



Cabriology: Putting Digital Collections in the Local Flow at Bruges Public Library

Koen Calis

Librarian, Bruges Public Library, Kuipersstraat 3, 8000 Brugge, Belgium,
Koen.Calis@brugge.be

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Abstract

Cabrio, the Aquabrowser implementation at the Bruges Public Library, is more than a catalogue makeover. Rich, variable, flashy and truly inspirational, its open structure tackles several strategic issues related to a changing network environment. Digital collections are merged with the catalogue to become part of a hybrid library mediation model. Cabrio focuses on local dynamics and existing participation, which are key features of public libraries, in order to challenge and redefine library perceptions and services.

Key Words: Cabrio; public library; digital collections; Aquabrowser

Introduction

The Bruges Public Library is a lively public institution engaging with the local community as well as a special library harbouring rich heritage collections. This is reflected in a wide range of users. We have tried to take advantage of this very complexity. Digitisation and access to digital collections should be part of an overall model: a rich hybrid local hub connecting a broad audience

to inspiration and knowledge, encompassing old and new, inside and outside, local and global, specialist and general needs.

As a public library we are well aware that the environment we work in has changed and that digital libraries are as much about users and connections as they are about collections. The traditional library catalogue has increasing difficulty to fulfil the expectations of the average user of, say, Google, Last.fm or Facebook, who is used to get immediate and often unintentional access to a wealth of content and connections he can control. As a result of this, new forms of participation and (collective) authority arise, which run counter to the traditional communications model of the public library. These are issues libraries should not solve on their own. But it is interesting to analyse how an individual institution can reconcile a collective development with exactly that local focus and commitment that makes a public library so unique in its physical presence.

That is where Cabrio comes in. This Aquabrowser implementation at the Bruges Public Library is more than a catalogue makeover. The acronym, in Dutch reminiscent of a flashy convertible car, connects 'catalogue' with 'Bruges', 'inspiring', 'internet', 'discovery' and especially 'openness'. In its richness, its variety and truly inspirational nature, its open structure tackles several strategic issues related to a changing network environment. It focuses on local dynamics and existing participation, which are key features of public libraries, in order to challenge and redefine library perceptions and services.

Integration

Overcoming Internal Fragmentation

The starting point was the fragmentation of local discovery. In addition to public library materials the library owns rich heritage collections ranging from medieval manuscripts and old printed books to personal collections, among which are the important literary archives of the poet Guido Gezelle. Information on these collections was dispersed over three databases and data formats:

- the public library collections and special collections from 1830 on (MARC concise)

- the Guido Gezelle archives archival database (proprietary format)
- the full MARC database for the old printed and manuscript collections.

While public library users had to deal with an alphabetical sorting of results containing a lot of items from the older collections, the two heritage databases focused mainly on expert users.

Furthermore the library had started digitisation, e.g. of a frequently used genealogical manuscript, a rare vernacular manuscript of the *Liber Trotula*, a medieval treatise on women's medicine, and Colard Mansion's incunable *Ovide Moralisé*. These projects are part of a cooperative local digital heritage platform <http://www.historischebronnenbrugge.be>. Each resource is well documented and includes specific retrieval features (e.g., a name index for the funeral manuscript or an index on mythological themes or woodcuts for the Mansion incunable), which give them an added value and make them searchable through Google.

Reconciling preservation with participation was an important objective for the digitisation of the brittle Gezelle archives. The complete poetry and photo archive can be consulted digitally. In cooperation with Antwerp University, there an inventory of the letters was made and several correspondence editions are available online. An educational website, <http://www.gezelle.be>, attracts users from Belgium and the Netherlands and leads them into the database. Finally, full in-house digitisation of all medieval manuscripts has just begun.

All of these collections are now available through one integrated interface in Cabrio, opening them up to a variety of users. The digitised funeral poetry of Guido Gezelle for instance is an unexpected source of nineteenth-century neogothic printing in Bruges. In cooperation with the Bruges City Archives a pictorial database was added, which blends well with the original content. Integration of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspaper and almanach collections is on the way. A search on the medieval abbot Idesbald reveals eighteenth-century old printed devotional books as well as poems, pictures and documents relating to his late nineteenth-century sanctification, actually telling his story through the ages. As a result of this, focus has shifted from access to a topical interest. Which resources are missing? How can the library connect these heritage threads to the interests of people or to scientific research?

External Sources

From a public library perspective Aquabrowser allows the library to plug into economies of scale and collective library development without losing its strong local focus. The Bruges Public Library has a long-standing tradition in cooperative cataloguing, but a lack of integration often prevented the Library from reaping the full benefits. One of the key issues in Cabrio was vertical integration with the facilities organised by the Flemish Government through Bibnet, the Digital Library Agency, especially the national public library hub bibliotheek.be. The databases are now being matched and merged on a daily basis. Among the benefits are data enrichment (merging of specific fields, covers, articles and tracks), thesaurus integration, the sharing of digital collections (websites, newspaper articles, etc.) as well as cooperative rights and cost negotiations. This catalogue mash-up also makes it easy to adopt innovative services developed centrally, such as the digital lending of music, the implementation of relevance ranking or the last fm tips. The platform is in place and is at this moment being implemented as a Flemish model for library networking (Bibnet Library Portals project).

Secondly, the library catalogue is complemented by external information resources, mostly local or literary. At this moment about 15% of the content is immediately available in digital form, and accessible for home use. The aim is not to compete with search engines, but to offer a selection of valuable digital content along with the physical library collection with the local audience in mind. The contents of a literary blog 'De papieren man' and the important Digital Library of Dutch Literature (DBNL) are being crawled. If you search for the poet Christine D'haen you get the news of her recent death or biographical details and essays together with the library content. The record detail also has external links to LibraryThing, subscription databases etc. The addition of In&Uit Brugge, local events and courses, as well as community information crawled from the web integrates the live environment within the library walls. In this way, a child looking for 'planets' is linked to the Bruges observatory. The query 'dementia' not only results in books and articles, but also links to local organisations, lectures and discussion groups. A search on 'Joss Stone' reveals her presence at the 2009 Bruges Cactus festival.

Local 'anchoring' of the library is crucial, because the combination of vertical (sectoral, general) and horizontal (local) integration makes the library catalogue a unique focal point, combined with an accessible cultural and knowl-

edge agent. Interestingly, potential partners who find themselves mirrored now within the library walls, have taken an interest in the library as a channel for reaching a broad audience of 40,000 direct users. It is a win-win situation, because the library is able to transcend the traditional media and delivery services that are so closely connected to its identity. For many people, the library is an a priori choice for or against a medium or the lending function. Perception rather than knowledge orients this decision. By enriching the library and making it hybrid we hope to shift the focus from content to guidance and user needs. The choice of a specific medium should be dealt with, subsequently, through refinements in the system. This concept of the library as a place of discovery was effectively translated into a promotion campaign. It showed people who ended up in unexpected life-enriching situations as a result of their catalogue search.

Creating Value: What's in it for Me?

The library's second main ambition was to develop a mediation model for this hybrid content, guiding users not to a blob of information, but only to what is valuable to them. The fine maze of physical local presence, the trusting relationship with users, the expertise of the staff, the knowledge of the local field and the library tradition of structure and quality are assets that distinguish the library from other actors in the new context.

Segmentation

First of all, we felt it was important to reduce the overload that is the result of the richer library. That is why Cabrio is segmented in subsets, indicated by tabs. As the ubiquitous records of the stack collection hindered the use of the open shelf collection, we decided to put the closed stack collection together with the heritage collections in the last 'heritage' tab. The open shelf collections are divided into an overall search and four subsets: children's library, fiction, non-fiction and music&film. These tabs also allow us to build focused search and discovery environments. Each domain has its own internal and external data, its own refinements and its own showcase with cover animation, menu and blog posts. This means that someone who is looking for novels in 'fiction' will not only find an inspirational reader's advisory environment, but he will also get more focused results not hampered by irrelevant articles, tracks or other content that happened to come within the scope of the search term.

Smart Searching and Sorting

The search is enriched with pseudonyms and synonyms. Related thesaurus terms and associations based on the data are offered in a word cloud. Of particular importance is the Flemish Bibnet thesaurus which we integrate locally and which operates across the various resources. This means that a query such as 'cookery' also will result in web crawled pages in which the term 'cuisine' is mentioned. In order to increase the catch, stemming is applied to some fields which takes account of word derivations and compositions. Much attention was paid to ranking the results, with the most relevant or most recent items listed first. Relevance ranking takes into account the number of items in possession and the distribution, so that popular works are higher in the ranking. Furthermore, specific field indexes such as subject or media citations are sorted by a combination of year of publication and acquisition date. The top results are always very fresh and keep changing as the collection develops.

Discovery through Rich Browsing

On the other hand, we want to give users a reason to use the system which goes beyond delivery, by connecting them to content they had no prior knowledge of or interest in, or for which they could not formulate the need.

To attract an audience beyond the real 'information seekers' we felt it was important to appeal to users not only in a literate way. The inclusion of covers in the results list and the detail page is not only aesthetical, but has an advisory role in the selection process. Cabrio also includes public domain trailers for novels and movies or podcasts of authors. We can easily conceive this for new fiction or information books, but it also applies to heritage collections. Imagine 25 editions of the same poetry book by Gezelle. Looking at the colour and the typography of the cover is an important means to distinguish between them.

As statistics show, one third of the queries are not search box initiated. This means that people follow the leads and choices that the system presents them. People use the system in a similar way to search engines. 90% of the searches stay on the first result page, either clicking through to the next first page or refining them. It allows users to develop previously vague needs on the go, very similar to the way they use the physical library. In order to do so, the system has been designed specifically to exploit the rich metadata struc-

ture, giving users rich browsing possibilities, including an attractive clickable map, or giving them smart refining options. Specialised advisory data such as media references, ranging from women's magazines to canonical literary guides are added. These reflect the diversity in life styles and media preferences. The same field is used to connect objects to local activities. With just a few mouse clicks it is possible to find Scandinavian thrillers in translation that were recently discussed in the media or historical novels shortlisted for the Booker Prize owned by the library. Heritage collections can be navigated through or the searches refined by provenance, publisher, exhibition, acquisitions etc. The exhibition field is an interesting one because it not only reflects the educational activities of the library, but also highlights the most precious collections or the major themes. For instance, one can easily see which medieval manuscripts were featured in the prestigious 2002 'Closed World Open Books' exhibition. 'The epitaph on paper' exhibition provides a thematic pathway to manuscripts containing funeral inscriptions collected mostly in the French period. Contrary to large-scale digital libraries that concentrate on a general common core of metadata, we feel it is important for us as a local institution to provide specialized data that describe the different contexts heritage objects are part of and open up a fabric of choices for rich browsing.

Showcase with Integrated Blog

The data can be accessed both from the individual record and from canned searches in a front end menu. This menu is part of the showcase of each segment, together with a cover flow animation of acquisitions and an integrated blog. The blog entries aim to activate content, connecting it to what happens in the library, the city or the broader environment. It is a very useful tool to bring long-tail content to the user's attention. Alternatively library activities such as an important acquisition or the annual children's literature festival finally get a face. It is very satisfying to see the lively physical library mirrored in the digital one. Because the blog is a prominent feature of the virtual access to the library, it is not a random exercise. On screen and on an annual basis, we seek representativity. We aim to post at least one entry for every tab per week, which means a full refresh of the screen within a loan period of four weeks. To plan this, we lay the library's internal calendar next to the agendas of the various socio-cultural partners. In return, the activities in Cabrio or new partner synergies give a stimulus to the physical library, creating new ambitions and work processes.

Connecting with the Community

The blog functions independently, but has Cabrio as its primary channel. It is a good example of how innovative services are embedded within the traditional environment and user activities. Users who wish to respond, are referred to the original blog. About 15% of blog entries receive one or more responses. Whether that actually happens is very much dependent on the type of message. Closed announcements often get no comment. A blog entry about a poster contest peaked at over 100 responses. Editorially we try to respond to this by writing posts that are more inviting to conversation, such as the list of ten novels every tenth day of the month to which users can add their own. Each response is again linked to the catalogue. Experience shows that the blog is beginning to lead its own life. Users subscribe to it. Posts are quoted or commented on, leaving traces outside the library and making them a privileged object of search engines. Within the organisation itself blogging soon leads to the use of related services like flickr, slideshare, youtube etc. which in turn activate content extra muros. Library use naturally overflows into outside networks. The same happens with the deep LibraryThing link or the Add-This button. In December 2009 Aquabrowser MyDiscoveries was added, allowing users to select, share and interact across library boundaries. Mobilising content has become a major issue.

Cabrio has caused a significant rise in home use of the library's own channel. With an average of about 8,000 unique external visitors per month we estimate that about 40% of the physical library users use Cabrio at home. They also use it more frequently than the previous web-based catalogue. Other successful examples are the above-mentioned educational websites www.historischebronnenbrugge.be and <http://www.gezelle.be>. Both are frequently being linked to by Wikipedia and other sites and they attract an audience that goes beyond expert use. Moreover, a search tree has allowed search engines to index the Gezelle archives inventory at item level. And yet, there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to proactively reaching out to non-library user environments to enable users to discover and reuse library content. Widgets exist and RSS is being studied. Obviously, the initiative lies with the user and the library has to show itself rich enough to be worthy of the attention. In this respect, the hybrid content as well as the rich structure and advisory data are an important basis on which to build future services. As far as local institutional partners are concerned, rather than focusing on a commercial business model, we are trying to develop reciprocal arrangements,

both in content and in the channeling of attention. At the moment outside-in linking happens mostly on a macro-level to Cabrio as a whole, but we are trying to develop more in-depth connections. What matters is to find a place on the radar of the users at the time when they have a certain need. Again the vision is to focus on cooperation with partner institutions at a local level, alongside with negotiating flows collectively as a library network.

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