

LIBRARY SPEECH – OCTOBER 2007

[SLIDE: penguin logo and Joanna Prior underneath]

Good morning everyone. It is a great pleasure to be here talking to you as a member of the 9-strong publisher consortium of Reading Partners – three years into what has been already a very fruitful relationship – certainly for us publishers, and I hope for the library service as well. I want to spend my minutes with you talking about some of the areas of successful collaboration, explaining a bit why a relationship with libraries has become strategically important to all of the UK's major publishers – not just Penguin – and point towards some of the great things we can do together next year and beyond.

I think the story of the publishing industry's recommitment to libraries is probably well known to you all in this room, so I won't labour it here, except where perhaps it serves to explain why things are now going well where once nothing was going on between us at all.

As publishers our world has changed a lot in the last 5 years. From our offices in London, our focus has been on selling to an increasingly consolidating customer base – our head office to their head office. Central buying is the norm and there is very little regional variation in what you find front of store in any book chain. Our regional sales reps are fewer in number and their task now reduced to calling on a small number of independents and some backlist and stock management of high street chains. This is in stark contrast to the complexity of the 149 library authorities and the thousands of libraries scattered across the British Isles which we find utterly bewildering. Not surprising then that we didn't really give the sector much attention. Enter The Reading Agency, who suggested a manageable navigation model that allowed us to make sense of the library service and find a way to draw it into our existing book reading universe. Reading Partners was born and gave publishers a way to talk to you all at once, and get a response.

A real dialogue could begin and we started to get some process embedded – The Rolling Calendar of events, the venues database, author database, training/ job-swaps – we began to grasp the real potential for libraries to help us as publishers to do our jobs of telling people about the wonderful array of books, new and old that our authors are writing. The librarian's expertise, commitment and passion for reading was something that could be harnessed by the partnership and in return publishers could bring writers into your spaces, our combined marketing and publicity skills could help to draw new visitors to the library, particularly through the Love Libraries campaign last year.

I now see all this as phase one of Reading Partners. Let's call it the courtship

[slide of amusing photo of courtship]

we were getting to know each other, we went on dates, we experimented with stuff, we exchanged gifts, we were trying to decide whether this was a relationship for the long-haul.

Now I believe, we are into real commitment. Phase two.

[slide of amusing married couple]

I won't call it marriage because I don't recall there being a wedding, but now we're in deep, we're invested – for better or worse.

So let's take a look at this phase two.

I think now we are really beginning to get down to the business of expanding the market for books and using the libraries' regional diversity and contact with the local community to help broker new relationships between readers and writers. Ironically perhaps, we are now finding a way to take advantage of the very thing that kept us away from you in those pre-Reading Partners days.

We've come to understand just how much libraries can help to bring authors and their readers together. We can see that the reach you have into your communities, your knowledge of your local area provides us with a new way to approach book marketing. This bridges a gap for us that has opened up in recent years in retail. The high street chains buy centrally, run a centralised promotional calendar. Bookshop events have changed in character and they certainly form a much reduced part of most author promotion than they have in the past. Nor do the stores seem to own the expertise at the moment. The voice of the personal recommendation now comes from the media – Richard and Judy, Daily Mail bookclub and others – vehicles that all books channels are making the most of – from Tesco, to WHSmith to Amazon. These are powerful volume drivers and so much of the growth in book sales is coming from a handful of these media driven bestsellers.

But it is with you that we can explore imaginative ways to bring books and the experience of reading to life. Of course there is huge pleasure in curling up at home with a horlicks and a novel but what's exploded in the last decade is the phenomenon of social reading – whether that's a bookclub, some kind of city-wide read, live events of all sorts of different kinds, festivals. People want to share their reading with friends, colleagues and even complete strangers. They want to blog about books, they want to talk and argue about them, they want to turn what has been in the past a passive and solitary pastime into something creative, social and involving. And frankly, I don't think that retail have really grasped this as they should or staked a claim on it. Libraries

on the other hand truly have and that's because you're close to the ground, to the readers and what's more you've got a remit to exploit it. And that's what I think is bringing this partnership of ours alive.

You've caught me at a good time to add some colour to this point because we've just finished a big tour with Nick Hornby for his first book for teenagers, Slam, working with libraries. We had bookshops involved to sell the books but all the work, organisation and hosting was by libraries.

[Slides of Hornby events]

So we were in Leeds, Manchester, Lyme Regis (a first for Penguin) and Norwich. We didn't want the usual Hornby crowd – we wanted teens. My goodness they are a hard to reach lot, but through the contacts with local youth groups, skate parks, graffiti clubs (can that be right?), sports clubs, musicians, dancers we were able to pull off some truly amazing evenings and we were reaching a new audience – young people who weren't used to coming to book events, who would never ever walk into a bookshop to hear an author read, who frankly probably don't visit the library much either. I wouldn't do it every day of the week but it felt good watching Nick sign copies of his book for kids with a rapper in the background and a skate workshop outside.

Our future depends on growing the market and finding new readers. We cannot close our eyes and hope that kids raised in a home without a book inside it will magically start reading for pleasure when they hit eight or nine. We cannot expect our multi-ethnic population to feel enticed by their high street bookstore staffed entirely by white graduates, offering books that in no way reflect their diverse culture or experiences. And whilst libraries cannot directly help publishers to find and acquire more diverse writers, libraries are so much better than any other partner at bringing the audiences to the existing BME writers on our list

[photos of the Constance Bristow event]

Here are some pictures of the Constance Bristow event held with Newham Library earlier this summer. Just look at this quote from the publicist working at Hodder... and bookseller

Penguin had a similar success with Rageh Omagh

[photos of Rageh event]

And he will be chairing a Reading Partners/Bookseller conference in November aimed at publishers and retailers to try and shake up our business.

Digital

We cannot expect teenagers to leave their exciting and creative digital communities to listen to some boring analogue books programme. This week we launched the first social networking site for teenagers dedicated to books – Spinebreakers

[slide of Spinebreakers homepage]

To address just this issue. It's important for all of us to give the message that being pro-book doesn't mean being anti-technology or anti-digital. At Penguin, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of digital innovation. Our website and online activities are the envy of the industry. But just because we're investing in one doesn't mean we're neglecting the other. Libraries need to have great book stocks to fulfil their function. But we have to harness the brilliant opportunities offered by new technology in all its forms to reach out to new readers, to hook them into our activities, to build loyalty, to give them added extras and to give them the written word in new formats too – audio, digital audio, podcasts, ebooks. Computers can be a friend to the book, a complementary tool, a fabulously effective channel through which to talk directly and intimately to consumers.

And so, at the beginning I said I would look at next year. Miranda has already talked about the National Year of Reading and the great opportunity it affords us all. Reading Partners have been looking at what we will contribute – how do we bring all we've learnt to bear on this national public focus on books and reading. Well today I can announce that we have a plan. Here are some of the headlines:

- A huge Year of Reading author programme in library venues and festivals, with really big name fiction and non fiction writers. This exciting programme of some of our biggest and best-selling writers will be unveiled later in the year.
- Pairing up 149 authors with a library in their region, to cover every library authority in England – with each author doing at least one event at their library
- experimenting with new models of author events to reach disengaged reading audiences who are not interested in the traditional “reading from the page” event
- libraries working closely with publishers to define more books appropriate for adult readers trying to improve their literacy skills

[National Year of Reading slide]

So let's be ambitious. I believe that the purpose of libraries is to help Britain become a nation of readers. Our purpose as publishers is to give you the books to do that. So the National Year of Reading is a great moment to demonstrate the real impact we can make together.

Thank you.