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Libraries and publishers creating new community reading scene

The Reading Agency has just issued a report on libraries' changing work with publishers. It shows that libraries are getting huge crowds for author events, launching debut authors to keen audiences and reaching people the book trade finds hard to engage.

The report evaluates work in 2008, the National Year of Reading, by Reading Partners, the partnership consortium which is transforming the way public libraries and adult publishers work together.

This included a huge National Year of Reading Reader Meets Writer programme with high profile authors. There were 80 events, attracting large audiences with matching book sales.

- "It is wonderful that public libraries have become so ambitious and professional in their approach to organizing talks for authors. Warwick Library organized a magical event for Alexander McCall Smith with an audience of 550. He enjoyed it more than any other reading he did that year, which, as anyone who has ever seen McCall Smith live will know, is saying something!" Ursula McKenzie, Chief Executive and Publisher for Little, Brown Book Group.
- Jeffrey Deaver's publicist said of his tour: "The libraries came through with much bigger audiences and booksales than straight bookshop events."

Other National Year of Reading activity included:

- Events targetting the National Year of Reading's 'hard to reach' audiences, such as Redbridge Libraries' event for Bollywood star Dev Anand which attracted a large Asian audience; Chris Ryan's events reached lots of men aged under 35 years and Louis Ferrante's events made a big impact on young offenders.
- Pairing local authors with three quarters of English library services for events, competitions, and intimate sessions with reading groups. Barbara Ewing's pairing with Westminster libraries turned into a giant read-in, with all the authority's reading groups reading *The Mesmerist*.

On top of its National Year of Reading commitments, Reading Partners also:

- Created 11 big reading promotions, building its use of libraries' 10,000 readers groups to market titles and authors. Promotions included Discover Stephen King and Celebrating 25 years of Discworld.
- Produced book trailers for plasma screen in libraries.
- Created author promotions exclusive to libraries, like posters celebrating James Patterson, the most-borrowed author in UK libraries, and a film tie-in with *Revolutionary Road*, promoting Richard Yates and his entire backlist.

Leading industry figures have commented on the strategic significance of this work:

“We love working with libraries because they share both our passion for books and our fundamental aim to get more people reading. Through the Reading Partners initiative we now have direct contact with a national network of readers. As a result, we can canvas opinion on covers, introduce new writers to an eager readership and take our big authors to an even wider audience. Libraries cultivate invaluable links with local communities, reaching a readership that is both diverse and engaged and slowly but surely, this connection is having a real impact on the way we market and publicise our books.” Jamie Hodder Williams, managing director, Hodder & Stoughton

“The Reading Agency has formed a crucial bridge between libraries and publishers by creating real opportunities to promote writers to the large community of readers who use libraries regularly. The Reading Partners initiative is now a routine part of Faber’s thinking about how to promote writers, particularly in the arenas of poetry and literary fiction. Building a grass roots readership for writers in these areas through libraries is now a vital part of our strategy.” Stephen Page, chief executive and publisher, Faber and Faber Ltd

What next?

In 2009 Reading Partners will be:

- Developing a multi-layered author event strategy including high profile author events, low cost, local events and a programme of live literature events for ethnic minority communities.
- Introducing training to increase the number of tried and tested library venues for author events.
- Feeding into strategy developments including the Government’s Library Review, the Creative Reading Charter, and Reading For Life, the legacy campaign for the National Year of Reading..
- Establishing an innovation task force, exploring library/publisher opportunities in the areas of digital developments and partnerships with retail.
- Embedding the new Children’s Reading Partners scheme including launching a new national book promotion.
- Launching a toolkit with Borders, encouraging more joint work with libraries.

Background

Adult Reading Partners is a partnership consortium which aims to expand the market for reading by transforming the way public libraries and adult publishers work together. It is led by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It involves the whole UK public library network and ten major adult publishers. A children’s version of the scheme was set up in May 2008 involving 12 children’s publishers, The Publishers Association and the main children’s library bodies.

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Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. (www.readingagency.org.uk)
- The Reading Partners 2008 evaluation report will be available to download shortly from The Reading Agency's website: www.readingagency.org.uk
- The Adult Reading Partners publishers are: Bloomsbury, Faber, Hachette Livre, HarperCollins, Harlequin Mills and Boon, Little Brown, Pan MacMillan, Penguin, Random House and the Independent Publishers' Guild.
- The children's publishers involved in the two-year Children's Reading Partners pilot project are: Bloomsbury, Egmont, Faber, Hachette, Harper Collins, Macmillan, OUP, Penguin, Random House, Scholastic, Simon and Schuster, and Walker. The Bounce consortium is also a member and The Publishers Association supports the scheme.
- The 2008 National Year of Reading is a year-long celebration of reading in all its forms. It aims to build a greater national passion for reading – for children, families and adult learners alike. The Year has encouraged people to read in businesses, homes and communities around the country, providing new opportunities to read and helping people to access help and support through schools and libraries. www.yearofreading.org.uk
- The Creative Reading Charter is an initiative being worked on by the Arts Council, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and The Reading Agency.