Innovation, Privacy And The Public Good In The Digital Age

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[00:00:37] We're really happy to have you here with us this evening as our guests are coming to the stage. I am empty I'm your chief librarian and we're happy to have you join us here tonight for this conversation with Tony I and Frank cat Alonzo. Tony Ageh is the Chief Digital Officer at the New York Public Library where he is responsible for the institution's ongoing digital transformation and its visionary work in making its collections and services as accessible as possible. Tony came to the New York Public Library from the British Broadcasting Corporation in the UK where he held a variety of leadership positions since joining in 2002 and managed over 300 staff members. His accomplishments include the development and implementation of the BBC Internet strategy and creation and implementation of the BBC player I player before leaving the BBC. Tony was responsible for the BBC Archives strategy making their substantial archives of radio television images and documents and by extension a substantial record of British culture and creativity increasingly accessible to the public in the UK and beyond Thank you Tony for joining us to share your insights experience and expertise. I am also happy to welcome Frank Catalano. Frank is a Geekwire columnist and podcast host covering the arts pop culture science fiction and the confluence of media and technology. He's also a veteran education technology strategist and analyst who consults in the ed tech industry. Thank you Frank as well for facilitating this conversation this evening. And with that I'll turn it over to the two of you.

[00:02:23] All right thank you Marcellus.

[00:02:25] Keep so Tony let's get some of the basics out of the way you are the chief digital officer at New York Public Library and you've been there about three years now and a half years two and a half years. What is a chief digital officer do.

[00:02:41] Well I would say that it does. We did I do two things. One is I'm responsible for the digital digital transformation of the entire library. I'm responsible in the same way the chief finance officer is for every dollar that is spent throughout the entire library.

[00:02:59] And she also has a small team that she manages who help her do that. I'm responsible for the the entire digital footprint all the digital activity in the entire library. I also run a very small team in the center. Help me manage that.

[00:03:18] What do you find to be the biggest misconception by the public about the role of digital in a library's mission books.

[00:03:27] I think the I think most people imagine that libraries.

[00:03:31] I like a lot of things you say the first thing you think so I think most people think libraries are books and therefore they think digital is digital books so you think the limitation is that people then think that the only thing digital is in a library is the essentially taking a book and putting it into some digital form.

[00:03:51] Yeah I think the first question anybody asks me is you know how long it's going to take you to digitize all the books once we get it once we get talking I sort of say you know that if you look at I don't know American Airlines they either have made a complete transformation digital transformation everything you would do with American Airlines now you would do it digitally.

[00:04:16] You can book a ticket. You can check in. You can get through the gate. You can literally get from one from this sort of the moment you want to start flying to the moment you arrive using some kind of digital interface. The only thing you can't do anything you definitely use is a physical aeroplane. If you use a real plane and probably really lose your real luggage.

[00:04:38] But those two things are still physical everything else is digital and the role of the library would be the same. Virtually everything that you do in some some way or other touches some digital activity whether that's the catalog or booking a hold or paying your fine book in a room using Wi-Fi. So you know there are digital activities all the way through every aspect of modern library. Only one of the things we do is deliver the books themselves digitally.

[00:05:07] What do you think. You talked about what the biggest misconception is. What do you think the proper role is of digital in a library.

[00:05:14] Well what's the proper role. Yes I think probably relevance in the area that we're in. I think there is an expectation among the public that we will use the most modern means available to us and probably to them to deliver out to develop deliver our mission to deliver services. So I think the role of digital in the context of a library is to deliver the most relevant and apposite service that we can or that the public expects us to be people who may not know.

[00:05:48] And this just occurred to me too. Can you give us any of the scale of the New York Public Library I mean how big is it and where does it rank sort of in world libraries. And it should be by a number of patrons number of branches number of books circulated et cetera.

[00:06:06] It's I mean it is pretty big.

[00:06:09] Yeah. I'm sort of you can sense my Englishness that I kind of reluctant to use the kind of superlatives.

[00:06:20] It's probably the biggest public library in the world. I think that by quite a large margin I think we probably have about 50 million items. We've got 92 buildings 88 branch libraries for very large research libraries.

[00:06:39] We think in I think they're only four or five libraries on Earth bigger but they're all national libraries. So the Library of Congress is the biggest library in the history of man. New York Public Library is probably about a third the size of that in terms of its collections but we're a public library. So you don't have to be a congressman to get into new a public library. We will serve our books to anybody. British Library is probably bigger by the size of its collection. But again it's a national library and it's not there to serve the public so you'd need to get permission you need a reader's card. You need to be qualified probably by an academic institution to be able to get into the British like to use the the the collections so the public library is the biggest library in the world that will let you get the public in and make our collections freely available to anyone. And we have very significant collections we'll share them not only with the public we would share them with any other library. So yes it's pretty big.

[00:07:44] So understanding the size and the scope of the New York Public Library and your description of what the challenges is or I should say the the role of digital in the library What's the biggest challenge in implementing what the role of digital is in an institution as large as the New York Public Library.

[00:08:04] I think avoiding distractions and staying focused on the things that we have to do or the things that in the most essential things for us to do right now. I mean digital technology is full of opportunity and it's full of it is a great tool kit. It's a great you know you can almost nothing you can't know that you can imagine you can't do and their resources are quite substantial. And so we can very easily distract ourselves and start doing things that we like to do rather than things that we need to do. The most important things we need to do are to make sure that people.

[00:08:45] However whoever they are can get to the material that we have to be able to use them in the way they need to use them probably in some degree of privacy so that they're not exposed to prying eyes I suppose.

[00:09:04] And I think the challenge is that it's a very large collection and it's trying to focus on the things that people need most rather than the things that we most want to do prior to being at the New York Public Library you were at the BBC and the BBC is in a different country.

[00:09:23] As I understand it then the New York Public Library the main offices yet the main offices and you're responsible for a lot of the digital activities at the BBC as well and the archives there

correct. Yes. What was the biggest difference do you see in moving from what essentially is perceived primarily as a broadcaster which may or may not be true for the BBC anymore to a library institution like The New York Public Library what was the biggest transitional change especially in how digital is conceived in both.

[00:09:56] Well I think so I didn't really watch television very much before I got the job with the BBC.

[00:10:06] So I was more interested in the role that that the new technologies could bring to reimagine in the greater potential of the BBC beyond making just programmes the so the first eight years I love it.

[00:10:26] My title was kind of controller of internet. Which in. That's probably the closest.

[00:10:31] That's like senior vice president something anybody can control the Internet that's going to be amazing.

[00:10:38] But BBC the heads of BBC divisions are called controllers as a control of television and the controller of Radio.

[00:10:44] So it was control of that and I developed this I play a product which was very successful at the end of that. A director general said to me you know what you want to do next. And I said I wanted to go work in the archives because I felt that there was so much value so much of the narrative of British culture and history.

[00:11:05] Been inadvertently recorded as they were making the programs everything from kind of the change in society and the change in the way that we conveyed information that I wanted to find a way of unlocking that. So I would say that the more important thing for me is the similarity between what I was trying to do at the BBC and the opportunities I get within the library because I was really trying to make the BBC into a library how successful do you think you were pretty successful.

[00:11:34] I mean I think the BBC rigidly archives the BBC was completely locked away and almost impossible for anybody to get to any programme makers could get to them.

[00:11:45] Now it's just normal that any any anything the BBC has produced is considered to be available you know will be made available to the public and then I guess is a approach that you're taking with the New York Public Library as well and it big in collections at libraries is making the more accessible I should have been a through line if you will.

[00:12:04] Not clear. So I think you know it's more of a demand structure so I think that the challenge for us is to is to create a system.

[00:12:12] I wouldn't get as far as just in time digitisation but to be able to respond to research or to any member of the public. And actually I would like to get a copy of this in a digital format that I can

use in this wave for these purposes and for us to be able to respond as quickly as possible to that request. Aspects of that are about trying to anticipate it. We know that there are certain things that people want at different seasons and different times to start building the process by which we can anticipate the kind of material that people will want but also to always have that ability so that somebody says I need a thing this week this month I need particularly teachers asking for specific teaching resources so that we can respond very quickly one thing that always comes with technology and it's part of the name of this program we're doing here has to do with privacy and as there's more technology and things become more digital things move more freely including the content and I realize you and I both share.

[00:13:10] We talked a bit prior we both share a dislike of the word content to describe different forms of media but the you have for the sake of this discussion you have the content which moves freely but then you also have information about those who are accessing or using or manipulating the content. What is the proper role of a library or an institution like a library in dealing with some of those interesting issues of where does the data that can move freely continue to move freely and when should the library step in and say no that's that's far enough to be honest I don't know.

[00:13:49] I think the face of it in the face of it you know if I were using it if I come into the library I imagine that once I'm in the space of the library I'm protected by the kind of the walls of the library it's a space I should feel I should be able to move around in I'm not nobody's watching what I do. No one's checking the books I read. Nobody's asking why I am reading things nobody keeps a record of anything I do and in the old world when you had a physical book that would be definitely the case you'd come in you could take a book without anybody knowing what you'd looked at in order to find the one who made the selection you would read the book you could take it out by handing over your card and they're going to think the only record certainly in the UK would be it dates in the inside telling you what date you had to be back but they wouldn't be in it there'd be no notification it was me that had taken it on it bring back the book they give me back my my library card and we're done there's no record at all of anything and what I've done how I've done it there's a real concern in the digital world as you start your search as you'd look log in.

[00:14:51] We know who you are and what time you've logged in and we know what you've put into the search engine we know how many failed searches it took you to find the thing you want we know what you did when you found the thing you won't know if you booked it if you asked to hold it if you took it out if it's an e-book we can see if you opened it we can see if you've read it we can see where you stopped reading it we can see when you brought it back and we can see that about everybody else we can see who else followed that we can see know aspects of who you've dealt with on the way and I feel all of these are great vulnerabilities I think both we and CSO and every library I know.

[00:15:26] But certainly this library and New York Public Library we delete all of their records and we delete them the moment we possibly can. There are many things we don't bother tracking at all. But it does concern me that the machines themselves may not be doing that the systems that that we rely upon or third party organizations that provide some of those services may not have the same attitude and not because there anything wrong with them but I just think they may not have the same

diligence and the same concerns. So that is a concern to us. On the other hand the libraries particularly archives rely upon information being made available to the public that some people would prefer the public not to know about. They'd like people not to know that you know certain history of done and their tax records or other correspondence. And so it is a very difficult line for libraries to be able to make available public information that should be in the public domain. At the same time respecting the rights of an individual to remove information from the public domain.

[00:16:37] How do you. Is there a process that you have started to establish as to how do you decide whether something should get greater accessibility or where you draw the line.

[00:16:46] You mean personally identifiable information we get.

[00:16:49] For example let's say you get this great collection of documents which might be property records historically speaking. And they happen to be only available for a longtime business paper. So as a result if you wanted to get that information you had to go into the library you had to manually go through every page and there might be personal information people that may be alive who may be deceased or what is whatever else like that in there. Suddenly you have the ability to digitize all of that and put it on the web make it fully available and so nobody has to go through any hoops to try to look at it. But that said that means that the content in there which might be personal information albeit at one point public information is suddenly available to anybody who wants to look at it. What kind of thought process would a library or a library go through before making the decision to make it that broadly available.

[00:17:41] So I don't know what other libraries do we don't publish it. So the only information that we publish in that way that you're imagining is material it's already in the public domain or materials out of copyright and facility to be out of copyright. That means that the last originator or creator must have been dead for 70 years. And so we kind of feel that there's a big enough gap between some of these personal information in that context and that's making the material publicly available on the Web. But we will certainly still give you access to material that's well within site copyright or is still clearly the originators are still alive if you come onto the premises.

[00:18:16] So I think the distinction is that which we would publish freely in that which we would give you access to what kind of expectation of privacy should an individual have as a library patron. Many of us now have sort of realized that when it comes to Facebook social media online systems that are commercially operated that our expectation of privacy is perhaps not what we the reality is different than we bought our expectation had been is the expectation of privacy when an individual comes into a library to use online or digital materials different should it be different.

[00:18:50] I think it should be different.

[00:18:51] And I think you know I think it would be true to say that it keeps some people in the libraries awake at night. So you know we have a person whose only job is to worry about patron privacy is a privacy officer. That is the only thing that Bill ever worries about and he worries a lot

about it. We have convened many groups of people. We currently have a project right now where we have asked one of our counsel general counsels one of our lawyers to convene an entire study around everything we think about privacy everybody every outside of us thinks about privacy and what the patrons think about privacy. And that's going to inform the way we start thinking about policies. We will talk. We are talking to as many people as we can.

[00:19:40] And every library I've ever been to every librarian I've ever spoken to seems to be far more concerned about it than I think the public think they are. And in most cases in the public of themselves I think it is a real issue because this the quality of the services that people have become used to whether that's Google Amazon Facebook which will find services taken to take for granted that people are reasonably comfortable with the information they gather about in order to make the services better. And I think libraries are beginning to feel that we are not part of that that that industry and we have to think very differently about it.

[00:20:27] How much of the concern about privacy in the library should be on the patron. How much should they be. What questions should they be asking. You know there's obviously as wonderful as the New York Public Library is and the Seattle Public Library and Other library systems. These aren't the only ones out there. They're probably you know many libraries may have different approaches to how they handle this.

[00:20:49] If I were to be a good informed library patron are the questions I should be asking of a library I don't think is anything you need to ask that we wouldn't have asked ourselves and I think we would give you a positive answer.

[00:21:03] So one of the things that we are doing in New York which is not just the New York Public Library but the Brooklyn and Queens systems as well is a program of education among the first among among the librarians in order to make us ready so that when patrons do ask us questions about what they should do or what concerns they should have or how they should deal with privacy issues that we are informed and we're able to give them the best possible advice we can. And so you know I don't want to overstate it but you know we take it very very seriously. It is something that we think is front and center of the concerns that we have about the role the library has in dealing with people in this era.

[00:21:43] Are you getting more questions from patrons about privacy these days especially in the current environment when people are concerned and the terms always was thrown out about surveillance state or surveillance technology. Are you getting more concerns from patrons. Because you already mentioned once that maybe patrons aren't as concerned as they should be your individual may be a better way of answering is we not going as many as we would like or expect.

[00:22:09] We do our best to invite people to talk to us. We put notices around and say come and ask us. It's you know that by the way the mayor of New York has also funded that program. So it's not just the librarians. I think we're you know right across the entire public sector. I think we are aware that we need to almost stimulate more questions and more challenge. We. We point out that there are

cameras on the computers and we've got arrows that point to CCTV cameras and we're telling people all the time. You know there are times when your you know your behaviors and your privacy as it is is at risk but we literally do everything we can not to breach that and to encourage people to understand more and to ask more Why do you think it is that people aren't more concerned or aren't asking more questions.

[00:23:09] I think older people don't believe that I think if you're of a certain if you're a certain age you kind of you can imagine it.

[00:23:20] And if you're young you've sort of grown up not you don't feel it's been taken away. I think you know people tend to fall into those people who are concerned tend to fall into two groups.

[00:23:29] There are those who kind of they trust the government to have information about them because they believe that the government will keep them safe. They are concerned about the behaviors of other people who are capable of creating a threat to personal safety. They don't really like the idea that the business is trying to exploit information about them. But then there's another group of people who sort of raise me comfortable that businesses will try to offer them improve services and personalize services and they don't really mind that kind of predictive nature of their commercial behavior. But they don't trust the government to have that view about them. I think the real problem is that if you're concerned about either side. The reality is that actually somewhere in the system it merges into one that you know government surveillance and commercial organizations kind of are all in one big happy bucket of information that's being gathered often with no real intent at all. It's just a kind of a systematic kind of sweeping up of information all of the time that has no particularly malicious intent but it just does exist.

[00:24:40] So it sounds like the majority of people either are resigned to the fact that the information is being gathered or they trust that nothing bad will happen if it is being gathered. That be the two extremes. Yeah. Okay. Should they be that trusting of the library.

[00:24:55] Library Yeah.

[00:24:58] With information I know you said that you know at the New York Public Library and in every library and library organization you've talked to this tends to keep people awake at nights right.

[00:25:12] To make sure that stuff that's private remains private. But do you think people are placing their trust in the right places when it comes to libraries Yeah.

[00:25:23] I think so. I mean I can't I can't think of anything that any library that I know of has done that would put anybody at risk.

[00:25:34] There may be things that will turn out that we should have had more foresight about. I can't imagine where they are now but it's often the case that something you hadn't thought would be will be true. But my experience of libraries and the behaviors of the libraries that I've worked in are that we

will very much on this side of caution we would rather not gather the information in the first place and run the risk of holding it and losing it. And we do have to have information with one exception. We get rid of it the moment we can. The only one exception is finds information finds.

[00:26:14] So in other words with that book from 90 years ago we're still going to haunt you no matter whether it's a digital age or not. Yeah okay. Good good to know. I'll have to take that copy over the mushroom planet and make sure that it eventually gets back from when I was a child.

[00:26:31] Having been in both the UK and now the US do libraries play a different role in the different countries.

[00:26:42] Well I don't know the US. I only know New York.

[00:26:45] Okay but fair distinction but I think so.

[00:26:50] I mean somebody was asked me what I thought about the fact that in the UK apparently a number of libraries have been have been closed down. And how did I feel that oh good for the US.

[00:27:05] I felt that the reason that libraries in the UK can be closed down in that way is because they're all under one single authority which is a single elected individual who has to balance a series of budgets against the prospect of their own re-election and so as a result they can make a single decision that will affect the entire country and affect all the libraries in the country and whether it's a good decision or bad decision. One person can make it from what I can see in America that it can't happen that you that you the mayor could affect New York's libraries but can't affect Chicago's libraries and vice versa. So I feel that the fact that distributed that federated system causes a huge amount of protection and safety for the libraries of America. The other thing I say to Santa Claus across as I walked across the street hadn't I didn't realize until I got here that the public libraries actually invented in America and I think that Americans are very very proud of the fact that this is this know this immense public good has come from here and I think that the more proud of the libraries than you think they are so that there is a difference.

[00:28:13] Go ahead.

[00:28:13] Not that you think they are but they're more proud of the libraries than one might think.

[00:28:18] I'm very proud of this library. For the record I want to make that very clear. The so the role of libraries or I should say maybe the governance of libraries is different in the UK and the US is the role of libraries different in either country. Different in how it handles being part of a democracy. In other words what what would you say the role is of a library in a democracy in the UK versus the US. Are they the same or are they different.

[00:28:49] And what does that role I think the notion of democracy is very different in the first instance because Britain has a monarchy.

[00:29:10] We have a different view about the role of our parliament and one is that one is kind of a permanent safeguard against the other.

[00:29:21] But I think in America you have something much closer to a true democracy. It is really a government that's elected by the people and it's held to account by different parties different bodies that are also one essentially elected by the people and that one is even then elected by people who are elected by the people. So in terms of kind of safeguarding democracy I don't think British libraries even imagine there's any role for them whatsoever in the that kind of spectrum that narrative.

[00:29:51] I think from what I know I mean obviously the political climate is very singularly different in America than in had been previously. And so what I think is really happening is that the public is starting to look to robust institutions that they can rely on and trust us almost like as a safeguard against issues that haven't yet arisen that challenged democracy.

[00:30:19] But that might. And so I feel that what libraries are being set up to be are kind of a safeguard against certain issues that really concern people in particular veracity or truth or authenticity of information. So I don't quite know how it's going to play out but I definitely feel that librarians are bracing themselves now for a different role that they may have previously had and that previous role would have been just a source of books and materials just to disseminate to in a very positive one.

[00:31:00] But I think now that there's a sense that they need to reinforce the kind of that kind of sense of veracity that you know that is is safeguarded by a library.

[00:31:17] If you take a thing from a library that's authentic and I think the Internet is beginning to show some free you know some frayed edges where a huge amount of information on the Internet either is clearly not true or is playing with truth in a way that is intended to manipulate people's perspective our libraries as they're currently structured.

[00:31:41] And I know you only speak for the New York Public Library but are they currently structured in a way where they can be this source of authenticity and veracity when it comes to information that they distribute well at the moment because we will only acquire information that we can that's safe.

[00:32:02] I would say yes. I mean I think there is a real issue when we start bringing important digital information. I think it will become a challenge for us to be able to verify the source or that the truth behind the material support.

[00:32:15] Digital is going to be a very significant issue for us born digital is what for people who may not know.

[00:32:21] So I would say born digital is material that was originated used in let's say the Internet by using online tools for which there is no physical print or other in our other version.

[00:32:33] So Twitter I would say is born digital or that's the material that's made specifically for YouTube but not something that has been digitized and then placed onto the Internet. Some of those things could be manipulated but I would say that the origin would have been in a physical format.

[00:32:55] Let's say so when it comes to me. If this changing role in a democracy is to go from being a passive source of here is the stuff you requested to have fun with it.

[00:33:08] Two we can vouch that this material is authentic from a standpoint of if this book says it's a cookbook we can verify it's a cookbook. Right. I mean what where do you draw the line at authenticity.

[00:33:21] That's a certainly for the content of Watson's in something is it but you know there's that there used to be an entire ecosystem that that account took responsibility for I guess hard to call it veracity but took responsibility for the material that was in the book. You know that we would say this is a recipe book.

[00:33:41] We can't guarantee that the recipes won't kill you. But there was a publisher who previously had you know had their name on that book and their reputation says that if you buy these recipes they won't kill you or there's a chef or an author who has a reputation for making recipes that won't kill you.

[00:34:03] So when it comes to you know basic things like that then I would say that we are just one part of a system that is trying to to say that this is you know this is a trustworthy reliable recipe.

[00:34:16] I think it's difficult when you talk about nonfiction books because the best we can say is Well the publisher stands by the book and the author stands by the book and we stand by the fact that these two people these two sources don't buy the book. I'm still not going to guarantee that anything in Mein Kampf is kosher or legitimate or some that you should follow but we will still say that is an actual copy of Mein Kampf. No one's taken any of the pages out. No one's changed anything no one's edited anything that is the thing that was written by the author and published by the publisher.

[00:34:46] So it sounds like what you're saying. I library can do is and I think in art world they call this Providence which is basically use multiple sources of information to say yes this is what it says it is even if it may not suit your needs at least it's what it says it is.

[00:35:01] Yes.

[00:35:04] And this gets more difficult in the digital world as you mentioned.

[00:35:07] Well I can't be sure that the blog post was written by you and I can't be certain that the thing that you say in your blog post are actually your views and I can't be certain that even if they are your views that those views have been verified by anything other than whatever it was you say so at this point when we start using blog posts or other online resources within the material that we serve up it becomes much harder for us to take responsibility for the truth of things.

[00:35:38] So we really don't know if that internet cat video really is a cat playing the piano or on a skateboard right. Yes. There's no way to prove that. How do libraries that have to deal with that challenge. It's got to be on your mind about dealing as more and more materials are born digital come from digital sources are distributed and get out of your hands digitally and can be changed after the library sends lets them loose into the world if you will the patrons. How do you deal with that.

[00:36:05] Yeah.

[00:36:05] So you know it's all very early and with you know say what do you call these distributed ledger sort of ideas. You know kind of early thoughts but so we're not there yet at the moment we're still making available books that are published by commercial organizations. We haven't even got as far as self publishing. So probably still hasn't tried yet. And we are just kind of dealing with materials that we've traditionally dealt with that we think we know the very best we can sort of you know verify as representative of the kind of materials that Penguin Random House would publish while the actual materials that they would I think we know that that is going to be a big challenge for us. I think before we even get there we've got to consider what's going to happen to materials that we have. Format shifted and to make sure that every part of the material that was in the original is still in the the representation that we've we've made available to people cut out bits of film and republish it.

[00:37:05] And it's very difficult to make sure that you still got the same piece of film as it was originally produced in the digital representation if you had to pick something that's born digital because obviously libraries are not as creators of content or most of them are not. But if you pick something that's born digital that you wish a library would have done you have any examples in your mind. Well I think

[00:37:35] I think the great goal for a library is to is to produce is to make available material to the widest number of people in the most in the most sort of equal way we possibly can. So you know in my mind something like if not Wikipedia the process that produces Wikipedia the idea of being able to distribute a system that distributes wealth and authentication in a way that we believe has the greatest chance of being true that can operate at scale and that can be made available to literally anybody that's close to for free is possible.

[00:38:20] I mean I think that's a pretty good example of the kind of thing that I wouldn't say a library would do but it looks very library shaped library shaped in other words just by the fact that again with a process there is sort of an editing vetting there is a citation of sources and it's kind of self-correcting.

[00:38:40] Yeah. And you know and intended to be equally available to everybody without any any variety that would be caused by let's say wealth. So no matter how how good your your hardware is you're gonna get the same version of Wikipedia.

[00:39:00] One of the advantages of an organization like the BBC is that it produces the same news to everybody at exactly the same moment no matter how expensive your radio or television is. You can't get a better version of it you can't get it earlier. You can't improve on the on the service. I think a library shaped surface is one that is like that we will give exactly the same book to everybody on exactly the same terms with exactly the same conditions. And you know there is you can't come in and buy a better version of the library. We won't give you there's no gold plated service. You can't jump the queue. Well you know with the exceptions when we know that you need additional help but we won't advantage anybody. We will just do our best to make sure that nobody is disadvantaged. And so Wikipedia has those kind of characteristics you know it is intended to be to me everybody where they are on equal terms and there is no way of getting a better version just because of some other advantage of you touched on equity there and accessibility.

[00:40:02] And I'm curious how much did those issues drive the work that you do in digital in the library in general. Because there's always a lot of talk. I know in one area and a relatively well which is education education technology the fact that there is a huge gap when somebody say leaves the school that they're at with accessibility to digital school resources based on what they happen to have at home whether it's a device whether it's broadband and such.

[00:40:31] How do you deal with issues of say equity and accessibility for people who may not have that same kind of equipment or access based on when they're not in a library environment.

[00:40:44] Well I think that's a good example of what I mean. I think if we've got to make sure that we are providing equivalent service services to everybody and it's very difficult to intentionally you know provide services that you know not disadvantage anybody but they've got no value to to everybody. On the other hand we also know that technology has a strange habit of reinforcing fault lines of inequality that we're already there.

[00:41:11] So just the kind of vision of Internet access follows exactly the same lines of telephone telephone access. So if you're part of the world that didn't have telephone then you're going to be worse off as a result of the provision of internet access. But I think you know if you look at some of the approach that the programs that they undertake here the intention intention of closing that gap making Wi-Fi available and trying to meet people where they are. And I also think of issues when I use the word accessibility I think about people with mixed ability and particularly disabilities. When I was at the BBC we we worked very hard to understand how important it was to make sure that people with hair you know hearing or sight impairments could get an equivalent service. But it took us a long time to really understand the needs of people with cognitive or physical or motor impairments because it may look like you've published on the web and everybody could equally get that. But anybody who's got motor issues is going to have to drag a piece of assistive technology in and that's going to change. That will change the level of service to the type of service the product that they

receive. And it's also the case that of course you know faster Internet will get better streamed services and high end machines will receive better connectivity. And that was always that was always a concern at the BBC was one thing when broadcasters say you can't get a better broadcast a better version broadcast but when your smartphone is significantly better than somebody else's low end device that becomes a real concern because you are unintentionally widening the gap between those who have and those who haven't have not in particular because our role is to make sure that that doesn't that doesn't happen. Now I think in a library you can feel that the librarians are aware of this and they know they have to go the extra mile when it comes to equity.

[00:43:09] And I've you know I admire the efforts but it is a very difficult thing to do because in trying to right size things you are actually moving resources from places where people were previously expecting resources in order to create the money to provide news new resources for a very particular group of people.

[00:43:31] Is this something that you put back then on your suppliers especially when it comes to digital to say a range of accessibility a range of bandwidth requirements that in other words if someone's gonna say hey we have this great you know image system for digital imagery do you go back to them and you say Great. How does it work when somebody has a very slow connection versus the fast as possible.

[00:43:55] Yeah we do say that and it's it's unrealistic for us to to try and push the cost of that or the responsibility that onto our thought and our suppliers.

[00:44:06] But it does mean that we know that that's the place where we have to add additional resource where our developers have to get involved. We have to work out if we take a service that is unequal.

[00:44:15] What are we now going to do to equalize it when it reaches us what he has what has been the most significant digital service a library has provided from your perspective what is the best thing you've seen.

[00:44:30] The best thing the best thing apart from the hot spots here in Seattle of course apart from the hot spots here at sea level to go down that would be high on my list really. Okay.

[00:44:39] Yeah. We have hot spots in New York as well. But I would that would be very high on my list. I think our our work around e-books. We don't know enough about. We don't know enough about a reading but distributing e-books as they stand I think has been an important innovation and we did that in New York on behalf of a much broader community. We are thinking how can we ensure that creators are acknowledged and properly rewarded when we create interventions into digitisation particularly when you're looking at works that are out print still in copyright. I think some of the things we do in the back end systems things you won't see around the discovery layers and the what we call the integrated library system the kind of sort of central nervous system that drives all of the systems around the back. I think pretty good. We've produced some very lightweight services we produced a

version and a reader that didn't require anything to be downloaded that you could just use on the open web. We produced a nice service for school teachers where we've got multiple copies of books that we know would be of use in the classroom. We create a system that allows teachers to come and look at our system identify books that we've got say 20 or 30 copies of and hold all 30 copies and then we'll bring them to the schools. What else. We've digitized some interesting things we digitized the green the green book in itself not necessarily groundbreaking but useful for us to keep on keep reminding ourselves how the past wasn't necessarily something we should always be proud of. If district we've digitized huge numbers of images of New York and then overlaid those historic pictures of New York and overlaid those with contemporary pictures and invited the public to come in and identify areas or notes annotate them.

[00:46:38] So you basically have crowdsourced identification of images historic images.

[00:46:42] Yeah. And so I ask people to place contemporary images over the top so we know we've done some interesting experiments and we've also tried to build some big pieces of infrastructure.

[00:46:53] What's the biggest disaster that digitally that you think a library has been involved in or something that's been oversold that has not quite lived up to its expectation. I guess I'm trying to use some traditional British understatement in my rephrasing of the question.

[00:47:07] I am going to say that I can't think of one I can think of areas where I think we should have moved faster areas that we have neglected that I think will at some point come back to haunt us. I can't think of anything that a library is done that's actually been harmful or bad. I don't see any area of waste. I mean I work at the BBC.

[00:47:29] We try to build our own end to end production system that cost about one hundred and about one hundred million dollars that we abandoned. We try to build an entire education curriculum for the UK. We spend about 200 million pounds on that and that was abandoned. I don't see anything of that kind of scale anywhere in the library systems.

[00:47:54] I think one of the things not to interrupt is Is it because the library system doesn't have that kind of money is that or is it because they just didn't see the need to have to create something that they had to own themselves sort of if it's not invented here it's not good enough.

[00:48:13] I think the guy and I can only speak for the small time I've been at the New York Public Library but I don't think we have a huge problem in raising a significant amount of gifts in order to innovate. If we put forward a strong enough case I think we could. I don't think we get to 100 million but we could easily raise 20 or 30 million for a project and then find that it was the wrong thing. I think what I what I previously imagined was was was a weakness I think is a strength which is that the libraries have been very reluctant to move too quickly and have allowed the marketplace and allowed other organizations to kind of prove things work before. Libraries have taken the plunge and I think that has actually inoculated us against that kind of waste for harmful behavior. I also think that librarians are incredibly risk averse.

[00:49:08] I think they do care very much about about patrons and about the impact that work does and so we're very unlikely to take a chance when we're dealing with with public money and when we're dealing with you know with with patrons that we have and particularly when it comes to like we have a personal relationship with them these aren't kind of faceless you know abstract abstracted users these are people that actually know and they come in they share the space that we work in. And so I think we have a very different connection and different different sense of responsibility for people that we actually know by name. I think probably there is an aspect of one one one issue is I think we're not big enough and no one library is big enough to really do something that has the kind of beneficial impacts to the whole sector that would not be the case I suppose if it were you know kind of a different kind of structure. So I think that's one area where we do need to think how can we be different.

[00:50:10] How can we find something that's common to us all that we all need that the commercial sector won't provide. We can take responsibility for for ourselves but I think we know early days we need to find we need to kind of learn to talk to each other in a different way. First of all and then recognize the areas where we think there's a potential vulnerability.

[00:50:31] Is that kind of a collaborative effort that you're talking about more likely to be something that a patron may not see it might be plumbing it by plumbing. I mean digital plumbing archiving technology circulation technology some cataloging technology is something that works behind the scenes. Is that more more likely to be a common interest across libraries.

[00:50:53] I think in the first instance yes because those the kind of the other side of that is I think we think we know best.

[00:50:59] I think we think we know you know we know what you need. One of the things that I know that the leadership of this library are very keen to do is to change that and to turn that around and listen you know be much better at listening and understanding what people need now what people think they're going to need in the future and being able to respond to that. So I think to start with. Sure it will be a piece of plumbing because I can see that there are gaps in the plumbing but I think the leadership of places like Seattle are more inclined to try and open a conversation with maybe not the older generation but the next generation of library users to say OK what are you expecting. What do you need. How can we help you get to where you need to be. So I imagine that's probably more. It's probably something we haven't thought of. I think.

[00:51:47] I mean we have so basically start with the plumbing because that's something everybody sees there might be gaps with or at least something like that and then see how the public and the patrons react and what needs do they have that you may not have considered.

[00:52:00] I think so. But I think you know yes I think that's exactly right. And I think there is you know we need to change the dynamic of the dialogue.

[00:52:07] I don't imagine yet that the patrons feel that we are willing to hear what they have to say over respect with responsive to their their contribution because I think it's very difficult to find the right forum for it. So you know the forum is probably not kind of face to face conversation but I'm not quite sure what it is. So we may be somewhere away from working out how do we how do we get uses of the owners and the uses of the library to tell us what they need from libraries that go beyond those things. Either we petition we traditionally would provide or the things that we instinctively think that we should be providing.

[00:52:45] So what's the role of paper going forward. What's the role of traditional printed materials and books. Yeah you're Chief Digital Officer. You must think about that.

[00:52:55] I'm a big fan of paper. I mean it only works.

[00:52:57] I mean I've I'm nearly 60 and I've only worked in this area for about 15 years and before that I spent my entire life working with paper. I think paper is I think print books newspapers are the best community communications medium ever invented I don't think in my lifetime they'll be surpassed. They have so many has so many advantages. It has its own power supply never it never wears out.

[00:53:27] You don't need to owe anything on to be able to read them. You know they lost it after hundreds of years. It's easy to see if somebody tampered with it or modified it. It's lightweight it's possible. Generally it's shareable. You can pass it around. I think books are here to stay. I think they're amazing. I don't think digital technology should try and supplant books. I don't think we should imagine that even that we should replicate them. I think we need to work out what is it that digital can do that is different from print and become specialists in that not try and compete with what is already a pretty perfect communications medium I believe also books don't try to electrocute you if you drop them in the bathtub while you're reading them.

[00:54:17] So that's probably another benefit of books but it isn't the Kindle isn't the Kindle waterproof like the new paperweight the new one is waterproof.

[00:54:26] So with that I guess that drawback has been taken away 20 years from now I'm not going ask you look 50 years in the future because that does everybody ask questions and ask you 20 years from now what to you.

[00:54:40] Does an ideal library look like in terms of services in terms of the relative role of digital. What would you like to see 20 years from now in a library.

[00:54:54] I think they're going to be two answers one which I think probably be more realistic than the one that I really would like. So I think it will look like that.

[00:55:01] I think they'll look like what's out at this arena now. I think it will be a place of community. I think it'll be a place of variety and diversity. I think there'll be a place where people of all walks of life

will come and do whatever it is they want to do and feel that they are allowed to do that and they're comfortable to do that and that they've got support from other humans who want them to do that. What I'd really like to say is is that multiplied at such scale that there are libraries or things that act like libraries distributed literally unto every street maybe even kind of versions of libraries in peoples in people's homes. Some aspects of the role of a library that people can be with you have with them all the time. That kind of sense of community and support a sense of knowing that whatever it is you need whether it's an information need or something to support your creativity or your ability self actualize is with you all the time.

[00:56:05] And I think there are kind of you know if we just said about the concept of tell of communication devices are trying to think back. If I went back to the eighteen hundreds and we were kind of you know we were dealing with letters and we were dealing with telegrams and we were dealing with what you call those telegrams letters. Telegraph. Yeah right. Yeah. And somebody said What do you think the future of communications technology will be. They said the idea that you could carry a communication device with you all the time that you could connect to your family you could phone your mother you could phone your you know your hospital or your doctor at any time. The idea that you could literally carry in your pocket. I think people do that's a bit far fetched but I think the kind of the principle of a library or the values of a library to be extended away from single large buildings into much smaller buildings and something that you can literally carry with you all the time a library that kind of just is with you all the time is kind of what I would like. I imagined that we could do that and that's kind of how I would like to fantasize concept of a library. I still like the idea of communal spaces. I still like the idea that you come together meet people that you wouldn't otherwise spend time with or sit close to or have any kind of sense of affinity with because I think that's the biggest thing that builds empathy. I think the thing we need most right now is to rediscover our own humanity a sense of empathy and a sense of responsibility for everybody else around us. Libraries do that probably more than any other thing.

[00:57:43] That's your twenty two year forecast on your ideal 20 year forecast forecast but if you give it that don't you. As the Chief Digital Officer The New York Public Library. Thank you. Thank you so much. We have time for a few questions.

[00:58:01] Jim Yeah hi I have a question I think you explained how public libraries and New York Public Library in particular value patrons privacy and protecting privacy in the digital age and have always protected privacy even in an analog age going forward given that other institutions and especially private sector companies don't share those same principles or maybe aren't as effective at at handling individual privacy as libraries are what do you see as the role of the library as an advocate or even a community.

[00:58:42] I'm not sure.

[00:58:43] Again I think I I think we have to sort our I think we have to take care of ourselves put our own house out be responsible for our own behaviors and our own attitude without expecting without trying to impose that on anybody else but I think that by being clear about what we will do and doing

the things that we clear about by living our own values I think that in itself might might change the expectation of a user who gets who gets to see how a library can operate and provide robust and high quality services without having to make kind of unnecessary breaches so that it would be possible for them to maybe have an expectation of other organizations.

[00:59:35] So in some cases then if I'm understanding it would be along the lines of hey the library does it this way why don't you do it this way. Right.

[00:59:43] And I think that the pendulum and remember patrons saying yeah. Right. Exactly. So. So it's the library can model good behavior if you will.

[00:59:50] And that was so I'm curious I'm kind of piggybacking on that because in the corporate world there's been so much hacking. What kind of hacking comes into the library system. How do you deal with that. And is it more because there's limited personal information that's kept kind of curious with all the attacks across the world that Digital Terrorism is stronger that they go after information that we keep I think I mean that guy and that's it.

[01:00:24] There are things that keep us awake at night and our see so you know that's that's the only thing that we've got at both a chief information security officer and a chief privacy officer. So we have reason large institution we can. We have the luxury of being able to afford people who think about not much else of those things. Let's start off by another is saying something slightly different which is we haven't got anything that's really worth stealing. I mean it sure there are gonna be some advantages and there are certain some assumptions you can make from knowing that certain people have read the Koran or certain people have read books on teenage pregnancy. But in terms of commercial value very little value in that it's kind of it's just harmful and disruptive. We have risks to our system integrity and we kind of you know run models where we have to restart and re re reboot everything because of breaches. But I think the motivation of the hacker has to be kind of spite because there's no value in getting the reading history of a 13 year old or a twenty three year old or a 43 year old. We don't have that much. I mean even if you grab every single thing that we'd ever acquired about all of our patrons you know it would fit on a postage stamp.

[01:01:51] I mean we know we're not talking huge amounts of data.

[01:01:54] You can't extrapolate much from it. And so we are concerned about it but we're more concerned about that. The patrons view about their data and think they don't want other people to know rather than the idea that some international hacker will sweep it all up and do something with it because there's not much you can actually do you can't sell it just you know to say just be an unkind thing to do and the other questions.

[01:02:24] All right. I'd like to thank you for being here. You're a select few but your question there.

[01:02:27] Yes.

[01:02:31] We have time for an off topic question Can you explain why the BBC is efforts at the universal education program failed Yeah it was in breach of the European guidelines on state assistance they aid. So the part of the reason why Britain voted to get out of the vote for Brexit there was a restriction on the amount of money that can be used state money money that came from the state can be used to create a rival's product to a commercial service. And the BBC felt comfortable in being able to do that because there was no service in the marketplace and it didn't appear to be any service in the marketplace. And that the British government had invited tenders from the marketplace to provide the service which they paid for. And there were no bidders for it. And so the government turned to us and told us to do it because there was a market failure was only after we had started the products and we started to build it that two of the publishers decided to challenge this decision. And although when it went to the E.U. the EU did not rule for the BBC to close it down British government risk averse and they felt that it would be safer just to abandon the project actually interesting question a little bit about that background.

[01:04:05] All right. Thank you all very much appreciate your being here you're a select group. Thank you

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