LIS: INVESTIGATIONS

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Taking a tablet or popping a pill: the impact of tablets on future library services

FROM OUR COLLECTION:

'Rethinking reference and instruction with tablets.' Edited by Rebecca K. Miller, Carolyn Meier, and Heather Moorefield-Lang. Library Technology Reports vol. 48 (8) Nov/Dec 2012

ALA (American Library Association) Techsource has consistently provided sound assessments of developing information technologies and their potential applications in libraries. Its offerings include a blog; *Smart Libraries Newsletter*; the *Tech Set* series, containing advice and practical tips on topics ranging from cloud computing to mobile applications in libraries; and *Library Technology Reports*.

Ancient libraries collected and organised clay tablets. Today's libraries seek to support the rapidly growing computer tablet ownership within our community and must respond to new circumstances with new services. The December 2012 issue of *Library Technology Reports* examines the use of tablets and includes articles referring to roving librarians, partnerships with teaching faculty, mobile learning applications, and the use of tablets in collaborative work experiences.

Trials and projects using tablets or other mobile devices in varying contexts are described. Work at various universities is outlined. Most articles refer to the need to train librarians in the use of mobile devices, emphasising the importance of cross-collaboration in the training. Workshops for librarians and users described address issues of managing content and new ways of searching for information through voice, visual representation, and QR codes. A trial of iPads in the University of the Pacific at the Reference Desk is deemed a success, although there were issues with interoperability and interconnectivity.

The more interesting articles in the issue focus on the use of mobile devices by "roving librarians". Tablets (iPads and Androids) were given to all subject librarians in one British university. The librarians were sent out to visit specific meeting places like coffee shops and the Student Union and to particular working spaces at announced times. A marketing campaign based on a popular martini advertisement was developed to promote the service. Advice and assistance in accessing ebooks, ejournals, and websites were provided to staff and students, either through appointments or through drop-in encounters. Some librarians embraced the new approach with enthusiasm; others were reticent. A quick survey showed that 86% of students were more likely to use the library's physical and virtual resources after the experience. The project provided considerable information to the librarians about their users' information-seeking habits and raised the profile of the librarians, leading to further activity.

Medical librarians have for many years been supporting evidence-based practice and providing a variety of information sources to support clinical work and observations. Several trials have used mobile devices as part of this practice and an interesting approach at the University of Illinois Medical Center is described. The librarian joined the team of physicians and students for rounds in a paediatric unit and used an iPad to gain quick and easy access to information. The National Library of Medicine's online gallery of mobile applications was used, as well as other specialist point of care medical applications. The program was considered effective by all involved and has led to improved patient care and provision of library medical information services.

Of significant interest is an article on Virginia Tech's iPad loan program with its art and architecture program. M-learning as a concept has been about for almost two decades. The iPad facilitates both the production of content and its consumption. It is possible to link learning with information resource access in a way that is effective for student learning and the library is able to support anytime-anyplace service delivery. Opportunities are limitless for some of these uses.

This issue of *Library Technology Reports* is of significant interest. The words *reference* and *instruction* themselves need re-thinking. They are arcane and outdated in the services that libraries can provide to today's users. Perhaps popping a pill will eliminate them from our vocabulary, imbue us with new ideas, and provide us with the energy to ensure that tablets are used to the fullest extent to provide services appropriate to today's and the next generations.

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