

Growing Daisies; streaming daisy audio books through local Dutch public libraries

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Abstract:

It is the ambition of service providers of books in alternative formats, such as Daisy Talking Books, to reach more people who can legally benefit from these special services. At the moment only 12% of the estimated target population is being reached. The goal is to double that number, so that percentage wise the active reach of the special library service is up to the standard of active mainstream library users (25%). Integrating the special Daisy Talking Book service into the mainstream library services is instrumental in accomplishing this.

With the establishment of a new library network which is supported by a new library law in the Netherlands, the right conditions for integration seem to be there. A national digital infrastructure for all public libraries to make use of centrally available services such as eBook-lending has been created. This provides an excellent platform to start a Daisy Talking Book service for the print disabled through the local Dutch Public Library.

Streaming Daisy titles through your own local library is only the next step on the road to full inclusive library services. Integration with the mainstream eBook service is one of the many challenges still to be faced.

Keywords: eBooks, Daisy talking books, public libraries, print disabled, streaming Daisy, Dedicon

1 THE SPECIAL SERVICE FOR ADAPTED READING IN THE NETHERLANDS

Special services for people with print disabilities have a history of more than a century. The invention of Braille signals the historic beginnings of special format books for the blind. Technological innovations such as audio recording, digital braille, and synthetic speech dramatically increased the impact and availability of adapted reading, although never reaching levels adequate enough to still what is aptly labeled as *the book famine*: pointing to the strikingly little percentage of books in adapted format compared with what is published worldwide. The leading paradigm for adapted reading has not really changed since the first braille book appeared in 1873: it is a *special* service in a *special* format for a *special* identifiable group of people. Summarizing the service in the Netherlands we see the National Center for Adapted Reading offering services to a clientele of around 30,000 persons who can make use of a collection of around 62,000 audio books and 10,000 braille books. There is an online catalogue through which you can sample books and order them on cd or listen to them directly as an audio stream. More than 10,000 clients have downloaded the DaisyLezer App that allows them to order titles and listen to them on mobile platforms. On a monthly base around 2500 users make active use of reading through the App. Dedicon produces the titles and is developing new ways to make reading accessible and easy to do, such as multimedia books where text, audio and pictures are synchronized.

2 ADAPTED READING IN THE DUTCH PUBLIC LIBRARY

In 2007 the special libraries for the blind were formally integrated in the system of the public libraries. This made an end to a long period of arduous and labored mergers of autonomous libraries for the blind, bringing both the production facilities as well as the customers services in one hand. The services themselves stayed pretty much special, working under an exception in the copyright law and providing books in special formats, reserved only for those who cannot read print, delivered though a dedicated front office especially created for the target group. Most of the Dutch Libraries do have a little collection of Daisy books in store. They are generally considered and treated as demo material. They are not very popular (low lending numbers) and not so easy to use (a Daisy player is necessary). It's no wonder many libraries in the Netherlands stopped investing in acquiring new Daisy titles to add to their collection. Visitors of local public library who have trouble reading print are in essence being referred to the internet- and postal services of the National Centre for Adapted Reading while becoming detached from the local library.

3 THE CHALLENGE

There are 16.8 million people in the Netherlands, and around 4 million of them are member of a public library, just under 25%. If we compare the numbers of registered users of adapted reading (30,000) to estimated number of people who have a print disability (360,000), we see that only 12% of them are using books in adapted formats such as Daisy Audio. That is less than half of what the regular library service manages .

This bothers not only the service providers, but it is worrying the government as well, especially when we take into account that the budget for adapted reading per active reader is much higher than for the active library user. The high costs for adapting the book into audio or braille are of course the causative factor here. So given the fact that there are 360,000 potential users for adapted reading, the question of how they can be reached remains The

leading thought that emerged is that a closer integration with mainstream library services could raise the numbers of people who use the adapted versions from a 30,000 to a 60,000, especially targeting two distinct groups: the elderly with diminishing eyesight and the young who struggle with reading problems like dyslexia.

The challenge here is how we, as special service providers working at a national level, can work together with the 160 public library organizations in the Netherlands who provide library services at around 1100 different locations, including “light” libraries called service points. And all of this without raising the budget (not possible) and without breaching the copyright exception (not allowed) that states that only the print impaired can benefit from the adapted books. With the development of a clever lending system integrated in the local website of the local library we believe to have found a possible solution.

4 THE NEW LIBRARY LANDSCAPE WITH NATIONAL DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Coming fall a new library bill will pass both houses of Dutch Parliament and come into effect. This is good news in itself. There has not been a library act in the Netherlands since the early eighties of the previous century. Above all, the new law creates a more transparent structure between the national, regional and municipal levels of governing and financing the library network. Here for our discussion one aspect of the law is especially relevant and that is the establishment and the lawful assurance of a national digital infrastructure through which all local libraries can acquire digital services, such as using a new union catalogue, ordering interlibrary loans or lending eBooks. The details have not yet been clarified for a 100%, but it seems that in the near future all Dutch public library users will have a choice between registering for the national digital library services (such as eBooks) and/or registering at the local public library (hopefully) nearby where people meet and books are stored on shelves. There is also some legal assurance that adapted reading will stay protected and will be governed (as all public libraries) by the National Library. The establishment of a uniform national digital infrastructure that can provide digital services to all public libraries provides an excellent platform for the lending of digital audiobooks (Daisy books) too.

5 A PILOT TO TEST THE ASSUMPTIONS

Using this central network makes it possible to provide a special service of Daisy books through the front-end of mainstream public libraries. Several steps need to be taken before that can become a reality and some protection measures need to be taken in order to prevent breach of copyright. In 2012 a short pilot was run at three libraries to test the assumption that the system is technically sound and that it will attract new users. The pilot made several things clear and helped to formulate improvements. Here are the more important ones:

- In three months’ time 168 users registered for the service. More than 500 items were lent by them
- In order to access the service one must confirm that one has legal access to this collection on the basis of a reading impairment. People did not complain about having to declare and confirm that they are struggling with a reading impairment.
- Two thirds of the respondents in the pilot were library users under the age of 30 with reading problems such as dyslexia. There were no blind users in the pilot.
- The service was judged favorably and more than 95% of the respondents would recommend the service to others
- The accessibility of the ordering website for daisy books needed to improved

- The Daisy audiobooks must be catalogued in the union catalogue by a unique identifier, otherwise clashes with the interlibrary loan system of the printed book are unavoidable¹. was not compatible with the ordering system.

With these findings the steering committee of the project was confident enough to proceed to the next stage and to make the money available for the next stage of the project leading up to a soft launch of this service for public libraries in 2014.

6 STREAMING DAISIES THROUGH LOCAL LIBRARIES

With the introduction of the online catalogue at the website of the National Centre of Adapted Reading, print impaired users could enjoy the online reading services such as browsing through the catalogue, order books on CD, and listen to the books online through a streaming audio service. An online Daisy Player was developed and embedded in the website that makes navigation through the audio possible. A personalized virtual bookshelf (“my bookshelf”) was developed to enable lending and returning of virtual books.²

Looking at the success and future potential of online reading, it was decided to exclude the slightly diminishing and relatively costly technology of CD-ROM from the national launch. Streaming daisies is now the leading focus for the Daisy service through Public Libraries. This choice narrowed down the number of titles from 62,000 to 45,000. Older (analogue) titles are not included in the streaming collection. There is a system in place that adds an invisible and personalized identifier to each individual stream that people listen to (watermarking). In this way possible misuse of the titles can be traced back to its original borrower.

A dedicated website for Daisy streaming service has been built at the national digital infrastructure. It is a full functioning website with several specific functions (widgets) that guide the search- and ordering processes. The Daisy online player is embedded, and the registered user can choose titles and make them available on his or her personal bookshelf. Special attention is given to the way a person is guided through the process that confirms that he or she may legally use the collection. One has to confirm that he or she is allowed to use the special collection. Publishers and right holders do need assurance that the special collection is not open to just anybody. The role of the National Centre for Adaptive Reading is essential here. They monitor the authentication process and will contact new registered persons in case of doubt. Here a balance needed to be found between a secure system and a user-friendly one. Only then can the challenge of raising the number of people that use streaming daisies be met.

¹ In reality the Daisy books were catalogued as manifestations of a certain work and not uniquely identifiable in the ordering system. This seemingly minor issue has had a major impact on the way we needed to think about our catalogue and will lead to more changes in the future once we will have introduced more adapted reading formats such as synthetic speech or large print.

² An App (DaisyLezer) for iOS and Android, is created to make the use of the online catalogue and streaming services more accessible for mobile platforms. Listening to books through your mobile phone is much more popular than listening to streams through the PC and/or laptop. More than a 1000 users have installed the App and on average around 2500 persons make active use of the App in a month. Listening to a stream of one’s favorite book title through a simple user interface makes it easy and attractive to listen to the books. The App gives just that: leisurely browsing through the catalogue and controlling the titles that are placed on one’s bookshelf.

7 A SOFT LAUNCH IN OCTOBER

The system that makes streaming daisies through local libraries possible has been developed centrally at a national level. However, individual Public Libraries are autonomous organizations that need to make difficult decision on how to best use their shrinking budgets. In other words: having the system (full functioning website) in place does not automatically mean that the local library users can easily find the service. Good communication, promotion and technical support are necessary. Most of the public libraries are aware of adapted services, see them as useful, but do not make it a priority within their own services. They are used to (and content with) referring to the good services of the National Center. Now they can add an extra service to their library users on top of that, without hardly any extra costs. Placing a banner on the local library website can be done easily, and that might be in many cases a very good first step. Making library staff aware of this service and how to use it, is also part of the project. Libraries need to see the benefits of this service and be able and confident to inform their patrons how to subscribe and use the system when a patron is in need of adapted reading. Libraries do not need to worry about the back-end. That will be offered and maintained by the same organization that is responsible for the national digital library services, such as eBook lending or streaming daisies (B.NL and Dedicon). Part of the launch in October is a communication and promotion plan directed at the local public libraries. There is some project money available for creating the local website banners and developing communication materials for advertising and explaining the service. The goal is to have the service implemented at 25 libraries before the end of the year.

8 PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Progress is being made when we see more and more public libraries offering and promoting special services to the print disabled public. The public library streaming Daisy service is instrumental in making adapted reading more visible and widely available. Having many library distribution points where people can be informed and connect to this service must have a positive effect. Making it part of the new digital library landscape where one can also lend eBooks, creates a look and feel of being truly integrated in the ecosystem of the library world, also for those who need to read in alternative formats such as streaming daisies.

There are many challenges ahead. We do not really know whether the system will be a success. Providing frequent and accurate management information on the use of the system is essential and will be available from the moment the first libraries are connected. Another challenge will be to attract the senior citizens who are struggling with their eyesight. We have learned from the pilot that it is the young who are attracted to the Daisy service. Now the elderly need to be reached and informed. That requires a different marketing strategy.

Form customer satisfaction polls we have learned that people prefer reading though an App instead of reading through a website. There is more “lean back and relax” connotation when using your phone as a MP3 iPod listening to your favorite books. In the future an App needs to be developed to make mobile leisure reading possible also for streaming Daisy services through your local library.

Streaming daisies are a step towards inclusive library services, but they are not the ultimate goal. As long as the adapted reading formats are produced under an exception in the copyright law, a complete integration between special and mainstream library services cannot be accomplished. Integrating daisy navigation and good quality audio to the now emerging

eBook market is a very promising and an attractive road ahead. In a way the streaming daisies can already be seen as audio-only eBooks. So the eBook and the Daisy book are closer together than many may suspect. Integrating them is truly the next challenge, including the much debated question whether libraries may or may not lend eBooks. But that is a subject far beyond the scope of this paper!

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