

Libraries in the age of Technology

In Canada, October is recognized as Library Month. So, perhaps we should ask ourselves; *“how relevant are libraries in today’s quickly evolving digital world?”*

As a library user I personally embrace technology and eagerly anticipate new innovations but still derive pleasure of holding a book in my hands as I relax at the end of my day.

The internet greatly impacts on how we find and access information, and with the burgeoning popularity of e-Books our reading habits are being transformed when we choose to read books, magazines or newspapers, all now available in electronic format. Public libraries have been navigating this changing landscape by adjusting how they provide access to these new information realities while maintaining traditional resources which are still heavily relied on by many public library patrons.

Is it the “Free” availability of internet access which retains long term patrons while at the same time encourages memberships from new public library users?

Today’s libraries provide a broad use of technologies such as:

- Online research access to both public domain and academic databases
- Apps-based access to library materials and programs from both library and home based computers
- Patron ability to borrow new devices and become familiar with a technology prior to making a purchase
- GPS navigation apps to assist patrons in locating materials inside library locations
- Kiosks/vending machines located at strategic locations within a community, allowing for borrowing of materials such as books, movies and music without having to physically visit a library

What are service priorities for public libraries?

- Partnering with local schools, community associations, daycares and others thereby becoming a true community gathering place
- Free literacy programs for patrons of all ages including preschoolers, adult learners, seniors and new Canadians whose first language is not English
- Providing safe, comfortable environments for recreational reading, doing research, studying and relaxing

Where did the “Shhhh!” go?

Today’s public libraries are not the quiet, peaceful sanctuaries reminiscent of a bygone era and still romanticized in period movies. Oh no, today’s libraries are vibrant hubs of activity, story times, technology classes, literacy centres, and listening portals. These and many more programmes are available to public library patrons free of charge regardless of their economic circumstances, religion, and ethnic background. Public libraries reflect the communities which support them and our communities are no longer quiet!

Our public libraries are no longer sacred temples of quiet contemplation...

Today’s public library collections are comprised of DVD’s, CDs, copy and print machines and computer terminals with patrons lined up for their turn at accessing all this shared and free technology.

However, for those who still like to browse through stacks of books seeking that hidden treasure of intellectual fulfillment they won’t be disappointed. Today’s public libraries combine the best of both; the traditional library collection and access to the digital world of instant access to information.

Insufficient budgets and a changing digital world serve to exemplify the profound need for public libraries. Libraries are still the “go to” destination allowing young families to spend quality time with their children, a place for seniors to learn how to access the internet and how to establish a “FaceTime” link with family and friends, a gathering place for teens. New Canadians can learn English and participate in conversational sessions to hone their new language skills while also having access to a digital copy of the daily newspaper from their homeland available to them in their native language.

Public libraries define and reflect our intellectual culture and stand as testimony to the importance of our fundamental freedom of expression, of our right to be educated and our right to improve our lives. Public libraries are examples of the best of democracy; public libraries change and embrace a changing world while safeguarding our past.

Visit your public library...you’ll be glad you did.

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