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Libraries and the Cloud

By Stephen Ingram

Cloud computing can be described as streaming web services over a network connection to fill your computer needs. It promises many benefits to computer users and many opportunities for libraries as data speed and technological progress continue to grow. As a service we should be prepared for how this will affect our library facilities and communities.

You enter the cloud anytime you access your email. When you open a document online, edit a photo, or upload a social media picture you are using cloud computing. Need software or documents to complete a particular task? You may be able to summon it with a simple command which would temporarily share it to your computer, allow you to complete your task, and dismiss it when you are completed.

Accidentally shut off your computer? Well, the

content in the cloud stays in the cloud. Servers back your information and you can summon it again, without the threat of loss. The cloud offers us the promise of unlimited computing power, ease of use, and unlimited data.

The cloud is here, and in use. Companies like Amazon, Microsoft and Google are betting part of their business on cloud computing. Literally billions of dollars are being invested in development of technology that can share data efficiently.

We have also seen a tremendous shift in how people are accessing their cloud data from the traditional desktop platform. Smartphones and tablets are offering easy, portable access to information and entertainment with a few keystrokes. These theoretically simple devices are



By Bob Johnson and Ted Gutmann

Most libraries would consider the concept, development, and implementation of their own mobile app as a huge undertaking, requiring large quantities of staff and development time to be devoted to this single project. We took the attitude instead that this project was just "business as usual", and as such, we would make time for it. We decided we would work it into our routine and take it one step at a time. Our concept, stated as a set of objectives, was to develop an application that truly placed the library and its available services right in the pockets of our patrons; to bridge the gap between the physical and the digital library by offering the "library as a service", all in one place; and to make that service universally available on the market's most popular mobile

devices.

When we stumbled upon the tagline "a library in your pocket," we knew we had found our end game. We knew it was something we could wrap our heads around. We thought it was something that everyone could get excited about.

But what was a library in your pocket exactly? Was it something that patrons would even want? And how were we going to implement it?

Why is it that the best ideas seem to emerge from the most unlikely places or in the spots that are totally removed from our routine existence? We quickly found that in order to think outside the box, that we needed to get outside our library's physical box and do our brainstorming off-site. Working outside the

library walls, coupled with our determination to break the library mold, we were assured that nothing was going to get in the way of our creativity. We asked staff members and their colleagues to join us in thinking outside the box and to serve as advisors for the project. The ideas came flooding in from all directions: scan an ISBN and check for local library availability; provide emergency and opt-in notifications and program reminders; automatically sign in to library services. With all these new ideas flowing, you would have thought we needed to form a committee to get anything done. But quite the opposite was true; we just needed to focus the ideas in the right direction and start building.

We wanted to promote our app as something completely new and exciting for the library, and we decided to market it aggressively. We engaged a graphics consultant to help us come up with the logos, icons, and other marketing materials such as bookmarks and banners. We also tried to excite some interest beforehand by including a brief

"coming soon" article in our newsletter and website. Once the app was officially released, our patrons took to it right away.

A question we often get asked is, "How did you find the time to develop such an involved project?" The answer is we didn't. Our philosophy for the development of the product was to move quickly and in small increments. We started with the basics and kept adding features as we went along. The other bit of advice we would offer is to look to your existing organization and network of contacts. There may be some hidden gems in there that you did not even know about.

Clearly, mobile technology is more than just a fad; it is very much the future. The advances being made in mobile technology are happening at a frighteningly rapid pace.

We look at our mobile app as the foundation of what we believe will be the future of library technology services. We are at a very early stage right now, (similar to where websites were in the late '90s) but we know that, as we continue to build and add to our mobile applications, we will remain an important asset to our community.

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removing the barrier of stand alone computers and replacing it with mobility. There is little doubt that these devices will proliferate to a price point where they are close to affordable by all people. Desktop computers will continue to disappear as mobility fills consumer needs.

With the advent and full scale adoption of social media, the cloud is also where your digital life is located. Many people, for good or ill, count on these services to store their photos of family and friends, leaving a digital trail of their lives to share.

So where do libraries fit in with this adoption of cloud services and how can we leverage them to help our staff and members?

First and foremost libraries should embrace the cloud. As patrons migrate towards these services we must be ready to have basic skill sets to handle questions and concerns. We should be prepared to train not only our staff, but patrons as well with the possibilities of a

cloud based digital life. This may mean adopting new technologies or changing existing patterns of networking and security.

Libraries may share documents and files through online drives and post important information for their communities for easy access.

Imagine all of a library's local history archive available for download. What if every bookmark or bibliography was placed online for reuse? Cloud based storage may end up being one of the many ways that libraries end up sharing information to their community or liberating library created content for all of our members.

Of course, the road to a library cloud based life may not be easy, affordable, or practical. There are also many issues with content ownership and copyright protection that will have to be explored through legal channels. Is the promise of the cloud too good to be true? Probably, but, like most people, we will all be using the cloud before we know it. Like social media it will be incorporated into our daily life and workflow.

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Upcoming Events:

4/4/13: TIF Committee Meeting 9:30 AM

Half Hollow Hills Library

4/23/13: Annual Library Tour: 10 AM Emma S Clark
Memorial Library in Setauket, lunch break followed
by SUNY Stony Brook Melville Library at 2 PM

4/30/13: CATS Board Meeting 9:30 AM

5/2/13: 2013 Long Island Library Conference

Libraries: The Future is Now

CATS featured presentations include:

- The Promises and Perils of Mobile Communication
- Future Proof your Library through Collaboration:
Where Reference meets Technology

