The development of web-based fiction promotion in public libraries: an investigation into styles and implementation to maximise its potential as a reader development device.

A study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Librarianship

at

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by

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Abstract

This project is concerned with investigating web-based reader development facilities being currently developed and maintained by UK public libraries. It aims to consider such issues as styles used and motivation behind the introduction of these types of facilities. It further hopes to illuminate factors and procedures surrounding implementation and maintenance, both in terms of logistics and in a wider context. This has been done in the hope of benefiting the further development of the field by alerting the profession to issues involved in the process. Therefore the collation of some good practice recommendations is also a primary objective.

The relative newness of the field has determined the research approach as qualitative. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with members of staff responsible for web facilities in five different library authorities. The findings from the interviews have then been analysed in the light of the previous literature and research relevant to the topic. A brief examination of the websites themselves has also been undertaken.

The report finds that elements such as booklists, reader reviews and lists of reading related links are common among library provision in this area. In comparison to parallel concerns such as commercial, independent and international sites, libraries are not lacking in innovation, but are somewhat behind in terms of scope and technical proficiency.

The reasons for introducing reading facilities are numerous, but include the historical development of the websites, government and local pressures, and the desire to give users the chance to interact more with their libraries. Readers' groups are important catalysts in the process.

There are some problems still to be overcome in implementation and maintenance, particularly on the technical side. Both the sites and the interview respondents displayed good awareness of quality and good practice on the web although there is still room for
improvement. Greater collaboration and communication among libraries is proposed as a solution to some of these difficulties.

The relationship between libraries and bookshops on the web is mutually beneficial in some respects at present. The world-wide audience was not found to be problematic by respondents. Overall, it is too early to be able to conclude much about the success of the facilities or the suitability of the web as a medium. Recommendations have been made for further research into these areas at a later date, focusing on the users' experiences of the facilities.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Description of Topic

This chapter aims to provide some background to the overall project, and to establish a research context for what follows. The topic will be described in brief, and then explored further through its aims and objectives, and by developing a sense of its relevance and timeliness. Some definition of terms will be attempted to delineate the scope of the project. Finally an overview will be given of the process of the research and of the report itself.

The project is concerned with web-based reader development and fiction promotion facilities being developed and maintained by public libraries. It has been motivated by the combination of a number of trends in the library profession; principally the current interest in reader development, and the growing importance of information technology (LIC (1997)). The recognition that these trends can be seen as complementary rather than competing has led to the innovation of resources which use the new technology to further traditional activities such as fiction promotion. This innovation is at present in its earliest stages; the purpose of this study is to investigate the facilities themselves, and the processes behind them in order to build a picture of the state of the art, and to identify factors and procedures involved in implementation and maintenance. This has been done with a view to benefiting the profession, particularly through the recognition and aggregation of elements of good practice in this area.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to examine current practice in web-based reader development and fiction promotion resources, both maintained and proposed by UK public libraries. This wider aim can be broken down into a series of research objectives:
to review the literature surrounding the topic in order to gain a sense of the context of the topic and illuminate issues to address in the data collection stages;

- to study the web resources themselves in order to discover styles and methods used, and to identify ways in which traditional fiction promotion and reader development tools translate to the web environment;

- to compare styles and methods used by parallel concerns, such as international library sites, commercial book sites and independent reading sites;

- to interview members of library staff in order to draw out their motivation in providing reader development facilities on the web;

- to highlight issues surrounding the implementation and maintenance of web-based reader development facilities by public libraries, particularly problems encountered and difficulties overcome;

- to identify and accumulate elements of good practice in this area

1.3 Relevance & Timeliness

1.3.1 Reader development and information technology

This project is grounded in the intersection between the fields of traditional library work around fiction and reading, which is enjoying a resurgence of interest, and the new facilities and activities involved in information technology. This section will consider the progression of both fields that has led to this intersection, and the need for this research to take place. It will also show the relation of the present study to previous and current research in the area, and the proposed benefit of carrying out this research at this time.

The need for fiction borrowers to receive some guidance about the books they choose has been well documented by literature concerned with browsing (for example, see Sear & Jennings (1991)). Fiction promotion activities have aspired to fill this gap, especially those centred around recommended reading lists. Early fiction promotion schemes, such as Well Worth Reading (McKearney (1990)) took the
stance of directing readers towards books considered to be of high quality. However, the approach of Van Riel & Fowler (1996) was less prescriptive, encouraging readers to experiment with books without differentiating between them in terms of quality. This shifts the onus from the books as individual units to the readers themselves (McCllellan in Goodall (1989)). The effect of this is that the role of the librarian is less authoritative than facilitative, and it opens the way for readers to take an active role in their own "development" (i.e. the way they move from one book to the next).

This ideological shift from fiction promotion to reader development in libraries is reinforced by official publications, such as Building the New Library Network (LIC (1998)), which identifies reader development as one of the four key skills for public library staff. This also makes clear the importance and interest of reader development in the eyes of the profession. The transfer of the focus of the DCMS/Wolfson Libraries Challenge Fund from ICT to reader development this year also signals the present emphasis on this as a 'key part of the work of the modern librarian.' (DCMS (2000a)).

As the public sector becomes accustomed to the pervasive influence of the Internet on information and service delivery in the 21st century, their web presence is undergoing a period of assessment and growth. Initial public library web development has been characterised by Ormes (1997) and Dempsey (1997) as experimental and uncoordinated. However, the emergence of the government guidelines on website design and content for public sector sites (IAGC (2000)) is evidence of changes, both proposed and in progress.

The predominance of both these areas in the modern library world has sometimes been seen as problematic, with books and reading seen as losing out to the new technology (P.D. James in Van Riel (1992)). However, more recently, there has been a recognition that IT based activities and more traditional reading activities can be seen as complementary rather than competing (Kendall (1998) and Ormes & Criddle (1998)). For example, LIC (1998) specifies that awareness of reader-related sites on
the WWW is of crucial importance, as part of its wider comments on reader development.

There have been many suggestions of how technology can be used to further activities such as fiction promotion, for example, by enhancing online library catalogues (MacEwan (1997), Huse & Hanratty (1995), Betts in Goodall (1989)). Most recently, the Branching Out initiative has been formed by the Society of Chief Librarians to bring books and technology together, culminating in the development of Book Forager on the web (Van Riel (1999), Branching Out (1999b)).

The results of the postal survey on fiction promotion activities which forms part of the Checking the Books research project, carried out by CEPLIS in November 1999, showed that while less than 10% of public library authorities are providing web-based resources, almost another 50% are considering developing them (Toyne & Usherwood (2000)). Website creation is also specifically mentioned as one of the costs that may be supported by bids to the DCMS/Wolfson Fund (Branching Out (1999a)).

Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) and Toyne & Usherwood (2000) both draw attention to public library initiatives which combine the web with reader development but as yet there has been no dedicated research into what public libraries are specifically doing in this area, and the factors and procedures involved.

1.3.2 Importance of monitoring

The importance of monitoring and evaluation in this area can be seen from the way in which the Well Worth Reading promotion acted as a pilot for other schemes in the area of fiction promotion (McKearney (1990)). Schemes like EARL’s Best On the Web Awards (EARL (1999)) contribute to recognising 'positive achievements of public libraries on the web', with the further aim of setting standards of good practice for other sites. Awareness of best practice, latest developments and possibilities is
also included as one of the guiding principles of Cambridgeshire's ICT strategy (*Cambridgeshire Libraries & Information Service: Information & Communications Strategy*). The issue of quality and what makes a good resource however is yet to be defined; although there is some evidence that library and local authority sites may not be making the most of the medium at present (Harden & Harden (1996-2000a), 'Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000)). The nature of this project, in seeking to understand and assess current activities in the area can thus be seen as playing a necessary role to promote good practice, to persuade other libraries to participate and to prove the worth of such endeavours in order to gain funding.

1.3.3 Relationship to other research

This research follows on from two previous dissertations. Evans (1999) found that public libraries in Sheffield were still not doing enough to help readers find books to read; this report can be seen to be investigating the effectiveness of a new way that libraries can help readers. Bachelor (1999) noted the growing importance of IT in her study of fiction promotion and reader development activities, and highlighted the importance of library staff being aware of the opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, this project has taken place alongside the CEPLIS Checking the Books study into the value and impact of public library book reading (Toyne & Usherwood (2000)). Within that context, it is hoped that this investigation into web-based reader development will illuminate a part of the library's role in 'developing and promoting reading through... direct intervention to give users the best possible reading experience.' (p.5).

The emergence of web-based fiction resources as a new development, and an area of growth for the near future thus suggests it as a relevant topic for investigation at this time, in order to fill a gap in the existing state of research into reader development. It is hoped that the examination of implementation practices as well as styles, with a view to quality and good practice, will prove of use to individual authorities, and will benefit the field as a whole, as the area develops further.
1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

1.4.1 Reader development and fiction promotion

Although there is a clear difference between the terms fiction promotion and reader development, as has been suggested above, for the purposes of this report, they have been used interchangeably with reference to any facility which supports or promotes reading as an activity. An underlying implication of this is that the reading material being promoted is imaginative rather than factual. The particular facilities that the report is concerned with are also referred to as fiction facilities and reading facilities. Again this should be understood as a simplified form, denoting any facility on the web which supports or promotes reading.

1.4.2 Web-based facilities

The term web-based has been used throughout the report to denote resources on the World Wide Web. The terms resources and facilities have been used interchangeably throughout to represent any page or part of a page on the web that is designed for a particular purpose; in this case, to support reading.

1.5 Overview of Report

The focus of this report is to present and discuss the findings of the research. The following chapter describes and examines the methodology behind the research process, including the choice of semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. The main body of the report is contained in the next four chapters which consider the web resources themselves, and the data gathered through the interviews, in the light of previous research literature. The final chapter draws together the findings into conclusions and makes some recommendations for further research.
The literature review is dispersed in the findings chapters, rather than being a separate entity, as this was felt to be more appropriate to the style of the research.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has provided a background to the description of the research, and the findings that follow. It has stated in brief the topic, and the aims and objectives of the project; namely to investigate web-based reader development facilities being proposed and maintained by UK public libraries, in terms of styles, motivation, and issues involved in their implementation, maintenance and use. It has further reflected on the relevance and timeliness of the research, noting this to be a new area of development, so that an examination at this stage has benefits for the profession. It has considered the relationship of this research to previous and simultaneous research. It has also defined some of the main terms used throughout the report, and has given a brief overview of the rest of the report.
2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the design of the research methodology for this project; that is, the "procedures and methods by means of which the identified problem" has been studied (Busha & Harter (1980: 20)). It will provide a detailed description of these procedures and methods, taking each stage of the process in turn. Justifications for their use will be discussed, as well as the implications for the design as a whole. The limitations of the overall research design will also be considered.

In brief, the stages of the research design were as follows:

- the central research question was identified and defined, following a preliminary investigation of the topic
- a qualitative research approach was adopted, using a multi-site case study as its focus
- a sample of six suitable library authorities was chosen from the CEPLIS postal survey data (This sample was modified due to lack of response from the candidates originally selected)
- semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection instruments
- interview questions were formulated, suggested by the findings of the literature review, and then grouped into themes for ease of data collection and analysis
- the interviews were transcribed, and the data analysed and reorganised into themes, following further comparison with related literature.

2.2 Research Question

The identification and definition of the research question is the initial stage which determines the choice of the methodological elements involved in any research undertaking. It is this central concern which affects the appropriateness, or otherwise,
of the various options. In this case, the research question is concerned with the development and maintenance of fiction promotion and reader development resources on the web by public libraries. Since this is a very new area of interest, the aims of the project were to discover factors and procedures involved in the implementation and maintenance of these sites, to illuminate issues surrounding these processes and to identify good practice in this area. A further part of the question was also to consider the styles of these resources on the web, and to compare them both to those used by parallel concerns, and to traditional methods employed by libraries in fiction promotion.

2.3 Research Approach

Having defined the research question, the next stage of the design process was to adopt an overall approach, from which to choose data examination, collection and analysis methods. Given the uniqueness of the question in comparison to other research carried out in the area of fiction promotion, it was felt that the approach must be one suited to exploratory investigation rather than more rigid testing of pre-existing facts or hypotheses. A qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, stance, therefore, better allowed for the necessary flexibility, as there were no expected or predetermined answers in this case.

The appropriateness of this approach is further confirmed by Mellon's observation that qualitative inquiry should be used where: "in-depth understanding of human actions is the primary focus." (1990: 20). Since the aim of the project was to gain a clear picture of the attitudes and practices of library staff towards the phenomenon in question, it fits into this research tradition. Furthermore, the need for the library staff's own experiences and opinions to inform and shape the data generation and analysis stages also justifies qualitative methods, because of their inherent focus on allowing "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest" (Marshall & Rossman (1995: 80)) to emerge.
The usefulness of qualitative methods to examine the process of events in a particular context; "how ideas become actions, the reactions to those actions, etc.", (Gorman & Clayton (1997: 25)) also made them the most suitable for this investigation. Gorman & Clayton's (1997) proposal that qualitative data can be more readily understood and acted on by the profession than statistics and figures, provides a final justification for their use in the project, as it is hoped that the findings about good practice will help to improve further developments in this area.

2.4 Case Study

The form of a case study has been chosen for the research, following Gorman & Clayton's (1997) proposition that: "it is possible to derive knowledge of the wider phenomenon from intensive investigation of a specific instance or case." (p. 50). This approach has also proved necessary, as there has not been sufficient time to carry out a comprehensive study of the experiences and views of all library authorities with regard to web-based fiction promotion (Bell (1993)).

To allow for some degree of comparison and to develop a more complete picture, a small range of cases, rather than one single case, has been studied (Berg (1998)). Bryman (1988) proposes multiple cases as a possible solution to problems of generalisability in case study research.

2.5 Data Collection

The data for the project has been generated through the use of interviews. Their aptness for this purpose is evident in Mellon's (1990) characterisation of them as "long, open-ended conversations in which the aim is to understand a particular situation, event, or activity from the point of view of the person being interviewed." (p. 47). In this way, it was proposed that issues, thoughts, opinions and judgements could be unearthed, as well as operational know-how, concerning the implementation and maintenance processes involved in web-based facilities.
The necessary interaction of the researcher with the data as a result of this data collection method, and the possibility of personal bias affecting the findings has been recognised, and attempts to reduce its influence have been undertaken, as will be shown later in the chapter.

2.6 Interview Population and Sampling

As mentioned above, time limitations meant that only a sample of authorities could be interviewed for the project. Six authorities were chosen from the sample who responded to the CEPLIS postal survey of November 1999, and indicated that they would be prepared to be further contacted. Four authorities who indicated that they already had web-based fiction resources were selected for interview, including two involved in the Branching Out initiative. These were complemented by two authorities who had indicated that they were considering developing this resource.

Since the number of authorities with web-based facilities is fairly limited at present, the choice of respondents was largely dictated by necessity. Indeed, having selected the sample from the CEPLIS results, a confirmatory look at the websites of the chosen authorities revealed that the picture had changed quite dramatically, even in the months since the postal survey. Therefore, the original sample had to be altered to take into account those authorities who had newly developed resources, and even some whose web fiction provision seemed to have disappeared.

The final sample was further affected by a lack of response, from some authorities, to the letters sent appealing for their participation. This proved to be a substantial obstacle; in the end, only five authorities were interviewed. Four of these had developed web fiction resources, including three in the Branching Out initiative. The fifth authority was considering the imminent implementation of similar resources.
This meant that there was not the opportunity for quite the balance of relevant data to be collected as had been originally anticipated. However, this sample did still allow for many interesting insights and comparisons to be made.

2.7 Interview Subjects

It was decided that the specific interviewees would, where possible, be members of staff responsible for the development of the web-based resources in question. This proved to be less than ideal on some occasions, as the members of staff in question lacked knowledge about the reader development side of the question. This was somewhat mitigated on two occasions by the suggestion by the authorities that two relevant members of staff were interviewed at once. However the inherent divide between staff responsible for technical matters and those responsible for content is notable in itself, and will be further commented on in the later chapters.

2.8 Interview Design and Structure

The interviews were based around a semi-structured, interview guide approach. This was in order to facilitate cross-comparison between interviews and a systematic examination of themes at the data analysis stage, whilst retaining the capacity for flexibility in response from different interviewees (Patton (1990)). This flexibility proved invaluable when conducting the interviews, as the researcher could use local knowledge, gleaned from the website prior to the interview, to keep the discussion highly relevant and probe further into some issues.

The interview guide also helped in getting the most out of the limited interview time (Patton (1990)). The questions were suggested by the findings of the literature review, and a preliminary examination of web materials. They were grouped into themes in order to help the interview flow like a natural conversation. Two separate guides were constructed; one for the authorities with web fiction facilities already in
place, and one for those at the considering stage. The guides have been included as Appendices 1 & 2 at the end of the report. The themes were:

- Proposed or current facilities, motivation and managerial issues
- Implementation and monitoring of facilities
- Wider context

**2.9 Interview Content**

The questions were related to the respondent's knowledge of the phenomenon; "their experiences, their opinions or attitudes, their reactions to trends and developments, their knowledge etc." (Busha & Harter (1980: 78)). The questions were open-ended, to avoid bias and permit the interviewee to respond in their own frame of reference (Patton (1990)).

At the first interview, a preliminary question was added, concerning the respondent's particular role in relation to the authority website. This was done partly to provide an 'easy' start to the interview to facilitate transition to the more detailed, and potentially difficult questions. It was also included in order to judge the level of the respondent's knowledge about both the technical and the content aspects of the website, so the rest of the interview could be tailored in response. This technique was very effective, and was thus used in all following interviews.

An open-ended invitation for comments was included at the end of each interview in order to counteract the effects of interviewer bias.

**2.10 Interview Conduct and Anonymity**

The interviews took place at a location chosen by each interviewee, usually their place of work. This was so that the interviewees would feel at ease. The interviews were taped to allow full concentration on the interactive nature of the interview
(Mellon (1990), Patton (1990)). This was especially important given the inexperience of the researcher, as was having a face-to-face, rather than 'phone, interview. The interviewees' agreement to tape recording was solicited prior to the interview.

The respondents were also informed that they would not be identified by name in the final report, in order to facilitate openness in the interviews.

2.11 Data Analysis and Report Structure

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, with the aim of increasing the accuracy of the transcript, and facilitating the earliest stages of analysis (Mellon (1990)). Coding and reduction methods were then used to reorganise the data into themes for the written report. The data was then compared and integrated with the findings from the literature review, and a close examination of websites relevant to the research question.

The main body of the report, then, comprises of four thematic findings chapters. The literature and web review is dispersed within these chapters, rather than being a separate chapter in its own right, as this was felt to be more appropriate to the spirit of the research. A full bibliography and list of relevant websites is situated at the end of the report.

The themes are:

- Styles of current and proposed fiction sites on the web
- Development and motivation of public library fiction sites
- Logistics of implementation & maintenance of the sites
- Wider issues
2.12 Limitations of Methodology

Although some consideration has been paid to the limitations of the methodology throughout this chapter, it is pertinent to consider them at greater length here. The principal limitation of this research has been the lack of time, which has meant that the number of interviews has had to be kept quite small. Many of the other limitations have been compounded by this; for example, the lack of possibility to continue writing to potential authorities until a suitable 6th interviewee was found. The results of the time constraints in combination with the disappointing response to invitations to participate, means that this research is ultimately limited in scope and generalisability.

A possible alternative way of approaching the research question, which would minimise some of these difficulties, would have been to send an initial postal survey to all the library authorities in the UK, asking them to detail whether they had any web fiction facilities, and if so, explaining what they had provided, who was responsible for them and whether they would be prepared to be interviewed. This would have helped to have built up a wider picture of the development in this area, and would also have solved the problems of finding the most appropriate person to interview and later lack of response to participation requests. However, the time taken to perform such a survey is probably beyond the scope of a project like this. Although CEPLIS data, from which the sample was selected, should have performed this function up to a point, the delay in between the date of the survey and the dissertation limited its usefulness in what is a very fast changing area.

It must therefore be stated that this research cannot be taken as an authoritative picture of the current state of development in the field; it merely gives some indication of styles and practices of the authorities concerned. It is hoped that the level of comparison and contrast achieved, however, will show the potential for these findings to be extended beyond these limitations.
Although attempts have been made to minimise bias in the research process, by using open-ended questioning, and constant awareness of the researcher's personal viewpoint, some bias is inevitable and should be borne in mind by the reader. The inexperience of the researcher has also acted as a constraint; in the devising of the interview schedules, in the conducting of the interviews and in the presentation of the findings. A more practised researcher could perhaps have elicited richer data, or data less affected by personal bias.

2.13 Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodology behind this research project, providing justifications for the choices and inclusion of the various stages and methods. It can be seen that each stage has implications for the rest of the process, and that the decisions have been made based on the original definition of the research question and aims. It has further reflected in detail on the research process in practice and considered its limitations.
3. Results & Findings - Web Styles and Quality

3.1 Introduction

This first chapter of results and findings aims to provide a background for the discussion of public library reader development and fiction facilities on the web in the following three chapters. It will discuss the style and content of resources both currently provided and being planned by UK public libraries on the web to support reading activities. The data for this will be drawn from the interview transcripts, and from an examination of the websites themselves. This will include some pertaining to libraries not included in the interview stage, in order to present an overview.

Once an impression of the state of the art has been created, the chapter will consider how these sites compare to parallel concerns, such as international public library sites, commercial bookshop sites and other independent reading sites, in terms of what they provide. The methods and styles used by UK public libraries will then be considered in terms of how they relate to more traditional fiction promotion methods used by libraries. Finally, the level of quality of the public library reading sites will be discussed, including some ideas on how this can be assessed.

The examination of resource content and quality described in this chapter is designed to give an overview of what public libraries are doing in this field, and with what measure of competence. However, a brief look at a limited number of sites is all that has been possible; the comprehensive application of evaluation criteria to any of the sites is beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, this chapter should be seen not as an authoritative picture, but as providing both some idea of activity in the field, and a context for the rest of the report. Screen dumps will be used to illustrate some of the examples in the text.
3.2 Styles of Fiction Facilities Provided by UK Public Libraries

3.2.1 Background and literature review

Because of the relative newness of this field, not much has been written on what exactly public libraries are doing (or planning) on the web in order to support reader development or to promote fiction. The exceptions to this are some comments made by Kinnell & Shepherd (1998), which is the first indication of libraries using the web in this way:

'The Internet is already being used as an interactive review mechanism with scope for lists and comments by readers... Other authorities are putting onto the Web recommended titles, lists of literary prizes etc. A library in the West Midlands has made the facility available for local authors to give brief details of their current work.' (p.98).

This introduces the idea of booklists on the web, a staple of traditional fiction promotion (McKearney (1990)) and also the idea of using the particular features of the web for interaction in the form of book reviews and comments by readers.

Other relevant literature, such as Ormes & Criddle (1998) and Harden & Harden (1996-2000b), makes suggestions of facilities that public libraries could provide to support readers. The examples used by Ormes & Criddle (1998) are largely drawn from resources currently maintained by commercial book sites, such as annotated catalogues, gateways of links and online author events. Harden & Harden (1996-2000b), on the other hand, mostly propose extensions to traditional library practices, such as thematic lists, space to discuss reading and creative writing, a virtual poet-in-residence and a readers' reviews page.
The workshop carried out as part of the Checking the Books project¹ (see Toyne & Usherwood (2000)) brought to light some proposed work connecting reader development and the web for several authorities. One authority were planning a set of pages to be developed, particularly aimed at 15-24 year olds. At this stage, they did not have a clear idea of what facilities they would be providing.

3.2.2 Existing facilities described by respondents

The types of facilities described by the respondents mostly fitted into the pattern envisaged by the literature. Two respondents mentioned booklists as forming a major contribution to the site. Two respondents also had book review facilities, although one involved visitors submitting reviews through the site and another received them manually from readers' groups. The readers' group reviews were particularly inventive, as they had themes behind them. One was called Raves 'N' Rants, 'which gives a for and against version of a book which are quite interesting,' and the other was based on the idea of Room 101, 'where somebody's pet hate of a book would be nominated to go to Room 101.' Visitors to the site can vote by email to decide whether it goes in or not. This site also had an area where people could write anything they liked, in the area of books and reading.

Another respondent's site also included a discussion area, plus information about local literature events and a monthly competition. A main feature of this site was the Book Lover's Guide to the Internet, which contained not only advice on how use the Internet to find reading related information, but also a set of reading related links.

3.2.3 Further facilities proposed by respondents

Although only one of the interview respondents was planning to introduce fiction facilities from scratch, two others were proposing substantial additions to their existing provision. The respondent who was at the considering stage saw his plans as

¹ This took place in London on 19th July 2000.
having an active and a more passive element. The latter involved adding more reading and literature related links to his existing gateway resource which had originated from a set of links that librarians had found useful. The more active side was going to be based around the readers' groups in the authority; with reviews submitted by them and information on books they were discussing. He also hoped that eventually there would be scope for visitors to the site to submit their comments on books.

One of the respondents planning additions was also intending to 'set up a system to enable people to send in their reviews.' She also hoped to have specific features based around promotions and events, for example, focusing on the Gold Dagger Award and asking website visitors to choose their favourites from the last ten years of winners. The other respondent in this position was hoping to add more interactive features as well, such as literary quizzes and a feature called Ask CHRIS:

'...it's going to be... an automated version of the old fiction guides that we used to have at enquiry desks... people will fill in a questionnaire and it will actually suggest books that they might want to read.'

The site of another authority had developed from a live discussion event held over the Internet. The respondent in question had found this event both interesting and challenging and hoped to have the chance to do it again.

3.2.4 Facilities on the web

This section will give some indication of other fiction facilities found on public library sites on the web. Suffolk's library site has a space for book reviews which children submit themselves - [http://www.suffolkec.gov.uk/cgi-bin/childbz.cgi?type=view](http://www.suffolkec.gov.uk/cgi-bin/childbz.cgi?type=view)
Calderdale libraries have book reviews from their book chain, and also from readers' group members - [http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/libraries/readers/chain/index.html](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/libraries/readers/chain/index.html). Lincolnshire libraries have information on how to set up and run readers' groups, with an annotated list of titles their groups have discussed - [http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/library/readers.html](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/library/readers.html). Buckinghamshire Library and Information Service for Schools are building a database of children's books reviewed by adults, as a resource for teachers, librarians, parents and children - [http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/liss/index.htm](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/liss/index.htm). Bradford's reader2reader page has reading autobiographies of staff, and reading habits of authors, which describe people's relationship with books - [http://www.libspace.go-legend.net/read2read/readinghabits/index.htm](http://www.libspace.go-legend.net/read2read/readinghabits/index.htm)
Wakefield's Book Zone has a list of the 100 books of the 20th Century, as well as a set of links to reading related material on the web -

http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/community/libraries/bkzone.htm

A different sort of library site can be found at Stories From the Web -

http://hosted.ukoln.ac.uk/stories/  This is a collaboration between the UK Office for Library and Information Networking (UKOLN), the Library and Information Commission (LIC) and various individual authorities. It is designed for children and includes extracts from books, activities relating to books, including submission of reviews and comments, plus interviews with authors, games and competitions.
3.3 Comparison of Styles Used by Parallel Concerns

3.3.1 Background and literature review

As mentioned above, Ormes & Criddle's (1998) proposals for fiction facilities to be developed by libraries were influenced by resources provided by commercial book sites. In particular, they refer to services offered by Amazon, suggesting that: 'There are already Web sites which are linking people together electronically to explore and appreciate literature.' (p.479). Kendall (1998) discusses how libraries can support readers by directing them to existing Internet sites, and includes international library sites, genre pages, awards pages and bookshop sites in her discussion.

The particular influence of bookshops on the web will be discussed at greater length in chapter 6. However, when considering styles, it seems pertinent to discuss briefly the kinds of facilities provided by parallel concerns to UK public libraries. US library sites, individual reading group sites, and commercial book sites were all cited by respondents as influential when they were designing their own facilities.

3.3.2 International public library sites

One respondent suggested that American library sites were 'a lot further forward than we were in terms of developing' web fiction facilities, at the time of planning her authority's site. The Seattle site - http://www.spl.org/humanities/fiction.html - which she particularly mentioned has annotated lists of books recommended by staff.
The San Antonio Focus: Fiction pages - [http://www.sat.lib.tx.us/Fiction/fictionindex.htm](http://www.sat.lib.tx.us/Fiction/fictionindex.htm) - also have thematic booklists devised by staff, with the special feature of read-a-likes for readers who have read all the books written by their favourite author. This site also has a very comprehensive set of links to other reading related material, such as sites about book awards and bestsellers. It further contains information about its own reading groups.

There are other US sites with similar facilities, but a notable one is the Skokie public library site - [http://www.sat.lib.tx.us/Fiction/fictionindex.htm](http://www.sat.lib.tx.us/Fiction/fictionindex.htm) As well as booklists and annotated links to other sites, it has a form where readers can ask for advice on what to read next, or information on an author. The library staff will then reply to their request.
Outside of the USA, Christchurch library site in New Zealand -
http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Library/Guides/IfYouLike/ - maintains a index around the idea of 'If
you like X, then you might also like Y.' This related not only to books, but to music
as well.

3.3.3 Commercial book sites

The online versions of UK bookshops, such as Heffers - http://www.heffers.co.uk - and
Waterstones - http://www.waterstones.co.uk - offer an index of staff reviews, and
categories of books to browse. Heffers also have an email forum with several set
topics, such as Book or Film, and Not Your Bag. Participants can email their
postings and are invited to comment on those of others.
The Amazon site - http://www.amazon.co.uk - also has options to browse categories of books. Most importantly though, it has the type of annotated 'value-added' catalogue referred to by Ormes & Criddle (1998). Looking at a book title and price also brings up reviews by critics, and any customer comments submitted about the book. Suggestions of other similar reads are also included. Site visitors are encouraged to submit their own reviews as well as read those of others.

Also of note is the Guardian Books site - http://www.booksunlimited.co.uk. As well as obviously containing news about books and authors, the site contains information on authors and extracts from books. It hosts live author events, to which site visitors can submit questions, and although all the reviews are by the newspaper's experts, there is a literature discussion board which visitors can register for and contribute to. There are also quizzes, for example identifying the source of first lines from various novels, and a set of organised, annotated links to other reading related material on the web.
Although commercial sites in general are bigger and reflect the concerns of their parent organisation, it appears that they do include value-added services, alongside their core function of selling books or promoting newspapers. This shows such facilities do have a value in drawing people into their sites.

3.3.4 Independent & organisational sites

There are many independent book and reading based sites on the web, and it would not be possible to give a full account of them here. Instead, this section will discuss three sites in particular. Two of them are notable for being UK based, and the third was one mentioned by respondents, and by Kendall (1998). Because of their independent status, it is important for sites like this to define their scope and purpose.

Lit-Net - http://www.lit-net.org - describes itself as a virtual literature centre, which promotes literature in the West Midlands and offers services to readers, writers and
librarians. Unfortunately, a problem accessing the site means that its facilities cannot be discussed at further length at this point. The Reading Room - http://www.reading-room.com - is supported by West Yorkshire Arts Marketing:

'The idea behind the Reading Room is to create an online forum for readers' groups, and we hope to encourage readers to develop their appreciation of literature beyond the covers of the book they're reading.'

The site thus has an interest in promoting events, explaining that, although it has a West Yorkshire bias, others are free to contribute. The facilities offered include lists of local readers groups, review submission and a discussion board, which didn't seem to be working at the time of access.
BookBrowser - [http://www.bookbrowser.com](http://www.bookbrowser.com) - is a site created and maintained by two librarians. They describe the site thus:

'BookBrowser is a site dedicated to reading. We offer fiction reading lists, book reviews, forthcoming titles, author information and much more. We made BookBrowser to help avid fiction readers and authors find each other.'

A review team adds a minimum of 15 new reviews to the site each week, and there is a substantial gateway of links to other reading related sites. Because the site has been built up over some time (1996-2000), it has the depth of coverage that inevitably UK public library facilities currently lack.
3.3.5 Comparison to UK public library sites

It can be seen that many of the above sites are offering similar facilities to UK public library sites, such as booklists and the chance to submit reviews. Libraries, then, are in no way lacking in ideas and innovation in this area. The main difference is one of scope; clearly both commercial sites and older sites have had the capacity, the time and in the case of the bookshops, the money, to build up sites covering a much wider area. Whilst commercial sites will inevitably continue to cover more material than library sites, there is still scope to build on what's already been done. For further discussion of problems of the size of resources (e.g. number of sites linked to), and questions of supply and demand relevant to libraries only, see chapters 5 and 6.

Commercial sites seem to have had more technical success than other types of sites where discussion and bulletin boards often don't seem to be working. Although, again, commercial sites have the money to support the technical innovations, if the answers are out there, public libraries should be able to find them. Possibly this is one area where further communication with international sites could improve UK sites.

3.4 Relationship of Traditional Fiction Promotion to Web Styles

3.4.1 Background and literature review

This section will consider how traditional methods of fiction promotion have been used in the web environment, what alterations have been necessary and what the particular advantages of using the web over traditional methods might be. The transfer of some of the traditional methods is quite clear; Phelan (1993) describes booklists as 'the crux of the whole enterprise.' (p. 8) in fiction promotion. This sort of material is easily translated to the web environment.
An important lesson learnt about promotion materials through schemes such as Well Worth Reading (McKearney (1990)) has been the need for professional design. While Goodall (1991) notes that: 'Design and artwork are recognized as being a crucial part of the schemes.' (p. 153), Denham (1996) enforces the idea that the quality of this design is paramount:

'The days of the hand-written, poorly produced amateur leaflet are gone. Libraries have been forced into producing professional promotional materials if they wish to obtain favourable responses from users.' (p.78).

Design is an essential part of websites, with graphics and styles being easy to incorporate and experiment with.

The use of categories to arrange fiction stock, in order to support browsing has been demonstrated to be of value by Sear & Jennings (1991). They compare the needs of different users against the relative benefits of a categorised stock as opposed to an A to Z sequence and conclude:

'This is not to say that all public libraries should promptly rearrange their fiction stock, but that an increased awareness of the search strategies actually employed by readers and a willingness to experiment with arrangements could be productive, and are appropriate to an increasingly 'user-centred' approach, in which the librarian is seen as a provider rather than a custodian of materials.' (p.111).

This application of browsing as a reader development technique clearly has potential to be used as a function of web resources; after all, the activity of using the web at all is often referred to as browsing, and the software used to do so, a browser.

3.4.2 Traditional fiction promotion techniques used by respondents on the web

The use of booklists as a staple of web resources has already been noted; further to this, several respondents emphasised the role of their sites in supporting and
extending the work of the readers' groups within their library service. Reviews facilities provided or seeded by staff are a kind of virtual staff recommendations service, whereas the ability to read other user's comments online can be compared to readers' noticeboards in libraries. The popularity of choosing books from the returns trolley has been noted by one respondent's site and they have chosen this as a model for a booklist, based around books other local people have read and enjoyed.

Respondents clearly took some pride in the design of their pages, having a generally solid idea of good web design and what appealed to users (see chapter 5 for further discussion on this). One respondent was consciously revamping the look of her pages to be more attractive to users. Another authority had taken the importance of good design so seriously that they had used a graphics consultant for the design of the pages; the respondent felt this was 'why it's got a good feel to it really.'

One respondent was already using stock categories for the children's part of the reading facilities, in order to organise the reviews. Another was considering this approach:

'...One of the things I want to do is to get those categories themselves on the website and then perhaps build up the lists from those category headings, so that there'd be some graphic element to this as well, but it would be linked into the way we actually categorise our books.'

This respondent also recognised the appropriateness of the web for mapping onto the different ways that people choose fiction:

'And that is the nice thing, as I say, about the web, you have the information there, it's just in one place but you can get to it from however you think is appropriate.'

Because of the nature of the web, and its use of hyperlinks, a single book or review can be accessible as part of a genre area or an A to Z sequence at the same time. This
seems to accord well with Sear & Jennings' (1991) advice on complementing the search strategies of users.

3.4.3 Relationship between traditional and web styles

It seems that some of the main success stories of traditional library fiction work can be transferred to the web, and in some cases be improved by this. However, there are also inherent problems in using the web for this type of service, which will be considered in chapter 6.

3.5 Quality of Public Library Fiction Facilities on the Web

3.5.1 Background and literature review

Since this project has as one of its aims the identification of good practice in the area of public library reader development facilities on the web, some investigation of the quality of the existing resources is essential. However, quality on the web, in terms of design and content is difficult to define or specify. This is shown by Head's (1999) finding that: 'One study of 21 sites offering web design guidelines found 357 unique recommendations for "good design"' (p.106). Cooke (1999) attempts a broad definition of quality:

'In relation to information available via the Internet, quality is often used to refer to sources which contain original content, or sources which are accurate and reliable.' (p.14)

In terms of the type of resources under investigation in this project, 'Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000) criticises library sites for not being interactive or transactional enough, suggesting that: '...with the arrival of responsive new sites...the public will soon become accustomed to this new approach and frustrated with older styles which remain unresponsive.' (p.250). As will be seen in the next chapter, many public
library sites started life as an online noticeboard of opening times, locations and services. Head (1999) quotes Jakob Nielsen as saying: 'sites will have to do something real for customers and not just be online brochures.' (p.108). Therefore, one measure of quality could be the level of interactivity provided by the new fiction resources.

There are two different sources of standards that can be used for evaluating quality, in addition to the broad propositions above. One is website design guidelines, such as Gillies (1998) or the official government guidelines (IAGC (2000)). These guidelines contain recommendations both about content of the site, such as contact details, complaints procedures etc., and design elements, such as navigation. The other source is evaluative criteria, such as those used by SOSIG (2000) to determine sites that are suitable for adding to their social science gateway of links. The fields of Human Computer Interaction and User Interface Design (HCI/UID) are particularly concerned with formulating such criteria in order to make interfaces more usable (see Dix et al. (1998), Shneiderman (1998)).

The respondents' sites, and other UK public library sites, have been briefly examined with various guidelines and criteria in mind, and some quality elements and practices will be highlighted in the following section. As an interesting aside, an example of design guidelines formulated by a local authority can be found at: http://www.gloscc.gov.uk/standard/contents.htm (Design Standards for GlosNet).

3.5.2 Quality and good practice in public library websites

The title and purpose of a site should be made clear as early as possible (Head (1999)); two of the respondents' sites conformed to this by way of a "Welcome to…" banner at the top. Most of the respondents' pages have their departmental, or council logos in a prominent place as recommended by the government guidelines (IAGC (2000)) to help users recognise which pages they are in. One of the respondents' sites
also used the logo as an automatic link back to the home page, in case users were to become disorientated.

Other navigational supports were provided by one respondent, in the form of a permanent navigational bar with key operations (Home, Contact Us, Search etc.) at the bottom of the screen. Lincolnshire libraries -
http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/library/readers.html - also have a similar navigation bar at the top of the screen.

Head (1999) sees this as a useful function, both in terms of interface consistency and in ease of learning how to use the interface. The same site also had contact details at the foot of every page, essential content in the eyes of Gillies (1998), IAGC (2000) and Cooke (1999)). This site and two other respondents' sites contained last updated information at the foot of each page, which would help somebody visiting the site to

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assess the currency of the information and the level of maintenance provided (Cooke (1999)).

One of the respondents' sites had a site map to allow users a view of the whole extent of the site; useful for navigation (Head (1999)). Suffolk County Council site - [http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/central/sitemap.html](http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/central/sitemap.html) - also has a site map for this purpose.

Of the five sites, only one made a big feature of the online feedback function, with links and suggestions to send in comments at many different stages. Calderdale libraries - [http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/talk.html](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/talk.html) - also present their feedback options in such a way that seems to value contributions:

'Are there things you’d like to see here that are not currently available? Do you know of any sites we should link to? Do get in touch. We'd love to hear from you!'
Only one respondent had a web tracker which counts visitors to the site; this can help first-time visitors to see how popular the site is, although this in itself is no indication of quality (Cooke (1999)). In terms of support for frequent users of the site, one respondent had a What's New list on the site to alert visitors to change and new content as it was put on the site. Suffolk also has this feature - http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/central/sitemap.html - which Ciolek (1994-7) highlights as contributing to the usefulness of a site.

In terms of accessibility, none of the respondents provided a text-only version of the site for visually impaired readers using screen reader technology. Again, the Suffolk site does provide this facility - http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/central/betsie.html. Two of the respondents' sites used frames, useful for organising content, but unreadable by lower spec browsers.
Although all of the respondents' sites provided links to other related facilities, only one had a set of links which were fully annotated, to provide a value-added service for users (Cooke (2000), SOSIG (2000)). Other set of links had only partial annotations, (one in such a small font that it could not comfortably be read), or were not in any particular order. This seemed to be a substantial failing but one that could be easily rectified.

Not all of the sites were very consistent in design and layout from page to page. Consistency is a highly valued aspect of interface design, as it helps the user to learn how to use the interface more quickly (Dix et al. (1998)). One respondent's site sometimes made use of text-based links to other sections, and sometimes used graphics instead, and it was not always clear where the user was supposed to click at any given opportunity. Another of the respondents' sites did show good consistency in this matter by providing a text alternative to all graphical links at the left-hand side of the screen.

In terms of the reading and fiction content of the site, this material was sometimes hard to find, with the user having to assume the presence of such information and then pursue links that looked likely. The importance of prioritising useful content on a site has been proposed by Head (1999); although obviously in the case of a library site, there are many kinds of useful content, and the reading facilities may not be considered a priority. Only one site had the reading related content clearly flagged up from the libraries home page. Unfortunately this was also the site where an animated graphic of falling books had been used on the fiction pages, thus detracting from the content itself. Graphical elements should always support the information content of a site, not compete with the user's attention (Cooke (1999), Head (1999)). The provision of local and original content was high in all the sites; perhaps the most important indication of quality in this context (Cooke (1999), SOSIG (2000)).

At the time of the interviews and the site investigation, only two of the respondents' sites showed extensively interactive facilities. The other three showed varying
emphases on email responses and feedback. Awareness of the importance of and potential for interactivity was shown by all respondents in the interviews, and several were making plans to introduce or enhance these types of facilities on the sites. The Suffolk site was used as an example of a developed transactional and interactive site in 'Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000). The ability to perform renewal and reservation functions through the catalogue, and to submit book reviews demonstrates the best of what public libraries are doing at the moment.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has investigated the style and content of facilities to support reader development both currently provided and proposed by UK public libraries. It has provided a context for those facilities, both from the literature and from comparisons with facilities provided by parallel concerns and with traditional methods of fiction promotion. It has also attempted a brief discussion of some quality issues involved in web design, and of how the current sites measure up to this. It has shown that public library facilities are not lacking in interest and innovation, and that time and better consultation with similar concerns will almost certainly contribute to improvements in the sites. It has further considered that the sites themselves reflect some understanding of quality in design and content, and there are aspects which could easily be enhanced in this respect. The IAGC (2000) guidelines should help to make levels of quality more uniform across public library sites.
4. Results & Findings - Development & Motivation

4.1 Introduction

This second chapter of results and findings relates closely to the previous one; having discussed what facilities are being provided and considered, it will examine the reasons behind their introduction and development. The history of the growth of public library websites, from the point of view of the respondents, will first be discussed, to provide some background for how and why reader development facilities have come to be part of the web presence. The reasons given by respondents for both the introduction of fiction facilities, and for the particular nature of the facilities will then be investigated.

The role of readers' groups in motivating reader development additions will also receive some attention. This will be followed by some comments on the intended audience of the facilities, and in particular, how funding can affect the remit of the resources. Finally the chapter will consider the role of the website in the wider authority, as envisaged by the respondents.

Since the respondents' perspectives with regard to issues of development and motivation will be used to shape the discussion, aspects of the literature will be cited where relevant to support the primary data within the discussion, rather than in a separate review. This will be the pattern used in the following chapter as well.

4.2 Development and Nature of Public Library Websites

4.2.1 Origin of sites and incorporation of library staff

The first thing respondents were asked referred to their job in relation to the authority website. On several occasions this prompted a potted history of the origins and development of the site itself, how they had come to be working on it, and how
the reader development facilities had come into existence. For one respondent, the internet site had grown from the council intranet. Similarly, another had originated from a library information service, which had been on a teletext type system.

A third respondent described how the site had been initially set up by the council computer department, but that they had not wanted to undertake the maintenance of the site on a permanent basis. At this point, then, responsibility for the site had been passed to the libraries, and the respondent had become website manager. Having a sole person in charge of the site had resulted in the site developing in a rather ad hoc manner: 'it's me trying to get stuff on the site but there's no overall plan about it.' This was also true for another respondent, who had acquired responsibility for the libraries' part of the web because of his role in training staff to use the Internet: 'it's sort of fallen on me to look after the library pages of it.'

Dempsey (1997) and Ormes (1997) both characterise the initial development of public library websites as fragmented and experimental:

'The picture is largely of local experiment and exploratory first steps, essential preparatory work as building blocks and local experience are put into place.' (Dempsey (1997: xiii)).

'... there is great interest in the Internet and many authorities are exploring at some level how it can be incorporated into their services.' (Ormes (1997: 45)).

This fits in with the descriptions of the respondents above. The respondents whose sites were more advanced tended not to comment so much on the development of the site. In contrast to the two respondents above who felt there was an ad hoc influence to their work, the other three respondents worked as part of web teams and tended to be looking more to future progressions.
4.2.2 Dislocation between content and technical

The pattern of content creation for the websites seems to owe something to the history of their development. All five respondents described situations where devising the content for the site was completely separate to the technical operations required to actually put it on the site. Usually it was the respondents themselves who were responsible for the technical aspects of web design and structure, and they either waited for other library staff to provide content for the site, or made suggestions as to what could be provided by their colleagues.

This complete dislocation between the two parts of the process may well have been led by the original purpose of library sites: to make available pre-existing factual information such as opening times and locations of libraries. Even more complex documents, such as booklists or complaints procedures, would have been present in a paper form, and this would have been adapted into HTML for the sites. Thus with a historical precedent for converting paper documents into web pages, rather than designing for the web itself, it is easy to see how the dislocated situation came to be perpetuated. However, the web environment does not necessarily lend itself well to the style of word processed documents, especially when there is potential for more than a reading-writing style interaction (Harden & Harden (1996-2000a)).

This dislocated approach is discussed in further detail in the following chapter, especially with reference to ways in which libraries are aiming to compensate for the dislocation, or even to move away from it altogether.

4.2.3 Effect of funding

Another factor which could be seen to affect the development of two of the sites was their funding source. The other three respondents were funded from the main library budget, but two had special sources of funding, which thus had a time limit on them. Both of these respondents had concerns about what would happen to the site after the
finding period had elapsed. For one respondent, the end of the funding was due to provoke a review of the web facilities and he hoped that this would result in greater corporate backing, both in terms of personnel and of money. This was partly to do with the positive effect of the government library standards (DCMS (2000b)) which had shown his authority to be particularly under-funded.

The other respondent, however, was concerned about the ramifications for the maintenance of the site once the finding had finished. Toyne & Usherwood (2000) found that this was a common situation with specially funded reader development projects:

'... reader development posts were often filled by non-library staff and typically externally funded and this was seen to contribute to an attitude that reader development lay outside everyday library activities. And also, once the funding ceases so does the area of reader development activity.' (p.55).

This was a point of view expressed by another respondent, with reference to the DCMS/Wolfson Libraries Challenge Fund (DCMS (2000a)), the emphasis of which was changed from ICT to reader development this year. He hoped that reader development would not be abandoned when the Fund moved on to its next area of emphasis. He was confident that this would not be the case in his own authority, because of the long standing of the readers' groups.

4.2.4 Future of sites

The reader development facilities which were being provided and planned by the respondents' authorities were in general additions to their basic original site. They were seen as having the potential to make the sites livelier and more interactive (see the following section 4.3 for more details on this aspect). One of the respondents referred to this in quite a direct way:
'At the moment our pages are actually quite bland but we're looking to launch at the end of this month, a new set of pages called the [name of reading based pages]. We've been looking at what we could possibly do to the pages in general because they have literally not been touched since they were first designed a few years back.'

'Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000), whilst lamenting the general state of local authority sites, notes that the number of authorities with websites has grown by 13% since the previous year's Socitm report. In that time, 74 councils have also significantly improved their sites. The addition of reader development facilities could thus be seen as part of a 'new wave' of public library web development, building on the experimental lessons learnt in the first couple of years. One respondent commented specifically on this, using his specific case to reflect on the wider phenomenon:

'One of the things we're deliberately doing now is... moving the interactive and direct service providing content up to the front of the site and we're gradually going to move the vital but boring information about library opening hours and what the fines are to a slightly sort of back row position, so that the information's still there for people who want it. I think most library sites started out like that, in the way that, "oh yes we need a list of our libraries, list of our services, tell people how to get to us". But the move to a proper interactive service is well under way now, and I think more or less universally accepted.'

4.3 Motivation Behind Reader Development Facilities on the Web

4.3.1 Reasons for providing reader development facilities on the web

This section will consider the reasons given by respondents for providing the facilities in the first place, and for the types and styles of facilities provided. It is believed that this will provide some insight into the way the facilities are seen, and the functions they are intended to fulfil, by those responsible for them.
The factors which motivated the respondents' authorities to provide reading related resources ranged from local considerations to some on a national scale. At the latter end of this scale, the 'current emphasis on reader development.', was cited by several respondents as a motivating factor. One respondent clearly saw this in terms of a zeitgeist, rather than just something coming from the library world, as she mentioned the influence of bookshops, radio book groups, television, the Year of Reading and finally the role of the government. For another respondent, the month of information technology and reading within the National Year of Reading had been a particular catalyst.

On the web, a third respondent mentioned Branching Out's Forager as contributing to the desire to change her own site. She and another respondent also felt that the wealth of reading related sites had prompted them into wanting to introduce similar facilities, or at least to provide some guide to what was out there. Kendall (1998) uses the existence of reading sites as a starting point for encouraging library activity in the area, and it is mentioned as a part of the new focus on reader development by libraries in LIC (1998).

As well as this national pressure, two respondents particularly commented on local influences. For one, it was the literature development officer who was keen for reading services to have a web presence; for the other, it was the head of the whole service who wanted to make it a priority. Three respondents particularly wanted to support the work of their readers' groups and saw the web as a vehicle for this. For one of these, supporting the groups in this way was also a way of promoting the whole service:

'I think they [the readers' groups]re very important and they seem to be quite successful, that was definitely something we should be promoting and saying "look what we're doing, there are good things going on in [name of authority]."'
For further discussion of the role of readers' groups in the process, see the following section (4.4).

Two respondents stated that providing reader development on the web was a 'natural progression.' for them. This seemed to be because of their own history of reader development and fiction promotion work, in addition to the factors noted above.

4.3.2 Reasons for the nature of facilities provided

Respondents saw the types of facilities they were providing to support reading as being important for different reasons and having various effects. One respondent saw his prospective facilities as extending the work done by the readers' groups in 'trying to involve the users in the libraries, interacting with the staff, interacting with the stock.' In the same vein, these facilities could be considered to be helping readers interact with each other. The value of reader to reader communication is stressed by Wyatt (1998); and although she sees this communication as happening manually through the libraries, she does then suggest that the dialogues could be displayed on a web site. Despite writing earlier than Wyatt, Betts sees the potential of the technology itself as the forum for reader to reader interaction:

'...a lot of readers have made "connections" which can be of mutual benefit. Possibly the best way of achieving this is through some form of public access terminal: you know "why not enter your favourite authors and read someone else's?"' (quoted in Goodall (1989: 38)).

The same respondent also saw the facilities as a way of getting unique and local content on the web:

'... reader development, given that a lot of that will be individual reaction to books, will have its own unique selling point as well. So I mean, it's a way of getting unique
content on there rather than duplicating what other people are doing, although the idea is duplicated.'

This fits in with Harden & Harden's advice (1996-2000b) on how to decide what to put on a public library website:

'Think laterally about what someone using the Internet might be interested in at a local level and above all give them an opportunity to participate and contribute.'

The potential for greater interactivity through the reading facilities was recognised by two of the respondents, and included as a reason for developing facilities such as reader review submission.

Three respondents saw part of their motivation in the creation of a portal or gateway site for their users. One believed that: 'there is scope for... organising the knowledge that's out there.'; another hoped that her site would prove:

'... a useful stepping off point for people to lots of other sites. I think to find a site that gives you lots of ways to move on is very valuable...'

The notion of librarians as skilled gatekeepers in this way is envisaged by the LIC (1998), and Harden & Harden (1996-2000a) comment on the importance of 'Some attempt to unearth the buried treasure of the internet for the library's online community.' Along with this idea of a links gateway as valuable support for users, the respondent quoted above saw her site as 'something for people to dip into.' Another respondent's site had a strong events focus, and much of the content was going to be influenced by the events taking place in the area. She wanted her site to be seen as just an additional resource; like 'an electronic equivalent to browsing bookshelves.' (Kendall (1998: 31)).
4.3.3 Other reasons: advantages of the web

The reasons given in the above section relate to how respondents hoped users would receive the site, and thus why they had chosen particular styles or facilities. In addition to these reasons, there were specific advantages noted by respondents' in using the web for reader development. One was that the website itself was seen as a marketing tool by two respondents: 'it's a way of people knowing about the services that we offer.' Another respondent raised the idea that web facilities could appeal to a particular type of user:

'Because a lot of people will participate over the web who wouldn't dream of actually joining a formal reading group, or even filling a form in, in the library.'

This idea is an extension of the view of the library as a 'safe environment' in which to experiment with reading preferences, as explained by Van Riel & Fowler (1996):

'Your local library provides a safe environment for getting to know other readers without making a big commitment of time or exposing your privacy. If it doesn't work out, nobody knows who you are or where you live.' (p.115).

The desire for anonymity implicit here is well suited to the impersonal nature of web interaction. Further to this, Sear & Jennings (1991), Goodall (1989) and Toyne & Usherwood (2000) all comment on the reluctance of many users to ask staff for help or advice in choosing what to read. Goodall (1989) refers to this as 'the plight of the struggling fiction borrower who is most unlikely to approach library staff for help.' (p. 38). She also quotes the findings of Jennings & Sear, that 'help from library staff is generally welcome only at one remove.' (p. 38). Although this is used by Goodall to show the usefulness of traditional reader development activities such as booklists, it is equally applicable to web fiction facilities. As the above respondent commented:

'I think people are going to be more willing to use that sort of service perhaps than they are to come and ask somebody and sometimes be made to feel a fool, which I'm
sure no-one would admit ever happens, but I'm pretty sure there are still people
around who can be condescending to enquirers.'

The same respondent saw the web as a way of making services such as reader
development available '24-7'. Ormes & Criddle (1998) also note the widening effect
of providing these types of facilities through a 'networked environment, where
restrictions on time and location do not apply.' (p. 479). The constant presence of
resources on the web could also be seen as a response to the call from Alastair Niven
(quoted in Kinnell & Shepherd (1998)) to move away from one-off fiction promotion
initiatives to a more integrated and continuous reader development service.

In addition to this, if we accept Denham's (1996) proposition that professional
librarians do not have the time to discuss books with users, and Van Riel's (1993)
claim that many staff cannot recommend fiction with confidence, a permanent web
service could be seen as the answer. It could become a place where readers not only
have continuous access to staff recommendations, in the form of booklists and
reviews, but also to the views of their fellow readers.

**4.4 Importance of Readers' Groups**

For two respondents, the activities of the readers' groups provided the central focus
for their reader development pages. The idea behind this was that the site would first
of all be a means of promoting the groups and providing information about their
meetings. However, one respondent also felt that it was important to give the groups
a chance to publish their work, and to extend their presence:

'...so that when they're not actually at a group meeting they have somewhere to go and
that there is something there that they can recognise as their own...'

For these two authorities, it was also the enthusiasm of the readers' groups,
particularly in the face of apathy and disinterest from other members of the library
service, that had enabled them to get reading on the web in the first place.
For two other authorities, readers' groups had been a part of the impetus behind the reading facilities; one of these saw the readers' groups feeding into the site at a later date. Two respondents saw books studied by readers' groups as an important focus for the sites, as it meant that the libraries would already hold a large number of copies, and that the comments of the readers' groups could be used as part of the promotion.

4.5 Remit and Intended Audience

When asked about the intended audience for the fiction facilities, respondents gave a wide range of answers. One idea that was mentioned by three respondents was that they hoped the site was non-exclusive, and would have some appeal for all age groups. Three respondents also cited readers' group members themselves, both existing and prospective, as a principal part of the audience. The one respondent who did not mention the groups as particularly influential explained that some were unwilling to be promoted via the website as they felt they already had sufficient members.

Two respondents hoped to target some content directly at children, for example, information based around Harry Potter parties taking place in one area. Another respondent noted that the over 50s were the main fiction borrowers at the libraries, and hoped that they would get something from the pages.

For two respondents, funding sources had a big effect on their target audience. One respondent's site had Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding, which meant that the site as a whole had to have a community rather than just council focus. This perhaps explains the focus on the local readers' groups in the reading part of the site. Another respondent was being funded by the Arts Council, and stated that:

'we have a remit from the Arts Council to particularly look at younger people, young adults and so I think the style of it is sort of aimed at that market really.'
The concept of young people as the 'missing audience' from public libraries is noted in the information about Book Forager on the Branching Out site. They define the age range of this category as between 18 and 35 years. The Aslib report on the public library service comments that:

'... both users and library staff suspect that libraries do not appeal to young people. Our findings confirm that suspicion. One balance, teenagers do not feel that public libraries are up to date or that staff are approachable.' (DNH (1995: 8)).

The respondent above, and another respondent both hoped that making use of the technology to promote and support reading would make the library service more attractive to teenagers and young adults. At the Checking the Books workshop\(^2\), another authority mentioned plans to target the 15-24 age bracket.

Finally, one respondent also hoped that fellow library professionals would find the site of benefit. Again, the Branching Out site mentions library stock selectors, promoters and budget holders, literature development officers and reading groups as part of the range Forager might be of use to (Branching Out (1999b)).

4.6 Role of the Website

As part of the examination of the motivation behind website provision, the respondents were asked what role they thought the website facilities had in the context of the wider authority. One respondent saw them primarily as a tool to support and promote the central activities of the library:

'I don't, I mean personally and I may have got this wrong, but I don't see the website side of things from that point of view as an end in itself, it's just a tool to support others.'

\(^2\) This took place in London on 19th July 2000.
The website was also seen currently in this sense, as a peripheral 'added extra', by another respondent. However, he believed that this would not always be the case:

'... at the moment it's fair to say that people still think of the website thing as the last bit they add on - "yes we'll do our reader development programme, then we'll put something on the web"... but ... I think as they begin to see more people using it and that they get a lot of feedback quickly from it, I think they'll gradually begin to think of it as the most important part in many ways.'

Another respondent shared this enthusiasm for the potential of the web: 'I consider the web crucial to the way anything's going to develop in the future.' He also felt, though, that he had some ground to cover in convincing his colleagues of this, as the future of the site had not been officially discussed.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has considered the reasons behind why and how public library websites have developed as they have, with particular reference to the development and motivation behind the reader development facilities. It has shown that the websites are largely a product of the way in which they have developed historically, and that this is further affected by the sources of funding for the sites and the way they are seen by library staff. It has discussed the respondents' various reasons and motivations for the provision and styles of reader development facilities on the web, and the advantages to be gained from this method of service delivery. The attempt to address audience sectors otherwise uncatered for by libraries, and the strong belief of some respondents in the pervasive future of the web give grounds for encouragement for this area.
5. Results & Findings - Logistics of Implementation & Maintenance

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the logistics of setting up and running the facilities discussed in the previous two chapters. A sequential approach will be taken to examine the steps of the process in turn, starting from the planning and design of the site, through the functions necessary to maintain it on a day-to-day basis, to some initial feedback about how the facilities have been received by the public so far. In this way, it is hoped that a picture will emerge of the factors necessary and issues involved in introducing this type of facility.

Although the discussion will focus on the procedures relating to the reader development facilities in particular, much of it also refers to the construction and maintenance practices of the libraries' websites in general. It may be useful to refer back to the previous chapter, as there is some overlap between the remit of that chapter and this one in covering the initial development of the facilities.

5.2 Use of Quality Guidelines and Good Practice Recommendations

The important issue of quality has already been approached, from the position of evaluating the current state of public library reader development resources in chapter 3. At this point, the understanding and implementation of quality and good practice by the respondents will be considered as a complement to the earlier investigation. This section will discuss not only the explicit use of guidelines for designing the websites, but also, other practices undertaken by the respondents which contribute to the quality of their sites. A 'quality' assuring operation will be defined both by reference to the literature, and by the respondents' own understanding of good practice. Other quality issues will also be highlighted where appropriate in the examination of the stages of implementation and maintenance in the rest of the chapter.
5.2.1 Use of guidelines and accessibility

When asked whether any specific guidelines had been used in designing the websites, four respondents referred to standards developed in-house. Two of these went into some detail; for both, the guidelines were still in the process of being assembled and finalised, and were based on accumulated pieces of good practice, in conjunction with the government guidelines (IAGC (2000)). Some consideration had also been paid to access documents, detailing requirements for partially sighted users, by one of the respondents. For these two, guidelines were seen as being ideally comprehensive, but not prescriptive:

'And what we hope to come down to, we haven't quite finished this yet, is a fairly, a set of standards but the pages won't necessarily all look the same but they will have all the common things on like the right amount of contrast between the background and the text and stuff.'

'…it's being put together now into basic draft of guidelines which Hopefully will be available for the whole of the authority. That's basically covering everything from basic page design through to copyright, data protection, everything for intranet and internet use.'

Another authority had a set of guidelines which they used for evaluating other sites, when deciding whether they were going to provide a link to them. In these guidelines, attention was directed towards sites that were unique in their content, so that linking to them was really of value for the user. Taking responsibility for the value of linked sites, and aiming to provide unique content are stressed by Cooke (1999) as contributing to the quality of a resource.

Two other respondents presented an interesting contrast over the question of accessibility. The government guidelines (IAGC (2000)) place great emphasis on designing pages that can be accessed by the greatest number of users: 'It is essential that websites are designed to be open and not to disenfranchise sectors of the
The guidelines explain that this may mean not using the full capabilities of the technology, as some older browsers are not able to activate JavaScript, and screen readers for visually impaired users cannot interpret frames or tables. One respondent was concerned that her authority's sites had made a design trade-off in favour of professional design and to the detriment of accessibility:

'I suspect our site isn't very accessible… it has to look good, that's always the dilemma, you know, to get a site that looks really good but is accessible, it's really quite difficult.'

Another respondent also showed awareness of this conundrum, but her authority had tended to favour accessibility in the trade-off.

'We work on a basis of the lowest denomination so the lowest possible spec for a computer is the spec we work to for our library pages…'

Her authority were also trying to improve the accessibility for visually impaired users, but were having difficulty where tables had been used extensively in the site. They were considering a text-only version as an alternative to this, a quality strategy recommended by Head (1999).

5.2.2 Awareness and use of good practice

One of the authorities interviewed had been the recipient on more than one occasion of one of EARL's Best on the Web Awards; they saw this as an indicator of their position at the leading edge of website design. However, they were not complacent about this and recognised the need to monitor other similar sites on the web to ensure that they did not get left behind. Another respondent also saw this monitoring as an important way of assuring the quality of his site; he had also consulted other library authorities on their practices with regard to their sites. As will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter, such collaboration is extremely important for the overall development of library sites (Evans (1997)).
Respondents frequently showed a developed awareness of basic and more complex issues of good practice on the web. For example, several specifically mentioned the need to keep sites simple for reasons of accessibility. Consistency in the layout of different pages within the site was also stated as an aim by some respondents. This aspect of interface design is regarded as one of the mainstays of usability by experts in the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) (Hill (1995), Dix et al. (1998)).

The importance of limiting websites was mentioned by two respondents. This was both to keep the websites manageable from the point of view of maintenance and updating, and to keep the site practical for users. One respondent explained this was why such care was given to selecting sites to link to:

'I don't want those links pages to be too big because people won't use them, so there may well be a finite size for that, and that will also help edit it because if we're putting twenty new links in, we might have to take twenty old links out…'

The same respondent placed an emphasis on linking to useful content on other sites rather than trying to recreate it locally; the kind of sharing easily facilitated by the web. This would thus allow more time to be devoted to working on more important original content.

Public library sites have been accused of not making the most of the advantages of the web, in particular with regard to the interactive nature of the medium ('Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000), Harden & Harden (1996-2000a)). However, all of the respondents recognised the desirability of greater interactivity and indeed many were working towards this or were planning to make existing interactive content more prominent. One respondent explained the reasons behind plans to increase such features on the site:

'Vet needs to be very dynamic, it's the way the government are pushing for websites, government websites to be. And it also makes it a lot more of an enjoyable experience for people to use…'
This shows that the focus of site design and maintenance is on the user; again a strong theme of good practice in the field of HCI (Head (1999), Dix et al (1998)).

5.3 Timescales and Sequence of Implementation

This section will examine the timescale and sequence of planning and putting reader development material on the web. As previously mentioned, although only one of the respondents was in the position of planning to introduce fiction facilities from scratch, two others were proposing significant changes to their existing provision. This is further evidence of the 'new wave' of public library web development identified in the previous chapter. The respondents had a range of anticipated dates for the new material to be published, ranging from the end of the current month (July) to the early autumn.

The dislocation between content and technical aspects of the web design process, also discussed in the previous chapter can be seen in the implementation sequences described by the respondents. All of the procedures reported involved the generation of content by the relevant members of library staff, usually after some intervention or suggestion by the respondent in question. Some groups were seen to be more proactive in showing an interest in developing material for the web without intervention; these were the readers' groups, and on one occasion, the schools library service. Indeed, this latter example were unique in expressing enthusiasm for learning the technical aspects to speed up the process. The more usual sequence was for the technical and design duties to be performed by dedicated technical staff, often the respondent themselves, once the content had been received. One of the respondents described a style with a very consultative emphasis, where the content providers were invited to comment on the proposed design. This could be seen as a way of minimising dislocation.
The respondents explained that it was the content stages that were most time consuming, and that the technical tasks involved in publishing the pages usually did not take long:

'Probably within a week I'd have the basics of what the site would look like...'

'...as soon as we get [the content] we tend to put it up basically.'

Getting the structure of a new page right was felt by one respondent to be the most significant part of the process. Two respondents described implementation as a gradual process, with initial pages being added to, as more content became available.

One respondent described a more immediately complete resource, which had taken six months to develop. Her comments confirmed the impression that others had given, regarding time requirements for simplistic and more complex web design:

'You can do something very simple very quickly, that's our experience, but if you want something that looks or is fairly sophisticated it takes a bit longer.'

5.4 Updates

This section is the first of those to address maintenance considerations once the facilities are in place. The problem of keeping information up to date in general, where websites are concerned, was raised by one respondent very early on. The cumulative impression was that, despite being aware of the importance of this problem, none of the authorities concerned had fully solved it.

There was a pattern among respondents that content providers were responsible for alerting the technical and design staff to the need for updates in their section. In addition to this, elements of some of the websites which had a clear 'sell-by date', such as events and community information were time-tabled by the technical staff for revision. Data protection requirements also necessitated some information being re-
verified on an annual basis. On the whole, however, updating seemed to have a rather ad hoc, reactive status, and even the one respondent who had a regular updating policy admitted to having fallen behind.

When asked about the particular instance of checking for 'broken' hyperlinks, i.e. links to URLs that have changed or no longer exist, two respondents performed this task regularly with a software programme, and one more was looking into the purchase of such software.

There did seem to be some suggestion of future changes to address the updating question. One respondent was planning a new dating policy on information added to the site, with items passing their date being automatically removed. Another respondent stressed the need to assess the updating requirements of a certain facility before it was added to ensure it could be adequately maintained. Updating was a particular issue for the respondent who had expressed anxiety early on, as the reader development facilities and the member of staff responsible for updates were part of an Arts Council project, funded for 3 years only. Her possible solution was to train as many of the staff as possible to be able to carry out updates, moving away from the current dislocated situation. Criddle & Ormes (1999) report this as a solution to updating problems; with the added benefit that staff feel more of a sense of ownership over what they are doing.

A final comment on the issue of maintaining the site in the long term was that one authority had a web group which planned a rolling programme for the future of the site. Another respondent expressed his interest in having a similar sort of group in his authority. The importance of this kind of vision for effective planning and resourcing of public library websites is noted by Criddle & Ormes (1999).

5.5 Monitoring and Access

5.5.1 Monitoring
Some means of assessing and evaluating how a facility is used and received is clearly a vital component of its long term running. When asked whether they had any means of monitoring usage, two of the respondents stated that they used a software package for generating statistical data, and a further two were in the process of considering the purchase of such software. However, the employment of such packages appeared to be both problematic and of limited usefulness. One respondent commented that:

'You buy it and in your simplicity you think yes well we'll spend a couple of thousand on a package that will do that and then you realise it's actually going to take six months before somebody can actually figure out how it's going to turn out a report.'

He, however, remained confident about the eventual capabilities of the software to yield up such detailed information as how long users spent on a particular page, or whether, after reading a review, they followed a link to the catalogue to reserve the book.

The other respondent currently using a monitoring package was less optimistic:

'The whole situation with counting how many people access the site and hits and things is, it seems to be fraught with danger and most of the figures are meaningless. You have to decide what figures you're going to use and whether they are of any use.'

This is because the nature of the web means that some sites will be pulled off a cache when they are accessed by several users and so will not be counted individually. The only use to which he felt he could reliably put the data was to show a general trend of increased usage, although he did concede that greater familiarity with the package would probably produce more useful results.

One of the respondents was considering the purchase of a statistics package for high level monitoring, for example, to show which of the library pages were being
underused and required further promotion. Currently she used a proxy log generated by the firewall on the public access Internet terminals to learn which sites had been looked at.

5.5.2 Access

Because of lack of reliable monitoring information, none of the respondents had a clear impression about where their facilities were being accessed from. The feeling by most was that the majority were accessing them from home, with a growing number visiting them from within the library, as public access terminals became more widespread.

5.5.3 Feedback channels

All of the respondents had a specific feedback channel as part of their facilities, an essential element of a quality web resource (Head (1999)). In four of the five cases, this took the form of email links embedded in the pages. The remaining respondent predominantly used forms for feedback comments, a strategy which some of the others had also adopted as a complement to the unstructured email facility. Two respondents also had prominent contact details on their pages, such as address, 'phone and fax numbers. One of these respondents interpreted the occasions she had received feedback about other local matters not under her remit, as a positive reflection on the design of the site:

'...often it's due to a lack of information on the part of the people that they want to complain to because their details aren't obvious and ours are, so obviously our details are fairly prominent for them.'

Some further observations on the nature of the feedback received through these channels will be made in the last section of the chapter.
5.6 Promotion

5.6.1 Promoting web facilities and services

The following two sections focus on operations that, whilst not directly concerned with the mechanics of the facilities themselves, are nonetheless essential for making the most of them. The first of these is activities carried out in order to promote the fiction facilities, and the wider site itself.

There was a wide range of policies and methods described by the respondents in order to promote the web service to library users, non-users and staff. However, one respondent felt that the service was not really promoted at all, largely because of financial constraints, but also because of the lack of enthusiasm for the site in other council departments. The web address had been added to some of the departmental stationery but this was not a consistent picture.

5.6.2 Promoting to library users

Promotional ideas aimed at library users by the other respondents included adding a direct link to the reader development web resources from the default home page on the library public access Internet terminals. One respondent was even planning to make the reading page the default home page in some sections of the library. The surrounds of the public access terminals were also being used as a way of advertising the service, with graphical displays. Information in joining packs was seen as an initial way of directing users to the service. One respondent was planning a month-long campaign of printed bookmarks advertising the facilities, and another mentioned the use of posters within the library.

Interestingly, one respondent described ways in which they had cross-promoted library services. Groups identified as heavy Internet users, i.e. young males, had been targeted with book reviews at the front-end of the Internet terminals, in order to
encourage them to read. The books reviewed were chosen specifically to appeal to this group. Meanwhile, a booklet had been produced to introduce heavy fiction users to the Internet, by focusing on reading related sites. This scheme accords well with the proposed use of the Internet to support readers envisaged by the LIC (1998) and with suggestions made by Kendall (1998). The booklet, called the Book Lover's Guide to the Internet, had proved to be very successful with a second edition already in progress, and 5,000 orders placed for copies from other authorities in the Branching Out initiative. There was also an electronic copy of the booklet on the respondent's reading site.

5.6.3 Promoting to non-users

Council communications with the outside world were seen as a useful vehicle for promoting to non-library users. One respondent had recently written an article about the website for the council magazine which was to be distributed to every household. He also saw potential for advertising in the local press. Another site was promoted via the literature related mail-outs sent from the library. A third respondent described her practice of manually distributing leaflets to local organisations, including pubs, when she was visiting them. Her authority had also provided computers for information points in post offices in the area, which she felt acted as a good signpost to the service.

It was felt by several respondents that the best way, and indeed by one respondent, the only way, to really target non-users was via the web itself. One respondent felt that having the library catalogue on the web was a way of drawing in non-users. Another had noted that the main users of the site at present seemed to be non-library members, from the feedback he had received from them. The respondent who felt most strongly about this was planning to negotiate links with other reading related sites, for example, publishers. Her authority had also done some work on making sure the site got 'hit' by web search engines when people were searching for it.
5.6.4 Promoting to staff and colleagues

The best way to alert library staff about the facilities, both those within the authority and nationally, appeared to be word of mouth. One respondent had a network of contacts regionally and nationally that she planned to alert to the arrival of the new reading facilities now that they were up and running. Another respondent promoted the site in the staff magazine, and encouraged other staff to contribute Internet related discoveries to this also.

5.6.5 Importance of promotion

Three of the respondents mentioned plans to pursue promotion more actively in the future, indicating the importance of these activities to running of the facilities. One of these considered a proper launch essential to the success of the new reading facilities the authority was implementing.

5.7 Training

5.7.1 Training for staff

The respondents were asked for their views on what training was needed for staff and users to fully exploit the web facilities. Some initial Internet training had been carried out for staff in all the respondent authorities, usually as a response to Internet access for the public being rolled out to each particular library. One respondent's authority further supported this initial training:

'...we did send out a file at that time which had some training notes in it. And we do actually have hidden from the public a linked set of pages of quizzes for librarians and library workers to go through ... based upon you having a library user who's interested in these things in their area.'
Some problems seemed to have hampered the training of staff in gaining confidence with the facilities. Lack of computers to carry out training or to practice on was mentioned by three respondents as a significant problem. One commented that: 'our staff feel very frustrated that they can only just assist to get people started.' Attitudes were also seen to be problematic: in another authority, the recent arrival of public access terminals had met with severe technophobia, which again meant that the service could not be used to the full:

'There's one branch, I went out to a meeting at this branch, and I couldn't believe it, the PC there was covered with a sheet. The member of staff covered it over with a sheet all the time so it's not exactly promoting the service!'

It was generally felt, however that the New Opportunities Fund (NoF) funded training would solve some of these difficulties. The training plan of one of the respondents had been approved as a model of good practice; she hoped it was going to make a 'big difference to the staff.'

Only one respondent at this point specifically mentioned training for 'the other side of the Internet ... creating your own pages'. At this time, this was very much a possibility rather than a definite aim.

5.7.2 Training for users

Two respondents had used the BBC Web Wise training to introduce users to the Internet on several occasions, and one had made the Web Wise CD-ROM permanently available in selected libraries. The other had also held reading related open evenings for users and planned to continue this. A third respondent aimed to introduce taster sessions to the Internet for users once the authority had sufficient
public access terminals. In the long term, the level of staff Internet training was impacting on the level of user training the respondent authorities felt able to offer.

5.8 Problems

5.8.1 Problems in implementation and maintenance

Problems relating to and affecting all of the stages of implementation and maintenance discussed above, were mentioned in the interviews. Some have already been alluded to earlier in the chapter, but they will now be considered in more detail, along with some possible solutions, to gain an overview of the difficulties and limitations of the entire process. As far as possible, problems with similar origins will be grouped together in the following section; however, it should be understood that many of the causes are in fact interrelated and therefore impact on each other. It can be seen that the net effect of the problems encountered has been to restrict the development and full exploitation of the facilities so far.

5.8.2 Technical problems

Perhaps unsurprisingly for this area, many of the problems mentioned were of technical origin. The most striking of these was difficulties relating to the web server, which had resulted in a loss of access to facilities by potential visitors. This problem had been recently rectified in one respondent's authority, but this had taken a long time to sort out. Another respondent was suffering a loss of access of a two day duration at the time of the interview. Both respondents seemed to feel fairly powerless in the face of these difficulties.

Technical refinements or additions to the sites generally seemed to be problematic. The example of the statistics packages for site monitoring has already been cited above. Three respondents were in the process of investigating making their library catalogues available through the web, but had encountered problems because of the
capabilities of their current library management system. This was compounded by the prohibitive costs of buying a new one, although two respondents were in fact considering this. Another respondent, when discussing plans to add links from book reviews to the online catalogue, explained the difficulties arose from software incompatibility:

'It's the inevitable problem, you know, you've got one set of software on the catalogue and another set of software on the website and you've got to make it all talk to each other.'

A further respondent had experienced problems with the site after upgrading to an NT server. Desirable innovations such as greater interactivity on the site, were also being held back by technical hitches. For example, one respondent was hoping to eventually include space for readers to submit review and comments, but felt outfaced by the issue of mediating submissions.

Problems were also experienced in the publishing and construction of the site. One respondent's authority had recently upgraded their authoring tool for the site to a package that she and other colleagues felt was not appropriate given the size of the site. This difficulty was further compounded by the lack of training available in using the tool. Developments on another authority's site had been held up by the lengthy process of getting the infrastructure and protocols for the site in place. Once this had been achieved, however, the respondent was optimistic about developments continuing at a much faster rate.

5.8.3 Costs

An almost equally significant constraint emerged as costs and funding. As already stated, the only realistic solution to the problem of software incompatibility would be the purchase of new software, which had been experienced as problematic in the past for financial reasons.
One respondent's site had previously been hosted by an independent server:

'... if we wanted to put anything on there we'd say right we want to put information on there and they'd turn round and say right that's going to cost you so much. And it meant we couldn't do anything because the prices were prohibitive...'

This problem had been solved at the time of the interview by a new relationship with a different service provider. The long term plan of the authority was to have their own server and bring it all in-house.

Perhaps most restricting was the lack of extra money for staff time to spend on the web facilities. This will be dealt with further in the following paragraphs.

5.8.4 Time

The lack of time to devote to the design and maintenance of the web facilities was experienced as extremely limiting. This was often expressed as an added pressure which had to compete with the other facets of library work without having a designated space for itself:

'It's just one more thing on top of everything else we're trying to do.'

'...it was the usual thing where it was just people trying to develop these things on top of their other jobs and not really having time to do it properly...'

'...when I go along to people and say it'd be really good if we could do this on the web, I'm not very popular because it usually means they're going to have to do more work. There just isn't the spare capacity.'

'We're also facing a barrier in that [staff] don't have time to think, right yes this would be good on [name of website]'
The second quote shows that the actual development of the site suffers as a result of lack of time, whereas the fourth quote suggests that potential content for the site may be being overlooked. A possible solution to this latter difficulty was being implemented by the authority in question by adding the website as the final agenda item to all meetings, thus creating a space for discussion.

Other web projects, in addition to other non-web related library work, were also competing against the fiction facilities for time. One respondent admitted that the implementation of their new fiction facilities had been delayed by a community information project.

5.8.5 Staffing

Related to the time constraints addressed above were other personnel and manpower difficulties expressed by respondents. The problems related to manpower required for keeping material up to date have been partially explored above (see section 5.4 Updates). The situation where there are a limited number of staff with the necessary skills needed to monitor and perform updates to the facilities was common to most of the respondents. In two cases, this was a single member of staff, and the pressure was clearly felt by the respondents in that position. One explained that he had to abandon the introduction of a new What's On facility to the authority site; although the mechanics of its implementation were within his capabilities, he simply did not have the time available to keep it meaningfully up to date. Another respondent had experienced problems resulting from a recent turnover in staff.

Technical innovations were being considered by another authority as a solution to the problematic demand for skilled manpower:

'...we're going to gradually move some functions over to a database... so that pages can be updated automatically just by bunging some new information into a database. And we're going over to cascading style sheets some time in the next few months so
again you haven't got to think about, oh there's only three people available who can actually do HTML coding and can put stuff on...’

The government guidelines (IAGC (2000)) also recommend the use of cascading style sheets for this purpose.

5.8.6 Resources

As dealt with earlier in the chapter (see section 5.7.1 Training for staff), insufficient equipment for training and practising Internet skills for staff was seen to pose a substantial obstacle to exploiting the medium to its full. Criddle & Ormes (1999) also report this as a difficulty. One authority helped staff with limited Internet experience to assist users by informing them of standard responses to commonly experienced user queries. The NoF funded training and the implementation of the People's Network were seen by respondents as the eventual solutions to this problem.

The lack of equipment for staff to prepare material for the website on was also a factor that made more work for one respondent; this meant that she had to spend time on the task of typing hand-written reviews and lists.

5.8.7 Attitudes

The problem of technophobia was also briefly mentioned above, in relation to training (see section 5.7.1 Training for staff). Other attitude problems were also described; for example, a lack of enthusiasm for the website from other members of staff had far-reaching ramifications for some of the respondents. One described this as the main problem he encountered in trying to make the site successful:

'It's other departments' inability to see the importance of having the information available and they're not prepared... to give me the information or they only update it at a certain time of year and if I want it I'm going to have to wait until that particular
time in the year before I can have it. That is the main frustration and the cause of
problems.'

The same respondent earlier described it as an 'uphill battle' to convince others of the
usefulness of the site, but hoped that a corporate policy on the site would aid these
difficulties. In one instance, issues of data protection had prevented a useful facility
from being included on the site, but the respondent felt that this problem could have
been overcome by a more positive attitude from staff responsible for the information.

Another authority had experienced some early reluctance from colleagues, which
had been overcome by accolades from an independent body:

'Perhaps initially for the first month or two there were still people in the organisation
who thought it was a bit of a waste of time and funding, time and effort on a website
- what do we need one for? - but I think as soon as we won the first EARL award,
they fairly quickly changed their minds.'

A third respondent, whilst admitting some problems with staff unconvinced about
the importance of the website, was also suffering the opposite problem of over-
enthusiasm from one member of staff:

'...she expects us to have all this whizz bang, super-dooper, pictures everywhere, very
colourful, very active type pages, and although that's great because she's got the
enthusiasm, we do have to throw a bucket of water over her by saying, you will be
excluding quite a large percentage of Internet users if you put those images on...' 

This relates back to the earlier discussion on accessibility and design trade-offs.

5.8.8 Communication

Respondents also mentioned various communication difficulties. These difficulties
sometimes had their origin in negative attitudes toward the site, and also often further
contributed to the perpetuation of such attitudes. Three respondents particularly stressed that they had trouble getting content for the site from other members of staff. In one instance this was partly a geographical thing, as communication with branch managers was restricted to when the website staff could go and visit them. This respondent and another of the three believed that there was a PR job to be done on staff to raise the profile of the site and prove its usefulness. They also hoped that the introduction of procedural channels, such as the automatic inclusion of the website on all agendas would help with this:

'What we're trying to reach is a situation where whatever we produce whether it's paper or whatever, we're automatically thinking can we use that for the web, how can we use that for the web?'

Communication channels to technical back-up were also cited by two authorities as being unnecessarily complicated and thus resulting in delays in technical problems being fixed. One of these authorities was planning to set up an Internet group to 'pull all these communication channels together' in order to improve the situation.

One respondent expressed frustration over the fact that he hadn't been able to learn from the experience of others:

'...people must have been facing this all over the country and I don't see why our ICT department are having particular problems…'

This comment reinforces an idea advanced by Evans (1997) in his preface to Ormes & Dempsey's book on public library networking; that greater communication between authorities would be greatly beneficial to the development of new web-based services. In the same volume, Ormes (1997) comments that: 'Networking itself makes co-operation and the sharing of information considerably easier and it is to be hoped that public libraries will see this potential and exploit it.' (p.50). The above comment, in conjunction with the reassertion of the need for better communication
between library authorities at a 1999 workshop (Criddle & Ormes (1999)) seems to suggest that there is still work to be done in this area. The benefits that members of national initiatives, such as Branching Out, may be gaining will be examined in the following chapter.

5.8.9 Expertise

The effect of the limited time and staff presently devoted to the websites of the interviewed authorities has been discussed above (see sections 5.8.4 Time and 5.8.5 Staffing). Closely allied to these is the question of limited expertise as a factor preventing the optimum progression of the sites. One respondent described this as the 'gifted amateur' approach of librarians, in turning their hands to whatever innovation is demanded of them. He expressed doubt over whether this approach was sufficient. Another respondent felt constrained by the limit of his abilities:

'I have a certain amount of knowledge of creating web pages but the graphic side of things is not something I know a lot about and of course the Council graphics department is under a lot of pressure doing whatever else it does.'

Questions concerning the quality of library web resources are obviously related to librarians' own concerns about their limitations. Quality issues have been discussed at greater length, both earlier in the chapter (see section 5.2 Use of Quality Guidelines and Good Practice Recommendations) and in chapter 3.

5.8.10 Other problems

Other problems mentioned were related to the local government context; one respondent found that it took a long time to get anything decided and accomplished. Another referred to problems that other authorities had experienced when trying to build an online collaboration with Amazon, something that his authority had done successfully.
'I know other people have been looking at it, and have fallen foul of councillors…
councillors said, "oh this is taking the bread and butter out of the mouths of our
local bookshop that's been there 35 years."…'

One other respondent did refer to her own authority's decision not to link to Amazon,
because of an overall corporate policy of not linking to commercial sites. She
acknowledged the contradiction in this situation, in that sites that the authority does
link to, will almost certainly in turn link to commercial sites.

One further problem noted by a respondent was the currently disappointing response
to their book review submission facility. At the time of the interview, not many
reviews had been submitted and those included on the page had been mainly written
by staff in order to prime the facility. He believed this was probably related to the
lack of promotion, as a similar children's reviews section on another authority's site
was very well-used by the public. Therefore, he hoped that the problem could be
rectified by improved publicity and moving the facility to a more prominent place on
the site.

5.9 Feedback

5.9.1 Feedback relating to fiction facilities

This section will consider the nature of the feedback received about the reader
development facilities, and the websites in general. Following on from the comment
above about the lack of response so far, it was generally the case for respondents that
it was too early for much feedback, positive or negative, to have been received about
the fiction facilities. The consensus seemed to be that more time was needed to assess the impact of the new wave of fiction facilities; as stated previously, the new resources planned by three of the authorities had not yet been introduced at the time of interview. It was expressed by two of the respondents that extensive promotional work was going to be needed to alert people to the presence of the services.

5.9.2 Feedback relating to websites in general

The nature of the general feedback received, as stated by three respondents, tended to be enquiry based, often local or family history queries. Another large source of feedback was the catalogue, either asking when this was going to appear on the web, or reporting difficulties with it. One respondent was surprised and encouraged by the speed with which catalogue problems were reported:

'And they say sort of almost within minutes of something going wrong with [the catalogue], emails start rolling in, which again is a good sign because it shows people are using it.'

In terms of evaluative feedback, one authority had received positive comments, whilst another had experienced a less favourable response:

'Probably about a third of it is just people saying I really like your website, thanks for it.'

'We have the occasional "your web pages are boring" from various teenagers.'

Both these respondents tried to use feedback in a constructive way, a practice recommended by Gillies (1998). The first respondent explained how people's problems finding things helped to show where the site's navigational structure was in need of improvement. The second respondent's authority was aware of the less dynamic nature of their pages, and were undergoing a review and various changes.
This respondent also explained that they had implemented standards for replying to enquiries within a certain time limit.

5.10 Summary

This chapter has discussed the operations and process relating to the logistics of setting up and running reader development facilities, and also public library websites in general. It has looked at all the stages in turn, but has focused particularly on issues relating to quality and problems encountered and overcome. It can be seen that although current practices have a lot to commend about them, there is still ground to cover and difficulties to be overcome before public libraries can exploit the medium to the full in support of their readers.
6. Results & Findings – Wider Issues

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter of results and findings will reflect on some of the wider issues connected to reader development resources on the web maintained by public libraries. One of the significant themes to emerge from the literature was the relationship between libraries and bookshops, and the ways in which this relationship transferred to and was altered by use of the web by both parties. This was subsequently pursued in the interviews, both by a specific question and by unprompted comments from the respondents. The first section of this chapter, therefore, considers this relationship by discussing the opinions and feelings voiced by the respondents.

Another theme drawn from the literature was the effect of the use of web as a medium for library services, and, in particular, reader development resources. Respondents were asked for their responses to particular concerns about the issues involved in facing a world-wide audience for a localised service, and questions relating to supply and demand. These concerns are also presented and discussed in this chapter.

Finally, the level of integration between reader development initiatives of individual libraries, and those taking place on a national level are considered. In particular, the respondents' reactions to Branching Out's Book Forager are examined.

6.2 Libraries and Commercial Book Sites on the Web

6.2.1 Background and literature review

The questions relating to the issue of libraries and bookshops on the web were developed in relation to ideas expressed in the literature. Three key ideas were gleaned from the literature, and comments from the respondents could also be
categorised as providing illumination of these three areas. These areas related to the role of bookshops in relation to libraries, what could be learnt from their fiction promotion styles on the web, and what the relationship between libraries and bookshops on the web is or could be.

The role of bookshops as trend setters and role models for libraries in the real world has been noted. Phelan (1993) observes that methods of fiction promotion, such as face-out displays and dumpbins, were transferred to libraries as a result of their success in the commercial book environment. Libraries' choices of material to focus promotions on has also been heavily influenced by bookshop trends in the past (Van Riel (1993)). There is evidence that bookshops continue to have this function for libraries in terms of web development as well. Commentators from both inside and outside the public library world (Kendall (1998), Head (1999)) praise the innovations of Amazon in particular, and the usefulness of its extensive database of books and reviews for readers. Ormes & Criddle (1998) use the style and resources of bookshops as an example and an encouragement to public library activity in the field of web-based reader development, in saying that: 'Judging from the success of online bookshops, these kinds of services are already in great demand and are well-used.' (p. 479).

It has been suggested that as well as being first to use fiction promotion methods, both in their shops and on the web, bookshops are also better than libraries at this type of activity (Comedia, quoted in Kinnell & Shepherd (1998)). The above statement from Ormes & Criddle (1998) clearly envisages libraries following in the footsteps of the value-added information services already provided by bookshops. However, developments in bookshops demonstrate that libraries learning from bookshops may not be a one-way thing. Phelan (1993) observes that 'some bookshops are experimenting with community style activities which have long been the preserve of public libraries.' (p. 10). This pattern can further be seen in the appearance of new style bookshops such as Borders, which especially encourage browsing.
This suggests the possibility of a mutual relationship between bookshops and libraries. A.S. Byatt saw this kind of relationship as essential for sustaining a healthy reading world (in Van Riel (1992)). This interdependence is dependent on both partners having a distinctive role with relation to reading; a premise which is backed up by the literature. Van Riel (1993) sees libraries' particular strengths as contained in their 'special relationship with readers.' (p. 84); in her eyes, this makes up for any deficiency in currency of stock. Goodall (1989) quotes Spiller's views on the distinction between the two:

'…bookshops generally aim to display on their shelves 'the best' of what is available and the material which is most in demand. The library's brief is wider, and gives special emphasis to the promotion of minority interests.' (p. 90).

Goodall's own opinion on the difference between the two is also based on what each can offer, but she believes it is not just a difference of types of stock but of the entire approach: 'Libraries are not selling products but are offering a very distinctive range of services.' (1991: 38). Data from the preliminary Checking the Books report also shows that the commercial motivation of the bookshops affects how users feel about them, as opposed to libraries: '[Visiting the library is] a very multi-dimensional cultural experience, as opposed to going into a bookshop and having a money transaction.' (Toyne & Usherwood (2000: 32)).

If the aims of bookshops and libraries can be seen as not just different but complimentary, a mutually beneficial relationship seems possible. However, if libraries are seen to be competing with bookshops for readers and transactions, partnerships either in real life terms or on the web seem to be unlikely.

6.2.2 The role of bookshops on the web for libraries
The above ideas from the literature were reflected by the interview respondents, both in their responses to specific questions and in unsolicited comments. They acknowledged the trend setting function played by bookshops, both in the real world and on the web. One respondent saw the bookshops' focus on things like best read as contributing to the upsurge around reading that had led to the concept of reader development. On the web, the Amazon book site was mentioned frequently as an inspiration, particularly in showing the demand for value-added information, and the popularity of reader contributions:

'I think what Amazon has shown is that it's possible to have… an incredibly value-added catalogue… I think what we can learn is that there is a huge demand for value-added information about books in particular…'

'Sites like Amazon.com… they're such a useful reference tool.'

'…something like Amazon has just been a great you know transforming thing, I think, with that whole idea of reader's comments.'

However, two respondents saw the significance of Amazon's success not just as an example to follow, but as having the status of the default expert in certain reading matters. One saw this as an interesting position, but one possibly worth challenging:

'I get a newsletter… they had recommendations like a recommended reading list or something like that and I think the interesting thing there is if you get a link there it takes you to Amazon bookshop and that seems to be, if you mention a book, you have to then go to a bookshop. You don't go to a site about the reader or the writer or something like that you go to a bookshop so they can sell you the book… I would like to be looking at alternatives to that.'

The other respondent, however, accepted this status:
'...if Amazon have got really good book reviews on there and...places for customers' comments then there's no point in us trying to do something similar...they haven't exactly cornered the market but it's certainly where I would go to get readers' comments on books.'

This acceptance is certainly a deviation from the position expressed in some of the literature discussed above, as it limits the extent to which libraries should follow bookshops.

6.2.3 What can be learnt from bookshops on the web?

Respondents in general felt that there were lessons to be learnt from the bookshops, but that it was important to tailor them to the particular circumstances of libraries. One respondent suggested that: '...they can teach us something but I don't think we should slavishly follow them.' The respondent above who accepted the pre-eminence of Amazon, believed it was more a case of pointing users towards existing resources, whether maintained by commercial sites or otherwise, than trying to emulate what bookshops were doing. She thought that it was important for public libraries to realise their limitations:

'I think you've got to be realistic about what can achieve on a public library site, with the resources that we have and the fact that we're not basically selling anything so we are always going to be limited in revenue capacity.'

Despite these provisos, there were some examples of what respondents felt they could learn from commercial books sites. One respondent proposed that: 'They're bright and they're flashy, they're probably more attractive and perhaps more forward thinking than perhaps County Council sites are likely to be.' Two respondents referred to the concept of value-added information as a goal to strive for, although they acknowledged that it might take a while to achieve:
'[Bookshop sites have] pulled together what we are slowly trying to move towards which is a book list, possibly based on a book genre with reviews based upon them.'

'I think what we can learn is that there is a huge demand for value-added information about books in particular, but we've probably got a long road to go down to actually start matching that…'

6.2.4 The relationship between libraries and bookshops on the web

The above comments illustrate that libraries and bookshops do have a relationship on the web; in part this relationship is one where libraries learn from bookshops, and in some cases, defer to them as experts. The respondents had diverse opinions about the benefits of this relationship, and about the distinctive advantages of both parties. One respondent did not believe that a mutually beneficial relationship was possible:

'I think on the Internet that they would come into conflict and that the way the book trade is at the moment there would be no generosity of spirit from them as there has been in the past.'

Another respondent expressed doubts over the willingness of bookshops to work with libraries: 'I think there's also a feeling of well if we give you one copy, you reach the ten people who could have been buying the book.' However, she felt that the trend in libraries was turning more towards offering services than products, as the Goodall (1991) quote above suggests, and that bookshops might feel less threatened by this. Another respondent initially expressed reluctance to publicise the bookshop sites from his library site because of the conflict between the two. However, he changed his mind halfway through a sentence, saying that:

'…well, no, we're not trying, we're trying to encourage people to read books, it doesn't matter where they get them from, if they borrow them from us or go out and buy them so I've got no problems with providing links both ways.'
This fits in with the idea of a reader development service, rather than books as products. His change of mind shows that this point of view is still relatively new and that there is still some ambivalence towards bookshops.

One authority had taken this idea of buying and borrowing as non-competitive a step further and had a direct link to the online shopping aspect of Amazon. The respondent explained that this was about recognising that: 'some people want to borrow the book from the library and some want to buy it. Well, let them buy it, and give us a few pennies in the process!' Although he felt it was important not to push the commercial side too hard, he believed this was a mutually beneficial exercise in associating the library with quality information, and encouraging people to trust the commercial service because of the library connection:

'…certainly if we could co-operate with people like Amazon, to help draw people's attention to that information, but still give them the idea that somehow this is coming through your trusted friend the library service, you know, that's all for the good.'

This sense of trust is part of the special relationship with readers alluded to by Van Riel (1993). Other distinctive qualities that libraries felt they had to offer included the ability to give the reading related material more of a community feel then the bookshops. One respondent echoed Spiller's words about the breadth offered by libraries:

'…the bookshops are out to persuade you to buy books really and they're going to promote things that they want to sell whereas we've got a very different aim really…So yeah we're offering a much wider service really.'

However, she pointed out that libraries do have their own concerns, such as promoting back stock, because of the focus on book issues as a performance indicator.
As a final comment in this section, two respondents felt that pursuing alliances with publishers could be more advantageous to libraries. One commented that: 'I think there is a lot that libraries can do with them, especially around reading groups and book recommendations.'

### 6.3 Nature of the Web and Library Services

#### 6.3.1 Background and literature review

The use of the web as a medium for library services, and reader development resources in particular, raises certain issues. Using the web necessitates making information hitherto restricted to a certain geographical region available to a much wider audience. The greater promotion of services through the site may also have the effect of stimulating a demand for those services that the localised authority cannot meet. Furthermore, there are issues surrounding the usefulness of providing these services via the web at all.

Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) raise the first of these considerations, in noting that:

> 'One authority made Web pages available for reader recommendations, seeded by staff, but found that respondents came from places as far away as Southern California.' (p.98).

There are several points to be drawn from this. Firstly, it becomes clear that any facility on the web is available for anyone to look at the world over, as long as they have the technology. Secondly, fiction promotion material provided by libraries in the normal course of things is designed with the local audience in mind. When using the web, is it appropriate to only think of that local audience, or should facilities be designed with the global audience in mind? In other words, is the response from Southern California necessarily problematic? Thirdly, what about the services connected to the web that can only be used by the local audience, such as making
reservations from the catalogue? These considerations were addressed by a specific question and prompts within the interviews.

Questions of supply and demand have been raised in reference to any promotional activities undertaken by libraries (Goodall (1989)). Ormes & Criddle (1998) state this position, using the example of enhanced catalogues:

'A catalogue which also more effectively promotes new books should result in increased demand for library stock – counterproductive if the library does not have the available resources to meet this increased demand.' (p.478)

The issue is further complicated by delivering fiction promotion facilities via the web. Because normal promotions are often focused on a list of books, libraries at least know which books they may well need extra copies of (McKearney (1990), Goodall (1991)). However, a web fiction resource is likely to be longer lasting than this type of promotion and so must necessarily cover a wider range of books. Moreover, from the library fiction site, the reader may venture into other fiction sites (and may even be encouraged to do so) where they can find all manner of books that he/she may want their library to provide.

Even if library fiction sites only ever include material on books within that library service, there are still problems, because the material is physically divorced from the book itself. The very focus on a particular book which causes a surge in popularity, may then cause frustration for other borrowers:

'The most frequently cited example of this was lists of authors or books on bookmarks given out at the issue desk or posters displayed on the library wall.

- *What really annoys me is when you see a list and you go and look for it and it's not even on the shelf. What's the point?* (Toyne & Usherwood (2000: 42))

Even web services where the reader can check the catalogue to see whether the book is in at the same time that they develop an interest in it do not necessarily solve this
difficulty. This is because the web services can be accessed from outside the library, so that by the time the reader enters the library building the book may have gone.

The developing concept of reader development presents a paradox when searching for a solution here. Goodall (1989) suggests an answer to the problem of promotions tied to particular books, which are then always on loan:

‘…lists which promote authors or genres or themes are more effective as they tend to widen reading habits…’ (p.106-7).

The web is ideally suited to widening people's reading habits, as it gives access to information about all sorts of books. However, as mentioned above, this may be dangerous in provoking people to make requests for all sorts of material not stocked by the library. A potential answer could be to see reader development as a service in itself; so that guiding readers to new books was the aim, rather than providing the actual book. This fits in with some of the comments from respondents above about not seeing buying and borrowing as competitive. A question was asked in the interviews which aimed to unearth some of these issues.

The literature also prompts questions about the eventual usefulness of providing reading services via the web at all. Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) quote Goodall's statistic that 87% of users never access the catalogue. Does this mean that any kind of electronic guidance is simply not what users want? Goodall's (1989) research, the work of Sear & Jennings (1991) and the above quotation from Toyne & Usherwood (2000) suggest that library users are more inclined to browse and choose from what is on the shelves than gain an overall picture of what may or may not be there. And, as has been noted, the web is even less tied to the stock actually on the shelves at any given moment than the catalogue is. It was hoped that some idea of the success of the services would emerge from the interviews as a whole.
6.3.2 The world-wide audience on the web

Respondents were asked whether they thought attracting respondents from places like Southern California was problematic. The general response was that it wasn't. One respondent felt that there was no problem, as long as it was clear what services non-local visitors could and couldn't use, such as the ability to reserve and borrow books. He also felt it was important that people putting material on the web, such as readers' groups, understood the concept of the world-wide audience, and that comments coming from other countries might be affected by a different cultural outlook.

This idea of different cultural outlooks was seen as one of the most positive things about comments from dispersed geographic locations:

'In some ways it's quite interesting because… you'll have an American perspective on the book and you'll have a UK perspective on the book.'

'I think it adds quite an interesting twist to it, to get feedback from a totally different environment. I think it's a way of opening people to different influences so it's a way of educating people about different countries and about different people and opinions, I think it's quite fascinating really.'

Two respondents also saw this situation as a good opportunity for reciprocity between libraries across the world.

Interestingly, one respondent had a completely different point of view; as mentioned earlier in the chapter, she saw Amazon as having cornered the market for readers' comments and thought that most people would now not use dispersed library sites for this. Her authority had however actively sought an American audience for the live discussion event that the current site had evolved from, in order to gain a global perspective.
Other issues relating to the world-wide audience included occasions where two of the authorities had mistakenly been addressed about concerns referring to the place of the same name in America. One respondent suggested that there were some concerns around how much information individuals divulged on the web, because of the ability for it to be misused by others. She thought that people will develop basic common sense about what to say and what not to say, and that staff should pass this on to users. Two respondents had received enquiries from different parts of the world, but had so far undertaken to answer them, since the majority were relevant to their local area. They felt that the volume of such queries was not so large as to be problematic, but if it reached that stage, they would refer the enquirers back to their own library service.

6.3.3 Supply and demand

The question directed to the respondents referring to supply and demand, asked them whether they felt web fiction resources should relate solely to stock held by that authority. One respondent stated that:

‘What we're trying to do with our booklists is keep them to books that we can actually provide in our libraries. If we have a general review page that covers books that aren't kept or stored within our libraries, we then have a question of do we publish the review, the comments. Possibly we say yes because we can offer it to them on an inter-library loan basis.’

This reply shows that although some thought had been given to this question, the matter was not entirely decided. Other respondents replied that they would be happy to respond to legitimate requests for material not held by the libraries; they clearly did not envisage the number of requests being high enough to present a problem.

The general impression, then, was that since the potential problems had not really been experienced yet, the respondents had not really considered the ramifications of using the web in this regard. However, in retrospect, a methodological weakness may
be the reason why these issues were not explored more fully in the interviews. The actual questions asked perhaps did not really provide the scope for discussing such a complicated network of ideas, problems and solutions.

6.3.4 The ultimate usefulness of reading services on the web

As constantly re-iterated throughout this report, these reading related facilities are still in the early days of development. The end of the previous chapter noted that there had not been much feedback from users yet. Therefore it seems too early to draw any kind of conclusions about the ultimate usefulness of the web for this kind of service. In any case, the answer to this question can probably only be found by studying the behaviour of users themselves and asking what they think. One final thought though is that although traditional library fiction borrowers may not find the web services useful for their needs, perhaps they have a role in providing a new kind of service for current non-users.

6.4 Libraries and National Initiatives

6.4.1 Background and literature review

This section will reflect on the level of integration between individual and national library reader development initiatives. In the interviews, this question was chiefly concerned with the Society of Chief Librarian's Branching Out initiative, which three respondents were members of. One of the respondents did also mention their authority's participation in the EARL consortium, but this will not be considered at length because it is not principally a reading based initiative. From the comments about respondents' relationships to the national picture, it is hoped that some ideas about the benefits of collaboration, both for individual authorities and the field as a whole, will emerge.
In addition to the libraries’ relationship to the national picture, the respondents were also asked for their reactions to Book Forager. Forager has been mentioned earlier in the report as a catalyst for individual libraries’ development and as an indication of the growing view of reading and information technology as complementary. Therefore, the respondents’ opinions can be seen as a reflection of some of their concerns about the services they themselves are providing.

Van Riel (1999) refers to Forager as 'an exciting software programme to help readers choose books in new ways.' (p.292). Essentially the interface of this programme has a variety of sliders which the user manipulates to indicate the sort of book they are looking for:

'Users make four selections, anywhere on an axis between the two polar extremes, and can filter the list by specifying details of the main character, the theme or a general plot.' (Jowitt (1999)).

An example of the Forager interface, showing the sliders, with extremes such as sad/happy, and the results brought up by a particular slider combination can be found in Appendix 2, following the interview schedule.

Forager is a part of the Branching Out website, and the uses for which it was intended are stated in the promotional material on the site:

'Book Forager is:
- a new unique way for readers to choose their next read
- cutting edge software, sophisticated and powerful, nothing else like it on the web
- creates an imaginative alliance between computers and books
- includes a range of recent contemporary titles, specifically chosen to appeal to the 18-35 audience
- opens up reading choices
- is very user-friendly but performs a complex task, capable of 20 million different combinations
• is freely available on the web – no subscription required.' (Branching Out (1999b)).

There are several notable things about this marketing of Forager. Firstly it is interesting how strongly the complexity of the technology is urged. Van Riel (1999) quotes John Turner, from the company who designed the software as saying:

'There is an obvious problem to solve – there is too much information. There is an absolute need to find a way to factor out the stuff you don't need and to zero in on what you want.' (p.292).

However, this supposition that information retrieval techniques are readily transferred to something as personal as choosing what to read may be questionable. Also of note is the age range targeted; also referred to on the Branching Out site as the 'missing audience', because of their lack of library use. There are questions here around whether the project will be limiting itself in only choosing fiction that will appeal to this audience.

6.4.2 Relationships with national initiatives

Two of the respondents that were members of Branching Out described a high level of integration; one even commented:

'Sometimes it's a bit difficult for us to see the join and we don't tend to distinguish… if it's reader development and getting people reading and talking about their reading as far as we're concerned it could go into either area.'

Another respondent, not in Branching Out, reflected that the nature of the web would facilitate such collaboration and could be very beneficial. The other authority not in Branching Out showed an interest in participating in wider projects, but wanted to sort out work in his own authority first. The third respondent member of Branching Out felt that their local reader development work on the web had not been particularly
influenced by their membership of the initiative. He deliberated about whether this was a good thing or not:

'…it's not been done in any co-operative way, and… some people might argue that it would be better if it was, and in effect all the libraries were accessing the same service rather than developing their own.'

He did feel there were also advantages that would be lost from a joint approach: 'I suppose in the nature of things people are still going to want something that says [name of authority] libraries.'

This was a question that presented problems for some respondents, because sometimes the respondent did not necessarily have anything to do with the consideration of membership of joint initiatives. Several of the opinions expressed, therefore, were personal rather than a clear picture of the authority's feelings or policies.

6.4.3 Reactions to Forager

Several respondents' initial reactions when asked for opinions on Forager reflected the literature above concerning the novelty and uniqueness of the Forager approach:

'… it's a different way of tackling it, isn't it. I quite like that.'

'Forager comes at it from a very different searching, you know, it's a nice sort of different way to come at reading, isn't it, there are lots of conventional ways to get at the information so…'

'It's a great new way of doing it…'
However, the overall picture with regard to Forager seemed to be that although it was a good concept, respondents had some reservations about its usefulness and potential success.

On the positive side, one respondent felt that users would appreciate the facility:

'I know the public like this sort of thing, I know the public are always looking for this information.'

He also felt that Forager could be useful for recommending books to users, something that he did not otherwise feel confident about doing. This was usually not a problem because his library assistants were happy to make recommendations, but even in this case he felt that Forager could be useful for them to expand their expertise beyond what they had actually read themselves. Another respondent used Forager as an example of an impersonal service that some users might feel happier about utilising, rather than having to approach staff personally.

Another respondent felt that Forager was well designed for its target audience, but that it might not be used by others:

'… what concerns me is possibly yes it will attract the youngsters but will people who are book readers normally think to look on the Internet? Have we broken down that technophobia yet within society?'

Other respondents felt that there were limitations with the database as it stood, both in terms of attracting a wide range of users, and of satisfying their requests once they were using the programme:

'…I still think it would benefit from having more mainstream fiction in there as well. Partly from a purely practical point of view, as a tool in a public library, if what you're dealing with is… sort of lesser known fiction, that chance of somebody actually seeing a book on Forager and coming into the library and being able to
borrow it are much more limited and also personally I think… when a list of titles comes up it's quite nice to see something on there that you do recognise …rather than a list of things that you have never heard of any of them.'

There were particular concerns not only about the content of the database, but also its size:

'… personally it wasn't very successful but I presume again that it's building up some sort of database as it goes and that as time goes on it'll get better.'

'I think the database needs to be much bigger. I think readers should be able to add their own reviews to make it work. If that happened and people recognised it as less of a set piece it would correspond to the ethos of the internet and would be as valuable as the Amazon review sections.'

One further notable anxiety expressed by two respondents was the possible subjectivity of the process, and particularly the reviews provided:

'…the only problem I have with all those things is, it's based on a particular person's view, isn't it? And if you don't happen to agree with their view, it's not going to help you.'

'… there are the big issues around subjectivity…'

The conclusion of the respondents seemed to be that perhaps some changes needed to be made before Forager could fulfil its full potential for reader development.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has considered at length three wider issues of relevance to public libraries and reader development on the web. The relationship of libraries and bookshops on the web has been discussed, with particular reference to similarities and distinctive differences between the two. Some examples of a mutually beneficial
connection have been demonstrated, in terms of lessons learnt and acceptance of the attraction and usefulness of bookshop sites for readers on the web.

The effects of using the world wide web for a locally based service have also received some attention. It was found that whereas facing a world wide audience has not presented a problem for respondents, potential difficulties of supply and demand have not yet really been encountered.

Finally the level of integration and collaboration of individual libraries in national reading initiatives has been discussed. The picture created is of no overall co-ordination of web fiction resources, although some respondents did benefit from active participation in Branching Out. Reactions to the Book Forager web resource can be seen to reflect the wider arena of library reader development facilities on the web; it is a good idea in principle, but has yet to prove itself and may not have full taken account of the differences between the advantages of information technology and the nature of reading.
7. Conclusions & Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 Introduction to chapter

This final chapter will attempt to draw together the findings of the report, in order to draw some conclusions, and suggest some recommendations for further research. This will be done through a brief summary of the four results chapters and their conclusions, and then some further meditations on the findings as a whole. The recommendations for good practice which formed part of the objectives for the project will also be included. The limitations of the research overall will be discussed, and some ideas for further research in this area put forward.

7.1.2 Summary of results and findings

Existing and proposed reader development facilities on the web were examined in terms of styles. It was found that elements such as booklists, reader reviews and lists of reading related links were common among library provision in this area. UK library sites were not lacking in terms of innovation and interest in comparison to tools used by parallel concerns, although they were seen to be behind in terms of scope and technical proficiency. It was felt that some ground could be made up in these areas over time, and through greater collaboration and consultation, both within the UK and with international library sites.

The motivation for and nature of the reader development facilities was seen to be partly shaped by the historical development of public library websites. Reasons for providing these type of facilities via the web ranged from the current emphasis on reader development to local pressures. The facilities were seen as a way of helping users to interact more with the library, of getting unique content on the web and of increasing interactivity on the web. Readers' groups were found to be an important
catalyst in the process. The attempt to address audience sectors traditionally uncatered for by libraries, and the strong belief of respondents in the future of the web gave grounds for encouragement.

The logistics of implementation and maintenance were seen to be commendable in some respects, but there were still difficulties to be overcome before libraries could exploit the medium to the full in support of their readers. In terms of quality, both the sites themselves and the respondents displayed a good awareness of quality practices. It was felt that the quality of the sites could be further enhanced without too much effort in some areas. It was discovered to be too early to make any definitive conclusions about the use and reception of the facilities by the public.

Wider issues such as the relationship between libraries and bookshops on the web were seen to be of importance. Some evidence of a mutually beneficial relationship was demonstrated, as well as of the distinctive advantages of both. The effects of facing a world wide audience were not found to be problematic, but other considerations arising from the use of a global medium for a local service had not yet been fully experienced. The benefits of national initiatives were experienced by some respondents, although this did not extend to an overall effect of co-ordination. Finally, reactions to Book Forager were used to reflect the wider field of library reader development facilities on the web, with the conclusions that although it is a good idea in principle, it has yet to prove itself definitively and may not have fully taken account of the differences between the advantages of information technology and the nature of reading.

7.1.3 Conclusions

One conclusion that could legitimately be drawn from the above is that it is too early to draw conclusions in this field. The newness of the resources, and the resulting dearth of feedback from users mean that as yet there is little idea about the ultimate usefulness of these facilities, or even, about which elements are more successful than
others. In the light of this, it is hard to make absolute judgements about quality, or good practice, which must eventually be determined by the extent to which the resources are *useful* to those who use them (Cooke (1999)). It is also difficult to make recommendations about what libraries need to do differently, as the success of what they are doing now has not yet been evaluated. However, some tentative suggestions will be made in the context of the research findings.

One problem inherent to this research, and perhaps to the field of web development in general is that there are no experts. Those who understand the technical aspects do not necessarily have the subject knowledge and vice versa. However, the web is not like desk top publishing or word processing where it is a case of turning copy into the finished resource. Designing for the web should be just that; designing with the advantages and constraints of the medium in mind. It is my belief that the kind of dislocation evident in the practices of the respondents would tend to lead to the unresponsive sites noted by 'Sites for Sore Eyes' (2000). The moves away from the dislocated system described by the respondents, such as more consultative practices, or the adoption of cascading style sheets should therefore be encouraged.

Other problems yet to be resolved, such as the technical innovations or the question of updates would be greatly benefited by greater communication and collaboration among UK library sites. Research such as the present study, therefore, has a important role to play in informing the profession what other libraries are doing and what difficulties they have encountered. There perhaps needs to be more consideration of which web resources could be best provided centrally, to avoid undue duplication on the web, and which facilities are of value because of their local content.

I would suggest that for libraries to make the best of the web there is still a way to go. Training is one area for attention; it is to be hoped that the NoF funding will prove the answer that the respondents hope it will be. Libraries and their staff owe it to their users not just to provide physical access to the Internet, but to be able to guide
them through the online environment, and to provide an example of the best that can
be achieved through their own sites. The existing reader development facilities
investigated by this report show that libraries can provide something interesting and
distinctive, particularly bearing in mind the local emphasis of the sites studied. This
report has shown that nothing can be achieved without enthusiasm; corporate support
for future developments will be the issue that decides whether libraries are a success
on the web or not. To conclude with a comment from one of the respondents, on the
future of the web in reader development: 'I think it needs a good three years of
energetic running and promoting before it will be the force it can be.'

7.2 Recommendations for Good Practice

7.2.1 Provisos

As has been stated above, a definitive list of recommendations for good practice is
not achievable at this stage, because of the need to partially define this by the
reactions of users. Therefore, this brief list has been formulated from suggestions
made by the literature, and to an extent, from my own personal viewpoint. It would
seem somewhat futile to duplicate the many guidelines for good web or interface
design discovered throughout the course of this research, so as far as possible these
recommendations have been suggested with public libraries and reader development
facilities in mind.

7.2.2 Recommendations

Public library sites should:

- be inventive with reader development facilities, and ways of promoting them
- always have an eye on what can be provided that is unique, and appeals most to
  the local audience
- use reader development facilities as a way of making the site more interactive
provide clear links and navigation to and from the reading facilities and the main home page
- link to useful reading related facilities, rather than trying to duplicate them
- select reading related pages to link to on grounds of the originality and coverage of the source
- keep directories of links organised, annotated, current and at a usable size.
- maintain current awareness of other reading sites on the web
- assess update requirements of any new information being added to the site, to ensure it can be adequately maintained
- keep layouts simple and consistent from page to page
- where possible, form web management groups, to plan the future of the site and have a vision of where it is going
- work towards ways of minimising dislocation between technical and content aspects of web design
- build and improve communication channels and networks with other UK public libraries to find collective solutions to problems

7.3 Limitations of Research

The methodological limitations of this research have been discussed in section 2.12. However, before going on to suggest further areas of research, it seems apposite to mention briefly ways in which this research has been limited. Time is the most obvious constraint, meaning that the research is limited in scope and generalisability. The inexperience of the researcher has also proved restrictive; it has been strongly felt by the researcher that greater experience would have led her to ask fewer questions and explored them further, rather than trying to cover a lot of data in limited depth.

Perhaps most of all, the research was limited by the fact that the field is in the earliest stages of development. Although this is partly the justification for the investigation taking place at this time, it could be argued that more could have been gained from performing a similar project even a year later. This would mean that
there would be more potential interviewees, allowing for a greater range of responses, and also that there would have been time for some initial assessment of the success of the current web facilities.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

7.4.1 As mentioned above, a similar project could be usefully carried out in a year, or two years' time, to see how the field has developed, and to assess the facilities more definitively, in the light of feedback from users. This research could either use interviews, as in the present study, or could attempt to build a wider picture using a postal survey, and then performing a few shorter follow-up interviews.

7.4.2 A project could be designed to find out how users receive the reader development facilities. Feedback from the sites could be used, as well as interviews with users themselves, to build a picture of how the facilities are used, which elements are most successful and who in particular is using them.

7.4.3 It would be useful for further research to be carried out into the implementation and maintenance of general library web resources. The present research would have greatly benefited from some more information about the history and development of public library websites.
Bibliography


*Open Government W3C Standards*. [Accessed 18.8.00]


List of Useful Websites

UK Public Library reading (and related) sites

- The UK Public Libraries Page
  http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac940/ukpublib.html
  'The aim of these pages is to present the most complete and up to date picture of public library internet activity in the United Kingdom. On some of the pages you'll find our own commentary on the public library networking scene as it develops.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Wakefield Book Zone
  http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/community/libraries/bkzone.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Bradford Libraries - reader2reader
  http://www.reader2reader.com/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

- What's In Essex Libraries - Get Reading
  http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/infoserv/ecc_lib/whatsin/fs_in.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Calderdale Libraries Book Chain

- Suffolk Children's Book Zone
  http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/cgi-bin/childbz.cgi?type=view [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Derbyshire Libraries Book Chat
  http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/librar/chat1.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Buckinghamshire C.C. - Library and Information Service for Schools: Book Reviews
  http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/liss/reviews.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Lincolnshire Readers Groups

- Voyage into Books - West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton & Hove Libraries
  http://www.voyageintobooks.co.uk/index.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Stories From the Web - including Birmingham, Bristol & Leeds Libraries with UKOLN
  http://hosted.ukoln.ac.uk/stories/ [Accessed 29.8.00]
International library reading sites

- San Antonio Public Library (Texas, USA) - Focus: Fiction
  http://www.sat.lib.tx.us/Fiction/fictionindex.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Seattle Public Library (Washington, USA) - Recommended Reading
  http://www.spl.org/wacentbook/picks.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Skokie Public Library (Illinois, USA) - Internet Sites for Book Lovers
  http://www.skokie.lib.il.us/read/fiction.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Skokie Public Library (Illinois, USA) - Ask A Librarian for a Good Title
  http://www.skokie.lib.il.us/read/mailform.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Rochester Hills Public Library (Michigan, USA) - Readers' Services Page
  http://www.metronet.lib.mi.us/ROCH/readadv.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Christchurch City Libraries (New Zealand) - If You Like Index
  http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Library/Guides/IfYouLike/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

Commercial book sites (with reading related facilities)

- Heffers Online Bookshop
  http://www.heffers.co.uk/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Waterstones Online Bookshop
  http://waterstones.co.uk/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Amazon
  http://www.amazon.co.uk/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

- World Book Day site

- The Good Book Guide Online Store
  http://www.goodbookguide.com/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Guardian Books
  http://www.booksunlimited.co.uk [Accessed 29.8.00]
Other book and reading related sites

- The Reading Room
  http://www.reading-room.com
  'The idea behind The Reading Room is to create an online forum for readers groups, and we hope to encourage readers to develop their appreciation of literature beyond the covers of the book they’re reading.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- Lit-Net
  http://www.lit-net.org/
  'Welcome to Lit-Net, a virtual literature centre for the West Midlands region of England and beyond. It offers access to a range services for readers, writers, librarians and literature professionals. It mixes up original data and text with selected links to other sites.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- BookBrowser
  http://www.bookbrowser.com
  'BookBrowser is a site dedicated to reading. We offer fiction reading lists, book reviews, forthcoming titles, author information and much more. We made BookBrowser to help avid fiction readers and authors find each other.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

Organisation and government sites

- Branching Out
  http://www.branching-out.net
  'Branching Out is an initiative from the Society of Chief Librarians supported by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England and managed by Opening the Book.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- National Literacy Trust
  http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/
  '... an independent charity dedicated to building a literate nation.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- EARL - the Consortium for Public Library Networking
  http://www.earl.org.uk/
  '... works to promote the role of public libraries in providing library and information services across the network. It offers support to library authority policy makers, and demonstrates prototype networked services.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

- People's Network Online
  http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/
  'Welcome to People's Network Online: the official website of the People's Network project.' [Accessed 29.8.00]
• New Opportunities Fund
  http://www.nof.org.uk/
  'We are a Lottery Distributor created to award grants to health, education and environment projects throughout the UK. Many of our grant programmes focus particularly on those in society who are most disadvantaged.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

• UKOLN - UK Office for Library and Information Networking
  http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/
  'UKOLN is a national focus of expertise in digital information management. It provides policy, research and awareness services to the UK library, information and cultural heritage communities.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

• DCMS - Department for Culture, Media and Sport
  http://www.culture.gov.uk
  'The Department for Culture, Media and Sport aims to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities and through the strengthening of the creative industries.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

• re:source
  http://www.resource.gov.uk/
  'Welcome to re:source, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. We are a new strategic agency working with and for museums, archives and libraries throughout the UK.' [Accessed 29.8.00]

**Website quality sites**

• Design Standards for GlosNet

• SOSIG: Selection Criteria
  http://sosig.ac.uk/desire/ecrit.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

• Public Library Website Design Guidelines (USA)
  http://www.capecod.net/epl/guidelines.html [Accessed 29.8.00]

• Information Quality WWW Virtual Library
  http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/QltyPages/ [Accessed 29.8.00]

• Open government W3C Standards
  http://www.open.gov.uk/services/standards.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

• Guidelines for UK government websites
Other sites of interest

- Information about Single Regeneration Budget
  http://www.yorkshire-on.net/matters/progress/srb/srb_intro.htm [Accessed 29.8.00]

- trAce Online Writing Community
  http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/ [Accessed 29.8.00]
Appendix 1

**Dissertation Interview Schedule** (for library authorities with web fiction promotion resources)

My name is Emma Walkey and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield. I am carrying out some research into reader development resources on the web for my dissertation as part of my masters’ degree in librarianship. I would like to ask you some questions about reader development and fiction promotion resources being developed and maintained by public libraries, with a view to formulating some guidelines and recommendations for good practice. I would first like to focus on your particular situation and web resources, and then broaden the focus to address some more general considerations. I would like to request your permission to tape record this interview for the purpose of analysis. I feel it is important to stress at this point that all responses will be treated as confidential, and no individuals or authorities will be identified in the final report. I would also like to thank you for your time and cooperation in taking part in this interview.

*As a preliminary, could you tell me what your job involves, and what relation it has to [name of authority] libraries on the web?*

**I Current facilities, motivation and managerial issues**

1. Could you please describe the facilities that your authority currently provides on the web to support reader development?  
(I could use prompts in the form of options, e.g. book lists, links to other reader development sites, reviews etc. if necessary)

I would now like to ask you some questions about your motivation in providing these facilities, and some of the managerial issues behind them.

2. What motivated you to provide these facilities?

3. Which current web sites, if any, were influential in forming your ideas on which facilities to provide on your site?

4. Who are the facilities aimed at? (Did you have a particular audience in mind, and if so, who and why?)

5. From where do you envisage people accessing these facilities?

6. What role do you see the facilities playing in the wider context of reader development initiatives in your authority?

7. What relation do the facilities have to other core library services, e.g. reader services?
8. What do you think needs to be offered in the way of training for both staff and users, in order to exploit the web environment?

9. How do you finance your presence on the web? Is the source of finance for these additions the same?

II Implementation and monitoring of facilities

I would like to move on to ask you some more specific questions about the logistics of setting up and running these facilities.

10. Could you describe the timescale and sequence of implementing the facilities?

11. Who was involved in planning and setting them up? (library staff, outside consultants, users etc.)

12. Did you use any form of guidelines or recommendations for good practice when designing/implementing the pages?

13. Do you make regular updates to the pages? If so, why and how often?

14. Are there any new elements or facilities you are considering introducing to the current pages? If so, what, when, and why?

15. In what ways do you promote these facilities to a) current public library users and b) non-users?

16. How do you monitor what use is made of the page? Are there specific channels for feedback?

17. What feedback have you received so far? How does this fit in with your expectations of how the site would be used/received?

18. What factors do you think may have influenced usage and feedback so far?

19. In your opinion, and bearing in mind feedback received so far, which elements of the facilities do you feel are most effective/successful?

20. What problems have you encountered so far in the implementation and monitoring of the facilities?

21. How have you addressed them?
III Wider context

22. What, if anything, can be learned from the fiction promotion styles of bookshops on the web?

Finally I would like to ask you about some of the considerations arising from using the web for this type of service.

23. Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) noted that a local authority web page which made space available for reader recommendations attracted respondents from as far away as Southern California. Do you think that this is problematic? What are the issues involved in providing facilities that can be accessed by people from without your authority?

24. Given that the web environment is not suited to restrictions of time and space, do you believe that fiction resources provided by public libraries should relate solely to stock held by that authority? Why do you think that?

25. What relation do the reader development policies of your authority have to wider initiatives, such as Branching Out?

26. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time and your contributions.
Appendix 2

Dissertation Interview Schedule (for library authorities considering introducing web fiction promotion resources)

My name is Emma Walkey and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield. I am carrying out some research into reader development resources on the web for my dissertation as part of my masters’ degree in librarianship. I would like to ask you some questions about reader development and fiction promotion resources being developed and maintained by public libraries, with a view to formulating some guidelines and recommendations for good practice. I would first like to focus on your particular situation and web resources, and then broaden the focus to address some more general considerations. I would like to request your permission to tape record this interview for the purpose of analysis. I feel it is important to stress at this point that all responses will be treated as confidential, and no individuals or authorities will be identified in the final report. I would also like to thank you for your time and cooperation in taking part in this interview.

As a preliminary, could you tell me what your job involves, and what relation it has to [name of authority] libraries on the web?

I Proposed facilities, motivation and managerial issues

1. I understand from the Checking the Books postal survey of November last year that your authority is considering introducing some fiction related facilities to your web site. Could you please tell me a little about what facilities you currently provide on the web and what additions you are currently considering introducing to support reader development? (I could use prompts in the form of options, e.g. book lists, links to other reader development sites, reviews etc. if necessary)

I would now like to ask you some questions about your motivation in considering these facilities, and some of the managerial issues behind them.

2. What has made you consider introducing these facilities?

3. Which current web sites have been influential in forming your ideas on which facilities to provide on your site?

4. Who will the facilities be aimed at? (Do you have a particular audience in mind, and if so, who and why?)

5. Where do you envisage people accessing these facilities from?

6. What role do you see the facilities playing in the wider context of reader development initiatives in your authority?
7. What relation will the facilities have to other core library services, e.g. reader services?

8. What do you think needs to be offered in the way of training for both staff and users, in order to exploit the web environment?

9. How do you finance your presence on the web? Will the source of finance for these additions be the same?

II Implementation and monitoring of facilities

I would like to move on to ask you some more specific questions about the logistics of setting up and running these facilities.

10. When are you planning to introduce the facilities? Could you give me some idea of the proposed time scale and sequence of implementing the facilities?

11. Who has been and will be involved in planning and setting them up? (library staff, outside consultants, users etc.)

12. Are you planning to use any form of guidelines or recommendations for good practice when designing/implementing the pages?

13. Do you plan to make regular updates to the pages? If so, why and how often?

14. In what ways will you promote these facilities to a) current public library users and b) non-users?

15. How will you monitor what use is made of the page? Will specific channels for feedback be included?

16. What problems have you encountered so far in the implementation and monitoring of your web facilities in general?

17. How have you addressed these problems?

III Wider context

I would now like to show you some examples of current fiction facilities on the web.

18. Could you give your opinions on these examples of current web site facilities in this area?
19. Some of these examples have been taken from commercial booksellers’ sites. What, if anything, can be learned from the fiction promotion styles of bookshops on the web?

Finally I would like to ask you about some of the considerations arising from using the web for this type of service.

20. Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) noted that a local authority web page which made space available for reader recommendations attracted respondents from as far away as Southern California. Do you think that this is problematic? What are the issues involved in providing facilities that can be accessed by people from without your authority?

21. Given that the web environment is not suited to restrictions of time and space, do you believe that fiction resources provided by public libraries should relate solely to stock held by that authority? Why do you think that?

22. What relation do the reader development policies of your authority have to wider initiatives, such as Branching Out?

23. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time and your contributions.
Forager Results

The Broken Chariot
By Author Alan Sillitoe
Reader comment
An unusual look at life through the eyes of a memorable character. Superb.
Where next:
- Kep's Asphaleia Farm by
George Orwell
ISBN 00022321X
Published: 1998

Incomparable World
By Author S.J. Martin
Reader comment
Conveys an 18th century London that you would never read about in history books. The 'underworld' of the

Heffers Forum

Not Your Bag?

Perhaps you're a popular science buff. Possibly sci-fi is your scene, or maybe music books ring your bell. Whatever, there must be genres you wouldn't consider reading in a million years. What are they, and what makes you think they're not for you? Surely you don't know if you've never tried...

Email now marking your submissions 'Not My Bag', meanwhile, here's what others are saying...

"Personally I wouldn't go near a romantic, Mills & Boon-type book if you paid me. My maiden aunt used to devour them one a week, but then she was a very slow reader! On the few occasions that I sneak a look inside, I found them to be bland, nondescript pap. Sorry to anyone who likes them, but I don't!"
Nicola Greenwood, Norwich.

Outraged? Disagree vehemently!? Email us now not forgetting to mark your submissions 'Book Or A Film?'. Please observe rules of politeness and decency when mailing your views. We reserve the right to exercise editorial control over submissions.
If you like books or music in a certain style or by a particular author or composer, you may wish to explore some of these...

**Fiction**

- Action and Excitement novels
- Stories about animals
- Contemporary Black American Authors
- Anita Brookner
- Tom Clancy
- Jackie Collins
- Catherine Cookson
- Patricia Daniels Cornwell
- Detective and mystery fiction
  - American mystery and detective stories
  - American private eyes...
- Family sagas
- D.H. Lawrence
- John Grisham
- Glamour/Sleaze novels
- Harry Potter
- Historical Fiction
- Horror stories
- The Horse Whisperer
- a good Humorous Novel
- Contemporary Irish Authors
- Jewish novelists and
- Mills and Boon Romance
- New Zealand fiction
  - Maori writers and Maori life
  - Modern New Zealand historical fiction
  - Modern New Zealand novelists
  - New Zealand mystery and adventure writers
  - Modern New Zealand romantic fiction writers
  - New Zealand short stories
- Oprah's fiction
- Novels about spies and espion
Readers Group Collections

Many of these titles have been recommended by other Readers Groups.

- About a boy - Nick Hornby
- Jingo - Terry Pratchett
- The statement - Brian Moore
- Rachel's holiday - Marian Keyes
- Snow falling on cedars - David Guterson
- Behind the scenes at the museum - Kate Atkinson
- The shipping news - E. Annie Proulx
- Memoirs of a geisha - Arthur Golden
- The firm - John Grisham
- The diving bell and the butterfly - Jean - Dominique Bauby
- Reap the harvest - Margaret Dickinson
WATERSTONE’S book of the month

- The Grashopper
  
  OUR PRICE: £3.50

Grashopper appears as a kind of companion to Barbara Vine’s 1993 novel King Solomon’s Carpet. The earlier book was largely set in the subterranean world of the Tube; much of the important action in the new one takes place on the rooftops of North London. Outside, the central character of Grashopper lives (uncomfortably) with relatives and embarks on a relationship with the enigmatic and charismatic figure of Michael Silverman. Silverman, ‘Siver’ as he is known, leads a crew of strange young drop outs whose pleasure is to roam the rooftops of Maida Vale. On one of these expeditions above the city streets, they witness events which lead to a tragedy.

Add to Basket | Add to Library

Booklist titles

- The Chimney Sweeper’s Boy
  
  OUR PRICE: £4.19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Where from</th>
<th>The book</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>Double Act</td>
<td>Double Act is about two twins Ruby and Garnet who enter in for the chance of starring in a film together without asking their parents first. So they sneak off behind their parents back so they can go to the audition. But something happens later on in the book they enter in for a place in a really posh school but only one of them gets in. The other twin is livid and decides that she doesn’t want to look like the other twin. And so it goes on. A brilliant book which is worth reading. I really enjoyed it and I never get bored of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Burbidge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Methwold</td>
<td>Comfort Herself</td>
<td>Comfort herself is about a girl whose mother is run over by a bus and she goes to a children’s home and then goes to live with her Granny and Granddad in Kent. And then she goes out to Ghana to live with her Dad who sends her to live with her other Gran in Warwansari who then asks to go back to England.</td>
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