Chapter 16
Acquiring, Promoting, and Using Mobile-Optimized Library Resources and Services

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ABSTRACT

Although the reasons vary, it is apparent that the majority of library users prefer electronic reference content primarily because information provided in that format is easier to find and use; plus, much of this content is accessed via mobile devices. This chapter will discuss best practices for acquiring, promoting, and using mobile-optimized library resources and services including reference content -- although most Ready Reference print collections have disappeared because of the ease of finding factual information thanks to Google, Wikipedia, and others. A report on mobile library surveys and vendor usage statistics regarding the use and future aspects of mobile-optimized library reference resources and services will also be discussed in order to provide a snapshot of what is working in this emerging technology that is impacting most everyone today. The chapter also will attempt to answer questions to determine if promoting mobile-optimized content is helping users discover oftentimes hidden library reference content while they are on the go.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, statistics have shown that mobile access to Web-based resources and services is growing exponentially. In fact, in 2010 the International Telecommunication Union estimated that there would be 5.3 billion mobile subscriptions by the end of the year. In 2011, there will be almost 7 billion people on earth, meaning that close to 80 percent of the world's population will have access to mobile devices and will eventually attempt to access authoritative information found in libraries. These numbers are staggering and should provide a compelling incentive for libraries to move into this mobile space. Mobile devices certainly are evolving beyond simple cellular phones: they are becoming connections to a world of information for users on the go who want instant access to information. In this new digital world, it is crucial for libraries to strive to have their resources and services mobile-optimized so as to be in their users' pockets at the instant they are needed.[1]

The *Horizon Report* (2010), a research project that identifies and describes emerging technologies likely to have a large impact on teaching, learning, or creative inquiry on college and university campuses (but could easily include public and special libraries), includes a chapter on mobile computing in which the report states that the projected time for mainstream use is less than one year. Interestingly, "mobile phones create new kinds of bounded places that merge the infrastructures of geography and technology, as well as techno-social practices that merge technical standards and social norms," so what will happen to our information culture when more than seven billion people gain access to high-quality information wherever and whenever they want it? (Moll, 2007, p.12). It will be an amazing and instantaneous way to access and share information globally, and since communication helps define what it means to be human, these "mobile devices [will] support communication in new and exciting ways" (Nagel, 2011). Again, it is imperative for libraries and other information providers to strive to include high-quality research materials and services and to merge the library as place (i.e., social aspect) with pertinent resources and services (i.e., technology) for mobile devices.

Within the last couple of years, several research studies have been published demonstrating what librarians have known instinctively -- that many library users do not use authoritative library resources such as subscription databases. Instead they turn to what is simple and, to be frank, good enough for personal research and for the "research" required of most college students. OCLC's 2006 report, "College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources" concluded that twenty-first century academic librarians "need to better understand the interests, habits and behaviors of college students using libraries—or not—in a time of information abundance" (De, R. C., & OCLC, 2006). Although the report focused on academic librarians, this is not the only group of information professionals who need to be aware of these changing research behaviors. The trend impacts all libraries, and this information abundance is even more profound now that users have access to information anytime and from anywhere. In other words, it impacts anyone participating in the information age.

It is also known and well reported that traditional reference collections in public, academic, and special libraries are being used less these days primarily because users feel overwhelmed and perhaps think that these collections are both outdated and more difficult to use. Consequently, library users have altered their research habits to consider that whatever they find is simply "good enough" (Prabha, 2007). All of these factors should change the way reference collections in libraries are built, promoted, discovered, and used. Although the reasons for this trend vary, it is apparent that the majority of library users, especially if they are required to use library resources for school or work, prefer to use electronic rather

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