as we walked in, the choir burst into song - unforgettable.

My other favourite experience was a long dreamed-of visit to the Courtauld Gallery. Housed in a magnificent courtyarded 18th-century palace on the banks of the Thames, it is a relatively small gallery (that is, not too overwhelming for



 James Patterson being interviewed



 Anwa at Trafalgar Square

an inexperienced visitor from the colonies), and home to a magnificent collection of paintings and artefacts. Standing in front of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and Gauguin's Tahitian paintings, I remember thinking, 'Is this really ME, HERE?'

Again, the opportunity presented by the Carnegie Corporation of attending these international book fairs has been more than the sum of its parts.

Strategies for digital publishing in a time of uncertainty

ANWA ADRIAANSE

Principal Librarian: Technical Services

City of Cape Town: Library and Information Services

The first speaker at the seminar, after the opening remarks as summarised by Brenda, was Kelly Gallagher, the Vice President, Publisher Services at RR Bowker. His topic was *Understanding tomorrow's digital consumer by knowing what they are up to today*.

This was an interesting talk about the inevitability of change and the factors dictating the rate and direction of change in the book industry. The publishing industry has been centred on the book, its design and physical dimensions, for so long that the onset of the digital transformation of this industry was bound to have a massive impact. Relying on traditional methods and processes and even traditional outlets is not the best way to manage this change.

At the moment though, this transformation can hardly be referred to as a tidal wave, since less than 1.5% of industry sales were made up of e-resources.

However, as indication of a trend, Internet sales of books overtook book sales in more traditional channels for the first time last year. The awareness of publishing industry products, including physical books, is increasingly online via the Internet. In fact, online reviews are now more preferred by consumers than printed ones.

The one constant amidst all this change remains the consumer and Gallagher had some interesting statistics regarding the American consumer: 65% of all books sold are bought by women; 60% of books are purchased by over 43-year-olds; the fiction consumer is made up of the ratio 65% female and 35% male.

I also attended a number of other seminars, of which two of the most interesting were a panel discussion entitled *The dedicated reading device: introducing a new proposition to UK consumers*, and an International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) presentation, *What's new for EPUB?*

From the panel discussion it became clear that a lot of collaboration has gone into and continues to be a part of developments in the field of reading devices and content for it. Developers such as Sony, while

respecting the heritage of the printed book, are intent on enhancing the reading experience with their digital devices. Penguin is continuously researching the type of content to make available in e-book format. For example, they are considering the conversion of travel guides to e-book format as one of their latest projects.

What became very clear from this discussion is that it is still early days for digital reading devices and e-books. This holds true where pricing is concerned. The reading devices themselves are still expensive and e-books are generally more expensive than printed books since VAT is levied on e-books and not on the physical book. The high prices are partly due to the enormous amounts of money pumped into research and development in these fields and prices should gradually start declining until it reaches a level acceptable to the market.

International Digital Publishing Forum

There is a lot of technical jargon thrown about when it comes to e-resources and the IDPF presentation cleared some of this up for me (starting with the acronym IDPF). The IDPF provides an umbrella body for competitors to discuss issues surrounding the digital publishing industry. The IDPF is also a standards organisation in that it developed and maintains the three standards comprising the electronic publication (EPUB) standard.

EPUB is the e-book standard. This is an electronic file format that converts any publication into an e-book. If you're interested in reading the background to the formation of this standard visit the web site www.idpf.org.

What may be of interest to us is that the EPUB standard helps reduce the costs of conversion and therefore more content will become available to the consumer.

DRM is the acronym for Digital Rights Management which basically provides control over how digital content is accessed on digital devices. The publisher or copyright holder, et cetera, sets the level of protection required for a particular book, for example, they may enable options such as *cut*, *paste*, *print* or *disable*.

I attended a few other seminars on e-resources but those were mostly sales presentations.

