

Mobile Apps in Library Programs

Abstract

Chapter 3 of *Library Technology Reports* (vol. 50, no. 8), “*Selecting and Evaluating the Best Mobile Apps for Library Services*,” gives ideas for using mobile apps in library programs and services. Ideas include creating online app guides, loaning tablets with apps, holding author events (interactive e-books), hosting app discussion groups, inviting local experts who can showcase the use of apps, incorporating apps in library instruction, recommending content-creation apps to your users, and hosting community events for creating apps.

Online App Guides

A good way to get started with recommending mobile apps to your community is to make a website for that purpose. When I worked for the MIT Libraries, we made a guide for the MIT community: “Apps for Academics: Mobile Web Sites and Apps,” <http://libguides.mit.edu/apps>. It recommends apps in several categories: productivity, reading, library research, taking notes, writing, presenting, MIT-specific, music, and a resource guide listing relevant books and articles.

These sites were created with LibGuides, a web publishing tool that many libraries subscribe to.¹ LibGuides makes it easy to copy and modify a site (with permission), and many libraries have copied the MIT Libraries guide as a starting point for creating a guide for their community.

I would encourage you to think beyond the usual list of library database apps. There are so many apps

that can help your community in all areas of their learning, and it makes sense for libraries to provide these recommendations. Showing the icon, along with a few sentences about each app, makes it easy to scan. If your library offers workshops about apps, your online app guide can be a good place to advertise it and to give to your users as a virtual handout when the workshop is over.

It’s great to see that many libraries now have app guides, either as separate guides or integrated into subject or topical guides. No matter which website tool you use, it’s useful to have a page that recommends the best apps for specific uses.

Loaning Tablets with Apps

Some libraries are making tablets available, either for use inside the library or for taking home. For example, the Brooklyn Public Library has a tablet-lending program.² See its site for details.

For some very useful information on the practical side of lending tablets, see the guide created for a workshop called *Integrating iPads and Tablet Computers into Library Services*.³ It includes sample policies, sample user agreements, presentation slides, and an extensive article list.

The authors of that guide (Rebecca K. Miller, Carolyn Meier, and Heather Moorefield-Lang) have also put together an excellent blog for keeping up to date on this topic: *iPads and Tablets in Libraries*.⁴

If you would like to get inspired with ideas for a wide range of apps that would make sense to provide

on your iPads or other tablets, see my online courses: Apps for Librarians and Educators, and The Book as iPad App.⁵ These courses offer you a chance to spend time with the very best apps (watch the class video demos in order to decide which ones to purchase) and spark your thinking about the potential of these apps for education.⁶

Author Events

Libraries have long been in the business of hosting author events. Have you also considered inviting app developers or the authors of interactive book apps to speak at your library?

The world of books and apps is converging in interesting ways, and it may be more appropriate to think about “learning objects” rather than the traditional formats of book, movie, game, course, comic, magazine, or slideshow.

A good example of an interactive learning object is the award-winning multimedia app, *CIA: Operation AJAX—The Interactive Graphic Novel for iPad*.⁷ This free iPad app is a great example of an interactive book that incorporates many different media types to tell the story of the CIA’s role in a 1953 coup that overthrew Iran’s government.

It combines animated comic book slides with ambient sounds and supplemental primary-source material like declassified CIA documents and newsreels. It creates an experience that feels like a comic book combined with a movie that you control the pacing of. I heard the developer of this app give an excellent presentation about it at a conference a few years ago (SXSW Interactive). The presentation is available on YouTube and is recommended if you’re interested in learning more about what goes into the creation of an app like this one.⁸

Are there developers of interesting apps that have content of interest to your community? Invite them to speak at your library about their apps, and provide a few tablets so that your audience can try the apps for themselves.

For a list of interactive book apps to consider, see the resource guide for my course, *The Book as iPad App*.⁹ It includes interactive book apps in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, reference, children and young adults, graphic novels and comics, and short-form content.

App Discussion Groups

In addition to your library book discussion groups, why not have app discussion groups? Using the same format as you do for your book discussions, invite members of your community to join a group that discusses educational apps.

If you are in an academic library, sometimes your students have great ideas about the apps they find useful. You could host events like these:

- Best Mobile Apps for Architecture and Urban Planning¹⁰
- Using Evernote for Academic Productivity—Share Your Tips
- Personal Content Management Apps

The librarian subject expert could create a guide as a starting point and then invite the students to share their tips, ideas, and best practices.

Local Experts Showcasing the Use of Apps

Having local experts showcase the use of apps is a little different than inviting an app author or developer to speak. For this idea, invite local educators or other experts who are *using* apps in innovative ways to give a talk.

For example, Jennifer Carey, director of educational technology at the Ransom Everglades School in Miami, uses Evernote with students in the classroom to help them organize their sources for academic research.¹¹ In “Using Evernote for Research,” she discusses her process and the details of how she works with students using Evernote and its web clipper to capture the information needed to properly cite their sources.¹²

Another example could be learning about using a mind-mapping app called Mindmeister in the classroom.¹³ Kevin J. O’Shea at Purdue University has published a detailed how-to guide for using this app in the classroom, including sample lesson plans.¹⁴

If you have experts like these in your local community, invite them to give talks at the library about how they are using mobile apps for education and productivity.

Incorporating Apps in Library Instruction

I’d like to encourage everyone to think beyond the usual instruction session that involves teaching students or the general public to use library databases and to format citations.

We can go beyond that by looking at the whole life cycle of learning and creating. Tasks such as researching, reading, analyzing, taking notes, organizing notes, doing field work, performing experiments, interviewing, writing, creating multimedia content, presenting, teaching, creating, managing your online identity, and more are all part of the learning process, and librarians can help at any of those stages.

There are mobile apps that enable all of those tasks. There are multiple literacies important in today's world, and educators of elementary students are focusing on these literacies with our youngest students. These students are future users of academic and public libraries and will come with exposure to this background.

Today's literacies include media literacy, information literacy, visual literacy, aural literacy, cyber literacy, cultural literacy, critical literacy, digital literacy, and more.¹⁵

When we as librarians become "app-literate," we can use that knowledge to provide ongoing training, both in person and online, using mobile apps that engage students of all ages and abilities.

One example of using our knowledge of mobile apps in training is a workshop offered by the MIT Libraries. The libraries have gone beyond one-time workshops about managing citations to the broader problem students have—organizing their personal information. MIT Libraries' guide to "personal content management" includes information about collaborating and sharing notes, citation, and organizing and annotating files such as PDFs, notes, and images.¹⁶ Managing citations is just one part of this larger world that students need help with. Mobile apps for these tasks include Google Drive, Mendeley, Zotero, RefWorks, Evernote, Dropbox, Papers, GoodReader, Flickr, and Picasa.

The decision to address personal content management came out of ethnographic research we conducted in order to learn about the pain points in students' academic lives. The 2011 Digital Scholarship Study helped us focus on the big picture and the details of students' academic lives and see exactly where they needed the most help. For a summary of themes, see my presentation "Academic E-Reading: Themes from User Experience Studies."¹⁷

For specific project ideas on incorporating apps in library instruction, see the book by Joel A. Nichols, *iPads in the Library: Using Tablet Technology to Enhance Programs for All Ages*.¹⁸ It includes projects for children, teens, and adults. Each project lists the apps needed, planning notes, and detailed instructions for the activity.

Apps for Content Creation by Your Users

Since libraries are getting more involved in different ways with helping their users create,¹⁹ it's good to know some of the best mobile apps to recommend to users as tools for their creative projects. Below I have listed a few of the many apps that people can use for content creation and curation. There are many other

apps for working with photos, video, art, and music, and you can learn more about those in my book *Apps for Librarians: Using the Best Mobile Technology to Educate, Create, and Engage*.²⁰

For Those Who Want an Easy Way to Start Creating Interactive Books

Book Creator for iPad, www.redjumper.net/bookcreator. Android, iOS. A very easy-to-use app for creating multimedia e-books. With it you can create e-books that include text, images, video, music, and narration. Great for working with kids.

iBooks Author, www.apple.com/ibooks-author. Mac OS. Even though this is not a mobile app (it runs on Macs), iBooks Author is important to know about because with it, you can create interactive e-books for Apple's iBookstore with multimedia features for viewing on iPads. It's easy to learn, easy to use, and free. Some libraries are using it to create interactive e-books from special collections. For an example, see this title from the New York Public Library: *NYPL Point: John Cage's Prepared Piano*.²¹

For People Who Want to Make Non-Boring Presentations

Keynote, www.apple.com/ios/keynote. iOS. An easy-to-use presentation app similar to PowerPoint that enables users to design beautiful presentations. It comes with a set of well-designed themes. Pro themes are available from several publishers as well.

SlideShark, www.slideshark.com. iOS. An app that lets you present PowerPoint slides on your iPad.

Haiku Deck, www.haikudeck.com. iOS (iPad only). An app that lets you create presentations with an elegant, minimalist look. One unique and useful feature of Haiku Deck is its ability to search Creative Commons–licensed images to use in your slides.

Prezi, <http://prezi.com/iphone>. iOS. An app that lets you create presentations on a zooming virtual canvas.

For Those Who Want to Use Shared Whiteboards for Demonstrations and Teaching

Explain Everything, <http://explaineverything.com>. Android, iOS (iPad only). An app that lets you create screencasts (or live demos) of annotated documents, drawings, photos, or videos on your iPad.

Doceri, <http://doceri.com>. iOS (iPad only). Another popular and useful interactive whiteboard app.

For Those Who Want to Create Designs for 3-D Printing

123D Design, www.123dapp.com/design. iOS (iPad only). One of several apps in this area made by Autodesk. 123D Design is a good place to start. With it you can start your

design on your iPad, save it in the cloud, and finish it on your desktop with 123D Design for Mac or Windows.

Makies Lab, www.makieworld.com. iOS (iPad only). An app that lets you build fully customizable digital dolls. See Libby (the librarian), <http://makie.me/forum/topic/348-libby-the-librarian>.

Blokify 3D Printing & Modeling, <http://blokify.com>. iOS. 3-D modeling software that enables kids to create toys they can play with virtually or physically via 3-D printing.

Thingiverse, www.thingiverse.com. Android, iOS. An app that lets you share and browse user-created digital design files for 3-D printing.

For Those Who Want to Curate and Share Content on the Web

Flipboard, <http://flipboard.com>. Android, iOS. A visual news-reading app that provides an appealing way to browse, read, and share stories from a variety of sources. Use it to create “magazines” on topics of your choice. Here’s an example: “Book as App—Interactive, Multi-Touch,” <http://flip.it/pdE1C>.

Scoop.it, www.scoop.it. Android, iOS. An app that lets you collect stories on a topic that you can share via a “magazine” on the Web.

Creating guides and workshops on how to use these apps is a great role for librarians who are facilitating knowledge creation in their communities.

Hosting Community Events about Creating Apps

Events like App Camp for Girls, <http://appcamp4girls.com>, are springing up to teach young people how to design and develop apps. Here’s the description:

App Camp For Girls is a place where girls can put their creative power to work, concepting and building apps, while learning more about the business of software and being inspired by women who are professional software developers. We think that when girls see how fun and creative app development can be, they’ll be more likely to pursue a career in software development and technology.²²

Libraries would be good places to host events like these—unconferences, BarCamps, hackathons, and more.²³ Consider collaborating with others in your community to host events that enable your users to create apps, podcasts, blogs, books, art, or films—any type of creative content.

Notes

1. LibGuides: www.springshare.com/libguides.
2. Brooklyn Public Library tablet lending program, accessed June 26, 2014, www.bklynlibrary.org/tablets.
3. Daniel A. Freeman, “Continuing the Conversation: Integrating iPads and Tablet Computers into Library Services,” ALA TechSource, March 15, 2012, www.alatechsource.org/blog/2012/03/continuing-the-conversation-integrating-ipads-and-tablet-computers-into-library-service.
4. iPads and Tablets in Libraries (blog): <http://tabletsinlibraries.tumblr.com>.
5. Apps for Librarians and Educators, online course by Nicole Hennig, <http://apps4librarians.com>; The Book as iPad App, online course by Nicole Hennig, <http://apps4librarians.com/bookapps>.
6. See this page for testimonials from former students from my courses: <http://nicolehennig.com/courses/testimonials>.
7. *CIA: Operation AJAX—The Interactive Graphic Novel for iPad*: www.cognitocomics.com/operationajax.
8. Daniel Burwen, “Reinventing the Graphic Novel for the iPad,” YouTube video, 59:39, talk at SXSW Interactive, published June 27, 2012, <http://youtu.be/wP9p08LrZCo>.
9. Nicole Hennig, Resource Guide for The Book as iPad App online course, <http://apps4librarians.com/bookapps/resources.html>.
10. For an example, see the slides from my talk for librarians at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Apps for Architecture and Urban Planning, www.slideshare.net/nic221/apps-for-architecture-urban-planning.
11. Evernote: <http://evernote.com>.
12. Jennifer Carey, “Using Evernote for Research,” *Indiana Jen* (blog), February 28, 2013, <http://indianajen.com/2013/02/28/using-evernote-for-research>.
13. MindMeister Mobile Apps: www.mindmeister.com/mobile.
14. Kevin J. O’Shea, “Mindmeister,” Web 2.0 Tools: New Possibilities for Teaching and Learning, October 19, 2011, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://wiki.itap.purdue.edu/display/INSITE/Mindmeister>.
15. “Multiple Literacies: It’s Not Just the 3 R’s Any More!” 21st Century Schools, accessed June 26, 2014, www.21stcenturyschools.com/multiple_literacies.htm.
16. MIT Libraries, Personal Contact Management Tools, <http://libguides.mit.edu/personal-content>. Several apps are recommended in the section called “Organize and Annotate.”
17. Nicole Hennig, “Academic E-Reading: Themes from User Experience Studies,” presentation slides, www.slideshare.net/nic221/academic-ereading-themes-from-user-experience-studies.
18. Joel A Nichols, *iPads in the Library: Using Tablet Technology to Enhance Programs for All Ages* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2013), WorldCat listing at www.worldcat.org/oclc/816512996.
19. Nicole Hennig, “Apps for Content Creation,” *Unbound* (blog), Simmons College GSLIS, June 8, 2014, <http://gslis.simmons.edu/blogs/unbound/2014/06/08/apps-for-content-creation>.

20. Nicole Hennig, *Apps for Librarians: Using the Best Mobile Technology to Educate, Create, and Engage* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2014), <http://apps4librarians.com/thebook>.
21. New York Public Library, *NYPL Point: John Cage's Prepared Piano*, September 5, 2012, free e-book available in the iTunes store, <http://itunes.apple.com/us/book/nypl-point-john-cages-prepared/id559342852?mt=11>.
22. About App Camp for Girls: <http://appcamp4girls.com/about>.
23. To learn more about “BarCamps” and “unconferences,” see the *Wikipedia* articles: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BarCamp> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference>.