

Bookspotting – Research report

Mobilising Scottish Books

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Executive Summary

Background

Bookspotting is an app created by Publishing Scotland to promote and present Scottish books to new and existing audiences. Funded by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland in 2013, it brought together Publishing Scotland and its partners Saraband Books, Spot Specific and Bibliographic Data Services (BDS). The partners had a range of existing partnerships and relationships. The aim of the Bookspotting app project was to explore the ‘mobilisation’ of Scottish books, and ways to offer readers pathways and signposts to guide them into different genres, authors, locations and books in a digital age.

The development of Bookspotting took place within the context of the significant change that book publishing is undergoing as a consequence of the advent of digital technologies. Digital technologies afford radical opportunities and significant challenges to publishers, and are disrupting traditional patterns of book production and consumption. For Publishing Scotland, the particular context of the Scottish publishing industry, which has an annual total turnover of c£343m, was also important to the development of the app. The project was awarded £53,960 from the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland.

The project

The aims of the project were to:

- mobilise Scottish literature for new and existing audiences.
- produce smartphone apps, fully supported by a custom-developed, hosted platform built around an enhanced dataset of Scottish-interest books, thereby offering users new, compelling ways to access the data.
- enable users to explore characters, moods, genres and specific titles, allowing a more engaging browsing experience than existing data-driven book sites.
- allow access, via the geolocation of titles, characters, scenes, and author sites, through maps, GPS triggers and specially constructed journeys.
- offer personalised reading recommendations based on surprising and unusual criteria that will extend readers’ awareness of books.

The project was led by three key individuals, Marion Sinclair from Publishing Scotland, Sara Hunt from Saraband, and Alistair McCallum from Spot Specific. They were supported in their work by additional staff from the Spot Specific office, particularly Ben Thorp, and an Assistant Editor, Mariclaire White.

The project was funded from April 2013, with the app being released into the Apple app store in March 2014.

Results

Bookspotting was released in the Apple and Android stores late in March 2014, and as such, many of the projected results of the project are not yet available for analysis, although it is anticipated that later months will enable this analysis in terms of how it has enabled the discoverability of Scottish books. The first week after release saw 2647 downloads in total (1864 iOS; 783 Android). Impacts on the partners are already clear, both positive and negative: all partners estimate having spent substantially more time than anticipated and/or budgeted for. However, all partners discussed their working relationships in very positive terms, and particularly appreciated the opportunity to undertake R&D with a creative and interesting range of partners.

Insights

Insights derived from the development of Bookspotting relate in particular to themes of publishing in the digital age; R&D, agile development and project management; and data. The key lessons learned from the project were:

- Innovation and R&D demands risk-taking and an adaptable approach. It is best undertaken with established partnerships and trust.
- Traditional industries need to be open to new modes of operation in order to adapt effectively to digital environments.
- Adapting large datasets for different purposes can be extremely time-consuming. It is important to be vigilant from the very outset about the choice of data source and how up-to-date and compliant it is with regards to industry standards.

Future

The immediate future for the Bookspotting team focuses on the release and promotion of the app, and subsequent feedback processes in 2014. These feedback processes will assess, as far as is possible with the analytics available via Bookspotting, to look at the extent to which the app has attracted an audience, both to itself and to Scottish books. In the medium term, the developments around Bookspotting are enabling Publishing Scotland to think through the development of the existing BooksfromScotland.com website. Once the app is launched, it is possible that it can be used as an exemplar for other regional or national literatures to promote themselves digitally. All three partners anticipate working together again.

1. Background

Bookspotting is an app created by Publishing Scotland with the intention of promoting and presenting Scottish books to new and existing audiences. Funded by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland in 2013, it brought together Publishing Scotland and its partners Saraband Books, Spot Specific and Bibliographic Data Services (BDS). The aim of the Bookspotting app project was to explore the 'mobilisation' of Scottish books, and ways to offer readers pathways and signposts to guide them into different genres, authors, locations and books in a digital age. It also had the intent of 'present[ing] Scottish material afresh and mak[ing] it fun and whimsical'.¹

Book publishing is undergoing significant change as a consequence of the advent of digital technologies. The development of online bookselling in the late 1990s has transformed the environment for bookselling and distribution. Subsequent adoption of both ebook technologies and ereading devices have led to a further shift in the industry, with the number of ebooks sold rising rapidly since 2011.² Social media have additionally altered the environment within which books are promoted and presented, allowing new forms of interaction between authors, publishers, readers and others in the book supply chain.

Digital technologies, therefore, are affording radical opportunities and significant challenges to publishers, and are disrupting traditional patterns of book production and consumption. High street bookshops have been placed under particular pressure, with the closure of many independent bookshops, and, in 2009, the high street chain Borders. In publishing, traditional marketing methods have operated primarily via the bookshop as an intermediary, but digital technologies mean that 21st century publishing cannot rely on established processes. Business-to-business (B2B) strategies are increasingly being replaced by direct-to-consumer (D2C) approaches. Technology companies and platforms – notably Amazon, Google and Apple – have entered into the publishing ecosystem. These developments mean that traditional – or 'legacy' publishers as they are sometimes termed – need to find ways to operate successfully within the rapidly altering environments in which they find themselves.³

Scottish publishing operates as a sub-section of the UK publishing industry, but has a particular identity and nature of its own. The *Books in Scotland* report (2012) confirms the Scottish publishing industry to be populated by over 110 active publishers, producing a total turnover of c£343 million annually. Around 3000 new titles are published every year, and the Scottish industry employs approximately 1500 people, plus numerous freelancers. Around 50% of Scottish publishers derive half their sales from the Scottish market, while 79% sell overseas (i.e. outside of the UK). In 2012, 36% of publishers were involved in digital marketing in some form (including via social media). It is anticipated that this figure will be higher in 2014, but no statistics are yet available.⁴

Although there are branch offices of major international publishing groups in Scotland (e.g. HarperCollins and Hodder Headline), Scottish publishing companies are on the whole independently-owned SMEs. However, they still publish across a range of difference market sectors, from academic (e.g. Edinburgh University Press), to fiction (e.g. Canongate, Freight, Sandstone), to children's (e.g. Barrington Stoke, Floris), to specialist non-fiction (Witherby Publishing Group). There is a small but

¹ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, August 2013.

² Publishers Association, *PA Statistics Yearbook 2012*, London: The Publishers Association, 2013.

³ See Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, 'The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit', *Book 2.0* 2013, 3:1, 3-23; Michael Bhaskar, *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (London: Anthem Press, 2013); Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴ *Books in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Centre for the Book, 2012).

active Scots and Gaelic publishing scene. Although Scottish readers are not strongly differentiated from their counterparts in the rest of the UK, there are some distinctions – the Scottish taste is very strongly for crime, as the 2012/2013 Public Lending Right figures (for the most borrowed books in Scottish libraries) revealed, with all of the top twenty books falling within the genre. These lending preferences undoubtedly reflect the strength of Scottish crime writing (e.g. Ian Rankin, Val McDermid, Stuart MacBride, Denise Mina), although non-Scottish writers also featured in the PLR figures.⁵

One perennial challenge to the Scottish publishing industry is that its bestselling authors tend not to be published by Scottish publishers, but by London-based conglomerates – a tendency equivalent to, as one Scottish publisher has described it, the best footballers being lured south of the border to play in the English leagues.⁶ Scotland has a long and illustrious publishing as well as literary history, with some of the most important historical publishing groups having their foundations in Scotland (e.g. Collins), but the 21st century has seen the closure of some publishing companies, or their regional offices (e.g. Chambers, Mainstream).

Despite its challenges, the current Scottish publishing scene is entrepreneurial in nature, and keen to demonstrate its importance as both a commercial and cultural force, as evidenced by the inaugural Saltire Publisher of the Year Award in 2013 (with a shortlist of BackPage Press, Barrington Stoke, Edinburgh University Press, Freight Books, Floris Books and the winner, Saraband Books).⁷ The forthcoming Independence Referendum in Scotland is an issue of keen interest to Scottish publishing, with publishers advocating for both the Yes and No campaigns: the potential opportunities for stronger brand presence in global markets and support for Scottish businesses offered are offset by anxieties about currency, membership of the EU, VAT levels (currently zero-rated on print books, although ebooks attract the full 20% rate), and a perceived sense of separation from global English-language markets.⁸

Bookspotting was conceptualised within these contexts, and as a way for Scottish books, publishers and authors to reach out to potential readers in a digital environment. Bookspotting is an app designed for both the Apple and Android systems, and offers to users a number of ways into book discovery, such as by location (either GPS or postcode); by date; by author; through character; and by a range of themed tours, for example. The intent of Bookspotting is to aid discovery of Scottish books in ways that are different to standard digital book discovery methods (such as the automated algorithms used by Amazon). The focus was to offer a more serendipitous and entertaining approach than that of other online environments, and also to provide one which focused on Scottish books.

The project came about via a number of existing relationships and partnerships. Publishing Scotland, the lead organisation, is a network, trade and development body for the book publishing industry in Scotland. It has a physical base in Edinburgh, with six staff (three full- and three part-time), led by its CEO, Marion Sinclair. It celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2014, having been established in 1974 by twelve publishers. It now has over 60 publisher members (not all Scottish publishers are members), and over 40 network (associate) members. The majority of Publishing Scotland's funding (c65%) derives from Creative Scotland, with other revenue from member subscriptions, training courses, book-fair representation and its Glasgow-based distribution centre, BookSource. Among its services is the existing BooksfromScotland.com website, which showcases Scottish books and publishers to readers using datafeeds from BDS.⁹

The three technology partners of the Bookspotting app project were Saraband Books, Spot Specific and BDS. Saraband is an independent Glasgow-based publisher, with publishing lists in the areas of

⁵ British Library/PLR, '100 Most Borrowed Books 2012/2013 Scotland', <https://www.plr.uk.com/mediaCentre/mostBorrowedTitles/top100Titles/2012-2013/scotland.pdf>, accessed 2 March 2014.

⁶ As discussed by one publisher in Miha Kovac and Claire Squires, 'Publishing in Wee Lands', *Logos* (forthcoming).

⁷ Saltire Society (2013), 'Saraband Announced as Saltire Society Publisher of the Year', <http://www.saltiresociety.org.uk/news/2013/08/12/scottish-publisher-of-the-year-announced>, accessed 2 March 2014.

⁸ Sarah Boyd (2014), 'Scottish Publishing and Independence', *Logos* (in press).

⁹ Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

illustrated non-fiction and fiction. Saraband, led by its founder Sara Hunt, is particularly known for imaginative digital publishing – including a Burns Night app – which led to the company being recognised as the inaugural Saltire Society Publisher of the Year in August 2013.¹⁰

Spot Specific is a software development company based in Glasgow. It focuses on the development of mobile and smartphone applications, as well as back-end systems. Spot Specific works for a range of clients, including international companies such as Three Mobile and Hutchinson 3G, as well as tech and cultural clients.¹¹

Bibliographic Data Services (BDS), based in Dumfries, supplies publishing industry data and other services to libraries. BDS catalogues and tags Scottish-interest books, which feeds into Publishing Scotland's BooksfromScotland.com website. BDS acted as a 'sleeping' tech partner, with Saraband and Spot Specific more actively engaged in the project development process.¹²

Bookspotting built on existing and close relationships between the partners. Saraband is a Publishing Scotland member publisher. Sara Hunt is a Board member of Publishing Scotland. Spot Specific is the company Saraband has worked with closely in the development of their existing apps, and thus had already worked together on various digital publishing initiatives.

The application to the Digital R&D Fund came about via these existing relationships. Sara Hunt and Alistair McCallum (of Spot Specific) had been aware of the Fund, and had considered putting in an application for the first call. However, they decided to delay the application, particularly in order to see the outcomes of the first call. Sara approached Marion Sinclair with the idea of applying to the Fund, with an awareness of the work Publishing Scotland had been undertaking with Visit Scotland, linking books to tourism, and working to supply members' books to Visitor Information Centres.¹³ The successful application awarded £53,960 to the project.¹⁴

2. The project

The aims of the project, as articulated in the Publishing Scotland application, were wide-ranging. The aims can be paraphrased as to:

- mobilise Scottish literature for new and existing audiences.
- produce smartphone apps, fully supported by a custom-developed, hosted platform built around an enhanced dataset of Scottish-interest books, thereby offering users new, compelling ways to access the data.
- enable users to explore characters, moods, genres and specific titles, allowing a more engaging browsing experience than existing data-driven book sites.
- allow access, via the geolocation of titles, characters, scenes, and author sites, through maps, GPS triggers and specially constructed journeys.
- offer personalised reading recommendations based on surprising and unusual criteria that will extend readers' awareness of books.¹⁵

Further aims of the project were to: improve audience reach, breadth and depth; provide wider access through familiar technologies; make member companies' books more discoverable; provide new revenue streams for member companies; celebrate Scotland's unique literary heritage; update the image of Scotland's vibrant publishing industry; support cultural tourism around all regions of

¹⁰ Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

¹¹ Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

¹² Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

¹³ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, August 2013.

¹⁴ <http://www.nesta.org.uk/news/national-theatre-scotland-open-eyes-and-ears-new-audiences-after-innovation-award>.

¹⁵ Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

Scotland; and offer new contexts for and new routes into Scottish literature.¹⁶ These aims and propositions sit alongside the broader contexts for publishing mentioned in the previous section. Overall the research question asked by Bookspotting is how – in a rapidly changing publishing environment – technology can promote and present Scottish books to existing and potential audiences, using digital, D2C strategies.

The project was led by three key individuals, Marion Sinclair from Publishing Scotland, Sara Hunt from Saraband, and Alistair McCallum from Spot Specific. They were supported in their work by additional staff from the Spot Specific office, particularly Ben Thorp, and by the temporary appointment of an Assistant Editor, Mariclaire White (a recent graduate of the MLitt in Publishing Studies at the University of Stirling), to work for the duration of the project. The team worked collaboratively and iteratively, Sara taking the main project management role, and acting as line manager for Mariclaire, who worked from the Saraband office in Glasgow.

Following notification of funding in March 2013, the project partners worked closely together to develop Bookspotting. Development happened, via a series of meetings between the partners, and in particular regular bilateral contact between Sara Hunt (as project manager) and Alistair McCallum and Marion Sinclair respectively, both through formal project meetings and more informal discussions by phone, email and face-to-face. As all three partners were working together on a range of other initiatives at the same time as Bookspotting, regular contact, often at the same time as other discussions, was easily facilitated. The partners set up a project Dropbox folder to share key documents and to enable collaborative working.

The first key challenge in the development of Bookspotting was the management of the data on which the app would draw. The existing datafeed provided by BDS to Publishing Scotland for the BooksfromScotland.com website came from a datafeed originally developed for librarians and not, as the partners anticipated, based on the industry standard metadata.

It turned out to be much less suitable for the aims of the app than had been supposed. In addition to the significant amount of missing data compared with what was expected, there was substantial duplication of ISBNs within the datafeed (i.e. multiple versions of the same book, for example Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, which had numerous ISBNs), and almost forty different book formats (e.g. standard formats such as hardback and paperback, but also formats including CDs and 'cloth'). The BooksfromScotland.com data amounted to around 15,000 records: far too many to be of practical use to the app. The project partners were aware from the beginning that using the pre-existing data would be a challenge to the project, but from Spot Specific's perspective, it proved difficult and took more time than anticipated.¹⁷ The app was in danger of becoming 'a baggy monster' given the number of duplicated books that could potentially have been included. Such a 'baggy monster' could not provide a clear or interesting guide through the app, and to Scottish books.¹⁸

Of this process, Alistair McCallum explained that 'there's a real difference between an ice flow and an iceberg. As the tech partner, you hope that it's an ice flow and you can see everything [...] it's sight unseen.'¹⁹ Given the amount of data in the existing datafeed, however, the feed proved more of an 'iceberg', requiring more time on the part of Spot Specific to organise the data than had been budgeted for. Given the amount of missing data, the partners had to dedicate a substantial amount of time to sourcing and manually inputting copy and images to the missing fields.

Alistair worked closely with Sara Hunt and (after her appointment in July 2013), Mariclaire White, in order to refine down to 'a pretty cool rational dataset', and make the resulting app 'as automated as

¹⁶ Publishing Scotland, 'Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland Application', February 2013.

¹⁷ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, August 2013; Interview with Sara Hunt, Saraband Books, August 2013; Interview with Alistair McCallum, August 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, August 2013.

¹⁹ Interview with Alistair McCallum, August 2013.

possible and as fresh and new'.²⁰ This process included finding practical and yet metaphorical ways for Spot Specific to work with Saraband: the creation of a 'shopping basket' into which Mariclaire could choose which of the multiple ISBNs to include in the app. The need to substantially refine down the data, using a process which was easy to comprehend, was key to a successful working partnership between software developers and project managers. Nonetheless, the unknowability of the scale of the challenge (the ice flow/iceberg metaphor) did delay the project, and also required the commitment of Spot Specific in particular to undertake additional work for no extra funding. Saraband also had to do substantial unfunded work, after approximately 6% of the overall budget (or approximately 14% of Saraband's budget) was reallocated in the absence of the requested contingency amount (some to Spot Specific to help 'share their pain' and some towards legal costs). The lesson from this appears to be that a larger contingency allowance would have been extremely helpful.

Alongside the process of manipulating and cleaning up the data, Sara Hunt and Mariclaire White worked over the summer and autumn of 2013 to devise and populate a number of the enhanced features of the app, which were to turn it into more than a bibliographic database. They asked publishers (Publishing Scotland members, but also other Scottish publishers, and publishers from elsewhere who publish books by Scottish writers or on Scottish themes) to provide copy for the app. The response to these requests was inevitably variable, with some publishers providing full information, while others were less engaged. (It is not possible to evidence why some publishers were less engaged with others, other than to surmise that some publishers could see the benefits more clearly for their books, and hence prioritised the provision of information). As the app was primarily intended for a general reading public, Publishing Scotland decided to focus on trade/consumer books (i.e. not academic, educational or niche special interest books).

Additional features were created for the app, which required both imagination and diligent research. One feature is 'Who am I?', in which users can use a slider to match themselves with a literary character. The sliders use Scots as well as standard English, adding a particular sense of Scottishness to the app, examples being: Jock/Hen; Loyal/Sleekit; Couthie/Crabbie; Fouting/Adventurous; and Canny/Glaikit.

Additionally, as books, scenes from books, and aspects of authors' lives (birthplace, place of death, or significant dwelling place in between) were geolocated (both by Mariclaire White and by the crowdsourced submissions from publishers), the possibility of 'tours' was enabled. The tours were assembled by the Assistant Editor, and operate via a series of scenes from books and the birth/death places of authors. The Assistant Editor located places by dropping pins on an OpenStreetMap (an open source mapping facility), which were then connected by the geographical narrative, which could be pursued by a user of the app on foot, by public transport, or car. Examples include tours of Edinburgh and Glasgow city centres, and of Orkney and the Outer Hebrides, as well as a Pub Crawl, a Trainspotting map, tours focusing on Robert Burns and Walter Scott, and Whisky Galore! – focusing on one of Scotland's other iconic products and its intersections with literature. The Trainspotting tour takes place in Leith Central Station (the end point of the novel), Edinburgh Royal Infirmary (where the protagonist Renton is taken after his overdose), and the Vine Bar in Leith (where Begbie attacked another character with a glass).

Additionally, each day of the year is linked to the 'Today in Scottish literature' feature: the birth or death of an author, or the publication of a book, for example. Throughout this editorial process of creating features for the app, there was close collaboration between the assistant editor, project manager and Spot Specific, in order that the creative possibilities and constraints of the digital environment, and the knowledge and imagination of the editors, coalesced.

²⁰ Interview with Alistair McCallum, August 2013.

In terms of the launch, there was an original aspiration that the app might be launched at the end of the funding period, during Book Week Scotland. However, the difficulties with the datafeed had slowed the development process. In December 2013, a round of user testing was undertaken to check for technological glitches and issues with content (testing included participants from Publishing Scotland, Edinburgh City of Literature, and the CReATeS research team). This testing threw up a number of issues with functionality and with copy, which the Bookspotting project team continued to work to resolve during January and February 2014. The app was demo-ed to Publishing Scotland members at a Christmas event in December 2013. Given the informal nature of the event, no user feedback was formally collected, but responses were positive, with publisher members intrigued to engage with the functionalities of the app.

At the time of writing, Bookspotting has just been released in Apple and Google's app store. Apple can be notoriously difficult with approval processes, and can take several weeks to confirm (or reject) publication with the app store. Initial promotion has occurred, predominantly via social media (there was a small budgeted amount for marketing and press in the final project management phase, but this was diverted elsewhere and all budgets were exhausted some time before the marketing phase). Key targets have been identified to help promote the app, particularly via Twitter feeds, with promotional bursts concentrated on particular aspects of the app related to the 'Today in Scottish Literature' feature.

3. Results

Bookspotting was released in the Apple and Andoid stores late in March 2014. As a consequence, many of the projected results of the project are not yet available for analysis – and, indeed, it will be hard to get indications of the usage of the app in any meaningful sense in the first couple of months after release. The first week after release (17-23 March 2014) saw 2647 downloads in total. These broke down into 1864 iOS, of which 34% were for iPad, and 783 Android).²¹ The app received media coverage via the BBC Scotland website, and was mentioned in *The Guardian* as one of the apps of the week.²² The app was also promoted via the Twitter hashtag #bookspotting, with organisations and individuals tweeting, including Scottish libraries and publishers.

It is hoped and anticipated that the app will generate revenue for member and non-member publishers of Publishing Scotland. However, as revenue from ebook sales will be directed through the respective ebook stores of the two platforms (the iBooks store and Google Books), sales statistics will not be reported to Publishing Scotland but to the publishers of each book. As such, it will not be possible for Publishing Scotland to assess directly the impact on ebook sales directly from the app without feedback from publishers. No revenue will be earned directly through the app, and it is only through survey of participating publishers in future months that data might be made available about discoverability.

It is expected that some sales will be pushed through to the BooksfromScotland.com website (although it is likely that users might use their habitual bookseller to buy books, or indeed borrow from the library). Depending on the future development of the BooksfromScotland.com website, it is likely that incoming traffic from the app might be able to be tracked, from which some data might be derived about how the app is pushing sales.²³

²¹ Email from Alistair McCallum, Spot Specific, March 2014.

²² 'App helps Track Classic Scenes from Scottish Books', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-26656244>; Stuart Dredge, '20 Best iPhone and iPad Apps and Games This Week', <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/mar/21/best-iphone-ipad-apps-games-sesame-street>.

²³ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, August 2013; Notes from Alistair McCallum, February 2014.

Publishing Scotland will not be able to derive data about user behaviour with the app (other than download statistics). Although user statistics and measurement are possible via the Apple and Android apps, they present an additional cost to the software developer which was not budgeted for within the application for the project.²⁴

In many ways, it is too early to analyse results from the Bookspotting project. However, it is clear that there have been impacts on the partners. All the partners comment that the time spent on the project 'clearly [...] exceeded the time allocated'. Publishing Scotland did not budget for its own time. Spot Specific estimate that its staff did double the amount of work as was budgeted for in the application, and in noting the difficulty in estimating an hourly rate, comment that 'it would be a lot lower than we'd have liked and very much lower than the development rates we charge'.²⁵ Despite this seemingly negative outcome, all the partners perceive there to be benefits in the working relationships which developed over the project.

These perceived benefits and future collaborations are discussed in the subsequent two sections, Insights and The Future. Overall, all partners discussed their working relationships in very positive terms, encapsulated by Alistair McCallum's comment that the project was a 'very valuable experience – a rare chance to do R&D at this kind of level – and great to work with such good content and such a motivated, smart bunch of collaborators'.²⁶

4. Insights

Publishing in the Digital Age

Traditional publishers typically take a project management approach to their workflow. Whether publishing companies are large or small, the print publishing industry is built on a sequential, linear methodology, which has scheduling at its core. One of the many disruptions that digital technologies have made to traditional print publishing is to throw into disarray traditional workflows. For some aspects of publishing, new development modes – once the publisher is accustomed – smartens the publishing process (such as using XML workflows).

Nonetheless, publishers tend to operate within long production schedules (very often at least a year from delivery of a book from an author to its publication date), with much time given to selling the book into bookshops via B2B relationships. The instant nature of the digital environment is problematic to publishers. While print publishers can respond very swiftly when necessary (e.g. producing books relating to current affairs; updating biographies shortly after their subjects' deaths), quicker timescales can be uncomfortable for publishers, not least because the time traditionally given to editorial, design, production and marketing processes is taken away. (Publishers recast the 'gatekeeping role' of which they are sometimes accused in terms of the 'added value' of the publishing process; something which, they aver, self-publishing does without.)²⁷ As with many of the Digital R&D-funded projects, the rapid development timescale of nine months was challenging.

In taking forwards the development of Bookspotting, Publishing Scotland was keen to fulfil the objectives stated within the application. A by-product of app development only became apparent in the development process, however. This by-product was that Publishing Scotland went through the process of app development. Going through this process meant that staff at Publishing Scotland experienced in practice some of the challenges presented to their publisher members, and – via the

²⁴ Notes from Alistair McCallum, February 2014.

²⁵ Notes from Alistair McCallum, February 2014.

²⁶ Notes from Alistair McCallum, February 2014.

²⁷ See Giles Clark and Angus Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008; 4th edn.); Kelvin Smith *The Publishing Business: From P-books to E-Books* (London: AVA Publishing, 2012); Frania Hall, *The Business of Digital Publishing: An Introduction to the Digital Book and Journal Industries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

action of publishing an app themselves – got to grips with many of the issues in digital publishing. As Marion Sinclair articulates:

The biggest thing is the evolving nature of what constitutes an app, and what makes a good book app. Traditionally we're very focused on blurbs, covers, and other information to 'sell' the title to the reader but this kind of material doesn't necessarily transfer well in the app environment where everything is smaller, faster, less complex, and 'digested' often very rapidly. Boiling down the essentials of a book and adding value to the experience was really challenging but has given us lots of food for thought as to how we should be selling books in the digital space.²⁸

For Publishing Scotland the app is clearly not a promotional tool for the organisation itself but for its member publishers and Scottish books more broadly. Nonetheless, the process has had the function of demonstrating that they are 'game to try things'.²⁹

The process of developing Bookspotting also meant that editorial skills of compression were necessary. Marion Sinclair expressed how 'in publishing, we are all in love with the text [...] and the more text there is, sometimes, the better'. Such wordiness is not suited to the 'mobile context', and early iterations of the design demonstrated very quickly that what might seem a short paragraph seems "hellishly long".³⁰ Attention spans online might contribute to the need for concision, but it is also an important *design* and *functionality* issue. Editors are used to processes of revision and writing copy to different lengths for different formats, and so linked to the traditional editorial skillset already possessed by Marion, Sara Hunt and Mariclaire White. Nevertheless, the emphasis on brevity insisted even more on cutting back on more unwieldy phrases, and instead focusing on swift communication in the digital environment.

R&D, Agile Development and Project Management

As the previous sub-section expressed, publishers tend to work with long schedules and a traditional project management approach. Spot Specific is, as are many technology companies, used to operating using agile development. Alistair McCallum described this approach as, 'you do an iteration very quickly and then everyone gets to use it'. The need for editorial compression was made obvious very quickly by this process. Nonetheless, Alistair also expressed that 'you have to line up an awful lot of things in order to do that first iteration'.³¹ That Saraband had already worked with Spot Specific assisted this process, meaning that Sara Hunt and Alistair were familiar with – and were able to adapt to – each others' processes.

All of the partners expressed the mutual trust they generated in working together, a 'critical mass' and a 'three-cornered kind of partnership [...] dynamic [...] we're getting something out of it so we're all willing to put a bit extra into it'.³² For Spot Specific these included having a product to show to potential customers, the increased skillset of staff in solving problems in relation to sizeable and complex datasets, and also the added value of working with cultural partners to create interesting products.

Reconciling approaches was a possibility because of adaptability, mutual trust, and also investment in all the partners working together. Section 4 demonstrated how all the project partners spent much more time working on the project than they had budgeted or planned for. For Alistair McCallum, it was important to 'bite the bullet and make sure that we developed [...] apps that we would be proud of – finished, highly polished products, cross platform and cross device'. For both Saraband and Publishing Scotland, as a publisher and a publishers' representative body respectively, the

²⁸ Arts Partner Quote, BookSpotting Key Project Information, February 2014.

²⁹ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, 2014.

³⁰ Interview with Marion Sinclair, Publishing Scotland, 2014.

³¹ Notes from Alistair McCallum, February 2014.

³² Interview with Alistair McCallum, August 2013.

development of a strong end-product was equally important. Sara Hunt expressed that as an innovation project, a ‘bumpy ride’ should be expected, and that risk was inherent to the process. She continued by saying that ‘if it was something that was commercially viable and easy to quantify and dead easy to do, someone would have done it by now [...] if you’re looking for something that’s a dead cert and is easily timetabled in, then it’s probably not that innovative’.³³

Data

In technological terms, a key challenge for Bookspotting was the manipulation of the dataset from BDS. As section 2 describes, for the technology partner it was very hard to understand the nature of the data and the scale of the work involved in preparing to make it fit for purpose. A key insight from the partners was that – if they were to start the project again from the beginning – they would build up” the data (to the number of titles they wanted to have within the app) rather than “slim [it] down” from the c15,000 titles in the BDS database.

This realisation came too late to be of help to Bookspotting as the development had progressed too far to make changing the process worthwhile. A future project based on a sub-section of a similarly large dataset might usefully think through whether it is better to build up or slim down. Marion Sinclair commented that ‘with hindsight, bibliographical data is so vast and fragmented and changes so much that we would perhaps put some more thought into the kinds of information we really need’.³⁴ Even more importantly, the inclusion of all relevant data fields in the original dataset would need to be checked in advance to avoid having to input pre-existing data manually, which effectively wasted much time. The data that needed to be inputted manually included fields such as author biographies and cover images. The need to input such basic metadata manually was in addition to inputting all the data the partners had expected to add (the calendars, geolocation and other special features).

Lessons Learned

- Innovation and R&D demands risk-taking and an adaptable approach. It is best undertaken with established partnerships and trust.
- Traditional industries need to be open to new modes of operation in order to adapt effectively to digital environments.
- Adapting large datasets for different purposes can be extremely time-consuming. It is important to be vigilant from the very outset about the choice of data source and how up-to-date and compliant it is with regards to industry standards.

5. Future

The immediate future for the Bookspotting team focuses on the release and promotion of the app, and subsequent feedback processes, which will take place over the late spring and early summer of 2014. These feedback processes will assess, as far as is possible with the analytics available via Bookspotting, to look at the extent to which the app has attracted an audience, both to itself and to Scottish books (though for reasons of publisher confidentiality, information will not be directly available about ebook sales via the app, for example).

In the medium term, the developments around Bookspotting are enabling Publishing Scotland to think through the development of the existing BooksfromScotland.com website, both in terms of the datafeed, but also more broadly with respect to new methods of marketing books and literature in the

³³ Interview with Sara Hunt, Saraband, August 2013.

³⁴ Notes from Marion Sinclair, February 2014.

digital age. It is anticipated by Publishing Scotland that it will take forwards development of the website soon.

Once the app is launched, it is possible that it can be used as an exemplar for other regional or national literatures to promote themselves digitally (e.g. Wales; Ireland).

All three partners anticipate working together again, having seen the process as positive, creative and a strong learning, research and development experience.

6. Further Resources

Further project information

Bookspotting (Apple version): <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/bookspotting/id827757271?mt=8>

Bookspotting (Android version):

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spotspecific.android.bookspotting>

Publishing Scotland: <http://www.publishingscotland.org/>

Saraband Books: <http://www.saraband.net/>

Spot Specific: <http://www.spotspecific.com/>

BooksfromScotland.com: <http://www.booksfromscotland.com/>

Bibliographic Data Services: <http://www.bibliographicdata.co.uk/>

Tools and guidance

Android's app developer page: <http://developer.android.com/sdk/index.html>

Apple's iOS Human Interface Guidelines for developing apps:

<https://developer.apple.com/library/ios/documentation/userexperience/conceptual/mobilehig/MobileHIG.pdf>

OpenStreetMap, used by Bookspotting for the geolocation of books and in the literary tours:

<http://www.openstreetmap.org/>

Further reading

'App helps Track Classic Scenes from Scottish Books', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-26656244>; Stuart Dredge, '20 Best iPhone and iPad Apps and Games This Week', <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/mar/21/best-iphone-ipad-apps-games-sesame-street>.

Michael Bhaskar, *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (London: Anthem Press, 2013).

Books in Scotland, (Edinburgh: Scottish Centre for the Book, 2012).

Sarah Boyd (2014), 'Scottish Publishing and Independence', *Logos* (in press).

Stuart Dredge, '20 Best iPhone and iPad Apps and Games This Week',
<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/mar/21/best-iphone-ipad-apps-games-sesame-street>.

Frania Hall, *The Business of Digital Publishing: An Introduction to the Digital Book and Journal Industries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

British Library/PLR, '100 Most Borrowed Books 2012/2013 Scotland',
<https://www.plr.uk.com/mediaCentre/mostBorrowedTitles/top100Titles/2012-2013/scotland.pdf>,
accessed 2 March 2014.

Miha Kovac and Claire Squires, 'Publishing in Wee Lands', *Logos* (forthcoming).

See Giles Clark and Angus Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008; 4th edn).

Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, 'The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit', *Book 2.0* 2013, 3:1, 3-23.

Publishers Association, *PA Statistics Yearbook 2012* (London: The Publishers Association, 2013).

Saltire Society (2013), 'Saraband Announced as Saltire Society Publisher of the Year',
<http://www.saltiresociety.org.uk/news/2013/08/12/scottish-publisher-of-the-year-announced>, accessed
2 March 2014.

Kelvin Smith *The Publishing Business: From P-books to E-Books* (London: AVA Publishing, 2012).

Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Other examples

Other related digital developments:

Edinburgh Bookshops Trail app, developed by Edinburgh City of Literature:
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/edinburgh-bookshops-trail/id611182270?mt=8>

Frasan, a mobile heritage app developed by An Iodhlann, Tìre's museum and archives centre
funded by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in Scotland: <http://www.frasan.org.uk/>

Gimbal, an app developed by Comma Press in which you can 'make your commute a journey of
discovery': <http://lets gimbal.com/>

Nudge Me Now, a digital book community: <http://www.nudgemenow.com/>

REACT Books and Print Sandbox, funded by the funded by the REACT Knowledge Exchange Hub for
the Creative Economy: <http://react-hub.org.uk/books-and-print-sandbox>

Palimpsest, an AHRC-funded, map-based database of Literary Edinburgh developed by the
University of Edinburgh: [http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-
cultures/english-literature/research-activities/palimpsest/overview](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/research-activities/palimpsest/overview)

Purple TV, city adventure apps: <http://www.purpletrails.tv/purplelive/purpletv-launches-purpletrails-all-new-city-adventure-apps/>

Scottish Literary Locations: <http://www.scotlitlocations.com/scottish-borders/>

Tastekid: cultural recommendations for young people: <http://www.tastekid.com/>

What Should I Read Next, a digital book discoverability tool: <http://whatshouldireadnext.com/>

Whichbook, a digital book discoverability tool: <http://www.openingthebook.com/whichbook/>

Publishing and book-related organisations in Scotland:

Association for Scottish Literary Studies: <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/>

Edinburgh City of Literature: <http://www.cityofliterature.com/>

Gaelic Books Council: <http://www.gaelicbooks.org/>

Scottish Book Trust: <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/>

Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication, University of Stirling:
<http://www.publishing.stir.ac.uk/>