

How public libraries are evolving to meet patrons' needs in the digital age

Public libraries have always played a vital role in the communities they serve. The changing needs and demands of patrons have led to a physical evolution of libraries, including an increase in group work spaces, expanded computer and internet access and dedicated kids and teens hangout areas. Concurrent with this physical transformation has been a change in the way libraries deliver books to readers, with 90 percent now offering digital content to complement their print resources.

In advance of the [American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities](#) initiative, OverDrive, the leading eBook and audiobook platform for libraries, conducted an end user survey from June 26-July 15, 2015. Administered via library websites, the survey collected input from 16,756 respondents. This report will utilize this data to examine the positive effect the shift to digital content has had on the role of libraries in their communities by helping attract new readers, serve existing patrons better and reach beyond their physical walls.

BRINGING READERS TO THE LIBRARY

A tech-savvy millennial lives on the internet. Riding the bus with her earbuds in one morning, she sees an advertisement for her public library's digital collection. She immediately visits the website, and realizes she can borrow thousands of titles 24/7 from any of her devices for free. **The library's gained an avid user.**

Data suggests this isn't an uncommon scenario; use of digital content is undeniably growing. Almost 4.5 million unique users accessed public libraries' digital collections in Q2 2015 – amounting to 700 million page views of book discovery – which represents year-over-year growth of 18 percent. More than 30 million eBooks and 10 million audiobooks were borrowed during that time period, producing year-over-year growth of 19 and 36 percent, respectively. A total of 175 million digital checkouts are projected for 2015, up from 137 million in 2014.

The survey respondents indicated a high overall library visit rate, with 65 percent reporting visiting the library – physically or digitally – at least once per week. Digital use is also surprisingly aligned with physical library visits: 72 percent of respondents that cited checking out at least one eBook per month also borrow at least one physical item in that same month.

What does this mean? Digital users are growing, and most of these patrons are also visiting the physical library.



MAKING IT EASIER TO FIND GREAT READS

Rory's favorite part of his job as a librarian is getting to know readers that come into the branch and using his extensive literary knowledge to suggest books he thinks they'll enjoy. He's delighted to learn he can also apply these skills to the digital library by creating curated collections of books (i.e. "Great Summer Reads") presented to visitors to the website.

Evolving his role to meet the 21st century habits of readers has allowed the library's services – in this case, librarians' book expertise – to reach more of the community.

More than half of the survey respondents reported they have a specific book in mind when they visit the library (physical or digital). However, most (80 percent) said that if that book's not available, they choose to browse other titles. This indicates that library users recognize the expansive options offered by the library, and tools like curated collections and automated eBook and audiobook recommendations are allowing for deeper and more convenient discovery of great reads.

GOING WHERE THE READERS ARE

The San Antonio Public Library installed two digital library kiosks at the San Antonio International Airport in fall 2014. The kiosks allow SAPL cardholders to browse and borrow from the library's digital collection. Temporary cards are also available for non-card holders, granting them access to the collection for 24 hours (titles can be checked out for seven days). **This innovative technology will bring the library to millions of travelers every year.**

Seventy-six percent of global internet users in 2014 owned a mobile device, according to industry expert Mary Meeker's *Internet Trends 2015* report. The OverDrive survey respondents have varying preferences for their favorite device for reading, listening to or viewing digital content from the library (33 percent tablet, 25 percent smartphone and 23 percent eReader), and a quarter use more than one.

Users of all types of digital content rank device compatibility as their most important criteria, followed by ease of use, value and content availability, according to OverDrive survey data. Digital library services score well with this criteria by: allowing eBooks and other content to be accessed on the device of the users' choosing; offering titles for free (for the lending period); and providing an additional option if the physical version of a title isn't available (or vice versa).

Libraries like SAPL are catering to our always-connected culture by going where their readers are, which is everywhere, and serving them through their preferred method.

More than 15,000 public libraries in the United States – and 20,000 worldwide – offer eBooks, audiobooks and other forms of digital content. This widespread adoption has allowed libraries to attract new readers, serve existing patrons better and reach beyond their physical walls.

Today and into the future, libraries continue to fill a crucial need, as displayed by their proven ability to adapt to the changing needs and demands of their communities. Nowhere is this more evident than the ALA's [Libraries Transforming Communities](#) initiative, which seeks to address "a critical need within the library field by developing and distributing new tools, resources and support for librarians to engage with their communities in new ways." We strongly encourage ongoing support for these invaluable institutions through frequent in-library visits, logging onto their websites and advocating on their behalf to non-patrons and policy makers.

[View the survey results on the following pages.](#)

SPRING/SUMMER END USER SURVEY RESULTS

Date range: June 26th – July 15th // Total respondents: 16,756

How often do you visit your library? (either physical or digital)

- 43% go more than once per week
 - 23% go once per week
 - 20% go once every few weeks
 - 6% go once per month
 - 5% go once every few months
 - 3% go once or twice per year
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How do you typically discover your books? (either in a library/bookstore or digital setting) Choose one or both

- 84% said in a digital setting (53% listed digital as only response)
 - 47% said in a library or bookstore (16% listed physical setting as only response)
 - 31% said both library/bookstore and in a digital setting
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How do you typically discover your physical books?

- 62% said by browsing shelves
 - 23% said by reading book reviews
 - 12% said by other media
 - 3% said by asking a librarian
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How do you typically discover your digital books?

- 64% said by browsing libraries online catalogue
 - 21% said by online book reviews
 - 10% said by automatic online recommendation
 - 3% said social media
 - 2% said online advertising
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When you visit your library (physical or digital), do you have a specific title in mind?

- 50% said yes
 - 50% said no
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Do you typically find it available for checkout?

- 58% said no
 - 42% said yes
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How long are you willing to wait for the title?

- 34% said as long as necessary
 - 32% said one month
 - 20% said one week
 - 10% said a few months
 - 5% said not willing to wait
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If you are not willing to wait, would you buy the title instead?

- 65% said no
 - 35% said yes
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SPRING/SUMMER END USER SURVEY RESULTS

Date range: June 26th – July 15th // Total respondents: 16,756

Do you leave without looking for anything else?

- 80% said no
 - 20% said yes
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How do you find another desirable title?

- 84% said in a digital setting (56% listed digital as only response)
 - 44% said in a library/bookstore (16% listed physical setting as only response)
 - 28% said both library/bookstore and in a digital setting
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What device(s) do you use to experience your digital content?

- 34% of responses listed tablet
 - 26% of responses listed smartphone
 - 22% of responses listed eReader
 - 11% of responses listed desktop
 - 7% of responses listed other
 - 29% of responses listed more than one device
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Demographics – What is your gender?

- 83% said female
 - 17 said male
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Demographics – What is your age?

- 3% said under 18
 - 2% said 18-24
 - 9% said 25-34
 - 14% said 35-44
 - 20% said 45-54
 - 26% said 55-64
 - 26% said 65+
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Demographics – What is your household income level?

- 7% said under \$15,000
 - 8% said \$15,000-\$24,999
 - 10% said \$25,000-\$34,999
 - 14% said \$35,000-\$49,999
 - 21% said \$50,000-\$74,999
 - 16% said \$75,000-\$99,999
 - 24% said \$100,000+
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Demographics – What level of education have you attained?

- 11% said high school
- 23% said some college
- 35% said college graduate
- 31% said post-graduate