

IFLA Public Libraries Satellite Conference: Paper

Title: "Let's tear down the wall between physical and digital: ZLB Topic Room"

Theme: Public Library Futures in a global digital world?

Key area: The future of the public library with a particular focus on breaking down barriers between physical and digital

Submitted by:

Sarah Dudek, Head of the humanities and social science division, dudek@zlb.de

Biographical statement: Sarah Dudek studied literature and philosophy in Berlin, Amsterdam, and Seattle. She worked for several publishing houses. Later, she studied Library and Information Science in Berlin and started to work at the Central and Regional Library Berlin. Her focus of interest are collection development, e-books, project management, collection marketing.

Vera Binz, Head of the sciences and economy division, binz@zlb.de

Biographical statement: Vera Binz graduated in Media Studies from Technical University of Ilmenau and in Library and Information Science from Humboldt University Berlin. She worked in standardization and interoperability at the German National Library and German Press Agency. Her main field of interest is the redefinition of libraries' functions in the digital world.

Postal address:

Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (ZLB)
Stiftung des öffentlichen Rechts
Postfach 61 01 79
D - 10922 Berlin

Abstract

The Topic Room of the Central and Regional Library of Berlin (ZLB) presents interdisciplinary material from the library's collection concerned with a certain topical or cultural issue on a monthly basis. In order to cover current topics online information is integrated into the presentation of physical media via the ZLB Topic Room Application on iPads and a Twitter wall. The ZLB Topic Room is a project in which the ZLB cooperates with many different partners.

Introduction

Curating varied information sources has always been an essential function of public libraries. This has never been more important than in today's rapidly changing information and publishing landscape. A relatively new challenge for libraries is the integrated presentation of physical material and digital information resources.

How can libraries succeed in the curation of online resources? In which ways can digital information integrate with physical media within library space? These are questions we started to ask ourselves these questions when we began to brainstorm for a new project: the Topic Room. It is a project of the Central and Regional Library of Berlin (Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin, ZLB), Germany's largest public library and one of the most frequently visited cultural and educational institutions in Berlin.

The aim of the Topic Room Project is to offer our patrons a monthly alternating interdisciplinary presentation of information resources concerned with a certain topical or cultural issue. Patrons are encouraged to engage with a complex topic, to gather introductory, but also background information. We want to empower our patrons through the access to different resources in order to form their own opinions, but the Topic Room is also a place for inspiration and discovery.

Classical Curating in Libraries

It seemed obvious to gather publications from various subjects: books, CDs, DVD/Blu-rays, magazines, newspapers, even licensed e-books and open-access-publications. The subject librarians suggest publications based on the curator's Topic Room concept. Each Topic Room has a curator from the library's Collection Development Department who is familiar with the subjects which are central to the specific topic. To search for media and publications which are traditional documents is a standard task for librarians who use library catalogues, specialized search engines, databases, and book trade catalogues. We usually gather up to 400-500 items per Topic Room which we present in categories that the curator chooses. Most of the items can be checked out. The bibliographic data of the presented titles are collected in a bibliography which patrons can take away in printed form or download from the ZLB-website.

[BOX] PAST TOPICS

- US Presidential Election (Nov 2012)
- Israel after the Election (Feb 2013)
- Leipzig Book Fair (Mar 2013)
- Poor & rich (Apr 2013)
- The Book Burnings of 1933 (May 2013)
- Eurozone, Euro Crisis (Jun 2013)
- Original or Copy? (Jul 2013)
- The Diversity of Islam (Aug 2013)
- German federal Election (Sep 2013)
- Fairytales (Oct 2013)
- Right-wing Extremism (Nov 2013)

Digital Curating

However, we quickly realized a simple fact: it is impossible to cover current topics without live-access to online digital information resources. Until a current topic crystallizes and a traditional publication appears it takes time. Especially with regard to topics which need to be covered with live information such as elections online information is indispensable. In addition to books, DVDs, CDs, etc. from a library's standing collection, online content must be selected, aggregated and presented adequately and in a comprehensive manner.

Therefore we began to collaborate with a Berlin app-development start-up called Konsole Labs. The ZLB Topic Room iPad Application was born in January 2013. It aggregates tweets and blogs, including links relevant to the given topic and a single website that we want to feature—a subject dossier, for example, from our cooperation partner, the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für

politische Bildung, BpB). Patrons can share digital information, links and the bibliography from the app via email.

((picture 1 with the following caption: Startscreen of the ZLB Topic Room App))

((picture 2 with the following caption: The ZLB Topic Room App aggregates Twitter, blogs, features a website and selected URLs))

During the last year, we have optimized the app and other components through various methods such as building up a content management system in the backend and refining the RSS and tweets channeling via full text or hashtag filter.

This was an entirely new task for us, but in a way very familiar as it included selecting and contextualizing information. However, digital curating is in many ways different from classical curating. In spite of searching for publications one chooses sources of information such as URLs, feeds, or twitter accounts. The source is chosen before the actual information is published. That means that the source has to be evaluated as relevant and trustworthy. What is published and made accessible in real time is beyond our control. Of course we can delete information which seems irrelevant or problematic, but we will never control the content in the way we do with regard to traditional publications.

Digital literacy

The ZLB Topic Room Application offers patrons a great chance to get to know and to become familiar with modern information technology such as iPads. It is also an opportunity to include various services such as twitter that many patrons are not yet acquainted with. An important insight that we have gained is the following: It is not enough to simply provide access to online resources and hardware. Rather, we must train our patrons in digital skills. From summer 2014 onward, we will offer new services within the Topic Room, e.g. guided tours with a focus on explaining digital components. Without the initial steps that we had taken in the Topic Room project, experimenting with iPads and mobile applications, we would not be able to offer any of the digital literacy services that we plan to offer, e.g. e-book consultation hours and a workshop series about data security on mobile devices. There is still a long way to go, but the project has been a critical first step.

Making digital information visible in physical library space

Since we wanted to make digital information visible in the library's Topic Room, we rented a large screen and a Mac mini. The app-developers programmed two features for the screen: a Twitter wall and a slideshow. The Topic Room curator can decide how to use the screen. For the most part, tweets and slides alternate. We have templates for the slides and can upload them via CMS.

((picture 3 with the following caption: The Twitter wall, publications to checkout, and old books from the historical collections in a display cabinet))

Apart from that, we provide an area with smaller screens and headsets in the Topic Room where people can watch short films such as documentaries which offer another way of accessing the topic.

((picture 4 with the following caption: Stations for film material similar to the ones in museums))

Edutainment

In addition to the ZLB Topic Room App the app-developers programmed a quiz app which we offer in some of the Topic Rooms. We can add questions, answers, and results via the Topic Room App's CMS. Usually we use existing material such as quizzes the Federal Agency for Civic Education offers on its website. The quiz adds a *gamification* element to the Topic Room which the patrons seem to like very much.

In some of the Topic Rooms we offer even more apps on some of the iPads such as apps from the Federal Agency for Civic Education which might blend in just perfectly with some of the Topic Rooms.

Cooperations and series of events

The project helped us reflect and redefine our role in Berlin's cultural and political landscape. We have found new friends and partners like the Ethnological Museum of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation or the Maxim Gorki Theatre, and we have formed a particularly strong partnership with the Federal Agency for Civic Education. Every month, they provide adequate publications for the Topic Room, support us in conceptual issues, recommend digital information resources and organize accompanying discussion events called "Time for topics."

Usage and sustainability

A view on the checkouts shows which topics our patrons liked most:

Leipzig Book Fair 2013
Poor & rich
The Diversity of Islam
Fairytales

We've learned that even topics we did not expect to be very popular—such as fairytales—arouse great interest among patrons. We'll keep this in mind for our future choice of topics.

At the end of 2013, Konsole Labs included a usage statistics in the CMS of the Topic Room App showing the amount of interest our patrons show in the app. We will start in 2014 with a detailed usage analysis of the Topic Room App.

In 2014 we started to offer our Topic Room App to other German metropolitan libraries. Some of them already showed interest and are planing to start implementing the Topic Room in their library. All they need for the Topic Room App is hardware and a small amount of money to have their hardware registered by the app-development company. They can offer their patrons our current app in the library, with or without their own Topic Room. We are also going to share the bibliography with other interested libraries in formats they can reuse, creating their own bibliography and adding their own call numbers.

We try to get funding to offer the app via App Store for free to the public in the future. Of course we would prefer to have an app for android as well.

The site of the ZLB which contains the Topic Room was refurbished so that the Topic Room paused from December 2013 until July 2014. Since July the Topic Room has a new exposed space in the library. It is now situated in an even more central area of the library, in the so-called "salon" including a café, a lounge with magazines and newspapers, and the art library (pictures and sculptures patrons can checkout).

[BOX] TOPIC PREVIEW

- 1914-1918: World War I
- Frankfurt Book Fair 2014
- 25 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall
- Society under Surveillance?
- Berlin International Film Festival
- Housing in Berlin

Insights and practical recommendations

1. It is impossible to cover current topics without online resources. There are probably many ways to tear down the wall between physical and digital. We chose an app and a screen to integrate various online information into the presentation of physical media, but we will continue to experiment with different ways of presentation as we all have to do in order to be perceived by the public as information guides within physical library space, but in the (partly) digital age .

2. Digital curating is different from curating physical media and traditional publications (digital or physical). In spite of choosing content we choose sources. Therefore we must learn to give up the maximum content control we had with regard to traditional publications.
3. Digital literacy is not omnipresent. There are many patrons who are not yet acquainted with information technology such as iPads. Therefore it is not enough to simply provide access to online resources and hardware. Rather, we have to stress what patrons gain in using our devices and our digital content and we have to train the digital skills of a large part of our patrons.

In 2014 the Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects of the American Library Association was awarded to the ZLB for its Topic Room iPad App.

The Topic Room has its own archive on our website that stores the bibliographies and links:
<http://www.zlb.de/kultur-bildung/themenraum/archiv>