

UXLibs III

Glasgow, 6-7 June 2017

Theme: Impact

This was my first UXLibs conference and it delivered a lot. It challenged, it raised issues and it provided workshops on practical user experience tools (cognitive mapping, love and break up letters, the 4Ls) to take away.

A key note by Matthew Reidsma considered ethics in the design process. Using the analogy of building design being influenced by the values of society, he drew the parallel to system and service design and how the values of the designer are embedded within it. He raised questions of how design creates limits on user choices and that designers should always question the outcome and possible consequences of their work. He looked at how search linkages and relevance ordering can reflect the bias and personal beliefs of the system designers and considered the use of personas to humanise data and allow us to see the people we are designing for. We were also urged to consider whether we only use positive personas or include the “messy, error-prone, distracted human” (M. Reidsma quoting K. McGrane).

Meredith Evans delivered an inspiring keynote considering social responsibility and privacy in archiving. She noted that often what material is preserved is chosen and interpreted by archivists and challenged this by stressing a need to weigh the expert voice and that of the user voice. She spoke of the *Documenting Ferguson* project where the community were encouraged to upload digital content created following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, to a community archive; material the archivists actively chose not to evaluate or describe.

Caretaking this archive led to several concerns for the archivists: copyright, attribution, the right to be forgotten, the challenges of preserving social media content (and the ethics of doing so) and the use of archive content by law enforcement agencies as evidence in prosecutions. She ended with the advice to be “courageous, vigilant and transformative”, to push boundaries and be open to change.

Within the delegate presentations, Åsa Forsberg spoke of basing arguments on evidence provided by UX data, Carl Barrow reminded me that staff are also library users and Emma Wisher about using UX methods in the new ‘open to all’ Library Advisory Group that replaced her university’s Library Committee.

Yael Schwartz and Andrea Davis of San Francisco Public Library advocated for “Think Less, do more” – to ‘do’ at every opportunity, to share a project in progress and not to be afraid to show the rough edges. Similar remarks were made throughout the conference: Matthew Reidsma spoke of minimal viable product and that the purpose of collecting data is to inform action, not to collect data; Meredith Evans of producing executive summaries, not lengthy reports, and Deirdre Costello spoke of being messy and sharing. Andy Priestner had spoken at the beginning of the conference about UX maturity and the impact of the institutional character on the opportunity to adopt UX.

The message for me was show the impact of your project as soon as possible – engender buy-in for projects from your users and your institution, do the ‘quick wins’ and use their impact to move to the bigger system designs. This was a conference that challenged in many ways (including an actual UX team challenge) but also left me with a personal challenge: to build UX into what I do.