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The Social Impact of Electronic Resources

on the Mission of Today's Public Library

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June 26, 2008

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Many physical public libraries are steadily running out of room on the shelves because of new materials continually being published. The most obvious plus to the technology revolution, through the implementation of digital books, would be to create much needed space while still providing up-to-date service for the patrons. In response to this need, new technologies have arisen and Amazon.com, a major provider of book services online, has recently come out with a new device called the Kindle. The Kindle is a machine that allows a reader to download a book onto this device and read it from there. One public library is now making the Kindle available to its patrons by downloading books and saving them to a Kindle, which can hold up to 200 books. If one library is already making digital books available to the public with success, it seems that digital books are already impacting library space and end-user services.

While searching for information on the internet concerning the use of electronic resources, it was apparent that paper consumption is another important aspect to consider when discussing the impact of digital books. Environmental issues are forefront in today's news, and while most in the information profession believe books will never fully be replaced by new technology, it is important to understand the impact digital books would bring to the environmental issues being discussed today. Books, magazines, and newspaper are frequently held responsible for mass production using paper. Whether recycled or not, paper does not come from an easily renewable resource and if digital books were to become the norm, paper would used much more sparingly.

The environmental cost of transporting physical books to their destinations is another aspect important to the future of electronic resources. The fuels, and wear and tear on delivery

vehicles, are monetary costs, but those can turn into environmental costs easily. With a digital book, it can be delivered to a patron via email, portable document format (pdf) versions, or to the reading tool they are using without using a vehicle. Just a few clicks of a mouse and the book is delivered to patrons almost instantly, with no waiting required. In looking at the environmental impact of the use of digital books, one can see why it is important to factor in all considerations of this new technology. Public libraries would also benefit because electronic resources do not use vehicles to be delivered, cutting the cost to the library.

Electronic resources will also have an impact on the public library regarding how patrons will learn to interact with them. One example of this is students' education through the use of the library. With electronic resources becoming more readily available, research is made easier. With a library's access to online materials and its own collection of digital materials, searching for the information a patron needs is accessible at once. In a traditional library, the information is normally housed within the physical building, or if not, one can retrieve the data through inter-library loan (ILL). This can sometimes take days for the information to be delivered to the researcher, whereas the resource would be available to the user instantaneously. The mission of the public library is to satisfy user's needs and to expedite information is just one example of how electronic resources will continue to be important in coming years.

Electronic resources are already influencing readers everywhere by making the information more widely available at a rapid pace. This not only affects libraries, but also publishers. Before electronic resources were employed by users, it would take months for a book to get from the publishers to the bookshelves. Now, with digital books, patrons can easily access books published in different countries or cities without having to wait.

Digital technologies also help authors self-publish their work, because with the help of online publishing providers, they are involved in their project from start to finish. Authors can change the existing documents, ask questions, and follow up after the publishing process is finished. Because of the ease of online self-publishing, more writers are considering online digital books as the way to get published, and public libraries benefit also because they receive the resource quickly. Again, the user's needs are fulfilled by receiving the information they need at a rapid pace.

Electronic resources are also adapting to our increasingly electronic lifestyles. While searching for articles related to digital technologies implementation, the main focus seemed to be the impact for the end-user. With our lives revolving around everything electronic, digital books are at the forefront for service to the users. One way digital books in the future can help users is by offering translation into different languages with a click of a hypertext link. In today's globalized world, multilingualism is very common, but there is also the other side, where someone might only know one language, and that language is not necessarily English. Digital books can offer an important opportunity to someone by translating a document into their language expeditiously. There are numerous services (such as Babelfish) which will translate a document online, but the potential for machine translation, one example being through Kindle, is enormous. Public libraries will gain from having this technology available for any patron that is bilingual because the library would be providing access for their needs.

Another implementation using digital books is the project that Microsoft and Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) are currently working on. DAISY was created to help the blind by going from analog to digital. The project consists of a new tool for the blind that will translate Word documents into a digital talking book. This medium may be talking books, but the

concept of digital technology is present in that a book that can be delivered immediately and satisfy the end-users needs through current machinery. Braille is a wonderful knowledge, but for people who lose their sight later in life, it is very hard to learn and it is not easily accessible everywhere. Therefore, digital talking books help the blind who need access to information but cannot see to read.

Technology is moving at a rapid pace, and while we cannot exactly tell what the future holds, electronic resources will continue to be an important part of the coming times. The impact electronic resources will have on user's busy lives, and the possibilities to develop further, are why we have to see where this new technology will lead us. Public libraries are in the center of this technology because libraries have always been streamlined to fit the needs of patrons. With new technology come new needs of users for library workers to incorporate into the daily function of getting information available to be accessed.

Electronic Resources Reviewed

Babelfish: To translate text please see http://babelfish.yahoo.com/

Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY): for information please see
        http://www.daisy.org/

Digital Books: There are a variety of sources for this type of electronic resource

The Kindle: To find information about buying this electronic resource please go to
        http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0015T963C/?tag=googhydr-
        20&hvadid=4421533945&ref=pd_sl_19calxq4k4_e

Online Self-Publishing: for more information please see http://www.wordclay.com/ or
        www.blurb.com