Hello I’m Gavin Bell, I work for the Nature Publishing Group and I design social software for them.

Today, I’m going to talk about readers, why I think they are important and how to bring them closer to you as a publisher,

This is based on work we’ve been doing at Nature, work I did at the BBC and current trends on the web.

I’m a psychologist by background and as such I care about how people relate to information.

As publishers you sell information, but I think there are better ways of getting people like me, “your keener reader” to develop a stronger relationship with you as a publisher.

So I guess I’m presenting as a web person who reads quite a lot of books, rather than a publishing industry native, but I’ll say we and us meaning publishers for ease of story–telling.

With that short intro
This is a bookcase, it is actually one of several in our house. It contains cookery books and some design / DIY books.

Last year at TOC Brian Murray mentioned the 6+ book buying public about 65 million of them in the USA, say 25%. I'm one of those, I live in London, but I'm sure the figures are similar in the UK.

However there is a difference between the books you can see behind me and other books I own these ones, I've even read quite a few of them.

These are different from the exact same books on the shelves at my local bookstore or in a warehouse at amazon.

They are different because they are part of my life some of them were presents from my wife. Some of them I like and use a lot, some sit on the shelf.

It would be good to know which ones.
This is what we do as publishers,
We sell books
If we don’t sell books we go out of business,

So why care about me.
Why care about the post transaction relationship?

We care about commissioning, printing, stock control, distribution, returns, best sellers, awards, google etc.
Well, there are a few reasons

Most sales are a single sale and repeat sales would be quite a good business model

Returning to the book buying public figures for a moment. The 1–5 market are not the focus of this talk, neither are the supermarket crowd buying block busters. There is little connection in the repeat sales here other than that the airport shop or walmart (tesco) stock them.

Instead I’m talking about the other 25% of people, the ones which it is worth chasing for repeat sales. The ones who for whom reading a book is not too much effort.
We got into this idea way back, sales sheets in the endpapers or lists of other books. More from this author, more in this series, imprint basically more from the publisher that they think you might like.

Yet, it is still very driven by the publisher and one way transactions we'd send you to a website now for the sales.
Who are these people, then your book buyers and how do you get to know them?

From your point of view as publishers it would be great to know which books your readers have bought. People who have bought a few books will buy more.

There is something special about books — once they achieve critical mass they are communal creatures and start to attract bookcases etc.

You might think I'm just joking, but there is a serious point here, which I return to in a moment.
Getting to know your readers

So how would you get to know me.

I buy technology books, cookery books, travel, photography, design and fiction – how would you know?

A mail in card or book registration as O’Reilly encourage in their animal books.

I’m not sure what the returns are like on those, but probably not stellar?
Large publisher wltm m/f 25-55 avid reader for conversation and on-going relationship, self supporting only

You could try this in the better papers, but they might not have a b2c category.
So how do you go about developing long term relationships with your customers?

Some companies have an easier time of it, as their relationship is more direct. My local bookshop has a loyalty card to help aggregate data.
There is one company which has done a pretty good job of it

Amazon have the relationship tied in pretty tightly with their own customers

Recently a report said that 52% of people who shop online start at Amazon. They may not purchase eventually, but they start there.

The primary reason – reviews of products from other people, usually strangers.

Weird eh? They’d trust the opinion of someone they’d never met over the manufacturer or Amazon or the press reviews.

This finding is pretty consistent for Amazon, the reviews are one of the major draws for people visiting the site

what those people are saying has a powerful attraction.

So what can you as a lone publisher do?
http://www.flickr.com/photos/lwr/246811052/

So forgive me I’m going to cast you all as chimpanzees for the moment, a bit smaller and probably smarter

Given that Amazon has scale in books sales and reviews that is pretty unassailable, what should you do?

Well Amazon may excel at the sale and recommendations for future sales, but it is not a conversational space.

The reviews are not a dialog, they are monologues in general
Social relationships

We are a social species we like to talk to one another, we like to discuss what we are enthusiastic about, we like to make friends.

We do this in the real world and we do this online, the two are merging, especially for the millennials.

People do things on the internet because they gain social currency from these interactions.

Contact is king as Doug Rushkoff said.
Books as context

We will particularly talk to one another if we have a common interest.

People do not buy books to make their apartment look pretty, well perhaps there is an exception for coffee table books.

People buy books with the intention of reading them if they are non-fiction with the intention of extending their knowledge of an area.

An area that they already have an interest in, they might well have personal relationships in this area too.

So a book is not just a single purchase listed on their bank statement.

It fits into the pre-existing context of their lives.

Many genres of fiction work the same way – crime or science-fiction. There is some commonality between the people who read the same books, at least there is the chance of conversation.
So books can be seen to have a collection of people attached to them and moving between related books, a bit like birds.

All of this context already exists, but mostly it is not being tapped into by publishers.

We have groups of people buying similar books, however this is often from different publishers.

Ideally you’d want them to buy more books from you.

So how do you get them to orbit back to you

This 5+ book buying crowd are more motivated discuss their subjects, as they have a deeper involvement with their subject. Particularly the hobby or genre groups.
All that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about. — Albert Einstein

So tap into this enthusiasm and you are likely to get a positive response.

There is some debate as to whether this may have come from Charles Kingsley, no matter, the point is well made.
I'm going to propose that you attempt to host a conversation, Maybe not the conversation you are expecting

There are two types of conversation about your books happening on the internet.

Conversation about your individual books.
And
Conversation about the area that your books talk about.

But first, lets look at and critique examples from some publishers
Publisher examples

A quick look at some examples of what publishers are up to

These aren’t bad projects, in fact they are often the most innovative they just show some useful missing links
Penguin have the James Bond books, but this book is listed several times, once for each new cover. This makes sense for the bookseller, but confusing for the reader, who wants to relate to the story, not the SKU.

Also not the best url, I've ever seen, I'll return to urls later

http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780141187587,00.html?breadcrumbList=%7Bcasino+royale
%7D&bcPath=c590614%2D00000000023%23%2D1%23%23%2D1%7E%7Eq636173696e6f20726f79616c65&searchProfile=UK-590614-global&strSrchSql=casino+royale
The book also made it into the blog a penguin classic project. Penguin mailed out a book in response for the promise to put a review on their website.

However this review is not listed on the catalogue page for even the same cover version of the book.

There is no mention of it, so nice idea, but a lack of joined up thinking.

They have got quite a few reviews and even attracted comments on the reviews from other readers.

So this is a valuable resource, but it is hidden away from the main people coming to their site.
Peachpit publish some excellent book, this book on presentations by Garr Reynolds is great. However it fails to mention or link to the blog that the book came from, nor is there any space for the reviews that this popular book will get from the internet.

Given that Peachpit seek out new voices, often coming from bloggers, this seems like a missed opportunity.

Even the profile page for Garr doesn’t mention his blog.

Taking people off your site is no longer bad. In this case people are probably more likely to buy Garr’s excellent book if they read some of his blog.

If your author has a blog, show this off, at least link to it.
A publisher led blog. These are quite popular.

I'm not sure who this is aimed at, the content feels like it is aimed at readers, but the style and layout of the site feels formal.

They have many authors on the same blog, so this doesn't feel like Nigel Slater's blog at all.

Something we found consistently in research at the BBC was that once someone has got to a deeper page, only give them content directly relevant to what they are looking at.

The recent comments on this page are comments on any blog post on this blog. I'd rather see more from Nigel or just comments on his posts.

Why are people coming to this page to read about Nigel Slater or 5th Estate? I'd say Nigel Slater, so give them what they are coming for, then encourage them elsewhere. Too many options will just chase them away.
Dorling Kindersley’s reader submitted travel guides.

It took me 3–4 pages to get to this review, which is the highest rated place from a person.

DK list their own highest rated first,
Then on another tab you can see the reviews from the readers
Then you can choose to rank this by most popular
Finally you can get to the most popular review from a reader for New York.

Compare with amazon, a simple bit of scrolling gets you to the reviews.

If you are hosting content from other people, then show it off, don’t bury it.
a quick overview of the menagerie that is social software 
(the picture is the Parisian menagerie from the 17th century)

So there are some decent efforts from publishers on the internet, but the default still seems to be a publisher led blog or a detached message board.

There are some other options, so here is a quick review of social software options
Commenting vs blogging

There is a big difference between these two things, but they are often said in the same breath or we say one when we mean the other.

Commenting is getting readers to annotate content that you publish, mainly books in your case. You own the object that is being commented upon, it is usually not reader created. Amazon reviews are comments.

Blogging can come from you as well, but the content is generally not for sale and is generally open for comments.

Offering your readers blogs is a complicated decision, as you now have a separate editorial voice to contend with. One I’d be wary of. You cannot influence the topics they raise or how long they stay with you.

However offering your authors blogs, I’d recommend, as long as they don’t have one.

Don’t force it and let them decide if they want comments, how often to post etc, though maybe more than once a month might be encouraged.

Both commenting and blogging are good ways to support / discover a community.
Message boards & wikis

I'm unconvinced that pure message boards or wikis add a huge amount of value.

Wikis, with the exception of wikipedia, are good tools for small teams to maintain a project or generate a final document. They are not really spaces for people to meet and talk.

Message boards are interesting, they'd seem like the answer. However they generate odd behaviours. People jump in and out to ask questions and they can encourage a slightly antagonistic atmosphere.

There are two important things with any message board
They must be linked to the main site concretely. So the board for an author is linked from every page about a book by that author

Your staff and authors should get involved. This is vital, you need to be in the midst of it, it is not a printing press.

The bar or pub analogy works well here, would you open a pub and then let anything go? Or would you talk to the guests and get to know them?

You can’t make community, too many wiki or message board efforts seem to be set up on this premise.
I think these are one of the key aspects of modern social software.

The means to add people to a network of contacts / friends, yes just like facebook, but without the noise.

Whether you have a commenting / reviewing system, a blog or even a message board, a single set of profile pages will allow your community to use your site as a place to make friends from those interested in your content.

The model is like a bar, you want to throw a good party for your readers, perhaps a slight refined one.

You define the space and the decor, but people come back for the friends they make in your space.

Chris Anderson put it succinctly “SOCIAL NETWORKING IS A FEATURE, NOT A DESTINATION”, something you add to a site to draw people together.

An app on facebook is not the endpoint, it might work well as an advert, but you need to draw together your own community
Ok, so other than an excuse to have my son in a presentation, what does flickr show us.

Explain that I own the picture, but that I can find out who the people leaving comments are and maintain a relationship with them.
That if I am in their network then they see my pictures automatically.
That it is about social interaction, not just tags and photos, the folksonomy is not the interesting part.

Studying flickr by posting pictures and adding people to your network so that you maintain social relationships is time very well spent if you are interested in web community.
Not 1-2 days of upload one picture, tag it and then abandon. I mean use flickr for a month or two, get your team on there. Explore and play with it. Flickr in preference to facebook, as there is a clearer focus on people and photographs, less noise from vampires and zombies.

They don’t do everything right, but they are pretty good at it. Flickr is not just tags and photos. What makes it interesting is that it is about conversation and social relationships. The photos just happen to be the substrate.
Creating these new kinds of relationships will put a large degree of change on your organisation.

New responsibilities and plenty of new decisions to make, probably new staff to hire.
One of the most important groups of people running these newer web community sites are the community managers.

They are the people, often full-time, talking, helping, encouraging and getting to know the people inhabiting your site.

Regardless of whether you are running commenting, a blog, a message board or an email list you need people like this.

Note you can’t create a community, just like you can’t create a lively bar.

You need to start with a small core audience, I’ll get to how to generate that in a moment.

Then encourage them and reach out to other people, inserts in books, links to bloggers, advertising perhaps.

Small steady growth is what you are looking for, you want to make it a place to hang out. Getting on Digg is not the goal, they visit and don’t return.
I could spend the entire 45 minute slot talking about moderation.

There is a lot of complexity here, but some simple approaches.

Deal with any issue quickly and transparently
Don’t just throw people out (they’ll come back again pissed at you)
Talk to people and find out what is wrong, it is like good customer service.

Be aware of the issue of libel and understand your responsibilities.
Who is being published, hosted and why
What is the purpose and who gets what tools and services – role definition

Three statements
You and your community
You vs your community
Your community and you
One of these will work for you, hopefully not the one in the middle.

There are plenty of decisions to be made in this space.
Often authors have more clout than your brand, they can take their readers with them.
Readers might want to discuss a subject area more than they want to focus on a book, brand or author – I’d let them

Your brand might seem unapproachable, certainly we have this issue at Nature, it is a career best to be published with us, so we might not be the most obvious informal hangout space.

The scope of your publishing house brand is probably too big, something between a single author and an imprint is about right.
Eg I’m not interested in all cookery books, just a few of your authors. How do you get me to hang out with other people who can cook, rather than people looking for basics
Your own editorial staff will probably need to change the most, listening to your readers is hard. Accepting that they know what they want even harder.

Negative reviews are hard too, but at least they tell you want to put on print on demand and what to stockpile...

Example of strong “publisher” ties
BBC Newsnight
Vibrant community lead by newsnight team blogging about the lead stories of the serious news programme newsnight. Frequently get dozens of comments and conversations.

Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer publication, resulted in Amazon picking up on people buying the Joe Simpson book Touching the Void at the same time. It is an arguably better example of mountaineering writing

This lead to Joe Simpson and Touching the Void being on the new york times best seller list for 14 weeks, plus the subsequent film.

Are you ready to anticipate this kind of community recommendation?
Source Chris Anderson’s The Long Tail.
Arguably the least important of the these areas, but one you’ll spend a lot of time over, both planning and implementing.

It is very easy to either not follow through on essential relationships, like tying versions of a book together and also to over-engineer systems that no one uses.

I’m going to overview some very useful simple technologies which let you connect bits of the web together in sensible ways.

Much of the web already exists and any site is only a small part of it. Realising this is important, it helps you to see that a large part of what you should be doing is integrating with the rest of the web, not building an island to rest on top of it. Google, Yahoo, Amazon and all those mashups are examples of this.

Small, agile and lightweight is the way ahead.
Starting with the most simple and often most maligned.

URLs should be short, memorable, persistent, stable and predictable

Short urls don’t break in an email
Memorable ones mean something to people eg amazon urls have changed to include significant words from titles
Persistent, if I link to something, it should be there in a year or two or ten, for books this should be forever.
Stable – regardless of how you change your technology platform you should be able to generate your old urls
Predictable – bonus points for this one. Given an author and a book, if I can guess the url for all books by that author then that makes for easier understanding of your website.

Understanding this is one of the most important things from this presentation. One url for one product / manuscript and strongly link to different versions of the same thing.
This is a simple idea, give people a consistent identity that they can use anywhere on the internet to login to other websites.

It is an authentication mechanism and can be seen as an provider of identity.

PROS – there are 200 million of them out there, people are more likely to try out your new service if they don't have to fill out a signup form

CONS – adoption is mainly in technical circles, moving people to understanding that a url can be something that identifies them is a challenge.
You need to modify your own login systems to deal with OpenID

It will happen, I'd recommend you consider this for this year. All major search engines are in there.
Federated identity management is here.
http://www.simplebits.com/work/microformats/

Microformats are a simple way of exchanging data on the internet. Ranging from a standard way of describing a person or an event to reviews and tags. They provide much of the benefit of an API for content, as the majority of access is reading data.

Useful way of allowing data sharing, put microformats for your authors on your pages and then someone can read your site and build a catalogue of your material. This puts your books in front of more people, probably leading to more sales.
We used to focus on making web pages. Today we are putting data on the internet. If you are still thinking about pages, then it is time to update. An API is a means to an end, it lets machines talk to one another. You have these in your company, they are called stock control systems and sales tracking systems. The same thinking needs to be applied to the web.

A quick example
Trackback is a technology that comes from the blogging world.

If I write a blog post about your book and link to your catalog page, then if you support trackback the blog software will send the catalog page a message saying there is a blog post about this book. Well, the blog software sends a message to the server than generates the catalog pages.

This means that you can automatically generate a list of blog reviews of your books

Pros – simple to implement with a solid open specification.

Cons – requires some form of dynamic publishing
Vulnerable to spamming
Blogger at the minute link to amazon...

The BBC support this for their news blogs.
SixApart have a great product in the shape of Movable Type.

It does a lot of the hard work of making a community application. Integrating it with your own systems is left for an exercise for the reader.

However it is a good starting place for developing community from, particularly their Community Solution.

Serious Eats and Gothamist are good examples.
Other options

There are other options,

Getsatisfaction.com – hosted customer service, good service, O’Reilly are already using it.

Using TypePad to host your company blog means you are hosting as part of an existing community
Then of course there is facebook and myspace applications.

Or roll your own approaches.
Becoming part of the web

This is something that both Amazon and Google do very well and something publishers are starting to do in terms of fragmenting content and letting it be displayed elsewhere.

Mashups are good for marketing and making new things.

Putting your stuff elsewhere is becoming more common, it is a good form of advertising and potentially reaches out to new readers, but it isn't conversational.
Why are the book catalogues on your sites terse lists of author, price and publication date. There are many thousands of people reading and reviewing your books.

Your community already exists and is generating useful information about your publications.

Aggregate it into the catalogues, sure provide a version for the book sellers, but if you treat your readers like they are interested in your books, then they might respond with interest in kind.

Most popular, most sold, recently reviewed show where the people on your sites. Not just the ISBNs.
If you aggregate content from others about your own publications then you start to become an authoritative source for your own content.

People might start linking to your pages to talk about a particular book. Bloggers in particular might, Amazon affiliate income is not that huge.

For this to work, you need static reliable persistent URLs for your each book, as I mentioned earlier.

You also need to do something about multiple editions, recognise that they are the same content. At the minute they are often listed separately. When someone reviews a book, generally it doesn’t matter if it is the hard back or the paperback or the 2007 film tie-in reprint. Editions do matter, but they should be linked together.

Separate products at least deserve separate decent URLs.

A quick note on linking, the days of linking to other sites from your site being seen as bad are long over. Linking is the lifeblood of the internet. If you link to people appropriately then they might well link back to you.
Aggregation

What about aggregating content

The content on other sites is retrievable, the “mash-up” so common in the web world can be made to work for you.

Pull mentions from librarything
List number of reviews on Amazon
Link to amazon for a sale (go where the market is)
Scour delicious or technorati or even google for amason asin or isbn references to your books, then filter this stuff to show the collective opinions on your books.

Go for the easiest options of amazon asin or isbn first, the ones where you can get a firm positive id on the object being discussed.
Play, experiment, take chances and expect stuff to fail.

Make it as easy as possible for people to play, technology like OpenID makes it easy for me to join in, a big signup form kills it stone dead.

You are trying to reach out to your readers, so make it as easy as possible to get them on board.
The main thrust of this talk is a simple idea. Take something that you all already own, your book catalogue and connect it to the people who buy and read your books.

Find the people, reviews and discussions on the internet and link them into the books you sell.

Then find the flocks and build community around them, giving your readers space to interact with one another.

You can get a lot more complex, but this first step is not too expensive.

Then when you find your community online you can then make a bespoke social network for them, like we have done with Nature Network.
Thanks for the photos

http://www.flickr.com/photos/tiswango/459292254/
http://www.flickr.com/photos/lwr/246811052/
http://www.flickr.com/photos/13734918@N00/277328729/

To these kind people for cc-licensing their photos on flickr
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