No More Us and Them: Mobile Support for Clients and Staff at UTS Library

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THE GAME HAS CHANGED AT UTS LIBRARY

At the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) Library, we are reinventing our services and support for learning, teaching and research to encompass physical, digital and mobile library services. We have developed a range of mobile services that make use of technology such as QR codes and social media to engage with clients and create opportunities for ubiquitous learning. This paper will explore the new mobile services UTS Library offers and focus on how our information literacy program is extending into mobile spaces.

Web 2.0 has created a blurring of the lines between formalised learning and informal play [1]. It has allowed a more social and collaborative online space to develop with open sharing of information. In academia, the curriculum has changed with the widespread use of Web 2.0 tools and 21st century learners are expected to be active content creators engaged in collaborative projects in physical, digital and mobile space. Learners are now embedded in the information landscape as they create, reuse and share content online. These networked learners [2] embrace new technology, mobile devices, gaming and social media as part of their information landscape at work or play. The 2010 Horizon report [3] predicts mobile devices will have a significant impact on education in the coming year. As the number of people accessing mobile internet in Australia continues to grow, information professionals need to understand how to support 21st century clients who engage with information that exists in the cloud and that can be created, shared and accessed instantly.

At UTS Library, Librarians and IT professionals are collaborating to create a suite of mobile services to support the needs and expectations of clients and library staff alike. We realise that in order to develop innovative services for our clients, we need to understand and play with the technology ourselves. This paper will discuss the services we have developed for clients and staff including: a mobile interface for our website, QR codes linking to mobile content, mobile social media, mobile reference assistance and a mobile Integrated Library Management System (ILMS).

MOBILE SERVICES FOR CLIENTS

What distinguishes us from other academic libraries is the way we work with our clients to develop more playful and personal library services. To meet the demand we have seen for mobile services, UTS Library created a mobile friendly website in 2009 providing clients with just-in-time support for learning, teaching and research. The mobile interface provides access to core information and services such as opening hours, PC availability, news, and the catalogue. This project was developed using a number of web applications including: Drupal, Endeca, PHP and python. A second phase was planned for 2010 with the development team intending to introduce three additional services as part of the mobile platform: study room bookings, access to ereadings and past exam papers. However, they opted for a single, transparent solution that can be adopted across most of the existing online library services. A filter was developed that recognises the device requesting our website and returns the appropriate content and format. This involved the use of intelligent tools such as WURLF (Wireless Universal Resource FiLe)[4] enabling the identification of various mobile devices and their capabilities, combined with a custom template engine that delivers a mobile friendly content based on the characteristics of the phone. The implementation of this solution allows for platform/device independency while eliminating the need for library staff to create and manage duplicate content specifically for the mobile environment. We have seen an increase in access to our mobile interface and current statistics show at least 2% of visits to our website are from a mobile device. The mobile interface will be further enhanced in 2011 with the development of client services such as: borrowing history, requests, geo-location technology allowing students to find each other in the library and integration of social layers such as reviews, ratings and favourites.

21ST CENTURY INFORMATION LITERACY

Information literacy has been defined as an "intellectual framework for recognising the need for, understanding, finding, evaluating, and using information" [5]. Regardless of changes in technology, this robust definition still applies to networked learners who embrace physical, digital and mobile information sources. In 2010, UTS Library trialled a series of workshops to increase client awareness and usage of our mobile services. Library staff with expertise in the use of mobile devices for m-learning developed and ran the workshops and helped clients access the University's free WiFi network, scan QR codes for instructional videos, download m-learning apps, search the mobile catalogue and databases. We are using QR codes in the physical library to 'add value' to our physical spaces [6-7] and connect physical and digital library services with contextual content via our mobile website and YouTube channel. Vodcasts and screencasts supporting information literacy instruction are created by Library staff and uploaded to YouTube enabling access on mobile devices in and away from the library 24/7. QR codes are strategically located around the Library and clients can link to instructional videos and watch them on mobile devices at their point of need.

For the last two years, UTS Library has held a Library Fun Day during orientation week and QR codes were used to deliver clues in a library treasure hunt. This required participants to navigate through six "stations", photograph each one

and be first back to claim the prize. In just fifteen minutes most were able to navigate all of the stations and cover everything normally taught in a one hour introductory information literacy class! Mobile technology was an integral part of the 2010 Library Fun Day, helping create an interactive experience in the physical library. Students are begging for library workshops to be more interesting and the success of our Treasure Hunt demonstrates that gaming and mobile devices can be used effectively in academic libraries [8].

UTS Library uses a range of social media to promote library services and connect with clients in their digital and mobile worlds including: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, blogs and Foursquare. Access to these sites is increasingly through mobile devices and we see this as an opportunity to deliver more targeted content and services to mobile users. When Foursquare was introduced at UTS Library an increase in 'checkins' resulted in free peer-to-peer promotion of the library. By providing mobile services, UTS Library is able to meet the expectations of 21st century learners who are increasingly using the mobile internet for work and play.

MOBILE SERVICES FOR STAFF

Part of UTS library's strategic plan is to deliver mobile services to library staff. Many staff use mobile devices in their everyday lives and increasingly expect to be supported by mobile technologies in the workplace. In order to support these expectations UTS library has prioritised two ways of supporting a mobile workplace: 1. Mobile devices to assist clients and 2. Enhance the ILMS to support mobile processing. Information Services staff were given iTouch and iPad devices to assist clients with queries whilst roaming the library allowing librarians to 'get out from behind the desk' and resolve queries in wireless hotspots, eliminating previous constraints such as fixed locations or an available computer. The devices utilise the mobile versions of our website, catalogue and other e-resources. The Apple devices were chosen as the standard device after testing to create a uniform consistency and transparency of library service. Staff were given the opportunity to test and play with the devices prior to implementation and this process was seen as an effective professional development opportunity.

A further challenge was to enable mobile work practices in other library departments. UTS Library's ILMS provider, iii, introduced a wireless accessible barcode module (Circa – Barcode) that enables Lending Services and Information Resources staff to execute specific tasks such as: Checkin, countin house use, and inventory control. iTouch devices were coupled with light, ergonomic barcode scanners [9], transforming them into an integrated mobile ILMS that can readily access the wireless barcode interface. This greatly reduces workload and improves workplace efficiency for staff who are used to sitting at a desk to manually check spreadsheets and catalogue records.

In 2011, UTS Library is implementing RFID technology by tagging the print collection and running a trial in the open reserve collection. The trial will inform how we operate when we move two-thirds of our collection into an underground automated retrieval system as part of a new library building to be opened in 2016. RFID allows more efficient self service for checkin/checkout with client records and item availability updated in real-time. In theory, items will never be missing again as RFID allows items to be found anywhere due to the geo-locating data within the tag. Implementing this technology will have a positive impact on staff by reducing repetitive and manual tasks like checkin and updating client records. Library staff will have more time to spend with clients and provide value added services.

INNOVATION THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

By developing mobile services UTS Library is able to meet the expectations of 21st century clients and staff who are increasingly using mobile technologies for work and play. We realise that in order to develop innovative services it is essential for staff to experiment and play with mobile technologies in the workplace. Understanding new technologies and expectations of our clients is the key to delivering services that meet the needs of 21st century clients.

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