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Technology in a Small to Medium Sized Public Library: Baldwin City Library

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Baldwin City is a small, rural community located in Northeastern Kansas, approximately fifty miles from the Kansas City, Kansas metro area. The Baldwin City Library serves the information needs of the community of approximately 3,400 people. The library provides a selection of books, periodicals, multimedia, and programming for community members of all ages. To learn more about the technology used in small- to medium-sized public libraries, Brian Herder, Emily Huckabay, and Sarah Tenfelde-Dubois interviewed Claudia Gillentine, the library's *de facto* Information Technology (IT) director, on Monday, June 29, 2009. Brian volunteers at the library and arranged the meeting with Claudia. The interview consisted of twenty-one (21) technology-related questions with a few more questions that came up during the interview itself. The interview process lasted approximately forty-five (45) minutes, during which all three group members asked questions and took notes. The interview revealed surprising information about technology use in small public libraries that the group had not anticipated. This brief paper will discuss the hardware, software, internet connection, networking, and online presence of the Baldwin City Library.

IT staff

As stated above, Claudia Gillentine is the *de facto* Information Technology (IT) manager at the Baldwin City Library. At the time of the interview, she was the only staff member that worked with the library's hardware, software, network, and website. Before coming to the Baldwin City library, she worked for fifteen (15) years at Baker University's help desk, helping resolve technology problems. Claudia continues to learn about technology by attending workshops sponsored by the Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS). NEKLS offers regular workshops called "Final Friday Tech Work Days" and "Tech Days," which provide public

librarians an opportunity to learn about cutting-edge technology. In addition, NEKLS provides Baldwin City Library with in-house staff training and consulting. Currently, Claudia is the only staff member that takes advantage of these resources. The other library staff has resisted learning about technology because they feel that they do not have enough time and have too many other responsibilities. Greenhill (2009) finds that this is the most common objection from library staff to learning about emerging technology.

Technology use

Claudia has observed the majority of adult users come to the library to use email and word processing software. Children, on the other hand, are frequently observed coming into the library to play computer games. Claudia feels that the economic recession has had a significant impact on patron use of technology. She has observed that more people are coming in to use the computers to work on resumes and job application materials. The staff has also found that more community members are bringing their own laptops to the library to utilize the free wireless internet connection.

Hardware

Baldwin City Public Library has recently begun to update the computers that are available for patron use. Claudia went through NEKLS to obtain nine to ten new Dell personal computers (PCs), which were installed at the library in February 2009. These PCs are situated at workstations throughout the library. Claudia hopes to obtain funding to replace these computers every three to four years. The library also has one laptop computer that patrons can check out and use within the library, and they also offer a second wireless card catalog. Both the KLA and ALA insist that libraries need at least one more PC than ports. This is why Baldwin City has wireless PCs in addition to the stationary ones. In addition to purchasing new computers, the

Baldwin City Public Library recently switched from an internal server and moved to a web-based system in February 2009. They had been using the previous server, also a Dell product, for ten years.

Software

Baldwin City Library has made several key software upgrades within the past two years, and they have been transitioning towards using more and more open source software. Currently, more than half of the software used by the library is open source. Baldwin City Library is using Windows XP as its operating system; Open Office for office productivity; Koha as its Integrated Library System (ILS); and Deep Freeze for PC security. Despite recently upgrading their computers, the library decided to stay with Windows XP as its primary operating system. This is due in part to Window Vista's reputation for instability and patrons' familiarity with Windows XP. While the library utilizes Windows, they do not utilize Microsoft Office for office productivity. Before they upgraded their hardware in February, they were only able to offer Microsoft Office on a limited number of computers, much to the frustration of their patrons. Open Office is a better alternative because all of the computers have access and because it is updated frequently.

Being affiliated with NEKLS allows Baldwin City Library to utilize Nexpress. Nexpress is a "shared catalog" that facilitates interlibrary loan within the library system. Nexpress relies on an open-source software program developed in New Zealand called Koha. Koha a great open source alternative to traditional integrated library systems, as it is frequently updated and allows for extensive customization.

The software program Deep Freeze is used to lock down the patron library computers. This program protects the library's investment by keeping many programs, files, and menus off-

limits to patrons. Essentially, the program creates a partition in the hard drive, and all of the settings are restored each time the computer is rebooted. Baldwin City never really had many problems with patrons harming the computers' setting; however, Deep Freeze gives the library additional peace of mind. It is important to remember that PC security problems caused by patrons are not necessarily malicious, but Deep Freeze helps fix mistakes just the same.

Networking and internet connection

Currently, Baldwin City Library has a 768 internet connection; however, the library is anticipating upgrading to a T3 connection within the next year. The line will be provided by Sprint, and it will be run into the south end of the building. Currently, the wiring comes into the office through a rack and is routed through a 24-port switch. From there, lines are run to each individual PC. In addition to these connections, the library also began offering patrons free wireless one year ago. Claudia has been surprised at how popular wireless has been. Baldwin City Public Library uses internet filtering called KanGuard, which is offered through the Kansas State Library. The library is required to utilize this service in order to receive public funds.

Website

The Baldwin City Public Library's website can be found at <http://www.baldwincitylibrary.org>. This website was created and maintained by Claudia. This website is hosted by NEKLS, and Claudia moved to this host to have more support and control and because of ease of updating. Viewing the front page of the website is uncomplicated, with most of the pertinent information in full view for the patron. The phone number, address, and email address is positioned at the top of the page in a banner form. The hours of operation are listed in the right hand column and the link to click to search the catalog is clearly labeled as

NExpress "search the catalog". Also, a calendar of events link is in the left-hand column, but seems to be broken, or Claudia is not updating information.

The website contains very little library jargon other than the "search the catalog" link, and offers other links to library related information under the FAQs tab, such as weather policies and computer/wireless access, using PDF documents. Primarily Claudia applies natural language to the library's website and as Kupersmith (2009) discusses, she "introduces more precise technical terms on lower-level pages" (n.p.).

While their new website is still relatively young, the library has not considered accessibility issues nor performed usability testing on their website. However, NEKLS has asked them to make their site more accessible, and they seem to be increasingly aware of this issue. Their web development software, WordPress, does have some design features to increase accessibility. For example, Word Press requires them to enter alternative tags on photos, so that they can be read by screen reading software. However, they have not made a concerted effort to make the site accessible or usable.

Digitization project

Five to six years ago Baldwin City bought into a digitization system called DocuWare. This was intended to digitize unique Baldwin City historical documents so that they could be used to create CDs that could be checked out, as well as possibly storing on a future database and retrieved online. Unfortunately it was a disaster. The system was hugely expensive and never worked the way it was supposed to. It could transfer information to CDs, but the search engine that was promised to the library when they bought DocuWare never existed in a workable sense, which made it almost useless for both CD and online information retrieval. Last year Baldwin City decided to cut their losses and withdrew from the program.

While Baldwin City Library is progressive with their use of Open Source, they are still lagging behind in several key areas. Due to the library's small size, their human and financial resources are limited, which affects their ability to offer technology. Specifically, their limited staff and resources has affected their ability to offer training to patrons, their use of Web 2.0 technologies, and their website accessibility. While these are not all due to the size of the institution, it is likely a contributing factor. Claudia reports that their library system, NEKLS, has encouraged them to utilize more Web 2.0 technologies including blogs, Twitter, and WebJunction; however, there has been staff resistance to this initiative. The staff, already burdened by full schedules, feels that they do not have enough time to learn or maintain these tools.

When one first considers technology in a small public library, there might be a temptation to assume that it is defined by not being up to date, perhaps because of a lack of training or social connection with larger, assumedly more advanced libraries. However, we found that not to be the case. Instead, small public libraries are largely defined by their much smaller budgets. The staff may be well-intentioned about acquiring the most current available technology, but finances are always a concern. This means every technology acquisition decision must be thought out carefully with an eye towards what will be useful to patrons often for many years into the future. Consistently we discovered that most technologies that the library did or did not have was a function of cost and perceived utility. It should be stressed that the staff of a small public library is just as interested in acquiring the best new technology as larger more urban libraries, but often have to be more creative or conservative about how they do it.

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