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Experiencing “iPads for All”: Results from a Library-Wide Mobile Technology Program

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Abstract

Libraries have become iPad enthusiasts on a global scale. 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 all library staff members to be familiar with the technology. This paper explains 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. Attendees explored practical issues faced when implementing the “iPads for All” approach, strategies used to encourage the adoption of the technology, creative uses of the device in work situations, and other outcomes observed to date. They also had an opportunity to use iPads to participate in a mobile technology service.

“The Times They Are A-Changin’”

In 2006, professors at the Department of Information Studies at the University of Tampere in Finland examined the skills library employees will need in 2015. The top five skills identified included customer-orientation, networking, information acquisition skills, tolerance of uncertainty, and problem-solving (Verho, 2008, p. 7). Albertsons Library, as well as others, has found the same need for a modern workforce with these skills. Rudy Leon, Technology Training Librarian at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, noted that, “Libraries have to change to serve the changing needs of our users; that means changing staff skill sets just as much as it means changing services to meet how students learn and faculty teach” (2011, p. 4).

Our students are also changing how they are approaching the university experience. In 2010, The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, found that almost 63% of the respondents owned some kind of handheld device that could access the Internet (Smith & Caruso, 2010). The 2013 version of this study found that usage of these devices had gone up. As one of the study's participating universities, students from Boise State reported that 90% own a laptop while 75% own a smartphone. Another important finding from the 2013 study was that,

“Students are ready to use their mobile devices more for academics, and they look to institutions and instructors for opportunities and encouragement to do so.” Additionally, students “still need guidance when it comes to better using it for academics” (Dalhstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013).

New technologies, changing patron expectations, and the erosion of the traditional higher education model are forcing libraries to reevaluate the skills needed by all staff.

Mobile Technology at Albertsons Library

As a dynamic and growing research institution, Boise State actively pursues creating an information and technology-rich environment. Albertsons Library, a central university service, has supported these efforts by being a campus leader in the area of mobile technology.

In spring 2010, library staff recognized the importance of making content accessible anywhere and anytime and developed the first mobile web site on campus. The site provided access to the catalog, mobile technology enabled databases, library subject guides, hours of operation, and tools for locating materials within the library building. The web site was so successful, the campus web services contacted

the library for assistance in creating a mobile site for the university.

Another way the library was a leader in campus mobile technology efforts was through its support of the adoption of mobile technology by students. In fall 2010, librarians began working with other university departments to study the use and adoption of e-books and mobile technology by students. The research project provided a mobile device to students in two Social Work graduate classes and made several hundred e-books available to them. At the end of the semester, students completed a survey about their experiences. Similar collaborations were later carried out with faculty from the College of Business and School of Nursing.

Library employees were also active participants in several campuswide initiatives such as the President's Council for Mobile Learning and Technology and the University's Mobile Learning Initiative. Librarians who were part of the Mobile Device Users' Group created an mLearning LibGuide where they shared research articles and other resources related to mobile technology. Librarians and staff have participated in presentations to faculty during the Mobile Summit held each summer.

Even as early as 2006, library staff began exploring how to provide e-books to their patrons by selecting 167 e-book titles from the ProQuest Safari Tech Books Online database. As more and more e-books became available and mobile devices were increasingly adopted by Boise State students and faculty, Albertsons Library began changing its collection development practices. Over the next few years, the library adopted e-books as the preferred monograph format and grew its e-book holding to more than 150,000 titles. These efforts impacted all service areas and dramatically changed how the library provides access to information.

In 2009, the library's computer services purchased and made available to library staff a variety of mobile devices including netbooks and iPads. Employees could check out and test the devices. Based on employee feedback, the decision was made to adopt the iPad as the preferred mobile

device, and in fall 2010, iPads were purchased for all faculty library and select staff in leadership positions.

Point of No Return

Boise State is dedicated to quality education, outstanding research, and community relationship building. Its environment is notable for the sense of "spirited optimism, transformative thinking, principled action, and responsible risk taking" (Boise State University, 2013). Albertsons Library has adopted this vision and actively works to support the University's strategic plan.

To encourage these efforts, the Library's administration began to expect a more versatile workforce. For example, each year, the Associate Dean, Peggy Cooper, adopts two words that encompass the expectations for all employees. Her phrases have included "Fluid and Flexible," "Creative and Innovative," and "Service and Civility." This technique helped describe the environment that should exist within the Library and made a clear statement that all employees were expected to embrace these characteristics.

With forces, both internal and external, facilitating a new way of providing library services, Albertsons Library reached a point of no return. In 2012, Peggy Cooper, then Interim Dean, had an experience that caused a major shift in how mobile technology was provided to library employees. While speaking with a member of the Circulation staff, she discovered the employee did not know how to download an e-book to a mobile device. Although the staff member was aware of instruction materials available through the library's web site, they did not have any first-hand experience accessing e-books and was concerned that they would not be able to assist patrons. It was obvious that not being able to access an e-book was equivalent to not being able to use a call number.

The "iPads for All" Model

Knowing how important it was for library employees to be able to access e-books, the decision was made to provide iPads to all library employees regardless of rank or job duties. Over

the summer and fall of 2012, every employee at Albertsons Library received an iPad for their own use. Preference was given to librarians who received the latest editions of the devices, while their previously used iPads were transferred to other staff. As a result, versions and features varied among the library's employees.

Specifications for how the employees would use the iPads, were minimal. The only explicitly stated requirement was that library employees must be able to locate and download an e-book from the library's collection. Beyond being able to accomplish this task, employees were not provided any other job-related expectations. Rather, "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" (Aagard, Armstrong, Cooper, & Nuxoll, 2013).

Another key decision made when distributing the iPads was to encourage staff to lead the way in training and adoption. Although the library's computer services did provide basic training and the manager of the library's network services did offer to meet with each employee who received a device, the library's administration did not require specific training. No one was told, "if you don't go to these trainings or use your iPad for this purpose, you can't have it." Consequently, strategies for self-education were encouraged. One example was a staff-created Google site which included links to support materials, a how-to guide on iPad basics, and lists of favorite apps, including games and other recreational tools.

Results of the "iPads for All" Project

As expected, certain uses of the iPad were readily adopted by most employees. Almost immediately, staff began using their iPads to take notes during meetings and look up information on the Internet. Other frequent uses were checking e-mail and retrieving calendar appointments. Staff also used them for "off-site acquisitions purchases, creating a mobile computer lab to support software training, and photographing and e-mailing meeting minutes" (Aagard, Armstrong, Cooper, & Nuxoll, 2013). The portability and connectivity of the devices allowed many employees to explore

providing library services whenever and wherever needed.

Many innovative and unexpected uses of the iPads were also witnessed. For example, library staff came up with the idea of hosting of an "Appy Hour" where library employees shared their favorite app or useful feature they had discovered. Other times staff shared apps that were simply enjoyable. The library's technical services staff were entertained one morning when an employee began playing her "Cat Piano" app. Another employee shared a meditation app he used for stress reduction. Although occasionally silly, staff were good natured and placed no stigma on personal preferences.

Rather, library employees began to see each other in new ways. "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" (Aagard, Armstrong, Cooper, & Nuxoll, 2013). An example is the disparate group that came together to write the original "iPads for All" article and later gave a statewide presentation on the project. The authors were from different units, with different levels of responsibilities, but had all been actively engaged in exploring how to use iPads in their work. Using their own unique perspectives, they were able to articulate how the iPads and the project had supported a culture of inclusiveness in the library.

One Year Later—Usage Survey of Albertsons Library Employees

In fall 2013, all library employees were surveyed regarding their use of their iPad and e-books. Based on an earlier study conducted by Barbara Glackin, Associate Library Dean, and Roy Rodenhiser, Director of the School of Social Work, the study was designed to provide further details on how the devices had been adopted and the impact on their work life. Of the 58 library employees, 36 completed the survey.

Results showed that many employees own one or more mobile technology devices, such as a laptop (64%), mini computer including iPad (50%), e-

Figure 1. Most Frequently Used Devices

Figure 2. Second Most Often Used Devices

reader (22%), or Internet enabled cell phone (69%). Additionally, most respondents did have access to Wi-Fi at home (89%). Access to a wireless Internet is critical to capitalizing on the mobility that an iPad provides.

The survey also revealed that library employees were still using their desktop computers as their primary device.

However, e-readers, including iPads, were noted as the second most frequently used device.

Library employees also reported what were the most and least important iPad features. Features reported as most important included:

- Wireless connectivity
- Portability
- Durability

Features that were rated as least important included:

- Add-ons (dictionary, annotation options, other)
- Ease of searching e-books
- Storage capacity

Library employees also found many uses for their iPads including convenience, portability, and job related tasks.

Although they work in a library, not all employees use e-books. A large portion (54%) of the respondents did indicate that they access e-books routinely to very often. However, a similar amount (48%) reported they only occasionally to seldom access e-books. When employees do utilize e-books they are primarily accessing them

Figure 3. Uses of the iPad

through either Albertsons Library catalog (86%) or another library catalog (46%). Many employees (43%) are purchasing their own e-books through services such as Amazon, iBooks, or Barnes and Noble. Interestingly, no employee responded “Never” to this question indicating that all employees have experience with e-books, even if it is minimal for some individuals.

When asked, “How has having access to an iPad changed your work at Albertsons Library?,” responses varied from the terse, “it hasn’t” to a more encouraging statement, “I have learned a lot about the capabilities of mobile technology. We kept hearing how important mobile technology was becoming, and it’s nice to have the opportunity to see that and really understand where we’re headed (something I could NOT have afforded to do with my current income).” Other employees mentioned specific ways that they have benefited from the devices, including note taking, being able to research questions during meetings, using it in the stacks to locate items, eliminating printing, answering questions when away from a desk, and documenting physical issues for maintenance services. One of the most surprising comments was from one employee who stated they had “never worked at Albertsons without one.” Similar to our millennial students who are considered digital natives having always had access to computers, this staff member appears to be the first mobile native in our library. For them, all library employees have and use mobile devices.

Limitations and Future Considerations

Although Albertsons Library employees generally reported a positive impact from having access to iPads, not all jobs have been transformed by the device. iPads can be used in many innovative and useful ways, utilizing the tremendous value accessing information whenever and wherever. However, not all positions lend themselves to becoming mobile. For many staff and managers, the question of how to capitalize on mobile technology in nonmobile jobs remains. This was particularly true for staff in the technical services area who do not have as many opportunities to directly interact with faculty and students and whose daily tasks can be best accomplished using a desktop computer. Additionally, many of the platforms and tools used by these staff do not perform optimally on devices with small screens. Some staff have found that having access to more than one desktop monitor is optimal for promoting job efficiencies, and sometimes the iPad functions as an additional monitor.

Another important consideration for the future is the cost of new equipment. With the continually changing economy and the relentless pressure increasing journal prices places on libraries, limited budgets continue to restrict the services academic libraries can provide. Combine this with the need to have access to current technology and library administrators may have to make difficult choices.

Finally, the question of how Albertsons Library will sustain a culture of inclusiveness will continue to be an important consideration. As Verho predicted in 2006, our library staff found that “communal dialogue and networking are the keys to success.” Even though not every person found a way to incorporate the iPad into their work, they

did participate in the project and the conversations that followed about the future of our library and its services. The “iPads for All” project laid a successful foundation for continuing discussions and serves as a model for future inclusion-based initiatives.

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