

Let Your Library Go Live on the Internet: How to Use New Technology and New Channels to Widen and Share Traditional Library Work to Engage New Users

Mats Nordström, Nanna Ekman, Suzanne Ahrling
Malmö Public Library
Sweden

{mats.nordstrom, naana.ekman, suzanne.ahrling}@malmo.se

***Abstract.** In 2011 the public library in Malmö, Sweden started broadcasting events at the library live over the Internet. By using this method we are able to breach the physical premises and reach a wider audience. We outline the equipment needed and discuss some of our experiences of this project.*

Keywords: Live Broadcasting, Streaming Technology, User Behaviour

1. Introduction

Sweden has a long tradition of publicly funded public libraries. In the library law it states that each municipality must offer free library-services for all citizens. Anybody can become a library member without cost and the services are also offered free of charge.

Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden with about 300,000 inhabitants. In 2008 the public library in Malmö adopted a strategy with a strong focus on digital inclusion (<http://www.malmo.se/bibliotek>). As a result of this emphasis on technology and digital communication the team called Digital Content and Dialogue was created. Early on this team was given the mandate to shape the library's digital communication with the users.

The digital infrastructure is evolving rapidly in Sweden and has brought new habits and expectations of the library users. To remain relevant in the ever changing digital Eco system it is important to break free from our previous physical restrictions. Today the users expect the library to be available anywhere, anytime, any way and on any screen. An important mission for the library is to be accessible to all citizens and the key is to be available in the places where people spend their time. The main focus for the digital interaction is to meet and interact with others on the platforms they already use and are familiar with, for this we mainly use free web-based tools.

2. The International Writers Stage and Live broadcasting

Another result of the new strategy was the creation of the International Writers Stage. This project focuses on the translated literature and international writers are invited to Malmö for a discussion with a moderator in the library. As a public library in a city with a very diverse population when it comes to language and education background we wanted to put more focus on literature and the literary conversation. We also wanted to strengthen the role of literature in our society.

We have chosen not to have the programs in our lecture room in the basement but instead build a temporary stage among the bookshelves in the library's main hall. We wanted the audience to be close to the books, but also to create something extra. There is always music and snacks for the audience before the program starts and we want to give the public the feeling that they belong to a literary club. Also, the lecture room can hold 100 people while the temporary stage in the library can host up to 600 people.

We arrange about ten to twelve author visits a year. Some of our guests are well known to the public but sometimes we also invite debutants. Most of the talks are held in English but with Nordic authors talks are in Scandinavian. This is a popular event and sometimes the house is full and we have to close the door to people. It is also a quite costly venture for the library.

The size of the events on the International Writers Stage is probably larger than most programs in public libraries. But apart from that, events with focus on books and reading are a basic and traditional role for Swedish libraries.

This large scale project presented us with a good opportunity to pull our resources and start experimenting with ways for giving easier access to the library. We wanted to take this traditional library work on to a new stage and widen our audience. The idea of making the programs on the International Writers Stage more accessible for a wider audience were in place from the outset in 2009. The first talks were recorded and published as podcasts on our website. We did this for about a year and it was highly appreciated by our users. In 2011 we took a step forward and started broadcasting the programs live over the Internet. By using live broadcasting we are able to breach the physical premises and reach a wider audience. On the Internet, we can reach far more people than the 600 visitors in the library. In this way we manage the resources spent on the program series in an efficient manner, increase the accessibility and enable reuse.

3. The long tail

The broadcasts we produce are archived on the web for those who don't have the time to come to the library or watch the live stream (<http://bambuser.com/channel/malmobibblan>). The films can also be used by students in our reading groups that want to learn more about the author. But also for those who want to relive a favorite program.

All authors do not attract the same immediate audience as for example an international literary superstar as Paul Auster, but since the broadcasts remain in the archives they can be seen much later and find a new audience. An example of this is the Swiss first time-novelist Dorothee Elmiger who visited the international writer's stage in the autumn of 2011. Her book had just been published in Swedish and hadn't been reviewed in the media yet. Only 9 people saw the live broadcast. Just a few weeks later she was the poster girl for the annual book fair in Gothenburg and was interviewed on Television and newspapers. To date the broadcast has been viewed more than 200 times (<http://bambuser.com/v/1919238>).

We have found that social media can be a powerful tool to build awareness for the live productions and the broadcast archive. We mainly use Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/malmostadsbibliotek>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/malmobibblan>) to spread the word and encourage our followers to share our content with their friends. During the events we also take photos that we share on Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/malmostadsbibliotek/>). Since we publish them with a creative commons license they are free for anybody to use.

This is a good example of the long tail effect where digital content is said to have a much longer shelf life and can constantly find new audiences. The ability to make our content available not only in space but also in time is very important to us.

4. Equipment and production

In theory it is possible to broadcast using only a free streaming app and a smart phone or a simple webcam. But for our purposes and for the user experience we aim towards, this solution doesn't quite meet our needs. In this section we will briefly outline the equipment and software needed for live productions at the public library in Malmö.

When we started researching what technology to use for our live productions, one important aspect was that the tools we chose should be user friendly but still give us the power to produce high quality broadcasts. The broadcasting team started out as three librarians without any previous experience in film and television and our approach have always

been to learn by doing. We began by setting up a core environment we feel confident in using and have since added new technology one piece at a time when the need have arisen.

One of the key factors to produce a successful broadcast is to have good audio quality. If you want to spend money on just one thing it's a good choice to spend it on a quality sound system and someone to manage it. Since the content is more about what our guests say than how they look good sound is more important than good visuals. For our live productions we tap the audio from the sound system used on the stage.

Our main video camera is a professional model that allows for a high quality picture even in less than ideal environments. As a secondary camera we use an ordinary consumer camera. Two video cameras make it possible to create a more professional broadcast, for example zoom and change the angle to provide a more enjoyable experience for viewers.

Since we use two cameras, editing software is also required. Wirecast is an affordable option for this purpose and makes it easy to produce broadcasts with good quality. You can work with several cameras and also add graphics that inform viewers about what is happening and who the sender is.

Access to a broadcast channel is necessary for live productions. For this purpose we use Bambuser. It was developed by a local Malmö company and was originally intended to let anyone broadcast live from their mobile phones. Today several major media companies use this service. At first we used their free version but have since upgraded to a pro-account that allows for more settings, is ad-free and includes a good statistics reporter.

Our channel on Bambuser is called Malmobibblan (<http://bambuser.com/channel/malmobibblan>). This is where all our broadcasts can be seen. It also serves as the archive for previous broadcasts.

We use a high-end laptop to handle the production and broadcasting. On a secondary computer we check the quality of our broadcast, chat with viewers and manage our activities in social media during the evening. To ensure good production quality it's vital to have access to a fast wired Internet-connection.

Using this setup we feel that we balance costs and quality in an effective manner. We invest in a few key pieces and use low cost services where we can.

5. The future

In closing, a few words about our plans for the future. In short it's all about sharing and letting our content run free. Libraries in smaller towns in Sweden create their own programs but they don't have the means to invite international authors. But since we broadcast on the Internet there is no real barrier and it's easy for us to share our events.

To date we have made 21 broadcasts that in total have been viewed 8500 times. By reaching out we hope to attract even more viewers for our upcoming productions. We want to enhance the distribution and circulation of the live broadcasts and find ways to increase user-participation and give the viewers the possibility of influencing the content of the programs in real time.

So our next step is to invite the smaller libraries in our region to show our broadcasts live on big screens in front of a local audience. The libraries create their own events and offer something to eat and drink. The local audiences can take part in the event by asking questions to the author using chat. And of course we offer the local libraries our content free of charge.

We imagine the future as a literary the Met where the library in Malmö shares our content to smaller cities. In this way we can widen the live audience and help lift the interest in reading and literature in larger circles.