

Writers and readers go mobile and social at Wattpad

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File picture shows visitors browsing e-books for children at the 64th Frankfurt Book Fair in Frankfurt, Germany

Allen Lau considers himself living proof that love of good writing is alive and well in the age of streaming video and terse text messages.

He offers as further evidence the 32 million people who each month visit online literature social network Wattpad, which he and Ivan Yuen

launched eight years ago as an online venue for writers and readers to connect.

"Wattpad is the world's largest community for reading and writing," Lau told AFP during a recent visit to San Francisco to meet with investors in the Toronto-based startup.

"We've created a mobile and social storytelling experience."

Of the more than nine billion minutes spent monthly reading at Wattpad, about 85 percent is done using smartphones or tablet computers, according to Lau.

More than a million Wattpad users are writers, who typically upload a chapter at a time while readers tune in the way they might watch episodes of a television series.

"We make story telling very different and unique," Lau said.

Readers shape stories

Readers share feelings, thoughts and criticisms with one another and authors at the social network, sometimes shaping fates of characters or directions of stories.

"Writing and reading have traditionally been very solitary experiences," Lau said.

"In this case, writers get constant feedback from readers in real time; and from the reader perspective it is almost like watching a TV show with 10 million people all at once."

Readers are free to wait until books are complete and then binge on

chapter after chapter, but that is rarely the case at Wattpad. The most common question fired off at the service was said to be "When will the next chapter be released?"

After Wattpad noticed writers providing links to music videos to listen to as background for reading, the social network added a way to embed YouTube clips.

"It has been so widely used, if you go to YouTube and search 'Wattpad' you will find millions of videos," Lau said.

"The writing is the main actor, but we have supporting characters: video and sound."

Wattpad sees a quarter of a million chapters uploaded daily, with about 24 hours worth of reading arriving at the service each minute.

Less than half the visits to Wattpad come from the United States, and the service is growing strong in an array of countries including Turkey, Italy, Britain, and Spain.

"Not everyone has an e-book store, a library, or a regular book store, but everyone will be on the Internet and everyone will have a smartphone," Lau reasoned.

"I am the walking proof that it is rubbish people aren't reading as much; the Internet is helping people to read and write more."

Writers find fame

The Wattpad mobile application is free, as is access to work uploaded by writers. More than half the stories on Wattpad were written on mobile devices.

Wattpad writers don't get paid, but exposure at the social network provides opportunities for them to make money.

Publishing house Simon and Schuster gave Wattpad author Anna Todd a sizable advance to make a series of books out of "After" stories she wrote on her Android smartphone and uploaded to the social reading network, according to Lau.

Hundreds of writers reportedly have seen their work on Wattpad lead to traditional publishing deals.

In collaboration with USA Network, Wattpad has commissioned a writer to create prequel stories intended to promote a coming "Dig" television show.

"This is one of the first," Lau said of the partnership.

"Whether a TV show or Starbucks, all good brands have good stories to tell. And where else can they tell their story but the world's largest story-telling platform?"

While Wattpad remains focused on growth, not revenue, companies can sponsor stories at the network or commission writers to craft tales tied to brands.

Revenue from sponsorships is shared with [writers](#), according to Wattpad.

Wattpad's popularity has soared in the Philippines, where the first television adaptation of a story from the social network is heading for prime time television.

Books and films have also been made there from Wattpad works.

Wattpad has raised about \$70 million in venture capital funding, the most recent round in April.

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