
THE PEOPLE WHO USE BOOKMOOCH

A closer look at BookMooch users in the wild

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This report presents the major findings and recommendations from our research concerning the people who use BookMooch. This project was part of a user experience research class at Kent State University. We hope the insights gleaned from our research can help improve and develop this extraordinary community, which John Buckman began with a simple idea: “take a book, leave a book.”

Three major questions drove our research:

Who uses BookMooch? Our primary goal was to create a more nuanced understanding of the people who use BookMooch, especially those who use it a lot. The user population was divided into a set of audience segments derived from major activities and task-driven behaviors. A survey of the active membership was developed out of these audience segments. From here, the team conducted interviews with one segment and a diary study with another. This report distills the insights obtained through all four of the major research instruments: audience segments, survey, interviews, and diary study.

Why and how do people use BookMooch? Our research was concerned not just with who uses the site, but also why they use it, and how. The goal was to develop a model of archetypal users to guide future changes. This model paints a picture, for each major user type, of their main motivations, goals, and behaviors.

How to improve BookMooch? We distilled our research into a set of recommendations for developing BookMooch to meet the needs of the current user population. We could make innumerable recommendations given the amount and variety of data we collected. This report addresses what we believe to be the most important recommendations.

AUDIENCES

We began with a task-based approach to defining the BookMooch user population. This approach distinguished users by how they behave rather than by demographic attributes such as age, income, etc. This process yielded six distinct audience segments. We narrowed our research to explore two segments in more detail: “Let’s talk about books” and “Out with the old, in with the new” (see below). The full list of all six audience segments can be found at the end of this report.

AUDIENCE SEGMENT 1: LET’S TALK ABOUT BOOKS

These members are interested in the social dimension of reading. For them, the pleasure of books does not end with reading but extends into the conversations that follow. They like to expand their reading horizons through a social network and to connect with people with similar reading tastes. For this segment, books are a way of bringing people together, and their long-term interest in BookMooch will increase if they can talk about books.

AUDIENCE SEGMENT 2: OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

People in this group find themselves in need of more space. They make room for new books by culling their current library, rotating their collection, getting a good deal on their books, and generally encouraging reading by sending their books back out to the world. They are attracted to BookMooch in particular because of the underlying principle of “swapping.” Often, they want to “find good homes” for their books. These BookMoochers are likely to enjoy BookMooch over the long term.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

SURVEY

We used SurveyGizmo.com to conduct a broad online survey of the BookMooch membership. In one week, we received about 3,400 responses. Some quick statistics:

- 1,600 respondents expressed willingness to participate in further research.
- 80% were female.
- 57% of users are between the ages of 25 and 44.
- 55% have no children.
- 80% have more than a high school education.
- 76% read more than 3 books per month.
- 60% are frequent moochers from BookMooch.

INTERVIEWS

We conducted seven Skype interviews with BookMoochers selected from among the survey responses. The interviews focused on the audience segment we called “Let’s talk about books”. Interviewees were selected from around the world, including the US, Finland, Germany, and the Philippines. These interviews revealed many things, including strong differences between US and non-US users. Many of the quotes that appear on this report are paraphrased from these conversations (the interviewers were not recorded).

DIARY STUDY

A diary study asks people to answer questions about their use of a product or service at regular intervals. By collecting data over time, diary studies provide an extended picture of user behavior rather than a snapshot. For BookMooch, we asked people in the audience segment “Out with the old, In with the new” to answer a set of questions every 3-4 days for 3 weeks. The questions addressed how they acquire books, get rid of books, and other aspects of trading books on BookMooch. Participants were recruited from the survey. We invited 24 users to participate, and we got 15 BookMoochers to fill out the first diary. By the end, 11 participants completed all the entries.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Four major themes stood out through all the phases of our research. Whether from the rapid and enthusiastic response to our survey, to the many stories of building community through swapping books, BookMoochers spoke passionately and clearly about what's important to them about BookMooch and their hopes for the future of the community.

COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY!

There is a fundamental and powerful sense of community among the users of BookMooch. Swapping books may first attract them to the site, but they soon feel welcome and connected with the membership through their shared love of books and the joy of sharing them. The most active members of BookMooch are *devoted* to this community, and they speak with enthusiasm and commitment, such as any social website would envy. To them, BookMooch is far more than a tool.

Any features that support the sense of community on and off BookMooch will be powerful. Help users establish their unique identity, and strengthen their connections within the BookMooch community.

BEYOND BOOKMOOCH

BookMooch users clearly identify themselves as such on other sites, and they use other sites to talk about BookMooch. We recommend strengthening the integration of BookMooch with other related sites where BookMoochers gather. Not any site related to books and reading, just those where BookMoochers have a strong presence and that complement and expand what BookMooch does.

FIX THE FORUMS

In our surveys, user interviews and diary studies, we found that the forums are both a source of great interaction and pain for BookMooch.com users. A very simple, fast, and conventional forum would be a win for BookMooch.

“INTERNATIONAL” IS A DISTINCT AUDIENCE

BookMoochers outside the United States are a distinct audience, not only because of issues of global shipping, but also of regional and language identity.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the four major themes, we make the following, specific recommendations. Additional details about each recommendation is provided in the body of the report.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

- Enhance the profile system
- Add an achievement system

EXPANDING BEYOND BOOKMOOCH

- Strengthen relations with sites where BookMoochers gather
- Extend outwards
- Enhance knowledge sharing about BookMooch

FIXING THE FORUMS

- Try new platform
- Make the forums simpler, faster and easier to use

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES

- Encourage people to send more overseas
- Allow international users to organize their own BookMooch experience
- Make finding Angels easier

PERSONAS

From the data, we have created two “personas.” A persona describes a major type of user. It is a hypothetical, but representative, model of an archetypal user based on our audience segments. The personas do not represent all BookMoochers and may not even reflect the majority. However, our research indicates the two audience segments modeled by these personas are keystone species in this community and meeting their needs is crucial to the future of BookMooch. Each persona (included as separate documents, one for each persona) contains a description of the persona, supporting data drawn from the survey, interviews, and diary study, and a set of scenarios that describe common tasks and lead to specific recommendations for improvements to BookMooch.

The two personas are:

Rianne the recycler. Rianne represents the “Out With the Old, In With the New” audience. Her story is based on the data collected through the Diary Study, supported by survey data.

Gretchen the gabber. Gretchen represents the “Let’s Talk About Books” audience. She is created from the interview data, and illustrates how BookMooch members converse.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

This project was undertaken by seven students and one professor as part of a graduate course in the *Information Architecture and Knowledge Management* master’s program at Kent State University (Kent, Ohio, USA). The course was called “Research Methods for Information Architecture.” User research is a difficult, messy, and iterative process. As a result, the course took a problem-based learning approach, rather than the standard approach of theory, case study, and exercises.

Students:

Amelia Campbell
Jason Richardson
Jim Maxwell
Marie Joyce
Michele Newton
Stephen R. Gracey
Thiago Franco

Instructor:

Karl Fast

COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY!

BookMoochers like to share their love for books, not just the book themselves. This is a major reason why they participate in the community. They access BookMooch not merely to swap books, but to interact with other people who love books and reading. For that reason, the site will benefit from features that help to bring people together. All our research started from books and reading but kept ending up at community, community, community!

PEOPLE ARE ATTRACTED TO VIBRANT COMMUNITY

Sifting through the data, it is easy to hear BookMoochers enthusiasm for connecting with other book lovers online. It is easy, also, to gather the attributes that make for a strong sense of community. Users spoke as often about their appreciation of LibraryThing, Shelfari, and other book-related websites as they did of BookMooch and the BookMooch community. For them, a large membership that engages in conversation amid regular communication from the community leaders contributes to that vibrancy.

I like that LibraryThing has a strong community. I also like that both BookMooch and LibraryThing have such **active memberships**. (paraphrased from interview)

After BookMooch stopped sending emails to everyone and only sent emails randomly when I list a book, my swaps went down. **The vibrancy of BookMooch diminished**. (paraphrased from interview)

I'd enjoy a few more "news" posts than we usually get. The behind-the-scenes stuff is fun, so I always have fun reading it. (survey comment)

I like the **sense of community on LibraryThing**; all the people there love books, too. (paraphrased from interview)

I log in every day on BookMooch and look to see what is going on, but **don't feel as much vibrancy in BookMooch**. I don't know what is going on. I miss the emails a lot. (paraphrased from interview)

I liked the idea of mooching books and sending ones I was finished with out to someone who would appreciate them. The site itself was slightly difficult to search, **but the members seemed warm and generous**. (survey comment).

QUALITY OF INTERACTION ALTERS COMMUNITY FEEL

In addition to the *quantity* of interaction, BookMoochers also cite the *quality* of the interaction as supporting the sense of community. There are several dimensions to the quality of interaction. How users treat one another in their communication is especially important. Other important aspects include

whether they are patient with non-native English speakers, whether they are generous, and whether they reach out to newcomers. All these behaviors infuse the site with community-ness and this, as much or more than the selection of books, keeps people coming back to BookMooch. In short, trading books attracts people to BookMooch, but the sense of community is what keeps them coming back.

Yes, I do feel welcome. For a while, **people were very opinionated and blunt in their responses.** At that time, I didn't know about those people; they didn't mean to be mean; **they just didn't express themselves in a very nice way...** Last year and after that it has been very encouraging forum and easy to participate and people are very nice. New people enter and are welcomed aboard. (paraphrased from interview)

Shelfari is more comfortable. **I am more guarded on the BookMooch forums.** There is **more flaming in the BookMooch forums,** there are a lot of misunderstandings. I feel like they have more commonalities in Shelfari. People can **make their own groups, talk in their native language,** and they don't have to overexplain to avoid being misunderstood. (paraphrased from interview)

Certain system features and protocols make the community feel stronger or weaker. In particular, users mentioned the "reservation" feature of the site, in which you can reserve a book for someone specific as being detrimental to the community feel.

I feel [the reservation feature] tightens up the community, but it also **sets up a wall of exclusivity for new users.** (paraphrased from interview)

It's so 'cliqueish.' Many times I've gone to mooch a book and **it's reserved for a friend.** (survey comment)

One thing that happened this week I thought was interesting.....there was a book that's been on my wishlist for a long time, and I really hoped to get my hands on it....It came up as available....but **when I tried to mooch it, it was for "friends only....and you're not listed as my friend."**... Today, she finally accepted, and I was able to mooch the book. **But I don't really get why people do this "friends only" thing,** unless it's a small band of Twilight readers sharing the series or something -- I tend to feel that the bookmooch community are my "friends" in that we share books and a love of them, in general. I sort of felt like a seventh grader hoping that someone would like me enough to let me sit by them at lunch! Kind of weird...(survey comment)

Finally, BookMoochers cited the approval process for new forum posts as harmful. We recommend eliminating it to reduce intimidation and encourage participation.

So how can you ever get to know or participate in the BookMooch community? **You can read but not get through the barricade of "being approved" which is very negative** and makes a newcomer feel totally unwelcome.(survey comment)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

BookMoochers, like all web surfers, belong to many shared interest websites, where they naturally experience a variety of features that they like. In addition to naming specific features, their descriptions of how they use which sites for which purposes imply potential features and functions for BookMooch to strengthen their community.

First, they think about other BookMooch friends when they see books they know others would like. An easy recommendation feature would serve this purpose. Instead of a mooching the book, they could recommend it to another member. Currently, you need to use email or some other non-BookMooch tool to make recommendations.

Through BookMooch I found someone who shares my reading interest. He lives outside of London in the UK. We talk via email. I love historical fiction and he recommended an author. I read one of her books and then read more. *Now, we think of each other when we look for books.* Our conversation has expanded to include politics between British and Americans. I work in a library with a lot of African Americans and he is interested in learning about these people. I am “fascinated that one random book swap led” to such rich and interesting conversations. (paraphrased from interview)

My “friend” alerted me to an inventory that she thought would have books that interest me. (survey comment)

Second, there were requests for being able to create “book clubs” on BookMooch. Perspectives on how that would work differed, but there is plenty of evidence to confirm John’s feeling that there is great interest in talking online about books. The question is not if it should be supported, but how.

I would find it better if the *community was a more prominent feature* with different streams so books and reading could be discussed rather than just swapping. (survey comment)

[I would like it if] they had a *chat feature or posting board* that allowed users to communicate better with each other. It would be great to have the option of doing an online book club through BookMooch so we could talk about the books we are reading and connect with other users. (survey comment)

A camera would be great. *I would love to do book discussions on Skype.* How about we pilot a Skype book club? (paraphrased from interview)

But most often, BookMoochers talked about how other websites helped them establish and clearly express their online “identity” and to get to know other members through their profile. The features are sometimes “gimmicky,” and sometimes practical, but they spoke of their desire to know and be known to one another in many ways.

LibraryThing has “nudging” which uses a photo of your reading pile. *Members can nudge you to what they think is better and should go to the top of the pile.* This increases my knowledge of what people like. I ask myself if I still want to read this book as much now as when I got it. The

nudging thing is cute idea. It's like having people around to sift through what there is to read. (paraphrased from interview)

I mooch based on profiles. I find people that seem interesting and then look at their accounts to see what books they have to mooch. I still look for specific books, but I always check the profile to see if who I am mooching from seems interesting (paraphrased from interview)

I use the BookMooch forums to request a book, or **to find an Angel to help me get a book I need** from someone that doesn't send overseas. (paraphrased from interview)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

Enhance the profile system so that users have more choices—and more specific choices—for building their profiles. For example, simply choosing which aspects, such as their reading interests, their wishlists, or their last five mooches, would help them communicate who they are.

While creating richer profiles is possible, it is not widely used, probably because it requires too much work to create. For example, member *tanelit*¹ has a detailed profile that uses several widgets. An improved profile system should make it *ridiculously* easy to create a profile like this. Editing a profile could be a matter of choosing which components to include from a list of pre-determined choices. These choices could include: last 10 books added to inventory, random titles from your wishlist, if you are a member of the Angel network, and so on. Free form content should remain an option, but this should be supplemented with simple, easy-to-use, constrained set of choices for quickly building a detailed profile.

Add an achievement system. Introducing an achievement system could help BookMoochers build their online identity and distinguish themselves, while at the same time bringing the community together. These are a common feature in computer games. They are sometimes called reputation systems, badges, or title tracks. They would be listed in the user's profile.

Achievements indicate that people have accomplished certain notable tasks or thresholds that are meaningful in that environment. For example, StackOverflow.com² is a site for asking and answering programming questions. Achievements (which they call “badges”) are used to encourage positive contributions. Badges are awarded for completing all the fields in a profile, asking questions, answering questions, receiving positive feedback from other members, and so forth.

For BookMooch there could be a variety of achievements, or badges. Being part of the Angel network would be a good badge. There could be a variety of tracks, each building on a different facet of community life, so that no matter what kind of “moocher” you were, you could become known for something. It would also introduce a fun way to support international shipping or encouraging people to help one another with technical issues. Each track could have clever, fun titles that could appear in profiles and postings.

¹ <http://bookmooch.com/m/bio/tanelit>

² <http://stackoverflow.com/badges>

Here are some possible dimensions of the BookMooch identity:

- **Quantity of Mooches:** As you mooch or give away books, you build a reputation as an active user.
- **Technical Support:** As you answer more questions in the technical support discussions, you build a reputation as a go-to moocher for answers.
- **Range of Topics Mooched:** You could be known either as an exclusive reader, of one kind of book or as a wide-ranging adventurer.
- **Credibility and Reliability:** Much like online auction sites, you could get feedback from those to whom you gave books as a reliable member.
- **Global Mooching:** As you mooch or send books internationally, you could be known for your willingness to transcend national boundaries.
- **Longevity:** The longer you stay an active member, the more your standing in the community might grow.
- **Security and Surveillance:** You could gain a reputation for vigilance against fraud and standing up for what's right by the BookMooch code.
- **Communication and Feedback:** The more you leave feedback or post to forums, the more you build a reputation as an active participant in the community life.

BEYOND BOOKMOOCH

BookMoochers are avid community members, not just of BookMooch, but on other websites where they share their love of books and reading. At the same time, they retain their identity as BookMoochers wherever they go. Their dedication to BookMooch is so strong that they create forums and subgroups as BookMooch members on those other websites. Features that strengthen the relationships beyond BookMooch will simultaneously strengthen the community relationships within BookMooch.

TALKING ABOUT BOOKMOOCH ON OTHER SITES

BookMooch members use other sites' forums to discuss BookMooch, to learn about authors and titles, and to trade books, CDs, or DVDs. Some members found BookMooch after they had started trading books on the other sites and have switched to BookMooch.

Other websites fulfill different niches. Or rather, they fulfill voids that BM leaves for me. *LibraryThing* has a discussion area to talk about BM. *Book Crossing* tracks BM Journals. *Ning* is also used for BM Journal activities. *Flickr* is where pictures of the BM Journals are posted. All these sites have functionality that BM lacks. I do a lot of BM-related things on these sites (paraphrased from interview; The only reason this person used these other sites was for BM-related discussion and activity).

A lot of the discussions on these forums were talking about BookMooch features, questions, problems, technical issues (paraphrased from interview)

I use the BookMooch forums in *LibraryThing*, but none of those conversations have moved off the forum. We talk about a lot of things: technical aspects, strategies for saving money, how to wrap books, BookMooch site features, books in general, books you want to keep forever, and books you think no one will ever want to mooch from you. (paraphrased from interview)

I don't like the BookMooch forums. But I use the BookMooch forums in *LibraryThing* all the time. (paraphrased from interview)

CONNECTING OUTSIDE OF BOOKMOOCH

Many stories emerged, also, about how people have met on BookMooch, then began in-person meet-ups and book clubs, or established discussion forums on other websites.

I am a member of a book club. It started as an online group. It's not a formal thing. We got an idea to have meetings in person. In [one club] we have reading discussions, where a designated moderator picks a book and leads the discussion. [The other] is more flexible, more like a mooching party. We meet at someone's house and mooch other people's books. They organize

online chats with people that live too far away, so that they can participate in the party (although they can't share the wine and snacks). (paraphrased from interview)

Sure, I've met other people from BookMooch face-to-face. They're regular friends and we talk about all kinds of things, not just books. I talk to some of them online every day, and we meet up about once a month. We also use Shelfari and other sites to talk (paraphrased from interview)

I spend most of my time on LibraryThing forums. I'm a member of several groups "Early Reviewers," Reading Challenges," and "888 Challenge Page". It is fun to be in touch with people (paraphrased from interview)

INTEGRATING BOOKMOOCH WITH OTHER SITES

Respondents to our questions mentioned a variety of other websites' features that helped them bring their BookMooch identities into the other communities. LibraryThing was most mentioned in this respect. We believe that extending BookMooch features in the opposite direction (toward LibraryThing, for example) would make the most of both communities. BookMoochers, as we said before, are avid community participants, and they feel at home moving from one site's community to the others, while still maintaining a primary "BookMooch" identity.

You can link to your BookMooch account from your LibraryThing profile. (survey comment)

If GoodReads was linked with BookMooch more directly (like LibraryThing) it would be a perfect marriage. More of my friends use GoodReads to talk about books and I use it to find books I like. I also use it to keep track of the books I'm reading and that I want to read. LibraryThing just didn't do it for me. (survey comment)

I love the combination of LibraryThing and BookMooch. LT gives me ideas for new books to read and BM sends them to me! It's become a lovely part of my life. My husband laughs at the parcels arriving and my 4 year old asks me "did you mooch that book Mum?" (survey comment)

Even if the BookMooch forums were better, I would still use LibraryThing. People are probably not going to leave LibraryThing. There is no reason the two sites have to be exclusive. (paraphrased from interview)

I like being able to have all of my books together on LibraryThing. (paraphrased from interview)

There is a in feature on LibraryThing where I can list my BookMooch id as well as AIM, Facebook, etc. If I am looking at the information page for a specific book on LibraryThing, there is a link that says 'give yours away' which will link you to BookMooch, paperback swap, etc, and you can go ahead and begin to list the book right away. That's how I found BookMooch. My first request came within 12-24 hours. (paraphrased from interview)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXPANDING BEYOND BOOKMOOCH

Strengthen relations with sites where BookMoochers gather. BookMoochers use other sites. Sometimes this is because BookMooch lacks a particular feature, but often it is because other sites target different aspects of the book/reading experience. LibraryThing, for example, is a “sister site” to BookMooch and not a competitor. People are likely to use BookMooch *and* LibraryThing, not one or the other. More tightly integrating BookMooch with selected sites used would increase the value of BookMooch. For example, the widget for integrating BookMooch with Amazon was cited by many users as a key integration tool that significantly improved their BookMooch experience.

Extend outwards. Integration runs two-ways. Features like the Amazon widget point inwards, directing people back to BookMooch. But BookMooch could do more to extend outwards, establishing connections in the other direction. This is a strategic issue. Our research did not lead to specific recommendations about what to do, but it clearly indicated that this was important for positioning BookMooch within the larger array of book and reading related sites.

Enhance knowledge sharing about BookMooch. People use BookMooch in interesting, creative, and unexpected ways. For example, the Angel network and the journal project were unplanned creations of the community. However, the knowledge about how these projects work and other tidbits for using BookMooch are locked up in the wiki. The wiki is hard to find, poorly organized, and not well integrated into the site. Moreover, it’s mostly text. We recommend creating a richer system for sharing BookMooch knowledge.

We think that videos and screencasts would be particularly effective. Imagine the following: a video about how to quickly and safely package a book, a screencast about how to install and use the BookMooch Amazon widget, or a personal testimony about being part of the Angel network and the benefits of sending books internationally. The videos could be hosted on YouTube, Vimeo, or other video sites. The role of BookMooch would be to (a) encourage the creation of videos around specific topics, (b) link to information about how to create the videos, and (c) integrate the information into the site and raise awareness about these features and services. BookMooch would not create this content. Rather, this content would be created by the users and hosted on external services. BookMooch would merely serve as a platform for integrating this community-generated material.

In our surveys, user interviews, and diary studies, we found that the forums are both a source of great interaction and pain for BookMooch users. Going into this project, the team knew this was a concern for John, and he was already exploring how to improve the discussion boards. This study confirms the importance of improving the forums.

FORUMS ARE SLOW

Having an active discussion forum is central to the social well-being of a site like BookMooch. It is in forums that community members share their passion for the site and for books. The community wants to discuss books and other parts of their life with the same intensity as their relationship with books. Many users felt that the forums do not meet their requirements, neither technically nor conceptually. Users cite the time to load as especially important, and many say that they cannot get the forums to load at all. Quick and effective forums were most often listed as the benefits of other book-related websites.

I have **not got the hang of the BookMooch forums**. There isn't much there, and it **takes a long time to open a topic thread**. I came to BM from LibraryThing, where the forums are much better. (paraphrased from interview)

When the BookMooch forums were working there was much more conversation than now. Because **the forums are broken**, the BookMooch community has deteriorated and the tight-knit members have split to other sites. (paraphrased from interview)

FORUMS CONFOUND EXPECTATIONS

The "Forum" is now a well-established and well-known medium for discussion. When users encounter the term "forum," they have expectations of how it will work, based largely on the conventions of the "bulletin board system" (BBS). BookMooch users are having trouble with the BookMooch forum because rather than conforming to the BBS conventions, it turns out to be more of an e-mail list manager, or listserv. This creates confusion. They wonder why it doesn't function as a "traditional" forum.

I don't use the forum. **I tried it at first, but it just didn't work for me**. I never got on well with the software. It **doesn't really work for talking about books**. It doesn't have a **traditional forum structure**. (paraphrased from interview)

A more **traditional, and easy, set-up** would have different discussion areas set up apart from each other, so that it gets organized. There could be sections for admin, genres, more personal topics (not ads), movies, etc. (paraphrased from interview)

[I wish] we had a reliable and “real” forum. By “real” I mean a message board with forums and subforums and threads that don't get broken up, not an E-mail message thing like we have now. I absolutely hate having to receive messages by E-mail. I hate the fact that I have to wade through E-mails by a handful of people on the forums (who don't seem to realize how rude it is to hijack and post their dozens of personal conversation messages), just to get to the one or two which are useful to me. (survey comment)

FORUMS DO NOT SUPPORT AD-HOC CONVERSATION

Beyond the technical limitations of the current platform and its unfamiliar conventions, BookMooch members miss most seeing conversations in threads and the ability to form their own group discussions.

The difference between the forums (BookMooch vs. Shelfari) is that the Shelfari forums separate the topics and the threads. The BookMooch forum is confusing. (survey comment)

It is hard to find old threads, and so you can't have a more involved, long-term conversation. Everything just builds up and gets messy. (survey comment)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIXING THE FORUMS

Adopt new technology platform. The following forum platforms are widely used and may be a good fit for BookMooch.

- Simple Machines (simplemachines.org)
- phpBB (phpbb.com)
- vBulletin (vbulletin.com)
- Lefora (lefora.com)

Further information on additional forum platforms can be found here:

- Comparison of Internet forum software
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_Internet_forum_software
- Forum software reviews
<http://www.forum-software.org/>

Make the forum simpler, faster and easier to use. Replacing the current forum platform with one of the many, conventional platforms would make BookMooch forums easy to use, would benefit new users, and encourage them to participate in the discussions. A simpler forum would be especially helpful to non-native English speakers. A standard consistent approach that a user typically uses in Italy should translate well to a user in Japan.

We have 3 key suggestions for the new forum, whatever the platform: (a) eliminate the approval process for new posts, (b) organize conversations in a small number of groups and (c) allow users to form their own group discussions.

“INTERNATIONAL” IS A DISTINCT AUDIENCE

BookMooch users outside the United States have specific needs and experiences of BookMooch. They have more difficulty finding and mooching books, and many have created work-arounds to use BookMooch better. They use other websites to talk about books, and they organize local groups of BookMoochers to swap books within their own countries. We found that “international” is a distinct audience.

INCENTIVES FOR INTERNATIONAL SWAPS ARE WELCOMED

International users appreciate the fact BookMooch tries to encourage people to send books to other countries by offering extra points. While they still have some problems getting books, they believe the point system is helpful. It may be possible to increase encouragement, thereby increasing the availability of overseas books.

I mooch mostly from abroad. I think **the point ratio is good** from how many a person sends to how many is requested. (paraphrased from interview)

I like that I get **extra points for sending books overseas**. (paraphrased from interview)

I liked the point system, you get points for listing books, you get your point right away when someone mooches from you, [and] **you get extra points for sending internationally**. (survey comment)

MOOCHING IN NATIVE LANGUAGES IS MORE COMFORTABLE

Aside from the issues of shipping, language plays a primary role in how comfortable non-US BookMoochers feel. Non-native English speakers struggle to talk about books in English. It is one thing to have a web interface that supports multiple languages. It is another to have the majority of members communicating in English. Even those members whose English is excellent feel awkward in the forums.

They like using sites where they can be included in the larger community, but also form their own smaller communities where they can feel more comfortable with people from their own culture and use their native language. They would like to be able to organize their BookMooch experience by their country, culture, or language, but not be excluded from the global community.

Shelfari is more comfortable. I find myself more guarded on the BookMooch forums. There is more flaming in the BookMooch forums. There are a lot of misunderstandings. It feels like **people have more commonalities in Shelfari**. They can make their own groups, **talk in their native language**, and they don't have to overexplain to avoid being misunderstood. (paraphrased from interview)

I wish I could filter by language **and** country. I like to read books in English, and sometimes it would be convenient to be able to look what books written in English are made available by Italian people. (survey comment)

US BOOKMOOCHERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SHIP DOMESTICALLY

Many users of BookMooch, both inside and outside the US, love that BookMooch supports international book swapping. Other sites support swapping within the US only or the UK only. However, they find that it is difficult to get books from other countries, especially the United States. Americans seem to expect that the cost of shipping outside the US will be prohibitive, even though international shipping from the US can be among the least expensive in the world. Since American BookMoochers greatly outnumber the non-US, international users complain regularly that they cannot get the books they want because no one will ship them.

The only thing *that* bugs me is when *Americans (not being racist here: Americans are the **only** people I've had this problem with), complain about the cost of postage* (which is far cheaper than it is in Australia). I understand that not everyone can afford to send OS, and I struggle with it, as I have a very tight budget, but it gets a bit much when I spend \$20 - \$25 posting a book overseas, and then request a book from an American who declines telling me that "You don't; understand what it's like for us...it'd cost me **seven** dollars to send that book overseas. That's just a ridiculous amount to spend!" I've had that sort of comment a lot and it really bugs me. (survey comment)

I don't really use other book-swapping sites because I *haven't found a lot for international users*. (paraphrased from interview)

I wish more people would send books internationally. There are a lot of US users on BookMooch, and *not a lot of Americans send books internationally*. It is really hard to get books from overseas. (paraphrased from interview)

If some one doesn't *allow international mooches I think it unfair that they can mooch internationally*. I now check before I allow a mooch proceed and won't send to someone who doesn't reciprocate. (survey comment)

I usually mooch 'fun' books, they are lighter, and people are *more likely to send them overseas than heavy textbooks*. The only textbook swapping site I have found are only for the US. I think that's a real shame. A friend of mine is looking for physics textbooks. All the ones he can find are overseas, they are really heavy, and *people aren't sending them to the countries where they are really needed*. (paraphrased from interview)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES

Encourage people to send more overseas. As described in the *recommendations for strengthening community* section, users could be known for their willingness to transcend national boundaries. We believe that more people would ship internationally if the system used some type of award or gratification (i.e., an achievement badge) to identify the Global Moochers.

Allow international users to organize their own BookMooch experience. International audiences should be able interact more “naturally”, according to their particular country, culture, or language. For instance, the forum could support discussions in different languages. We believe that, if applied properly, features like that will stimulate international participation (without excluding those audiences from the larger community).

Make finding Angels easier. BookMoochers should be able to easily get ahold of Angels. For instance, on every book’s page, there could be a link to the list of angels in the book owner’s country. Also, the information about Angels could be more integrated with the main site (if possible). Users should be able to browse “angels”, in the same way as they can browse “members”.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The majority of our recommendations fell into the four major categories of this report. Yet we also found many smaller trends and some of those were sufficiently strong to warrant special mention.

SEARCH

BookMooch's search function is a sore point for users. The search feature does not provide a *consistent* source of data when users are looking for a topic. Finding specific titles works well enough, but more general searches were a source of frustration.

It's also worth pointing out that users are turning to other sites because of "better search features." Updating the search could help retain users on the site rather than see them leave or at least split usage. And other users are very poignant about the search.

Search feature isn't very good, can't **even search by non-fiction**. (survey comment)

I am REALLY frustrated that Mooch is so **hard to search accurately** and one cannot search recently posted books, the search categories are totally inaccurate. I could not be more frustrated but emails to BookMooch are futile. PaperbackSwap is much easier all around. (survey comment)

Main problem is that you can't seem to **match author and title and format** on search to add titles. (survey comment)

It should be noted that many of these search problems are more accurately described as *fielded search* problems or *filtering*. That is, the search works, but users want to search by particular fields (title, author, publication date) or they want to quickly filter results according to similar properties (publication date, edition, fiction vs non-fiction, willing to send overseas, etc).

RESERVATIONS

To address the difficulties with the reservation feature already mentioned, we recommend the following. When a user reserves a book for a friend, the system should not notify all other users who have included the title in a wishlist. If the reserved book goes unclaimed, it should be "released" for other wishlists.

UPLOAD A PHOTO OF YOUR BOOK

Many members said that they would appreciate being able to upload photos of their book, especially when there wasn't another image available. Such a feature would go a long way toward accurately communicating the edition and condition of the books up for mooch.

ADD “BOOK CONDITION” AS A REQUIRED, SELECTED ATTRIBUTE

Many users feel that the condition of the book has not been communicated accurately before they agree to accept it. It may help to provide a pick list of common conditions to make the description more precise and accurate.

[I would use the site more if] people were required to state the condition of their books using a uniform grading system such as “new, near mint, very good, good, good-used, used”— including funky odors and food stains. (survey comment)

The goal is to make it ridiculously easy to accurately list common book conditions, while still making it possible for additional qualitative descriptions.

Some common book conditions might include:

- mold
- water damage
- smoke or the book smells
- markings in the text
- spine is cracked
- unmatched covers

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

The first step in the research was to divide the user population into segments. These segments were based on task-based behaviors, not demographic attributes such as age, gender, and income. We identified five audience segments in all. Two of these segments—“Let’s talk about books” and “Out with the old, in with the new”—were singled out for closer study.

Let’s Talk About Books. These members are interested in the social dimension of reading. For them, the pleasure of books does not end with reading but extends into the conversations that follow. They like to expand their reading horizons through a social network and to connect with people with similar reading tastes. For this segment, books are a way of bringing people together, and their long-term interest in BookMooch will increase if they can talk about books.

Out With The Old, In With The New. People in this group find themselves in need of more space. They make room for new books by culling their current library, rotating their collection, getting a good deal on their books, and generally encouraging reading by sending their books back out to the world. They are attracted to BookMooch in particular because of the underlying principle of “swapping.” Often, they want to “find good homes” for their books. These BookMoochers are likely to enjoy BookMooch over the long term.

Books Define Me. This segment wants to build a quality library with specific books that have personal meaning. They want to become better readers, and they read for personal improvement. The book itself and their book collection are central to their sense of self. They may collect special editions, or entire series, or a variety of bindings. They also like to display their books for others to see what they’re reading, and they get to know others by looking over their bookshelves.

You Can Never Have Enough to Read. This group was always looking for more books, expanding reading horizons, and getting many (or different?) types of books they are interested in. They may even admit to having an addiction to reading and collecting books. They like to talk about BookMooch as the solution to their collective proclivities, but find instead they end up mooching more than they give.

Bang For the Book. This segment was very interested in getting a good deal for their books, finding rare and collectible books, profiting from the system, and would be more concerned with a trade being successful on their terms.