Q&A – NISO Webinar Content on the Go: Mobile Access to E-Resources - August 8, 2012
Speakers: Carmen Mitchell, Institutional Repository Librarian, California State University San Marcos
Eleanor Cook, Assistant Director for Collections & Technical Services, East Carolina University
Marty Picco, Director of Product Management, Atypon Systems

Q. What is the link to Carmen's article?
A. http://www.dlib.org/dlib/january12/mitchell/01mitchell.html

Q. For the expense and the amount of staff time involved it seems like leisure reading and comparison shopping aren't very compelling uses of these devices. Maybe ask for free devices to use?
Eleanor: We did try that but no one would give them to us. It may not seem like a compelling reason to continue but we are recycling the original Kindles and Nooks for new models which are far easier to use than the ones we originally bought. The user interfaces have improved tremendously since first models. It was our dean's initiative to do this. If you had asked me would I do this, I can't say. He wanted us to do it so we did. We will not expand this program; we will stick with the number we have. We chose popular reading to put on them because of our workload; it was easier for us to do at the time. Other libraries we knew were doing the same thing.

Further: This was entered into as an experiment and it remains to be seen how long we’ll keep making these devices available. For now, they are definitely being checked out regularly. My biggest concern is what will be the fate of the content we bought? But then, we buy printed books and circulate them for awhile and then weed them, so it’s not that different. Also, we have spent less than $1,000 on content in 2 years – the price of these e-books was really low compared to many other resources we purchase for millions of dollars! And the time we spent on the project was good experience in collaboration. I have no regrets.

Q. Is there any software support to manage several devices at once or are you forced to update one at a time?
Eleanor: Ipads we can wipe clean when they come back; there's an automated program. I have also seen docking stations at ALA, but they are very pricey. We don't have so many devices, so it's easy to check them when they come back in. We don't have to do a lot of updating on a normal basis.

Further: There is process set up for systematically wiping the iPads that we adapted from Wake Forest University that makes the maintenance of them fairly efficient. They are kept on a charging cart. The E-readers do not need that much support since we don’t have that many of them. There is a company that offers a product called MediaSurfer - http://www.getmediasurfer.com/what-is-mediasurfer.html but I can’t tell you much about it except I saw it at ALA Exhibits.

Q. Do library staff teach patrons how to use the devices?
Eleanor: The 'petting zoo' we had was popular where we took the time to show people how to use them. Our circulation staff have to occasionally answer questions from patrons who check them out. But people seem to know how to use them or figure out on their own, and it hasn't been a huge problem.

Q. Do any of the users ask for ability to take notes on these devices?
Eleanor: I do not know the answer, but do know that the capabilities are on them but they are not that satisfying and it's one of the things that are holding them back from being used for e-textbooks. That's the next frontier. We had an e-book expo, had an office on campus for new initiatives who wanted to explore their use as e-textbooks. That would be a great topic for another webinar sometime.
NISO is holding a webinar about annotations on September 12 “Understanding Critical Elements of E-books: The Social Reading Experience of Sharing Bookmarks and Annotations” - http://www.niso.org/news/events/2012/nisowebinars/ebooks_social_reading/

Q. How many e-readers did your library start with - the total number?
**Eleanor:** It was 6 and 6, then 6 and 10. Now we have a lot more iPads. (I am not managing the iPads.)

Q. Wondering how pleased users are with the content you have put on there?
**Eleanor:** A lot of the content we have put on are specific suggestions from patrons, we have been encouraging people to recommend titles, we have not been the ones to pick the titles. Another thing many universities do is ask people for recommendations.

Q. Was there a pilot conducted initially?
**Eleanor:** Yes, the first year was the pilot.

Q. How did faculty respond to the e-reader services at your library?
**Eleanor:** Some were very excited about it, regular checkout patrons; others, not so much. No one was adamantly against it; people are curious and they are becoming more popular. People are now buying their own personal readers. We have looked into getting services like Overdrive or 3M cloud library but there are some issues; for example, the Overdrive arrangement is that the content is not yours, it is leased. We haven't really wanted to go there. I think we have reached our limit as to where we want to go with this.

Q. What happened at the Ebook Expo?
**Eleanor:** We invited a number of publishers and distributors of e-book content to our campus and along with them, the libraries had tables demonstrating the e-readers. It was like a vendor fair, essentially.

Q. Are the devices insured or have extended warranties?
**Eleanor:** The devices have a warranty period which can be supplemented by an extended warranty. Initially we did not take advantage of the extended warranty but when we bought the new devices last month we did opt for that since it was not very expensive and is certainly worth it if a device fails.

Q. What do you see for the future of E-readers?
**Eleanor:** That's a really hard question to answer, but I think that the e-reading and tablet functions will continue to merge. The market is still so volatile right now. We deaccessioned our original iPads and gave them to librarians to use around the building. I have one, and it is SO less satisfying to use compared to my husband's iPad 3 – each generation of device gets better!

Q. Given that most vendors are starting to offer mobile access, what application areas are most ripe for libraries to develop offerings?
**Carmen:** This is out of scope of the case studies that Dan and I did, but one of the most successful mobile library websites is 'wolfwalk' from NCSU libraries, which integrates images into the campus digital map. The mobile website is location sensitive, so if someone is doing a campus tour or is lost on campus and using wolfwalk to get around, they can see historical images of important people on campus. They may not know the lib is involved in the app, but shows how important library can be to the campus.

Q. You mentioned 6-12 months before app is updated. Does this mean you are constantly in design mode and have to maintain your tracking of developments? Once you are in you have to keep going?
**Carmen:** To clarify, you need to move quickly. If you are doing what now so many of us do, making decisions by committee, you need to have decisions made before you start. if you are halfway in and need
to go back to a committee, it will delay development. If you use an outside vendor for your app, get it written in the agreement for response times. Another thing is, what will you do if the vendor is acquired by another vendor? At Duke, the mobile campus iphone app was developed by outside vendor, and the vendor was purchased by Blackboard. Now the software is known as Blackboard mobile. You need an exit strategy. What if the company goes out of business? If you rely on an outside vendor to update your website and the service goes away/is no longer offered, you need to have a plan. Look at what happened to chat for libraries when meebo went away - a lot of libraries were left struggling and scrambling.

Q. The device pairing and authentication that you are using - need to be sure we are not providing access to non-faculty and students. Would this be a violation of our licenses?
Marty: The device pairing is something that is enabled on a per-publisher basis. The publishers are aware of the institutional use and practice, and many are very heavily dependent on institutional agreements. When they enable this feature they are aware of the fact that they are giving access perhaps more freely than the letter of their contract states. What we have found is that even though we have the option for many of the publishers to turn this off, none of them have chosen to do so and they have generally found that the increase in usage is worthwhile. So yes, probably some leakage for people going to libraries and getting more access than perhaps they should have, but the publishers see that as a net positive.

Q. Clarifying the demographics of the user group we are designing towards.
Marty: We are designing towards several groups- the scholarly/scientific/technical/medical field, so it's usually graduate students, professors, and researchers or practitioners in various fields, or to some extent clinicians. The comment about Facebook came out of a user group that we had at Stanford; the group was was medical students and postdocs. There were about 25 people, half of whom were medical and the other half were scattered around a diverse group of disciplines. Only the political science person said Facebook was ok! In every other discipline people said they would absolutely not mix their Facebook account with something they were doing professionally. There are a lot of downsides when someone is in that mode and the practitioner may see things differently, but when you are a grad student and going for your Ph.D. the downside of screwing up is greater than the upside. With other groups it may be different.

Q. Could someone explain the diff between a web append a native app?
Marty: A native app is one that is developed using the tools for the platform, so for iPhone or iPad, that's iOS, which has its own language, and a whole development environment made specifically for the iPhone/iPad. (The app) only runs on Apple devices and has to be downloaded from the app store. If you go to an Android device, that's a completely different tool set -- you have to redo a lot of work. Those are available in Google Play, although Google is a bit more free about how to get the app. Apple says 'our way or no way.' Blackberry is becoming less and less of an issue, but have their own set of tools. Web app is a customization of the website so it's very similar to a mobile customized website -- you can use the features of HTML5 to enable the app to work when someone is offline, create splash screens for desktop, etc. A well-designed web app can look almost indistinguishable from a native app.