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INTERNET RESOURCES

Melissa Mallon, Column Editor

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There's An App for That! Part I

The *Public Services Quarterly* Internet Resources Column is designed to be a clearinghouse for free, online websites (or apps); each column will focus on themes relevant to current issues in academic libraries and feature resources designed to make the lives of public services librarians easier. Any comments about the column, including suggestions for themes or recommendations of web resources, can be directed to Melissa Mallon at: melissa.mallon@wichita.edu

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Walk around any college campus, no matter where it is, and you will encounter a similar situation: students walking with their heads down and their eyes focused on their smartphones. Mobile devices are everywhere; students check their email, text their friends, and even submit assignments on their smartphones and tablets. Due in part to their proliferation on campuses, the 2012 *Horizon Report* (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012) named mobile apps as one of the top technologies to watch in higher education in the next year. Mobile apps made the list because they support students' expectations "to be able to work, learn, and study whenever and wherever they want to" (Johnson et al. p. 4). To keep up with the demand, many academic libraries have created mobile friendly versions of their websites, either through a dedicated mobile web page or a stand-alone app that can be downloaded on smartphones and tablets. Homegrown apps are a great way to provide customized support for users, but fortunately, since app building requires a fairly specific set of coding skills, there are many free and cheap apps readily available.

This column is the first in a two part series that focuses on mobile apps for academic, public services librarians. The focus is on free apps that can be downloaded on a number of popular smart phones and tablets (e.g. iPhones,

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iPads, Android, Windows, and Blackberry). Part I will highlight the range of apps available for librarians, while Part II will feature more comprehensive reviews of some of the best mobile apps.

REFERENCE AND INSTRUCTION

Choices abound for apps that can assist librarians with research support and instruction. They can be particularly useful for distance education situations and to connect with students and colleagues off-campus.

- *Blackboard Learn, Mobile Moodle*, and *SharePoint Mobile*. Embedding librarians in course management systems (CMS) have become an integral part of providing information literacy instruction to students at their points of need. Mobile CMS apps are perfect for students on the go and a great platform for hosting research tutorials, mobile-friendly course guides, and more.
- *Skype*. The popular video conferencing software is available as an app for a number of mobile devices and is just as easy to use as its desktop predecessor. Librarians can use the Skype app for individual research consultations, to provide distance librarian instruction sessions, and for virtual meetings with colleagues.
- *MindMeister*. Due to its application for teaching the research process in library instruction sessions, this app is ideal for users wanting to create, edit, and share conceptual mind maps. The app synchs with online accounts making collaboration between students and librarians even easier.

ACCESS SERVICES

There are a number of apps that can be utilized for circulation, course reserves, and interlibrary loan. In addition to WorldCat Mobile, many public and academic libraries have begun creating mobile-friendly Online Public Access Computers (OPACs) (M-Libraries, n.d.).

- *WorldCat Mobile*. Since this web application (http://worldcatmobile.org/) is optimized for mobile devices, it offers the added benefit of requiring no download. The web app uses global positioning capabilities to let users search for books and other items at libraries near their current location. As of this writing, the web app is only compatible with iOS and Android devices, but later releases should support more mobile devices.
- *Bluefire Reader*. This eReader app is compatible with Adobe Digital Editions and works with many eBook vendors including Ebook Library. Libraries that circulate eReaders or iPads can load this app for patrons to download and read eBooks.

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- *Hootsuite*. Social networking sites are excellent ways for librarians to quickly share information with their patrons. Changes in hours, library programming, and much more can be broadcast via social networking, but it can be a challenge to update each site individually. Hootsuite is a dashboard that manages multiple accounts (such as Facebook and Twitter), allowing for simultaneous updates and prescheduled posts.

RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps one of the best uses for mobile apps is for librarians' own research, productivity, and communication.

- *Toodledo*. This organizational app is perfect for keeping track of complicated to-do lists. Users can track and rank tasks by priority level, due date, length, or status. Push notifications can alert you when tasks are due. For added functionality, the app synchs seamlessly with the web version of Toodledo.
- *TED*. Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) is a nonprofit group that has been organizing innovative conferences since the mid 1980s. The company is best known for its TEDTalks, which bring together inspirational speakers from around the world. The app offers all the talks as audio files and includes features that allow users to share and download videos on their devices. A unique "inspire me" feature lets users create a customized playlist of TEDTalks based on their interests.
- *Pinterest*. This virtual pinboard is an ideal way to organize information and ideas from the Internet. Librarians can "pin" or tag items related to research, library spaces, technology, and more. The large network of Pinners means there are plenty of opportunities for discovering new ideas and browsing for users with similar interests and styles.
- *Flipboard*. Flipboard makes it easy for busy librarians to keep up with their professional readings. This app aggregates content in a visually pleasing, magazine-like format. Users can synch Facebook accounts, Twitter feeds, RSS feeds from Google Reader, and more. Content can be shared with the swipe of a finger or saved for later consumption.

To preview or download any of these mobile apps, visit the appropriate app store for your device:

- iOS (iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch): http://itunes.apple.com/us/genre/ios/id36?mt=8
- Android: https://market.android.com/
- Kindle Fire: http://www.amazon.com/gp/browse.html?node=3427287011
- Blackberry: http://us.blackberry.com/apps-software/appworld/
- Windows: http://www.windowsphone.com/en-US/marketplace

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In the next issue, we will list reviews of even more mobile apps that will save you time, keep you organized, and help you do your job better. Until then, grab your mobile device and start downloading!

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