



London Fair Dealer features: Social networking for bookworms

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Jo Grange looks at how LibraryThing and LibraryThing for Libraries are helping to develop communities of book lovers Until recently, reading a book had resisted technological advances, but like everything else, this has started to evolve and now we are embracing technology. Books are more easily available in electronic format, and sharing your opinion about a title print or ebook is more popular. So when LibraryThing, the online cataloguing and social networking site for book lovers, was launched more than five years ago, its success was hardly surprising.

LibraryThing connects people based on the books they read, and provides a space to create a library-quality catalogue of books. Users can contribute tags, ratings and reviews, take part in member forums, and find people with similar tastes in books. It also provides details of thousands of local bookstores, libraries and book festivals, plus author readings, signings, discussions and other book-related events in your area. Its popularity with its 1.2 million registered users would account for the 54 million books and 66 million tags that have been added by its users since launch.

Described by one user as one of the seven wonders of the web, the data is drawn from Amazon.com and more than 690 libraries around the world, including the Library of Congress. Once you have set up your library, you can search your books, sort them, create new collections, edit book information, print a copy of your catalogue, write reviews and apply tags, and connect with other readers.

LibraryThing is a sort of Facebook for people who like books, says one member, I can share my library with others, and meet people with similar tastes. The experience is like walking into someone's home and looking at their collection of books. Within a minute, you know whether he or she is your type, and you begin to wonder what else you might have in common with them.

And with the launch of LibraryThing for Libraries, libraries can now use this wealth of information too. This works within the library's existing operating system, allowing library users to access much of the content generated by LibraryThing users. It also has library-specific features such as a virtual shelf browser and mobile access via Library Anywhere.

For many libraries, the appeal is the wealth of reviews available for their users (all approved for usefulness and appropriateness by LibraryThing librarians), plus the ability for users to add their own reviews. There are two packages for a library to subscribe to: catalogue enhancements (book recommendations, tag-based discovery and other editions and translations) or review enhancements (user reviews, widgets to blog and links to Facebook, plus more than 450,000 reviews).

Anna Brynolf, of Digital Information Services at Malm University Library in Sweden, commented recently that staff liked the enhancements because it made the catalogue more dynamic and offered a lot of extra content. The general impression they had was that their users had noticed the difference to the catalogue, and had been using the tags to see whether a particular title suited their needs.

In general, the response from libraries around the world has been positive, and users are benefiting from the communities being created. As one Client Services Librarian said: LibraryThing is fabulous. My library has recently added LibraryThing to our catalogue and it's been really helpful with readers' advisory.

So as the reviews and tags continue to be added to the website, the communities keep growing and spreading further around the world to all those who have a passion for books, and a desire to share their

knowledge with others.

Go on, release your inner librarian you know you want to!

Jo Grange is Marketing Manager, Bowker UK, the distributor for LibraryThing for Libraries in the UK and all other territories outside the US

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