

Summary of the Digital Foothills Pop-up Roundtable

Sponsored by READS - Reference and Adult Services section of the NHLA
Friday, March 9, 2012 at the Hooksett Public Library

Several people who could not attend the pop-up roundtable asked whether we might pass on a summary of the discussions. In brief, here are some of the highlights:

How to manage rising costs? Several libraries have eliminated or cut back traditional reference purchasing, re-allocating monies to digital materials. Some have added programs like Advantage or Freading* to meet growing demand for downloadable books, and to supplement NHDB consortium. Should we encourage investigation of 3M, Ebsco, or other vendors offering digital service? Benefits of purchased content vs. licensed?

*Advantage is basically an extension of the NHDB program that allows individual member libraries to purchase titles for their own collections, making them more readily available to their patrons. It is expensive, but offers a good selection of titles.

Freading offers a system of tokens. The library purchases tokens, which patrons then use to check items out. The number of tokens required to check out or renew each item is based on date of publication. No waiting lists; multiple users may check out the same title at once. This allows libraries to pay just for what patrons are using. One drawback with the program: there are not many new titles by well-known authors, so for now it works best as supplement to NHDB. There seems to be real future potential for this model, as it serves both the library and publishing communities fairly.

How to convince publishers that the library community is actually good for their bottom line? From articles in LJ and the news release from ALA's meeting with publishers, it's obvious that there are misperceptions of library operations and their impact on the publishing industry. Can we better track and communicate the benefit that libraries provide to publishers? Patrons often find a new author through library use, thereby increasing sales for the publisher. Something for library associations to pursue, rather than individual libraries?

How to increase public awareness of issues libraries must cope with? It's important for patrons to know that libraries do not willfully withhold access, or create 'friction'. Some libraries make information available, but don't actively educate patrons on digital content issues (most offer training in use of devices and services). We don't want to repeatedly 'cry wolf' – ask patrons to "join us in the fight against" an issue, only to have it fade away or become a non-issue.

How to justify increase in budget with declining circ stats (due in part to increase in e-readers; patrons buy rather than wait to borrow)? Not all have experienced decline in circulation, and all have seen increases in the use of electronics and digital content. Some libraries have seen increases in all formats; others stated that the decline has reversed and they are now seeing increases across the board from previous year's statistics.

Lending policies and procedures for devices?

Training staff in using new devices is important – most staff should be able to assist patrons. Most libraries currently circulate a variety of devices: e-readers, tablets, MP3 players and even children's reading devices. Some circulate with materials already loaded; others lend empty devices or download a title requested by the patron. Most have age restrictions on lending devices. If no age restriction, what about lending devices with adult titles to young patrons... possibly lend empty devices or keep separate age-specific devices?

In addition to the previous questions, conversation touched on:

the diverse needs of NH communities (no one-size-fits-all solutions); establishing a Netflix-type streaming video service, either as part of NHDB or separately; feasibility of regional or statewide resource sharing; the necessity of keeping pace with rapidly changing needs and maintaining relevance in our communities; the pros and cons of online language programs; mobile apps for the library (providing more functionality than simply a mobile website); digital devices and content that serve our younger patrons – our future library users!

If you missed the READS pop-up, you can still expand your professional knowledge! The READS Roundtable Discussions on Continuing Education will be held on Mar 30 (Rye), April 6 (Boscawen) and Apr 9 (Lancaster).

Don't miss the Digital Summit on Friday, June 1st at the Hooksett Public Library. There will be much more discussion of the digital future, with a variety of presenters and sessions. For more information on this and other NHLA events, check out the calendar on the website at: <http://nhlibrarians.org/>

Thanks to everyone for their time, research and brainstorming contributions!

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