



Interview with Maxwell Riggsbee, Gadget Software

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KENNEALLY: In January 2007, Steve Jobs introduced the first iPhone and boasted that his company, Apple, intended nothing less than to reinvent the phone. A decade later, devices like the iPhone make it possible to access the internet using mobile phone networks and touchscreen technology. In 2017, smartphones rule the world.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. The speed of technological development at the beginning of the 21st century has outpaced our human ability to absorb the change. We have landed in a new world and have barely begun to explore it.

But like any environment, the smartphone world has rules – rules that publishers must learn, says Maxwell Riggsbee, chief product officer at Gadget Software, a mobile publishing platform developer. The new reading that is coming to dominate our media world, he says, must be complemented by a new kind of publishing that helps readers discover information in a blizzard of data. Max Riggsbee joins me now from Gadget's headquarters in Newark, New Jersey. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Max.

RIGGSBEE: Chris, it is a pleasure to be here.

KENNEALLY: We're looking forward to chatting with you, because this is a subject that we have tried to follow as much as we can here on Beyond the Book, because it really is about keeping up with technology. And as I said, that is a task. Today, we live in a world that is clearly a mobile world. According to some numbers I've seen you use, there are something like 4 billion mobile users today, and they outpace every other medium for creation and information consumption. So we are mobile-first in the 21st century. What this means is that users – that's us, Max, you and me – have seized control of content from authors and publishers. That changing relationship with content – what we read, listen, and watch – is going to have an impact on all media, and a profound one. So really, what it comes down to, Max, is we just don't read the way we once did.

RIGGSBEE: That is absolutely correct. This medium has really changed the way in which users, readers, interact with content. Perhaps the biggest thing here is selectivity – our ability to pick out the pieces that we want, perhaps at times even



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share those pieces or organize them in a new way, and deliver them out to an audience that we ourselves may be creating. This bidirectional nature and always-on connectivity of the smartphone is really changing our relationship with content.

KENNEALLY: And we're not just rewiring the technology, but it could be that we are rewiring our brains. As I understand, Maryanne Wolf at the Tufts University Center for Reading has looked into this and has come to the conclusion from her research that we're not born with any kind of innate ability to read. Our minds create the circuit to do so. And that circuit gets wired according to the form factor. It essentially defines the scope and the intensity of our interaction with a particular medium. So how are smartphones rewiring the reading path in our brains?

RIGGSBEE: This is actually a very fascinating conversation, because it's not just that the smartphone is rewiring that path, it's changing the complete relationship that we have with information. As we think about a book, which is that linear read – you start at the beginning, and you work your way all the way through – there's a similar kind of experience you have with a webpage, although those hyperlinks enable you to take that nonlinear journey, the real thing that happens with smartphones is information gets smaller, it's delivered to you, and you have to take on whole new strategies to filter, sift, select, and search for the kind of information that you want, but also to make decisions. Our reading becomes more utility in nature, as opposed to a comprehensive read that we once enjoyed when we were reading books and webpages.

So we're developing all kinds of strategies to just deal with this deluge of information that comes all the time from a variety of sources, many of which are not books. They may be things such as Amazon left a package at my door or a news alert, and we now have to handle all of that influx of information.

KENNEALLY: Some of us may have some nostalgia for those days of deep reading. It was a word-intensive world that we lived in. But as you say, we don't deep-read the internet. We hyper-read it, is how you have put it. So I guess I'm interested in hearing about the platform that you're trying to develop at Gadget which is to meet this challenge. You are doing that by transforming preexisting or new content into a streaming mobile experience that leverages technologies that make the smartphone smart. How do we do that? How do we move the linear structure of a book or a journal into this small, nonlinear device that we all carry?

RIGGSBEE: That is a wonderful question. When we decided to take on this mission to understand how to bring dense or complex content to the smartphone, the first question we had to ask ourselves is how does the smartphone even want to interact



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with that? The conclusion we came to is that it really wants to work in very small, atomic pieces. It likes message-based information. It doesn't handle long, endless scrolling of data very, very well.

So the first thing we looked at is how do we, if you will, disaggregate information and then put it back together in what we refer to as an atomic structure? At its smallest unit, think of every paragraph, if you will, in a book now being its own unique object – which we can, of course, enable a serialized read of – but since they're now atomic units, they're small objects that we can add other attributes to, the reader can now begin to search and choose the pieces that they want. We can stream that content directly to the phone and have it appear in a manner that's very similar to what you see in your newsfeed or what you might see, say, on a Facebook page. We can now take advantage of those technologies such as notifications or location-based information. And more importantly, we can deliver this now in real time, because we're treating that content in a streaming manner, so the world becomes more like other media technology. Think of how Netflix moved from deliver discs to streaming the content to you directly. We're enabling that same kind of functionality, but for what we would perceive as more traditional, dense content.

KENNEALLY: So you're talking about it from a technologist's perspective, and we have spoken earlier this year on Beyond the Book with Michael Greer, who's a consultant to Gadget Software and a frequent guest on the show. He's a textbook author and developer. He was telling us about the death of the paragraph, that the paragraph may have kind of come to the end of its natural life. The way you look at that is you see paragraphs, as you say, in the same way that content is seen anywhere else in the device. So a paragraph is kind of a message. What does that mean?

RIGGSBEE: Actually, that's interesting, because we've had many conversations with Michael about the paragraph. Fundamentally, what it means is that each object or each paragraph actually stands on its own. I think in the conversations you've had with Michael, he talks about this – how now, because we're delivering information as a collection of messages, although they may be organized as one coherent thought, each message in and of itself has its own small, unique piece of information that it wants to deliver.

So we now – through the use of a technology such as ours, we allow the reader or the user and the author to embellish that or select that in a manner that makes the most sense. Perhaps a particular object or paragraph needs an image to highlight it more effectively. We can now do that. Or perhaps I would like to connect this



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particular paragraph or object to another, because they are related ideas. As we begin to atomize and make the world a bit smaller, we can make each piece in its own right more comprehensive. I think that's what Michael means when he talks about the death of the paragraph. It may be also fair to say that it is transforming into a bit of a multimedia experience within itself.

KENNEALLY: We are chatting right now with Max Riggsbee at Gadget Software. It sounds to me, Max, as if you've taken something that is kind of a potential negative, which is all these distractions, and tried to turn them into a positive, that these are ways of helping readers – adding meaning it's adding information.

RIGGSBEE: That's fair to say. We are filled with hints today as we read on these small devices. If you think about a newsfeed as an example, often we have an image. We may have some type of title or a summary piece of information to help us determine, do I want to go into this a bit further today? So we enable for that kind of an organization, so people can quickly summarize a piece of complex text or a complex asset, if you will, but then at any point in time be able to dive in deeper, expose what's under the covers, so to speak, and then continue a linear journey just simply by swiping, if you will, to the next object.

So we do support the notion of a linear read. It's important to understand the full argument someone is attempting to make. But also enabling someone to work with these materials in a utility fashion, almost transactionally, if you will, to at moments pick the pieces that they want and just explore those and then move on to the others when they're ready.

KENNEALLY: So what you're doing is taking this dense, heavy information and moving it into this thin, lighter medium. My final question to you, Max Riggsbee, is how do authors and publishers respond to this? Are they ready to jump in, or do they say, wait a minute, this is leaving behind stuff that we really think matters?

RIGGSBEE: Wow, that's such a wonderful question. I guess the way I would answer that is first, publishers are responding very positively to what we're offering, because they're not losing anything. Nothing gets lost when we disaggregate information and then atomize it and create a collection of smaller objects. Actually, there's much to be gained. So what they began to realize is this medium wants to work with their content differently. It wants that content to be embellished whenever it can be. And it wants to – the reader wants to have a completely different experience, an experience that's more media-oriented, as opposed to traditional publishing.



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In that regard, there's been very strong support for what we're doing and our working with publishers, because they want people to access their content, and they want them to experience that content, and now we're providing a way in which they can do that on the very devices that readers already have.

KENNEALLY: And it's the very device that they're probably listening to us right now on. Max Riggsbee, chief product officer at Gadget Software, thanks so much for joining us on Beyond the Book.

RIGGSBEE: Chris, thank you very much, and look forward to speaking with you again in the future.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center, a global leader in content management, discovery, and document delivery solutions. Through its relationships with those who use and create content, CCC and its subsidiaries RightsDirect and Ixxus drive market-based solutions that accelerate knowledge, power publishing, and advance copyright.

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