

What's On Reading Partner Catch Up

How lovely to see you all!

It's been nearly three years since we last tried to do this...

Obviously, a LOT has happened in that time.

But while some of us had to pause, as a sector we NEVER stopped doing what we do.

And now that things are pretty much back to normal, it seemed time to bring us all together again. Or to bring as many of us together as is practically possible!

But before we start...

The one key thing that comes up when I talk to Partners is how many of you tell me that people have found out about your events or classes via the site.

Indeed, I was at a Christmas Carol at Reading Rep between Christmas and New Year and bumped into THREE friends who each told me they knew about it and booked for it because of What's On Reading.

We're going to look at some numbers and whatnot but this to me is the key takeaway. Have we all had something similar happen?

In the last three years...

We've grown – there are over 200 Partner organisations now, although some are a lot less active than others. And sadly we've lost a few folks along the way, too – people who moved away or otherwise never really bounced back from the pandemic.

We've expanded our list of genres to encompass more types of events that fit within the *arts/culture/heritage* umbrella, including natural history & heritage, games & interactive events and community & networking events within the sector.

Following feedback from various voices across the sector, we developed the resources hub as a place to share things like funding opportunities, networking events, insights and analysis and more.

The hub also has a public-friendly side, with a place to share news stories, volunteering and other shout-outs and other “wider-community” listings.

In the last three years...

We've also made various improvements to the site, often based on your feedback, such as:

- **Improving search – both in terms of making free search better and allowing users to better break things short by what/where/when**
- **Updating the event banner image specs so that it accepts different shapes and sizes of images**
- **Being able to hide the list of performances and send users off to a single booking link**
- **Added a secure “gated content” area of the site which can be used for paid streaming of videos or other paid-access digital content (although, admittedly, the time for that is mostly past for a lot of us)**

All of which has helped improve our users' experience of the site over the past few years.

It's still not perfect (trust me, I'm working on the auto-unpublish-old-events thing!) but it's getting better all the time...

So, some headline stats

In 2022, we had:

- **Our busiest Christmas ever** – over 60 events and activities listed on the site, and a great number of events live in time to be listed in the Reading residents' newsletter, which went to every household in the borough!
- **Our busiest New Year's Eve ever** – admittedly, only 8... but that's more than any other year!
- **A packed summer festival calendar** – around 20, from Are You Listening in May to Dance Reading in Oct/Nov. And in 2023 that's already starting to grow!

Our tweets were seen by **1,786,900 people**, and we gained **673** new followers (not bad considering Elon!) – we now have **5,509 followers**

Our Facebook posts reached **328,482 people** – with 2827 likes, 2997 link clicks and 433 shares. Over there we have **2.7K likes** and **3.4K followers**

So, some headline stats

And the podcast – which we changed format of part-way through the year, was heard by a lot of people, too!

The Top 5 episodes were:

1. Ep.27 'Everybody Dance'
2. Ep.28 'Campus Culture'
3. What's on Reading Oct 22
4. Ep.29 'Creative Communities'
5. What's on Reading Nov 22

We also have a monthly highlights list on visit-reading.com, REDA's new site aimed at those visiting Reading.



So, some headline stats

But the website is the key player in all this.
In 2022, whatsonreading.com had:

1,317,763 sessions

789,664 users

of which

786,504 were NEW users

Average session time was 2mins 23secs, with an average of 5.44 pages per session

This is all very good news

So, some headline stats

Top Ten pages on the site

	Page	Sessions	Users	New Users	Avg. Session Duration	Pages/Session	Bounce Rate
1	/	282,554	222,732	166,822	07:40:20	1.47	30.41%
2	/hexagon/whats-on	146,649	158,402	93,021	07:02:35	1.95	17.11%
3	/venues/hexagon/whats-on/jack-and-beanstalk	34,325	37,761	20,248	07:27:07	1.56	53.73%
4	/whats-on	20,963	66,006	14,326	23:22:26	4.51	37.16%
5	/venues/south-street/whats-on	17,889	19,702	9,654	05:26:31	1.79	35.70%
6	/whats-on/this-weekend	14,660	19,050	10,971	10:45:09	1.78	43.25%
7	/christmas-in-reading	12,006	14,112	9,902	12:31:54	1.49	67.99%
8	/my-account	10,269	28,201	3,951	09:26:48	5.18	13.47%
9	/venues/hexagon/whats-on/baz-luhrmanns-strictly-ballroom	9,300	10,702	6,084	14:29:25	1.43	54.49%
10	/venues/sub89/whats-on-events	8,715	7,705	6,282	07:31:45	1.28	33.26%

So, some headline stats

I've got the top 2,500 pages for the year.

We won't go through all of them!

But we will go through some interesting highlights of the top 500. Now, obviously, the Reading Arts content and stuff like the homepage will take up the lion's share of the views, but...

- **95 were non-Reading Arts events** – roughly 20%, reaching over 70K visitors
- **34 were Partner landing pages** – they reached just over 30K visitors
- **The top genres were:**
 - **Comedy**
 - **Children**
 - **Music**
 - **Theatre**
 - **Art & Exhibitions**

So, some headline stats

- **23 theme pages** were in the top 500 – and 5 of them were in the top 50:
 - /christmas-in-reading – **12006 sessions (7th highest reach of the year)**
 - /jubilee – **5322 sessions**
 - /themes/cracking-comedy – **2551 sessions**
 - /themes/new-years-eve-reading – **2019 sessions (this page was only live for a month or so)**
 - /themes/half-term-reading – **1954 (this was re-used each half-term)**
- **The public-facing side of the hub is proving to be a great resource for the people of Reading**
 - The Volunteering page was ranked **59th last year with over 1450 views**
 - Various news stories and PR announcements reached **multiple hundreds of people**
 - Even the **“paid roles” page was within the top 500 of the year** – so could be a great recruitment tool

But what does this all mean?

The site has good authority within Google (and other search engines). It's a reliable source, with the right balance of words and pictures, consistent and fresh content, and good links in and out and a decent bounce rate.

All of which means our site will always rank well within Google.

Some of the highest ranking event/landing pages were ones that relied heavily on our site authority – newer events whose own online presence was too new or too small to rank higher than ours in searches.

- **In short, the strength of the site will continue to be a benefit to the events listed on it, especially for newer events/orgs when it comes to Google listings**

The most successful theme pages are evergreen ones – they stay up, year on year and the content is constantly refreshed.

- **The pages themselves build good authority within Google's algorithms, staying live, fresh and relevant during their lifespan. The Christmas theme page was live from April/May with new events continually being added, which in turn benefitted the events listed on there**

But what does this all mean?

- **Immediacy seems to be the current flavour when it comes to searching by “when”**
 - **/whats-on/this-weekend - 14660 sessions**
 - **/whats-on/today - 5326 sessions**
 - **/whats-on/tomorrow - 1451 sessions**
 - **/whats-on/this-month - 625 sessions**
 - **/whats-on/this-week - 436 sessions**
 - **/whats-on/next-month - 322 sessions**

And that seems to correlate with the experience here at Reading Arts and other conversations I've had with folk that people have tended to leave it later to book than historically was the case

- **“Will I get Covid?”**
- **“Will it get cancelled?”**
- **Cost of living crisis**
- **Lots of postponed events rescheduled over a close period so less money to commit to other events**
- **Anything else?**

What's next?

- **We hope to continue to grow – attracting new Partners and hopefully getting more and more of your events on the site too.**
 - Remember, Google likes fresh content, and the longer a listing is up the better it will rank in search engines.
- **We'll be catching up with our developers soon to go through our list of requirements**
 - Auto-unpublish of old events it top of that list!
 - And so is redesigning the homepage
- **We'll continue to build the resources hub and share highlights in the monthly Partner newsletter.**
- **Looking at more print advertising in the town – both generic flyers and more specific ones.**
- **Working with more groups like the Reading Independent Festival Forum to help the work they do.**
- **And aim to do more events with all of you – smaller, focussed sessions and workshops, informal gatherings and hopefully make this an annual event!**

But in all this, the question is – how is it helping you? Is it helping you? And what else can we do to help?

Parish notices

Reading Libraries couldn't be here today, but they're happy to work with organisations who are looking for spaces to put on events.

They wanted me to mention that in the beginning of October they'll once again hold Fun Palaces across the libraries. It is a national event which aims to bring communities together and allow people to try out new things. In the past they've had a flamenco workshop, lots of art/craft activities and last year RISC came and did a workshop making food planters from recycled plastic bottles. Lots of families come along and it is always good fun!

Any organisation interested in getting involved by sharing a skill, hobby or a workshop/demo can contact Sarah Hernik via the link in the Resources Hub.

Anyone else got anything they want to share, invite or otherwise mention?

Thanks to

REDA for their ongoing support with What's On Reading – and for tonight's refreshments, too!

The team at The Hexagon for their assistance in hosting this event tonight.

Jonathan Richards for his work on the podcast every month.

And all of you for coming – and for helping make What's On Reading the legitimate service for the people of (and visitors to) Reading!