

Trend Watching

Who and How to Follow

In the last chapter, we discussed some examples of rapid technology change, evolving technology and job duties in libraries, consumer technology innovation cycles, and the way changes in consumer technology affect libraries. In this chapter, we explore the concept of trend watching and different types of trend watchers. We look at trend watchers in the library and the non-library technology industries. We look at some tools and techniques for following trend watchers. Finally, I discuss how important it is to pay attention to trends in your local community and share some ideas for how to do that.

What Is a Trend Watcher?

Before we start looking at specific trend watchers and what types of information they share, let's first define what is meant by a trend watcher. There are two types of trend watchers: *organizations* and *individuals*. Individual trend watchers can be grouped into two loose categories: what I call *reporters* and *explorers*.

Organizational trend watchers include research organizations, think tanks, and government and non-profit agencies that scan trends or industries. In fact, one trend-watching organization is named Trend-Watching. TrendWatching focuses on global consumer trend watching.

TrendWatching
www.trendwatching.com

Similar organizations include the Pew Research Center and its wide-ranging research on Americans, including research on technology and libraries, and



Figure 2.1
 People getting ready to learn about trends

Edison Research, which focuses on media trends and election polling among other things. Each of these organizations actively looks for, reports on, and researches a variety of trends.

Individual trend watchers are just that—individuals. They don't necessarily represent a business or organization. If they are associated with a business,

it's usually in a consulting or research capacity. Many of them are simply people who are interested in a topic and like to share. These individuals can often be further divided into what I call reporters and explorers.

Reporters regularly read and report on news and information about topics that interest them. They might also discuss new technology or tools, adding their own ideas to a debate. They might supply a tutorial on a new service or tool because they are interested in it. Reporters usually accomplish these tasks through a blog or a social media tool like Twitter or Facebook.

Explorers are on the front lines, creating trends. They build new tools and create technology to meet local needs. They might design a pilot project to test a theory and then report findings. Their work might be accomplished under the umbrella of their day jobs, or they might do these projects during off hours.

There's no hard-and-fast line between reporters and explorers. Often an individual does a little of both.

Advantages of Following Trend Watchers

Following a trend watcher will provide you with information on emerging technology trends and ideas that might affect the library industry and the world at large. This information is usually not found in library trade publications and academic journals. Emerging technology trends often take one to two years to reach those publications. In the ever-changing technology landscape, a trend can't truly be defined as *new* after one to two years. Customers could already be expert users by the time a trend is formally published in a traditional, peer-reviewed academic journal.

Since trend watchers are already following and reporting on key trends affecting the library and information industry, you don't have to duplicate this effort. By following these key players, you can quickly update your knowledge of emerging trends.

Let's explore a variety of organizations and individuals who watch for, create, and explore technology trends in the library industry.

Organizational Trend Watchers in Library Technology

For the most part, organizational trend watchers are connected to library trade magazine publishers and other library and information industry organizations. These trend watchers report key news, emerging trends, and other information related to library technology.

Here are some organizational trend watchers to follow:



Figure 2.2
ALA logo

ALA'S CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES

The American Library Association's (figure 2.2) Center for the Future of Libraries describes its mission as follows:

- Identify emerging trends relevant to libraries and the communities they serve
- Promote innovation techniques to help librarians and library professionals shape their future
- Build connections with experts and innovative thinkers to help libraries address emerging issues¹

It has a blog you can subscribe to through RSS or email and weekly articles highlighting emerging social and technology trends that are important to libraries.

THE DIGITAL SHIFT

The Digital Shift is part of *Library Journal*. Here's a description of Digital Shift:

The Digital Shift is the new home for all technology-related stories and features published by *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*. We'll cover everything to keep librarians informed as they help ease patrons' and students' immersion in an increasingly digital world. From the rapidly changing e-book marketplace, to self-service interfaces and download stations, to the latest in online tools and resources that will help patrons and students work and learn most efficiently—when it comes to navigating the Digital Shift, we've got you covered.²

Topics have included ILS news, e-book integration with BiblioCommons, and broadband needs for libraries.

DISTRICT DISPATCH

The District Dispatch is an online publication of the American Library Association's Washington office. It focuses on library policy news. Currently, that type of news includes information about digital inclusion, broadband internet access, and privacy issues—all topics that relate to technology.

INFODOCKET

INFOdocket (figure 2.3) is also sponsored by *Library Journal* and is written by Gary Price, a library consultant. INFOdocket shares information industry news and resources, and it is frequently updated. Topics have included publisher and e-book news, digitization projects, and information about net neutrality legislation.



Figure 2.3
INFOdocket logo

ALA's Center for the Future of Libraries
www.ala.org/tools/future

The Digital Shift
www.thedigitalshift.com

District Dispatch
www.districtdispatch.org

INFOdocket
www.infodocket.com

Individual Trend Watchers in Library Technology

Many individuals within the library technology community publish blogs focused on emerging technology trends. These trend watchers discuss many things, including technology-related news, thoughts they have about how to use new technology, ideas and services they have discovered at a conference, and even pilot projects that they have led. If you follow one or more of these people, you will definitely learn more about different types of emerging technology!

One thing to note with individual blogs: These blogs are written and maintained by real people with real jobs, families, and outside interests. Sometimes they publish a lot of content, and sometimes they take short breaks. If you notice a blog with good articles that hasn't been updated in a while, most likely that blogger is taking a break. Wait a few months and check back again.

Here's a list of individual trend watchers to start with:

STEPHEN ABRAM

Stephen Abram is a librarian and principal with Lighthouse Consulting and executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. His blog, *Stephen's Lighthouse*, includes posts on library strategies for marketing, technology, and user alignment. Topics on

his blog cover a wide range of emerging technology and cultural changes taking place.

JASON GRIFFEY

Jason Griffey is the founder and principal at Evenly Distributed, a technology consulting and creation firm for libraries, museums, education, and other non-profits. Griffey is a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University and was formerly an associate professor and head of library information technology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Topics covered include information on his LibraryBox project, personal information security, libraries and immigration, and technology innovation.

SARAH HOUGHTON

Sarah Houghton is director of the San Rafael Public Library in California. In her blog, *Librarian in Black*, she tends to write about library technology-related topics. Recent posts include discuss a library advocacy project she worked on and library privacy practices.

DAVID LEE KING

Yes, that's me! I write about social media, emerging trends (hence this publication), and libraries. My blog, *Davidleeking.com* (figure 2.4), includes articles about social media in libraries, technology improvements, and tips on improving digital content.

R. DAVID LANKES

R. David Lankes is the director of the University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science in Columbia, South Carolina. Recent blog posts discuss social responsibility and libraries, fake news, and information about recent presentations he has given.

THE 'M' WORD—MARKETING LIBRARIES

The 'M' Word—Marketing Libraries is written by Kathy Dempsey and Nancy Dowd. Just like the title says, this blog focuses on marketing in libraries. Blog post examples include winners of a library marketing award, National Library Legislative Day, and library funding issues.

BOBBI NEWMAN

Bobbi Newman maintains the *Librarian by Day* blog. She is a community outreach and engagement specialist at the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Great Midwest Region. She is also a writer and



Figure 2.4
Davidleeking.com

frequent speaker at information industry events. Newman writes a lot about digital literacy and training initiatives at the *Librarian by Day* blog and has recently started writing about health literacy. Recent posts discuss health librarianship, gender equity, and privacy in the digital age.

NO SHELF REQUIRED

No Shelf Required is a blog focused on e-books and the publishing industry. It was started by Sue Polanka and is currently managed by Mirela Roncevic. This blog features a variety of contributors, and it's a great resource for keeping up with the e-book industry.

PAUL SIGNORELLI

Paul Signorelli is a San Francisco-based writer, trainer, instructional designer, presenter, social media strategist, and consultant. He maintains the blog *Building Creative Bridges*. Current topics include global learning spaces, the New Media Consortium conference, and creating transformative learning opportunities.

MICHAEL STEPHENS

Michael Stephens maintains *Tame the Web*, which focuses on libraries, technology, and people. Stephens contributes to the blog and has frequent contributors who also write for it. Recent posts discuss fake news and libraries, library science students, and the 2017 *Horizon Report* for libraries.

T IS FOR TRAINING

Maurice Coleman is a technical trainer at Harford County Public Library (MD) and a consultant and



Figure 2.5
Joyce Valenza's blog

speaker. He produces the blog and call-in show *T Is for Training*. *T Is for Training* is unique; it's a podcast, so you can subscribe and listen to the finished product. Better yet, it always starts off as a call-in show. It's a fun way to share ideas, thoughts, and brainstorming. The content mostly focuses on some aspect of teaching and training.

STEVE THOMAS

Steve Thomas runs *Circulating Ideas*, a collection of podcasts focused on librarian interviews. Recent interviews include Renee Grassi, youth services manager at Dakota County Library System in Dakota County, Minnesota; Jeremy Shermak, a doctoral student in the School of Journalism and Moody College of Communication Doctoral Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin; and Susan Hildreth, the inaugural Gates-funded Professor of Practice at the Information School at the University of Washington and former director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

As an aside: Thomas's podcasts are a great way to learn if you don't have a lot of time to read. If you have a morning or evening commute of twenty minutes or more, podcasts are a great way to stay up-to-date on emerging technology trends.

JOYCE VALENZA

Joyce Valenza maintains the blog *Neverending Search* (figure 2.5) at the *School Library Journal's* website. She writes about a variety of issues and topics that concern libraries, teaching, and learning. Recent topics include Google's recent launch of Applies Digital

Skills (a resource for teachers), Flipgrid (a video discussion platform), and Google's AutoDraw.

JESSAMYN WEST

Jessamyn West is a library technologist with a variety of speaking, writing, and consulting jobs. She has been blogging since 1999 about a variety of topics. Recent posts include getting paid for giving presentations, options for doing remote librarianship, and thoughts on helping library patrons with their computer issues.

Stephen Abram

<http://stephenslighthouse.com>

Jason Griffey

<http://jasongriffey.net/wp>

Sarah Houghton

<http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack>

David Lee King

www.davidleeking.com

R. David Lankes

<https://davidlankes.org>

The 'M' Word—Marketing Libraries

<http://themwordblog.blogspot.com>

Bobbi Newman

<https://librarianbyday.net>

No Shelf Required

<http://noshelfrequired.com>

Paul Signorelli

<https://buildingcreativebridges.wordpress.com>

Michael Stephens

<http://tametheweb.com>

T Is for Training

<https://tisfortraining.wordpress.com>

Steve Thomas

<https://circulatingideas.com>

Joyce Valenza

<http://blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch>

Jessamyn West

www.librarian.net

Some International Library-Related Blogs

THE DISTANT LIBRARIAN

Paul Pival is the public services systems librarian at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. He maintains the blog *The Distant Librarian*. His blog was originally focused on distance learning tools and tips (hence the name), but it has since expanded to other areas, like training, screencasting, and a variety of useful web tools. Recent topics include searching Google Maps via shortcuts, fake news, and finding good information on Twitter.

MUSINGS ABOUT LIBRARIANSHIP

The blog *Musings about Librarianship* is maintained by Aaron Tay, a senior librarian at the National University of Singapore. Recent posts focus on data manipulation tools, new citation indexes, and assessing library electronic resource usage.

NED POTTER

Ned Potter is a librarian at the University of York in the United Kingdom. He tends to focus on library technology and marketing. Recent posts discuss ways to improve the student library experience, preparing short presentations, and library UX (user experience) tips.

The Distant Librarian

<http://distlib.blogs.com>

Musings about Librarianship

<http://musingsaboutlibrarianship.blogspot.com>

Ned Potter

<https://www.ned-potter.com>

Trend Watchers Outside the Library Industry

Here are some organizations and individuals that have consistently good information related to trends in the general technology field (not just for libraries).

Organizations

MASHABLE

Mashable covers recent news and developments in a wide variety of technology-related areas, including

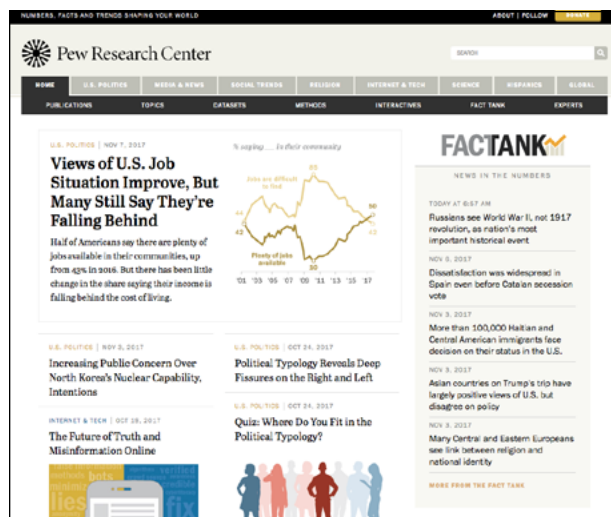


Figure 2.6
Pew Research Center

social media, mobile technology, online video, web-site development, and technology gadgets. Recent topics covered include making selfies better and digital currency.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Here's what Pew Research (figure 2.6) says about itself: "Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. We do not take policy positions."³

Pew researches a number of topics, including public libraries; US politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and US social and demographic trends.

Pew is a great place to visit to discover the newest research on internet use. Current articles include privacy and information sharing and searching for work in the digital era.

READWRITE

ReadWrite, formerly called ReadWriteWeb, focuses on emerging web-based technology. Recent articles discuss wearables, self-driving cars, and mobile networks.

TECHCRUNCH

TechCrunch focuses on technology start-ups, new internet products, and breaking technology news. If you want to know what's new on the web or in the world of technology, this is a great place to start.

TECHMEME

Techmeme is a technology news curation service. Here's how it describes what it does:

Techmeme was founded in 2005 by Gabe Rivera as an automated news curation service, like Google News, but focused on the leading edge of technology. Starting in 2008, we introduced human editors to complete the editorial process. . . . Our experience leads us to believe that a thoughtful combination of both algorithmic and human editing offers the best means for curating in a space as broad as technology. Today, Techmeme remains independent, bootstrapped, and privately held, a point of differentiation in an increasingly complicated tech media landscape.⁴

Techmeme curates some of the sites mentioned in this report, plus a lot of other related websites. If you want to follow just one of these technology news sites, this is a really useful one.

TRENDWATCHING

TrendWatching, a trend-watching company, focuses on trends of all types, including technology trends. It sends out quarterly trend briefings.

WIRED

Wired covers a broad range of developing technology and digital culture news. Topics covered include Google developments, mobile apps, and Russian hackers.

Mashable

<http://mashable.com>

Pew Research Center

www.pewresearch.org

ReadWrite

<https://readwrite.com>

TechCrunch

<https://techcrunch.com>

Techmeme

<https://www.techmeme.com>

TrendWatching

<http://trendwatching.com>

Wired

<https://www.wired.com>

People to Watch

DAVID ARMANO

David Armano writes the blog *Logic + Emotion*, which focuses on social media, digital experience, and marketing design. Recent articles discuss age diversity, branding, and digital transformation.

JAY BAER

Jay Baer writes the blog *Convince and Convert*. He has turned this blog into a business focusing on social media and content marketing. Recent articles explore a variety of topics concerning social media.

JOHN HAYDON

John Haydon (figure 2.7) writes about social media for nonprofits, which translates well to a library setting. Recent articles include making impressions with donors, creating a better donation page, and crowdfunding versus peer-to-peer types of fundraising.

BRIAN SOLIS

Brian Solis works in the Altimeter Group at Prophet, a research firm focused on disruptive technology. Recent articles include disruptive technology, customer experience, and digital transformation.

David Armano

<http://darmano.typepad.com>

Jay Baer

www.convinceandconvert.com

John Haydon

<https://www.johnhaydon.com>

Brian Solis

www.briansolis.com

Tools and Techniques for Following

Once you have identified the trend-watching organizations and individuals you want to follow, you need to decide on the best way to follow them. The easiest way, of course, is to simply visit the websites on a regular basis. This works well as long as you are following only one to five websites. If you want to keep track of more than that, you need a better, more automated way to do so.

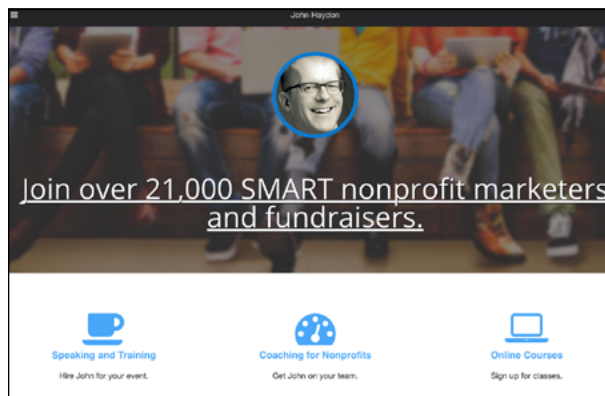


Figure 2.7

johnhaydon.com

Subscribing to Trend-Watching Sites

The best way to follow trend watchers is to subscribe to their content, and most blogs and regularly updated news websites have multiple ways to do this: subscribing via the website's RSS feed, subscribing via email, or subscribing to one of its social media channels (usually Twitter or Facebook).

Once you have subscribed, whenever that website posts new content, you will receive a copy of that content. As you can imagine, subscribing to trend-watching websites can be a huge time-saver because the new content comes to you.

Here are some ways to subscribe to trend watchers and trend watching websites.

USING RSS FEEDS

To subscribe to a website content by using its RSS feed, you will need to use an RSS feed reader. Here are two RSS feed readers to check out:

- **Feedly.** Feedly is a great tool to use to subscribe to news, blogs, podcasts, and YouTube channels. Feedly works on the web using a web browser and on mobile devices using a mobile app.
- **Digg.** The Digg Reader was built as an alternative to Google Reader, which was discontinued in 2013. Digg Reader can be used on the web or via a mobile app.

Other RSS readers to look into are listed in the gray box on the following page.

Feedly

<https://feedly.com>

Digg

<http://digg.com/reader>

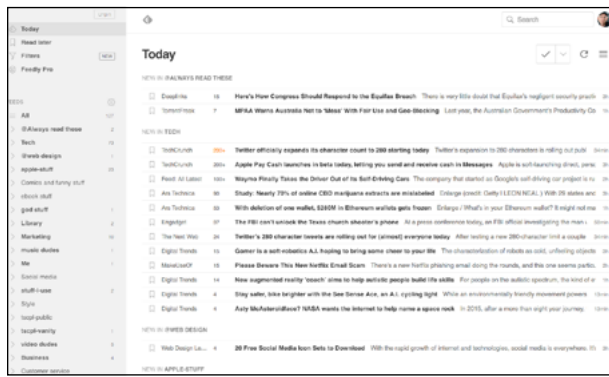


Figure 2.8
Feedly.com

NewsBlur
<http://newsblur.com>

Inoreader
<https://www.inoreader.com>

Panda
<http://usepanda.com>

Feedbin
<https://feedbin.com>

Feed Wrangler
<https://feedwrangler.net>

The Old Reader
<https://theoldreader.com>

One thing to remember about these RSS readers is that most are not free, although some are free up to a certain point. For example, NewsBlur is free for one to sixty-four subscriptions, but there's a twenty-four-dollar annual fee if you subscribe to more RSS feeds.

SUBSCRIBING VIA EMAIL

Most trend-watching websites include a way to subscribe to their content using email. Once subscribed, you will receive an email version of their new content.

Subscribing via email is a good choice if you plan to follow a small number of trend watchers or if there are certain trend watchers you want to see every time you access your email account. If you have too many subscriptions, your email inbox might become quickly cluttered. I follow around 500 blogs and trend-watching websites, and I would not want that amount of email going to my inbox!

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Most of these blogs and websites also have social media channels, like Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn. Whenever they post new content to their website, they also post a link to that content on their social media channels. That allows people who follow them on social media the ability to access the new website content.

They also might tweet links to news and tools they find helpful or useful.

One caveat about following people on social media: you'll probably get a mix of trend watching and personal information—like what they had for dinner—especially if it's an individual trend watcher. If you don't mind a mix of personal and professional content, using social media channels for trend watching works well.

GOOGLE ALERTS

Have you ever performed a Google search that you'd like to regularly revisit? Google Alerts was created for just that purpose. To set up an alert, type in your search, narrow it down by result type (i.e., blogs, news sites, everything), and specify how often to run the alert and how many results are returned. You will also need to choose how you'll receive the alert (via email or an RSS feed). Once this is done, whenever that search finds new results, you will receive a link to the content.

Other Ways to Learn about Technology Trends

READING THE TECH NEWS

In addition to following organizational and individual trend watchers, there are many other ways to stay up-to-date with technology. You can regularly visit a couple of general news sites that report on technology-related news.

The CNN website has a Technology News section. CNN produces some original articles, but also features an interesting stream of articles from sources like *Wired*, Mashable, CNET, and Ars Technica (another technology-based news organization). CNN follows these technology-related news sites and posts what it considers the most newsworthy articles.

CNN Technology News
<http://money.cnn.com/technology>

Most major news sites, including *USA Today*, Reuters, the BBC, and the *New York Times* (figure 2.9) include Tech sections in their publications and are

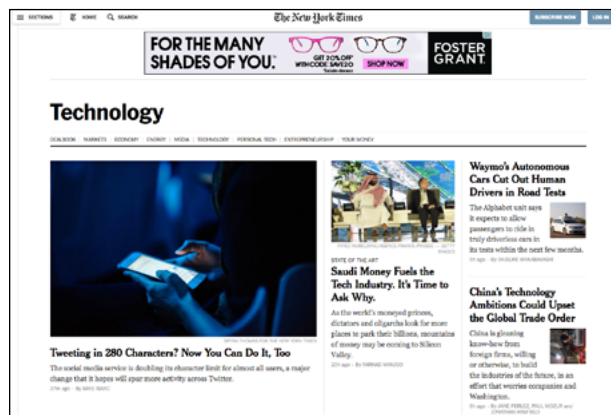


Figure 2.9
New York Times technology section

worth checking out.

KEEPING UP BY ATTENDING A CONFERENCE

Library technology conferences can be a worthwhile way to connect and learn from many technology-oriented people in a short amount of time. My favorite conferences include the following:

- **The east coast Computers in Libraries Conference**, held each spring, and the **west coast Internet Librarian Conference**, held each fall. Sponsored by Information Today, these conferences are three full days of library-focused technology updates, projects, and ideas.
- **The American Library Association annual conference**. This annual conference is rather large—with usually about 20,000 people attending. It is focused on libraries in general. However, if you are selective, you can find some great technology-focused sessions. It's also a great event to meet other like-minded librarians.
- **Local conferences**. Most likely there are some technology seminars or conferences within driving distance that you should think about attending. There are small conferences and gatherings focused on WordPress, building websites, podcasting, and social media. For example, for about four years, I helped organize the Podcamp Topeka conference. This “unconference” focused on social media and emerging trends—not just for libraries, but in general.
- **Webinars**. Infopeople, the American Library Association (ALA), the Public Library Association (PLA), Urban Libraries Council (ULC), and OCLC all provide webinars and online courses.

ASKING YOUR COMMUNITY

You can gain valuable insights from your local community when you find out more about its technology interests and needs. There are several ways to do this. One way is to listen in on locally focused conversations through Google Alerts or through Twitter searches.

To set up a Twitter alert, follow these easy steps:

1. Go to Twitter Search.
2. Click Advanced Search.
3. Enter your desired search terms.
4. Under Places, enter the name of your city or locality, “Near this place.”
5. Click Search button.
6. Choose the type of search you want to do (i.e., Top, Live, Accounts, etc.).
7. Choose More Options, and then click Save This Search.

Once the search is saved, you can access the results in your Twitter software of choice.

What should you listen to using these types of alerts? Listen for tech-related things, like frustrations with a mobile device or computer, new apps people are interested in, or new games they are playing. This will inform you about what your community needs and uses and will help you know what you should be focused on to better help your customers.

OBSERVING FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY

Finally, you can find out what your community thinks about technology by direct observation. Observation techniques can be split into two types: formal and informal.

Formal observation can be done through focus groups and surveys. An online survey can be created through a tool like SurveyMonkey and placed on your library's website. Questions can focus on community technology trends. For example, if you want to learn about e-book use in your community, you might ask survey questions such as

- Do you own an e-book reader or app? What type?
- What kinds of e-books do you read?
- How often do you download e-books from the library?

If you choose to use a focus group, you would gather a group of people together and ask those same questions. Then you would record what the group shared.

What's the difference between surveys and focus groups? A survey is more rigid and provides answers



Figure 2.10
Social media signage at Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library

to specific questions that can be measured (e.g., 75 percent of respondents said yes to this). A focus group is less quantifiable but allows for discussion. Both are useful.

Informal observation. You can also gather useful information about technology trends through informal observation. For example, the next time you walk through a public area of your library, simply observe

what people are doing on your library's public computers. Don't be intrusive—you still want to respect patron privacy rights—but pay attention to what websites customers are using or what activities are taking place on the computers. You will quickly notice familiar websites like Facebook, YouTube, or web-based email tools. You might notice some people playing a variety of online games.

You can also pay attention to how people are using the Wi-Fi in your library. What kinds of mobile devices are they using? My guess is that your customers have brought in laptops, tablets, and their smartphones. They expect a great Wi-Fi connection.

This simple observation technique is useful because it can help inform your thinking during a website redesign. By knowing what types of websites your customers use and the devices they are using, you can build website functionality based on what you know your customers are already familiar with.

Another way to observe informally is to notice technology trends where you live. Businesses sometimes place social media “follow me” stickers on their front doors (figure 2.10). They may have a “Follow me on Twitter and Facebook” sticker, for example. If you see something mentioned that you're not familiar with, it might be a good idea to explore further and see if that tool or service can be used in your library.

Notes

1. “Center for the Future of Libraries,” American Library Association, accessed October 4, 2017, www.ala.org/tools/future.
2. About page, The Digital Shift, accessed October 4, 2017, www.thedigitalshift.com/about.
3. “About Pew Research Center,” Pew Research Center, accessed October 4, 2017, www.pewresearch.org/about.
4. “About Techmeme,” Techmeme, accessed October 4, 2017, <http://techmeme.com/about>.