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iPads for All: Experiencing the Unexpected

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Experiencing the unexpected

Libraries have become iPad enthusiasts on a global scale. Koç University Library, Istanbul, Turkey¹; Briar Cliff University, Sioux City, Iowa²; Colby College, Waterville, Maine³; Central Medical Library, University of Münster, Germany⁴; Omaha Public Library, Omaha, Nebraska⁵; and Westlake High School Library, Austin, Texas⁶ are just a few of the many libraries that include iPads in their suite of tools and services. Librarians use the mobile device in all aspects of their work, and they are an ever-present part of our patrons' lives. As a result, there is a growing need for library staff members to be familiar with the technology. This article describes Boise State University Albertsons Library's use of mobile technology, specifically iPads, and the internal shifts that occurred as the library made mobile devices accessible to all library employees.

History of mobile technology at Boise State University Albertsons Library

Beginning in 2006, Albertsons Library started to actively explore mobile technologies. Among the early initiatives was the creation of a mobile Web site. As the first unit on campus to do so, we assisted the university's Web services in developing a site for the institution at-large. We participated in several campus-wide projects, including attending the President's Council for Mobile Learning and Technology and the university's Mobile Learning Initiative.⁷

Another collaboration was to work with different departments on campus to provide iPads or netbooks to entire classes,

both distance and on campus. Allowing students to use the devices for an entire semester provided them the opportunity to become digitally fluent and allowed us to evaluate needed resources and services to support mobile technology. These early initiatives laid the groundwork for what evolved into a standard library service and directed our efforts towards developing a mobile library. The experience gained through involvement in these projects contributed to the library being one of the most active and successful campus leaders in creating a new and mobile university.

Mobile technology has influenced our collection development activities. As mobile devices became commonplace, we dramatically expanded our ebook collection. Over the last two years, we grew our holdings to more than 150,000 titles and purposefully chose platforms that supported downloading. Ebooks are now the preferred monograph format. This shift has impacted all library staff, from acquisitions to cataloging to circulation to reference. We are all engaged in providing access to, and assisting patrons in using, ebooks on mobile devices.

In 2009, a decision was made that had a profound impact on us. The library purchased and made available to library

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staff a variety of mobile devices, including laptops, netbooks, and later, iPads. Encouraging staff to check out and test the different devices enabled us to gauge their value and usability. As a result of this experiment, the library selected iPads as our primary mobile device. This decision transformed the way library staff work with our patrons and each other.

iPads for all staff

As Boise State University moves forward with its Mobile Initiative, Albertsons Library continues to lead in mobile technology. In fall 2010 and spring 2011, the library purchased iPads for all faculty librarians. Later that year select staff in leadership roles and public areas received iPads. As this group of early adopters found and demonstrated innovative ways to incorporate iPads into their daily work, it became clear that we had not accurately predicted who would benefit most from the availability of the devices. We decided that all staff, regardless of their work assignment, needed to have the same access to, and level of proficiency with, mobile technology as our users and partners. Every staff member now has an iPad for his or her own individual use.

Staff were encouraged to treat the device as their own, meaning use it for both work and personal purposes. Staff were urged to *play* with the iPad and discover its capabilities. We believed that affording staff free rein to explore the device would lessen resistance or fear of learning a new skill, and as people became comfortable with the devices, the competencies would follow.

Members of the Library Advisory Group and interested staff developed a list of core skills for the iPad. The skills include simple tasks of turning the device on and opening an application; involved tasks like syncing calendars; and specific job-related skills, such as looking up items in the library's catalog or downloading a library-owned ebook. This core skill set is a benchmark by which the library can measure its

success in training staff and developing their skills. The Library Network Services personnel offered group and individual training sessions.

A staff-run Google site was set up specifically to share information about iPads and their uses. The site is open to all staff and will evolve as they share their experiences. It includes:

- a statement of purpose for providing the iPads;
- links to self-help resources, such as ebooks and online tutorials;
- a how-to guide to iPad basics;
- tips-and-tricks where staff share their knowledge;
- recommendations of favorite apps; and
- ideas on how to play with the devices.

What we knew, what we hoped for, and what surprised us

We knew that academic, public, and special libraries used iPads in a variety of ways: downloading ebooks, providing roving reference, taking notes, and accessing e-mail and calendars. Albertsons Library immediately adopted those common iPad activities. Additionally, we used iPads as a device to cultivate partnerships with other campus departments and facilitate our role as a campus leader in using mobile technology.

We expected and were correct that iPads were a tool that would foster innovative new services and streamline existing processes and procedures. Staff use them for off-site acquisitions purchases, creating a mobile computer lab to support software training, and photographing and e-mailing meeting minutes. The mobility of the iPad increased our abilities and opportunities to provide excellent customer service at the point of need. What we did not expect were two major shifts in our library paradigm.

The first unexpected shift is that the use of iPads is transforming the internal culture and working relationships within

the library. The library-wide adoption of iPads is supporting a new empowerment among staff. As we observe one another using iPads in ways we individually had not imagined, we are gaining a new respect, awareness, and appreciation for each others' skills and abilities, regardless of the position or rank of the user.

A prime example is a staff member who was reluctant to the point of not even wanting an iPad is now taking the lead in exploring the device's accessibility features. We are observing new conversations and new collaborations among staff as we learn from one another, creating an environment of open discovery. Old job-defined silos continue to erode. Staff whose jobs did not typically involve interacting with patrons and faculty are now included and can confidently engage in mobile technology instruction sessions. The investment in iPads for everyone is seen by staff as an affirmation of their value to the library and the library's willingness to continue their professional development.

The second major shift we are experiencing is the iPad's impact on traditional library jobs. Historically library jobs have been space-based, requiring a computer or a specific location to deliver a service or complete a task. The iPad's mobility allows employees to break away from that physical infrastructure, freeing staff to be where the patron is at that teachable moment.

One example: a technical services staff member attended a meeting in the Student Union where a lecturer recommended a new book. She pulled out her iPad, confirmed that the item wasn't in our collection, went to Amazon.com, and ordered the title before the end of the lecture. Another example: a librarian returning from an off-site instruction session was stopped by a student looking for a professor's office. Using her iPad, she immediately located the office and provided directions for the student.

Why?

We have seen significant changes at Albertsons Library with the adoption of the iPad. Why? It's our belief that it was the

choice we made to provide the iPad to everyone, rather than the iPad itself, that sparked change. It's true that it is a powerful device. However, what has been even more powerful is our decision to be inclusive. Once we acted on that decision, we immediately observed a new respect for, and acknowledgement of, what each of us contributes.

As we support a culture of sharing and discovery in our library, we are breaking out of the "this is the way we've always done it" syndrome. We are empowering all staff to be full participants in Albertsons Library's mission to be actively engaged in learning, teaching, and research at Boise State University.

Notes

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