

EEL... ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEL gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at maclean.lesa@gmail.com

There's an app for that

Unless you've been living under a rock, you will know by now that the information profession has been undergoing a radical shift in the past two decades and is showing absolutely no sign of stabilising. This entire issue of INCITE is devoted to the catalyst of that shift: technology!

I've been a long-time proponent of the strategic implementation of technology to make using libraries easier, for many reasons. Why should a library staff member waste their time hunting down journal articles and books for a document delivery request when our clients can use something like Virtual Document eXchange (VDX) instead? Facebook is a brilliant medium for reaching clients in certain demographics. I could go on!

During my career I've come across many people who have some trepidation when it comes to new technology. It could be easy to assume that I'm talking about older generations, but that's simply not true. I've met plenty of non-Gen Y folks that love to dive in to new technology head first. The biggest arguments I generally hear are, "Oh, I'm not interested in that", or "I don't have time for that". Both of these are completely valid arguments, but permit me to make a suggestion: start playing.

What do I mean by playing? Well, you could define play as to "engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose" (thanks, Google). I think that this definition makes light of just how useful play is. If you look at children playing, they are busy learning a lot of important things like motor control, social skills, and language skills. As we're sent through the grind of a formal education system, play becomes less and less important to us until we get to the point of having our own kids.

We all have different approaches to new technology. Some like to sit back and read the manual before turning a device on, whereas others prefer to throw the manual to one side and dive right in. I've been known to do both, mostly depending on how expensive a new gizmo is.

But I believe the best way to learn something is to not only have a look at the manual, but actively play with it. I can guarantee that you will engage better with something if you are interested in what it does for you.

You might have already had a friend or a co-worker try and get you to create an account on Twitter. You might have already created an account and tweeted a couple of times, but it just hasn't grabbed you. What I suggest is to find a site that's focused on an activity you know you already enjoy. You like knitting? How about Ravelry? You're training to run in the City to Surf next year? Download Runkeeper to your iPhone. Want to find a new dive site? There's an app for that. I imagine you will make time to use technology if it actually interests you.

Some recommended social networking sites and apps:

For whatever your hobbies might be, there will be some sort of social network or app for it. Here's a pick of some that I use as well as a few that come highly recommended to me:

- Diveboard (www.diveboard.com) – An online dive log and dive site discovery network
- Flickr (www.flickr.com) – Photo sharing and discovery
- Goodreads (www.goodreads.com) – Book reviews and recommendations
- LibraryThing (www.librarything.com) – Catalogue your own book collection
- Ravelry (www.ravelry.com) – Knitting and crocheting
- RunKeeper (www.runkeeper.com) – Track your workouts using your GPS-enabled smartphone
- YourGardenShow (www.yourgardenshow.com) – Share garden know-how and resources

Worried about privacy? Many people are justifiably concerned about their privacy. The best advice I can give you is to become familiar with the privacy controls that the sites you use provide. Different sites give different levels of control. If, at any stage, you aren't comfortable with sharing personal information with a site, just don't share your personal information. There is a long and proud history of people on the internet using pseudonyms.

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Matthias Liffers is a scuba divin', motorcyclin', vegetarian librarian. After working in a variety of roles in Perth including Systems Librarian, Web Co-ordinator, Web Information Analyst, and Emerging Technologies Specialist, he decided to move to the other side of the country to be the Librarian at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (which admittedly jibes quite well with his passion for diving). He is currently helping to organise the 2013 New Librarians Symposium (NLS6), which you should totally attend. He tweets from @mpfl and it shouldn't be too hard to find him on LinkedIn.

