
Materials Matchmaking

Articulating Whole Library Advisory

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Guest Columnist

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As noted in this column in *RUSQ* 48(2) ("Building on a Firm Foundation: Readers' Advisory Over the Next Twenty Five Years"), one of the challenges facing readers' advisors in the coming years will be format-based advisory. Our audience needs to expand beyond just the reader to include viewers and listeners, and we need to be alert to both the similarities and the differences between working with these users and working with those interested in print materials. In the following column, Tara Bannon Williamson begins the conversation, looking at how we can best work with the reader, viewer, and listener and listing some of the tools that are available to advisors. Williamson, librarian at the Schlessman Family Branch Library, the busiest of Denver Public Library's branches, chaired the Colorado Association of Libraries readers' advisory special interest group, founded Denver Public Library's current readers' advisory group, and is an adjunct professor at the University of Denver's Library and Information Science Program, where she taught the readers' advisory course offered spring quarter 2010. She also will be teaching this course summer 2011. Williamson also is a frequent contributor to *NoveList*.—*Editor*

The library continues to dynamically evolve into a thriving destination, alive with sound and rich in format. Steadily, the library world has seen and embraced new formats, from the original books on tape and VHS to the new formats of playaways and downloadable electronic media. Library customers drive this change with their eager acceptance of and hunger for these and other types of audiovisual material. As film rental stores suffer through bankruptcies, libraries must seize their opportunity. People seeking traditional brick-and-mortar video rental can enjoy our physical space, while Netflix and Amazon customers who expect recommendations while browsing also can have their needs met through readers' advisory.

How then does a readers' advisor adapt to the growing demand for nonprint materials? A new terminology is required. Rather than develop different skills and terms for viewers' advisory, listeners' advisory, and readers' advisory, an all-encompassing term should be created to reflect the universal and modern nature of our skills. Materials match-making implies the level of personal preference that informs each interaction while keeping the result set broad and unlimited by format.

Without realizing it, many customers already expect a recommendation model not limited by format, much like that provided by Amazon. Those without expectation are educated on library scope when offered multiple formats

when they simply provided a title. A customer interested in *Marley and Me* may be delighted to learn of the availability of not only the book by John Grogan, but also the film starring Owen Wilson, the audiobook narrated by Johnny Heller, or the kids' books by various authors.

Offering multiformat materials advisory to library customers is not significantly different from offering traditional library services, it simply requires a broader filter when creating connections between customers and library materials. Ascertaining whether or not the customer is looking for a specific suggestion, an answer to a question, or requesting a barrage of possibilities is the first step.

Providing materials matchmaking for nonreaders will guarantee the sustainability of the library by showing relevance to all members of the community and by providing a possible bridge to more traditional library services, including requesting print material. Customers who start by requesting informational videos can be enriched by considering the print collection and vice versa. Pitman states, "In fact, there are all kinds of questions that we answer by automatically pointing patrons toward the book stacks that we could just as easily (if not better) handle with video format."¹

When working with readers, we use the elements of appeal to make connections to new books and authors. Saricks writes that these same concepts of appeal, "pacing, characterization, story line, frame (physical setting and atmosphere), tone and mood, and style and language,"² will also help connect viewers and listeners with new materials. There are, however, some new facets to consider when applying these appeal factors across formats.

APPLYING APPEAL FACTORS ACROSS FORMATS

Film

Appeal factors can be applied when discussing audiovisual formats as well as print, although some translation is required and additional questions should be posed when mining information related to the viewer's interests. In some ways, recommending DVDs can be simpler than working with books as there are more contributing entities. While a book typically has one author, a DVD can be seen to have many. While listening to your customer, pay attention to whether it is the overall film (director), dialogue (writer), characters (actors), or another element entirely, and that can lead you to a wealth of suggestions. Genre terms and definitions are directly transferable from print to film.

Setting, an important factor/element for readers, may be an even larger consideration for viewers. In many films, the setting is almost a character unto itself, with possible theme music, moods, and intent. While watching a film may be less of a time investment than reading a book, for many viewers films evoke a stronger immediate emotional bond and reaction by eliciting more of our senses. With high-definition films and televisions becoming more common, the setting is more than coming into focus; it is assuming a role on stage.

Cinematography in a film can be loosely equated to the use

of language or tone in a book. Cinematography is the artistic unveiling of the film, the silent narrator, while the tone and language of a book play the same role. A customer requesting films that are dark and ominous may not only be referring to the plot or the setting of the film but to the pace and cinematography.

As with setting, customers may have a different tolerance level for cursing, sexual content, and violence when consuming books and movies. Hearing and seeing this sort of thing affect some people more potently, while for others, the imagining the violence or hearing the words in their mind affect them more deeply. Most films come with ratings, warnings, and content notes that can help the customer and the librarian make an informed decision about what they are taking home.

Music

For most librarians, music may be the most intimidating arena in which to make recommendations. In addition to musical tastes being intensely personal, listeners may struggle with how to talk about music. Music lovers often identify with a genre or subgenre or perhaps a few particular artists but often cannot articulate the elements that attract them to one musical group or artist over another. When working with listeners, using genre while applying additional searchable criteria such as imprint and date of publication can yield the most efficient and effective results.

In the world of independent music, the recording label is often congruent with the publishing company. Not only are they aligned with the tastes of their niche customers but also may represent a self-identified subgenre. When providing readers' advisory, it is useful to know that the imprint Luna, a subset of Harlequin, concentrates on paranormal romance. Similarly in the music world, Brushfire Records, formed by Jack Johnson, and Righteous Babe Records, formed by Ani DiFranco, both feature artists whose styles are similar to these performers.

Although date of publication is not generally of import when making reading recommendations, it can be a portal for creating solid music recommendations. Musical influences, styles, and lyrics are heavily influenced by the era in which they were produced, reflecting not only the political and popular influences of the period but embodying the spirit of the day and evoking memories and emotions remembered by the listener.

The environment or activity in which the customer wishes to enjoy their music will also inform your recommendation. Customers requesting workout music will have different expectations than pregnant mothers seeking to nurture the tiny genius gestating within. Tempo, lyrical content, and genre will be factors to consider during materials matchmaking. During the interview, establishing a solid baseline regarding preferences and expected outcomes will guide your interaction and inform your suggestions.

Being aware of local radio stations, music venues, and trends can keep you abreast of recent releases and events that may be of interest to your customers and can improve your recommendations. During the materials matchmaking interview, inquiring about their favorite radio stations can

READERS' ADVISORY

inform your recommendation beyond asking what "kind" of music they like.

Audiobooks

Audiobooks are most easily approached using standard appeal terms because the content is identical to that of the print item, except in the case of abridged material. The added facets of narration, length of recording, intended listening arena, and format are important ingredients to also consider.

In addition to the concerns of story, setting, mood, language, and character, audiobook advisory requires a knowledge and sensitivity to things such as the narrative voice, reading style, where the auditor plans to listen to the recording, and what sort of media format the auditor needs and desires. These new ways of thinking about audiobooks also can apply to working with users interested in help finding music and films.³

Male voices are generally more popular for listeners and easier for older adults to hear due to the lower register.⁴ Multicast performances will appeal to fans of the old radio shows and those that struggle with distinguishing characters or are less experienced with audiobooks. Authors reading their own work appeal to many listeners because "the writer as narrator format lends authenticity and makes listening even more intimate."⁵ When assisting a customer new to listening to books who does not know what they prefer in a narrator, it is wise to send them home with female, male, and multicast vocal selections so they may explore their preference, if any.

Becoming familiar with a varied selection of notable and award-winning narrators is a significant first step in creating a successful audiobook advisory experience. The Audie Awards, sponsored by the Audio Publishers Association, bestows accolades on multiple aspects of production and narration in more than thirty different categories. While the selections are a springboard, the breakdown of types offers valuable insight into appeal terms for this format.

BECOMING A RECOMMENDATION ENGINE

A recommendation engine provides suggestions that are based on a customer's tastes and usage. Until a library product is successfully created to exist within our OPACs or on top of our catalogs, library staff will need to become recommendation engines. Providing advisory services to our users fortifies the role of the library in its community by making connections between people and materials and building relationships with library users through conversation and overlapping interests. Iskold writes,

A great recommendation system can retain and attract users to the service. For example when a user returns a movie, he/she is recommended another movie they might like—which increases the likelihood of return business.⁶

Being able to successfully suggest a film, CD, or book

increases our relevancy in our users' lives and increases the likelihood of a return visit and word of mouth referral.

In addition to consuming as much media as you can muster, listening to those around you talk about what they like and why, and asking customers where they hear about their items and why they like them, there are several online and print tools that the materials matchmaker can use to insure a successful interaction. While no universal tool yet exists to answer any audiovisual reference or recommendation question, several excel at addressing specific common interactions.

PRINT RESOURCES

Print resources can be effective during materials matchmaking depending on the currency of the publication date and the quality of the indexing. *Leonard Maltin's 2011 Movie Guide*, *The Time Out Film Guide 2011*, and *Halliwel's Film Guide* are excellent examples of film catalogues that contain reviews, indexes of performers, and lists of award winners. The magazine *Video Librarian*, "is the video review magazine for public, school, academic, and special libraries, as well as video fans who are interested in a wider variety of titles than what's found in the average video store" and is a great way to stay up-to-speed with new releases.⁷ While excellent for general review, browsing, or familiarizing yourself with names and titles, these resources are generally too static to be effective during material matchmaking.

ONLINE RESOURCES

IMDb (The Internet Movie Database)—www.imdb.com

IMDb, which turned twenty in October of 2010, is now an affiliate of Amazon. IMDb "started as a dream to make a tool that we, as movie fans, would find really useful and fun. Over the years, millions of other movie fans have found it useful and fun too."⁸ Most effective when answering questions such as "which films were Kathryn Hepburn and Spencer Tracy costars?" and providing filmographies, movie summaries, and trivia, IMDb is one of the best and most popular of the freely available movie databases.⁹ For those screening by content, IMDb provides a Parent's Guide field that provides in-depth content advisory on sex and nudity; violence and gore; profanity; alcohol, drugs, and smoking; and frightening and intense scenes on a scale of 1 to 10 with reasoning.

Rotten Tomatoes—www.rottentomatoes.com

Featuring box office information, release dates, reviews, and celebrity news, Rotten Tomatoes is unique in that it allows you to search by critic. Early in 2010, Rotten Tomatoes joined forces with Flixster to create a "database of more than 250,000 movies, 2.3 billion user reviews, 500,000 critic reviews, more than 20,000 trailers and videos," plus local movie showtimes.¹⁰ Customers looking for the hottest titles with the most scandalous stars will enjoy recommendations plucked from this site.

Filmsite—www.filmsite.org

“Filmsite—also known as Greatest Films . . . is a unique website containing interpretive, descriptive review commentary and historical background, and hundreds of colorful, vintage film posters for some of the best Hollywood and American classic films in the last century.”¹¹ While limited by publication date and country of origin, Filmsite is affiliated with American Movie Classics and provides extensive film lists that film buffs can accept as definitive. Customers looking for broad lists of “The Greatest Films” or “Controversial Films” or genre studies like film noir, chick flicks, and greatest disaster film scenes will enjoy this site.

TuneGlue—<http://audiomap.tuneglue.net>

For those wishing to find more musical groups or artists similar to another, TuneGlue provides a visual map that creates a web of connections that stimulates discovery by providing an accurate and intriguing suggestion result set. Connections can be formed between multiple groups, strengthening the potency of the recommendation. Each search creates nodes, which you click to expand to reveal four to six suggestions that are related to the original query and are connected with an elastic line. Expanding several nodes reveals a web of connections between musical groups and artists. These connections, generated by LastFM and Amazon, are entirely user-driven.¹² Rather than being a tool to answer a specific question, this is an excellent resource for those seeking exploration and discovery of new artists in relation to beloved favorites.

Musicoverly—<http://musicoverly.com>

Musicoverly generates an online radio station based on searches, and most uniquely, mood. Arranged like compass points, the listener is presented with the selections of Energetic, Positive, Calm, and Dark. Further refining the search, the user can select decade and genres (rock, metal, blues, gospel, jazz, R&B, rap, electro, Latino, classical, soundtrack, world, reggae, soul, funk, disco, pop and vocal pop) to further home in on the desired results. In addition to mood radio, Musicoverly offers dance radio searching with Tempo +, Dance +, Tempo -, and Dance -, at the compass points also further refined by decade and genre. Musicoverly’s full benefits may not be recognized at the reference desk because audible streaming music may not be condoned at your location, or it may not be equipped to handle it.

AMG (All Media Guide)—www.allmusic.com; www.allmovie.com; www.allgame.com

Originally intended to simply recommend music, the All Media Guide has grown to include movies and video games recommendations and information such as metadata, descriptive content, relational content, and editorial content.¹³ When assisting customers wanting to know everyone who has covered a particular song, entering the song title into AllMusic.com will provide relevancy ranked results. As IMDb

compiles complete filmography information, AMG provides discography information, including track titles included on each album.

SongLyrics.com

Customers can occasionally only remember a portion of the song or a phrase from the refrain. This is one of my favorite transactions, as I am briefly serenaded while the customer sings, hums, or raps. Occasionally, the customer misremembers lyrics, which is why the “scattered words” option in addition to phrase is so useful on SongLyrics.com. Identifying the song can lead you to the artist, the album, and perhaps even other music they might be interested in. This is an excellent tool to answer a specific question regarding lyrics and finding information regarding those lyrics.

Pandora—www.pandora.com

Created with input from the Music Genome Project, each song has been carefully considered by credentialed individuals in a way astoundingly different from other user-based input: “It’s not about what a band looks like, or what genre they supposedly belong to, or about who buys their records—it’s about what each individual song sounds like.”¹⁴ Because musicians are best equipped with the passion and vocabulary to discuss, categorize, and analyze music, beyond that of the average music appreciator, Pandora is able to sublimate what average listeners can only hint at. Wyatt writes that “the elements that matter in the work of . . . Pandora (tempo, lyric, key) are the appeal cousins of RA’s pace, character, language, setting, tone and detail.”¹⁵

CROSS PROMOTION OF LIBRARY MATERIAL

No material exists in a vacuum. TV shows allude to books, and movies feature soundtracks meant to promote up-and-coming bands. Songs are based on books and feature references to films. Books are based on films and TV shows or share writers across the mediums. Wright notes, “With this new approach to television, and with DVD circulation reaching new highs in our libraries, it is easier than ever to draw connections between our patrons’ viewing and their reading, and back again.”¹⁶

Library materials can be marketed as bundles, promoting a whole sensory experience and illustrating the depth and breadth of your collection. Whether actually secured together as a bundled unit with twine and a tag or loosely displayed as a unit, bundles show that the library is in tune with their lives, needs, desires, and can possibly even exceed their expectations.

Five Bundle Examples:

Theme: Lost: The Multimedia Experience

Book—*Bad Twin* by Laurence Shames (ghostwriting for metafictional character, Gary Troup) or any number of books

READERS' ADVISORY

referenced on the show

DVD—*Lost*: Season One or any of the other seasons available

CD—*Hurley* by Weezer or the *Lost* soundtrack

Theme: *Date Night*

Book—Wide range of cookbooks or books on massage

DVD—Wide range of romantic comedies

CD—Wide range of jazz, adult contemporary or classical music

Theme: *Frank Lloyd Wright*

Book—*Loving Frank* by Nancy Horan

DVD—*Frank Lloyd Wright: A Film* by Ken Burns

CD—*Beethoven* (Wright wished his architecture to emulate Beethoven)

Theme: *I've Got a Brand New Pair of Roller Skates*

Book—*Derby Girl* by Shauna Cross

DVD—*Derby Mania* documentary

CD—*Best of Melanie*—song “Brand New Key”

Theme: *Chicago Blues*

Book—*Spinning Blues into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records* by Nadine Cohodas or *Rage To Survive: The Etta James Story* by David Ritz and Etta James

DVD—*Cadillac Records*

CD—*At Last* by Etta James

STAFF TRAINING TALKING POINTS

- Learn to approach customers. Customers wearing concert or film apparel may be amenable to friendly banter regarding recommendations based on their clear and advertised preferences.
- Encourage staff to make recommendations. Providing opportunities for writing recommendations or establishing a staff picks area can provide low-stress practice in preparation for live recommendations.
- During regular staff meetings take a few moments at the end or beginning to roundtable interesting books, film, and music staff has seen, read about, listened to, or are anticipating. With each staff member contributing, you cover a wider area of interests.
- Promote your nonprint collections. Using bookmarks, displays, and any other merchandising tricks at your disposal, make sure these items are being seen and advertised. Combine various formats in your displays.
- Demolish the stereotype that libraries are not aware of or eager to discuss popular culture. Traditional views of the library are in direct contradiction to the belief that requesting a movie or CD recommendation from a librarian could be rewarding.

SUMMARY

It is important to note that customers may not know to request a matchmaking intervention, and as librarians, we need to be bold enough to offer it to them. This can be achieved simply and without library jargon. Customers requesting a popular title may face an extensive wait list as more and more customers take advantage of the library's offerings. After placing their request and before they walk away, asking if they are looking for a movie for tonight/the weekend/a special occasion can get the ball rolling.

Until a database similar to Novelist for providing recommendations for movies or music is created, or tools such as an algorithm that generates suggestions based on either customer or librarian input, or a recommendation engine is made available to libraries, any librarian can learn the skills needed to smoothly navigate the materials matchmaking request using skills based in readers' advisory.

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