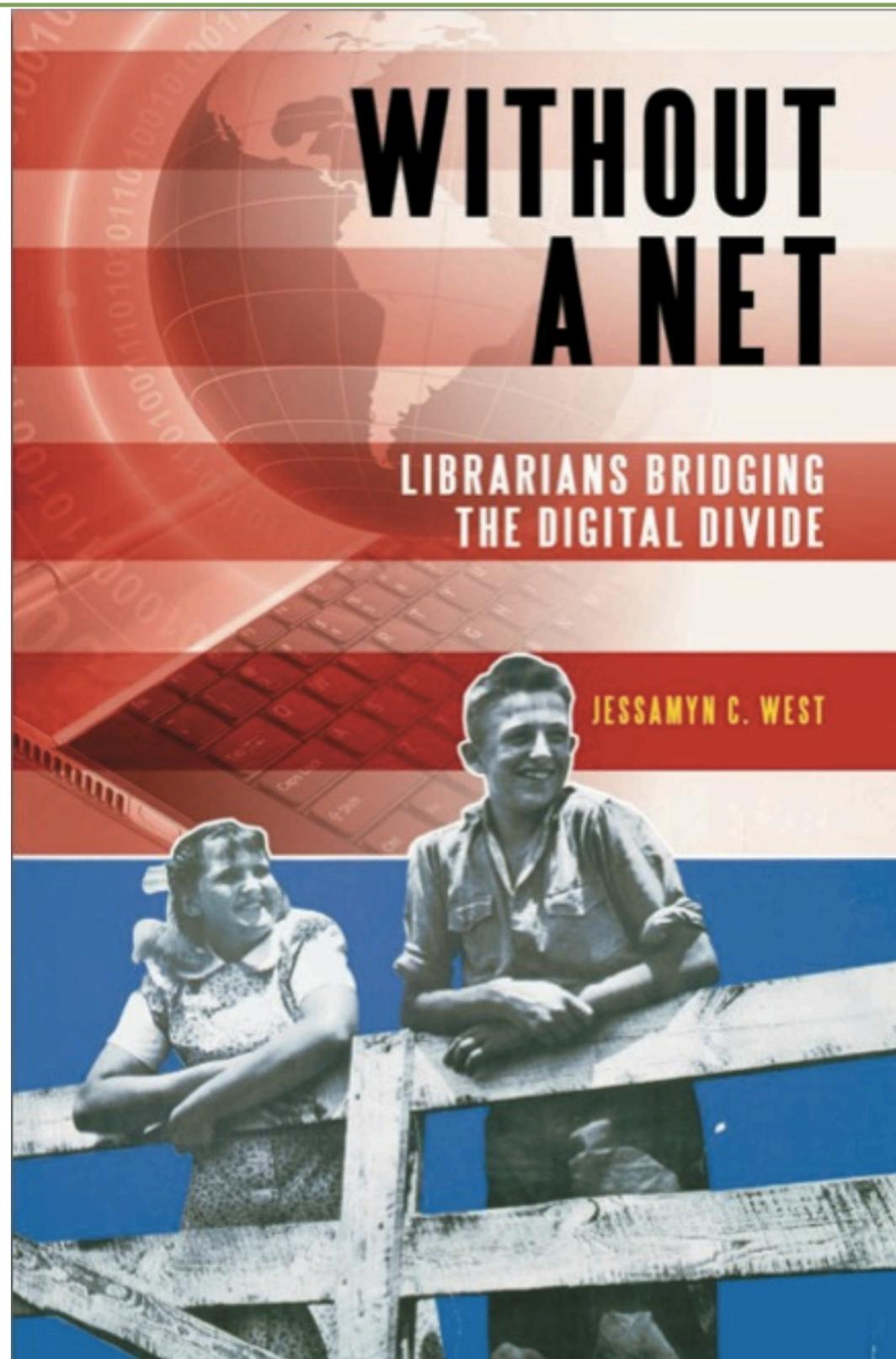


# The Unevenly Distributed Future

LACUNY Institute 2012

Jessamyn West - [librarian.net](http://librarian.net)

Thank you so much for having me here. As a public librarian and rural technology instructor with an internet job, I'm frequently going to places where I'm the odd person out. I go to SXSW interactive to talk about the digital divide. I go to small library conferences like the Maine Library Association conference to talk about my job being director of community at MetaFilter.com. I've come here from a small Vermont town to talk a bit about technology and academic library spaces.



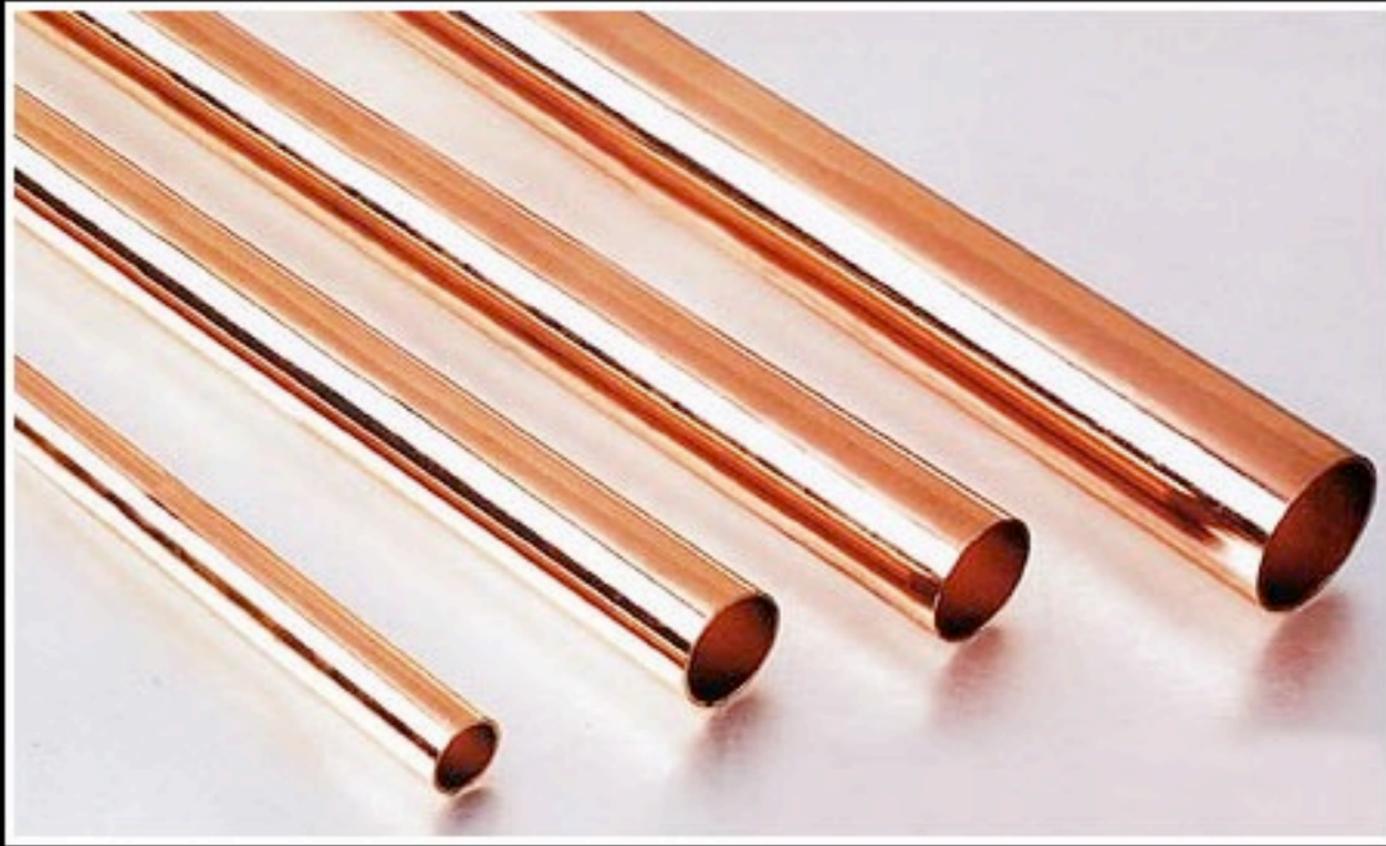
The book that I wrote about the digital divide in 2010--a book that mostly talks about the institutional hows and whys of working with the information poor--was written, edited, proofread, copyedited, published and sold without me speaking with or meeting with any of the other wonderful human beings that were associated with it.



I explain this to the people who live in my rural community in Vermont and some of them nod knowingly and some of them don't quite get it at all. And yet, my ability to both live in a rural place and have an internet job that I can support myself with is entirely a function of this online place.

# Online Space

ONLINE SPACE – This symposium today is talking about spaces. One of the most fundamental chasms involved in the digital divide is the concept of "online" as a space in and of itself. This is tricky for a few reasons.



**INTERNET**  
**IT'S JUST A SERIES OF TUBES**

– For people who haven't yet made the acquaintance of this space, the concept of there being a "there, there" is hard to get your head around. It's largely a metaphor and, as educators know, some people are better and some are worse at working with metaphors. My technology instruction time is primarily spent grasping at metaphors to explain to people how email or a web address works, to relate it to something they know.

## Ask MetaFilter

Thursday, May 31, 2012 12:00

[Home](#) [FAQ](#) [Archives](#) [Tags](#) [Popular](#) [Best Of](#) [Search](#) [Random](#)

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7 questions and 113 answers posted since your last visit

### May 31

SNL filter: Please list for me the Saturday Night Live skits where guests unexpectedly show up. [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [Melismata](#) to [society & culture](#) at 11:42 - 8 answers (8 new) +

Rest Pause Strength Training [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [Query](#) to [sports, hobbies, & recreation](#) at 11:35 - 1 answer (1 new) +

Overnight in Newburgh, NY - late dinner / early breakfast recommendations? [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [ryanshepard](#) to [travel & transportation](#) at 11:33 - 1 answer (1 new) +

Can anyone recommend good introductory Illustrator and Photoshop classes in NYC? [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [belsny](#) to [technology](#) at 11:21 - 1 answer (1 new) +

I live with two roommates and need to provide a new cleaning schedule. The once a week, one person does everything, seemed ok until someone started missing weeks. [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [InterestedInKnowing](#) to [home & garden](#) at 11:14 - 6 answers (6 new) +

I lost my glasses. I need help adapting until someone shows up at my house and can help me find them...in 2 days. [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [kanata](#) to [grab bag](#) at 11:13 - 25 answers (25 new) +

Help me find more unconventional artwork that'll make me say, "Wow." [\[more inside\]](#)

posted by [xenization](#) to [media & arts](#) at 11:04 - 3 answers (3 new) +

Ads via [The DECK](#) [\(hide\)](#)

20 most popular [tags](#) in the past month:

[resolved](#) (251) [travel](#) (65) [music](#) (50) [work](#) (41) [relationships](#) (34) [food](#) (33) [career](#) (32) [moving](#) (31) [books](#) (30) [nyc](#) (28) [job](#) (26) [car](#) (25) [family](#) (25) [iphone](#) (25) [mac](#) (24) [dating](#) (23) [health](#) (21) [internet](#) (21) [jobs](#) (21) [cat](#) (20)

Posts by category in the past month:

[clothing, beauty, & fashion](#) (63) [computers & internet](#) (294) [education](#) (84) [food & drink](#) (99) [grab bag](#) (96) [health & fitness](#) (188) [home & garden](#) (146) [human relations](#) (250) [law & government](#) (64) [media & arts](#) (201) [pets & animals](#) (49) [religion & philosophy](#) (12) [science & nature](#) (51)

- For people for whom this space is real, it's as real as other spaces. My job is online, I go to work there and make an actual salary (benefits and all) based primarily on things that I do in a space that is largely imaginary to many of the people in my day to day corporeal existence. Many people are forced into this space before they may be ready to be there (job applications, unemployment benefits, moose hunting licenses) and it seems foreign and hostile, even after folks have told them how great it is, sometimes because folks have told them how great it is.



# Community Virtual Library

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### Recent Announcements

#### Library News & Events

**April 15 - 30** Community Virtual Library If you'd like to donate to CVL and have some fun at the same time, try the new Hit the Cloud game that is just behind ...

Posted Apr 17, 2012 5:47 PM by D A

#### Library Events April 1

**-14** Community Virtual Library YARD SALE! We've kicked off our FUNdrising efforts with our annual yard sale on Info Island. This year you'll find the sale floating above the ...

Posted Apr 3, 2012 4:15 PM by D A

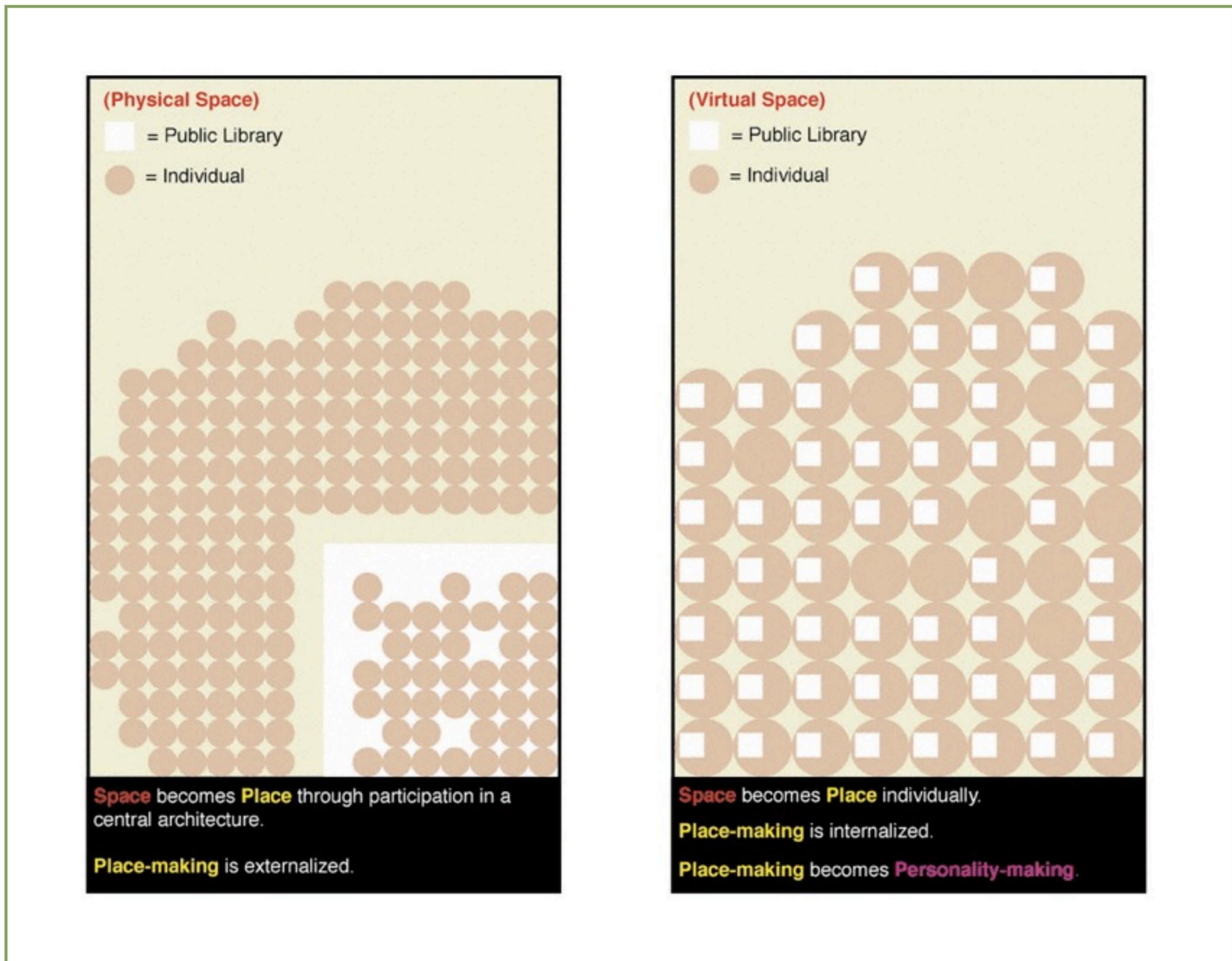
### Info Archipelago

Today ◀ ▶ May 2012 ▼

Print Week Month Agenda

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
29 18:00 Coexist Dis	30 17:00 Dancing at 19:00 "The Clairv	May 1 19:00 "Alice, Let'	2 19:00 "The Trolls'	3 16:00 Renaissanc 18:00 GRC Discu: 19:00 TALES FRC	4 17:00 Dancing at	5
6 18:00 Coexist Dis	7 17:00 Dancing at 19:00 More from	8 19:00 "The Girl W	9 19:00 "The Trolls'	10 19:00 Surfer Stoi	11 17:00 Dancing at	12
13 18:00 Coexist Dis	14 17:00 Dancing at 19:00 "A Study I	15 19:00 "The Girl W	16 19:00 Two Old W	17 19:00 Surfer Stoi	18 17:00 Dancing at 19:00 Tahiti Iti -	19 13:00 CVL FUNdr 14:00 CVL FUNdr 15:00 CVL FUNdr

- While there are debates to be had about this concept generally, online spaces are seen as more of a commons. Anyone with a computer and internet access can access more online spaces than one could actually visit in a lifetime, so the concept of branded online spaces is primarily the turf of major online players like facebook and google. And perhaps that is how it should be? When institutions talk about building new spaces, they are rarely talking about spaces online (except Second Life and we all know how that turned out - very useful to a small subset of people but didn't hit a tipping point for the rest of us.)



One of the larger questions facing our profession is the shifting of more and more physical content, cultural content, to digital containers and what to do about this. It creates a bit of a tautology. If we're not housing actual physical items in our physical buildings, what does that mean for the concept of library as place? And what should it mean?

All of these issues combined with peoples' lack of a clear vision for dealing with them, exacerbate other divides that are more pernicious.

# Digital Divide

## DIGITAL DIVIDE

So, backing this up a bit to my general research area which is the digital divide. Even though I come from a small rural public library setting and we're talking large academic library stuff there are some similarities and some differences in who is online doing what.

34%

no broadband

20%

entirely offline

A few statistics: in 2012 we're still seeing 19–20% of Americans without any internet access at home and 34–35% without broadband. This includes smart phones.



The similarities: whether we're rural or urban the people least likely to be online are the people who are often disadvantaged in other ways: senior citizens, non-English speakers, adults with less than a high school education, and those living in households earning less than \$30,000 per year. People living with disabilities are significantly less likely to go online and Pew reports that 2% of adults in the US are so disabled they self-reportedly can't get online at all.

# Crossing the mobile media digital divide via the 'Bridge of Death'

By **Amy Gahrn**, Special to CNN

updated 6:08 PM EDT, Fri October 7, 2011 | Filed under: **Mobile**



The differences: There are two large differences between the rural and urban digital divide.

1. The first is that the urban digital divide is mitigated somewhat by the rise of mobile computing. If you can afford a smart phone (\$200 to \$300 up front and an average of \$90/month in a country where making minimum wage won't allow you to rent a two bedroom apartment in any state in the US), you can get internet-level speeds if you live in most cities in the US.

# On Tribal Lands, Digital Divide Brings New Form Of Isolation

Posted: 04/20/2012 2:50 pm Updated: 04/23/2012 6:54 pm

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936

108

303

2,679

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Gerry Smith

Sonny Clark, 59, must drive five miles up a mountain to get cellphone service connection and 40 miles to get online.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. -- Like many college students, Wilhelmina Tsosie must go online to complete her assignments. But unlike the vast majority of Americans, she finds that the biggest challenge in her coursework is merely getting connected.

Tsosie is a member of the Navajo Nation, the Native American community whose sprawling reservation has long been isolated from the rest of the country -- an isolation now being reinforced by the digital age.

Some people claim that this is leveling the playing field because we're seeing mobile populations that are much more racially balanced [i.e. black people, white people and hispanic people (who speak english) are all equally likely to own mobile phones]. Other people argue that the lack of net neutrality, vendor lock in and mall-like nature of many mobile phones including smart phones make them poor substitutes for real platforms and achieving actual tech literacy. The most "open" of the smartphone platforms, Android devices, have significantly more functionality if you can mate them to an actual computer and while iPads no longer REQUIRE owning a computer for activation, having one sure is helpful.



Digital  
migrants

Digital  
natives

2. The other major difference in the rural/urban divide is the variable effect of time. A common myth about the digital divide is that if young people just sit tight, eventually all the "old people" who don't know how to use technology will die and then we'll be living in some brave new technological future with the "born with the chip" generation we've all heard so much about. I even believed this when I was in library school. I figured I'd graduate, spend a few years teaching everyone how to use OPACs and email and then ... somehow ... people would just know these things and we could move on to solving more complex problems. That day hasn't come yet.



And in rural areas, this is true to an extent. The younger people in rural communities tend to receive tech education in schools. I do see a lot of people at drop-in time still who are getting online because they are in some sort of job retraining situation and don't know how to use a computer even though they're in their thirties but those people are the rare exception.



This weeks "I've never used a mouse" person (this is not her, I don't have a photo of her) was a woman who had been a painter and a paperhanger and now wanted some more marketable skills in a down economy. She was dragged in to drop-in time by a friend, claiming she could never learn to use a mouse. Turns out that she wasn't quite right, but she didn't believe that because she was stupid, she believed it because she'd had very few tech experiences and they'd been uniformly negative.



# BROADBAND ADOPTION IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES



A Social Science Research Council report by  
Dharma Dailey, Amelia Bryne, Alison Powell,  
Joe Karaganis, and Jaewon Chung



Version 1.1 March 2010



In the cities you have a different phenomenon, immigration. People come from other countries where they had lower tech access/abilities (not all countries, certainly) and they move to places like New York where they (often) live with people with their same background, and you wind up with these neighborhoods and regions with people who have low tech literacy who, once they achieve this literacy, move out and are replaced by people with this same low literacy. As a result, there are pockets of tech illiteracy even in the middle of one of the more wired cities in the US.

# Literacy

## LITERACY

The real problem with people not knowing how to use technology isn't just the learn-a-computer aspect of it, it's the general lack of cultural understanding surrounding technology and the role it plays in many people's lives. The parallel to institutionalized poverty is useful. It's not just that you can't afford to go to the dentist, it's that you live in a community where going to the dentist isn't a shared value. Over time, this reinforces the no-dentist culture which is problematic for long term health and wellness of the community.

## The main reasons non-internet users do not use the internet

*In May 2010, 21% of American adults age 18+ did not use the internet. (This number is 22% as of August 2011.) When asked the main reason they do not go online (in their own words), these are the factors they cite.*

	% of offline adults
<b>What is the MAIN reason you don't use the internet or email?</b>	
Just not interested	31%
Don't have a computer	12
Too expensive	10
Too difficult	9
It's a waste of time	7
Don't have access	6
Don't have time to learn	6
Too old to learn	4
Don't want/need it	4
Just don't know how	2
Physically unable	2
Worried about viruses/spyware/spam	1
Other	6

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 29-May 30, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=2,252 adults 18 and older (n=496 for non-internet users).

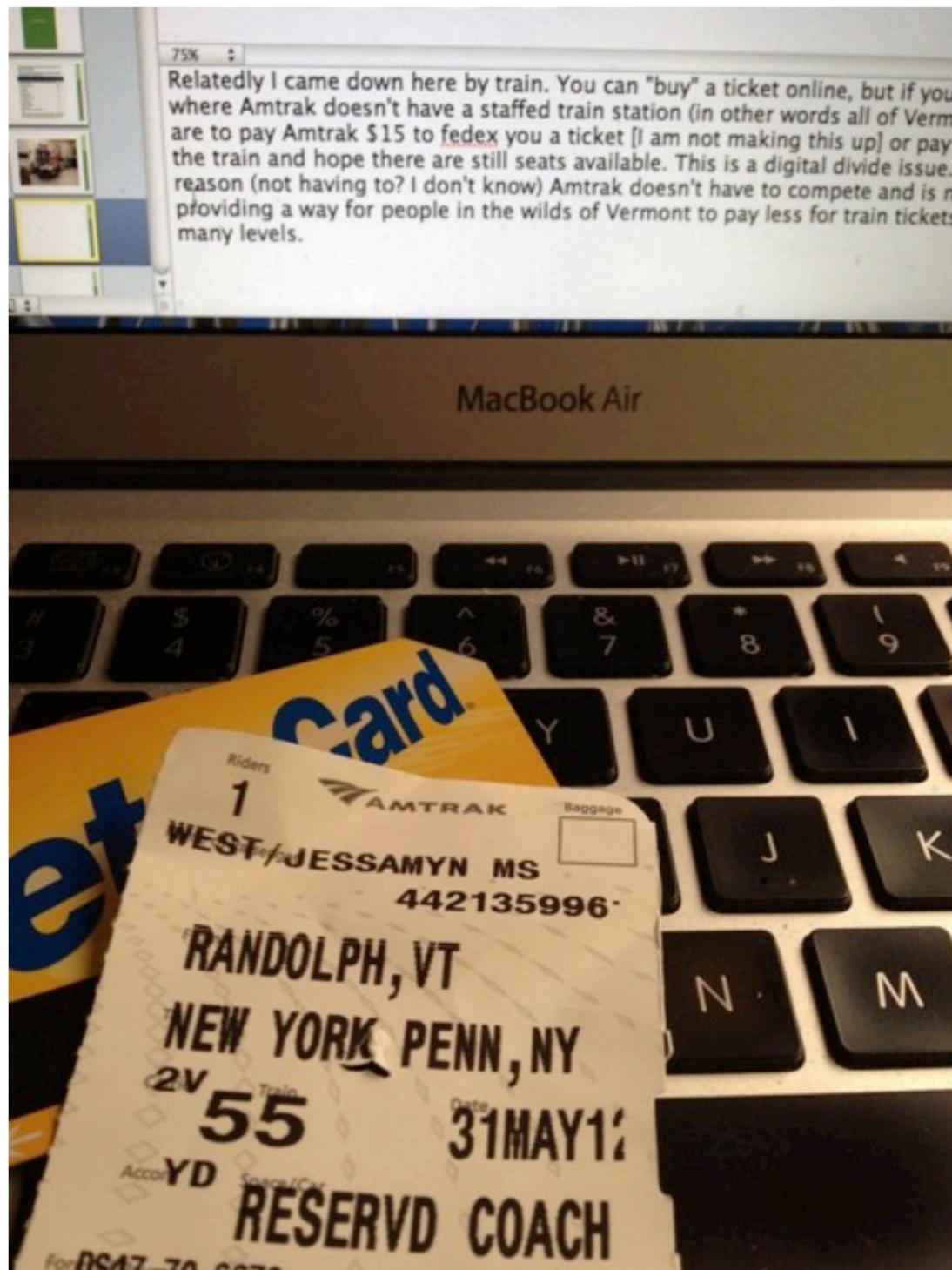
More: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Home-Broadband-2010.aspx>

People who are digitally divided don't just lack access to computers and internet access, they literally often do not understand why such a thing might be useful. The big reveal from the continued Pew studies of internet use and culture in the US is looking at offline populations. They write

"Among adults who do not use the internet, almost half have told us that the main reason they don't go online is because they don't think the internet is relevant to them. Most have never used the internet before, and don't have anyone in their household who does. About one in five say that they do know enough about technology to start using the internet on their own, and only one in ten told us that they were interested in using the internet or email in the future."



The people I see at drop-in time, a free "open lab" type thing that I do five hours a week in my community, have often been living with technology problems--a broken computer, a failing website, non-functional internet--for months and sometimes years. Their understanding of the problem is imperfect enough that often it's difficult to tell what part of their technology system is actually broken. These are complicated interdependent systems that were often not built with the end user in mind. I see people struggling and I wonder, sometimes, if people have this level of difficulty when they get a new car. And if not, why not?



Relatedly I came down here by train. You can "buy" a ticket online, but if you live somewhere where Amtrak doesn't have a staffed train station (in other words all of Vermont) your options are to pay Amtrak \$15 to fedex you a ticket [I am not making this up] or pay when you get on the train and hope there are still seats available. This is a digital divide issue. For whatever reason (not having to? I don't know) Amtrak doesn't have to compete and is not interested in providing a way for people in the wilds of Vermont to pay less for train tickets. This vexes me on many levels. [UPDATE: fixed in August!]

## Wasting Time Is New Divide in Digital Era



Drew Kelly for The New York Times

Alejandro Zamora, an eighth grader, calls himself "a Facebook freak." His mother would prefer that he use the computer for homework.

By MATT RICHTEL

Published: May 29, 2012 |  273 Comments

In the 1990s, the term "digital divide" emerged to describe technology's haves and have-nots. It inspired many efforts to get the latest computing tools into the hands of all Americans, particularly low-income families.

 FACEBOOK

 TWITTER

 GOOGLE+

 EMAIL

The New York Times had an article this week "New 'Digital Divide' Seen in Wasting Time Online" where they talk about a study published in 2010 by the Kaiser Family Foundation finding that children and teenagers whose parents do not have a college degree spent 90 minutes more per day exposed to media than children from higher socioeconomic families. In 1999, the difference was just 16 minutes.... Now this article takes a slightly snobby tone and we're all familiar with the pros and cons of the "they're just playing GAMES" aspect of online time, but it's also worth thinking about the difference between just any old computer usage and monitored, assisted, mentored computer usage.



Which is where WE come in, sort of. We're now in a situation where we want to encourage access to digital materials, where we benefit from economies of scale and usefulness in preservation when we can get people interacting with materials digitally. This involves many cultural shifts which I'll talk about in a little bit. One of the largest ones, and possibly the least obvious one, is sociocultural.

<http://chicagopubliclibrary.tumblr.com/post/15308255458/how-well-do-you-understand-ebooks-like-reeally>

Summary of reasons	
Relevance (not interested + waste of time + too busy + don't need/want)	48%
Price (too expensive + don't have computer)	21
Usability (difficult/frustrating + too old + don't know how + physically unable + worried about virus/spam/spyware)	18
Availability / Access	6

The biggest impediment for actual non-users isn't knowhow, it's fear and disinterest.

Back to Pew: the main reason offline people don't go online is because they don't think the internet is relevant to them. Most have never used the internet before, and don't have anyone in their household who does. About one in five say that they do know enough about technology to start using the internet on their own, and only \*\*one in ten told us that they were interested in using the internet or email in the future.\*\*

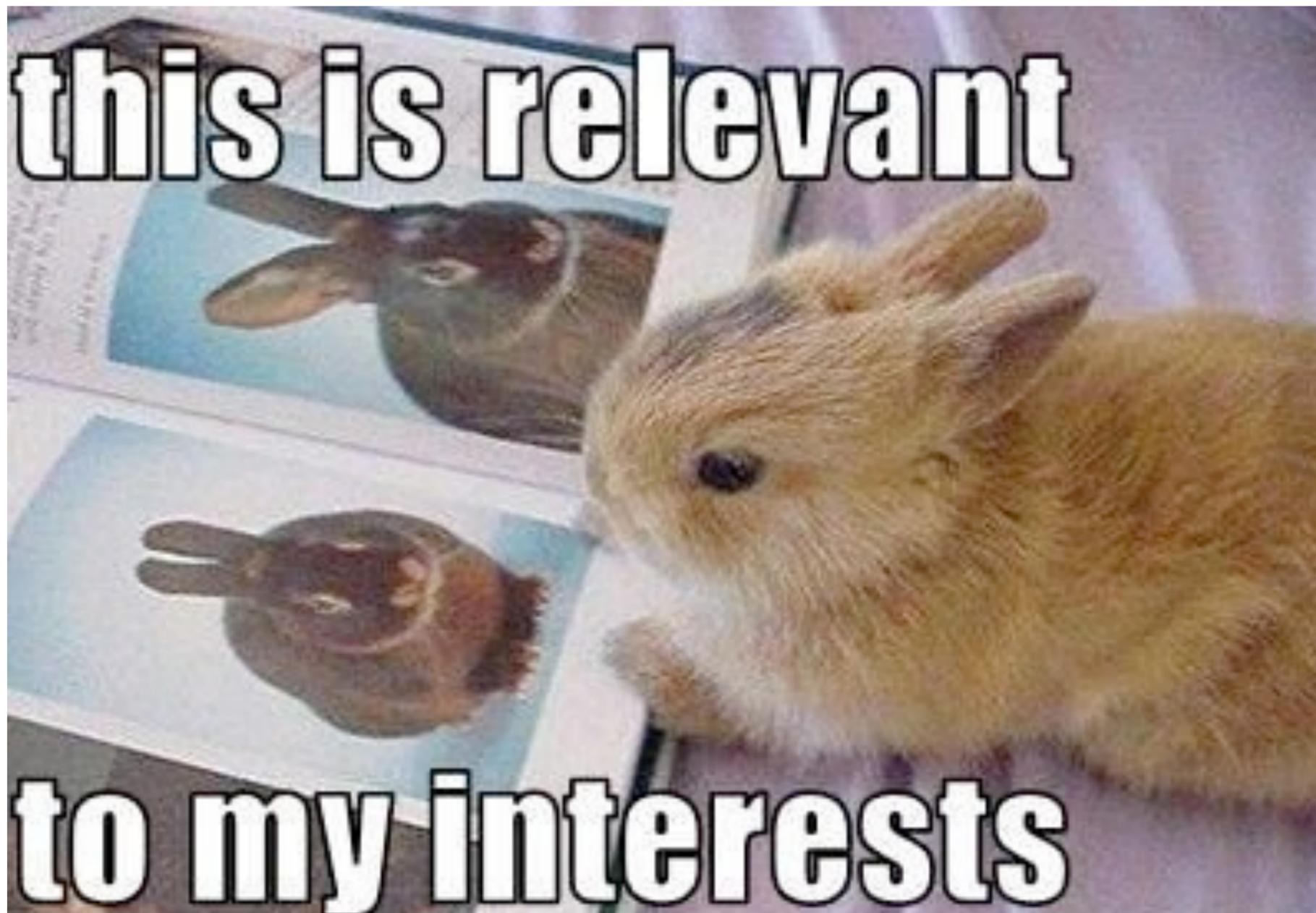


While it is not in any way our responsibility to be the ambassadors for this digital content future, it's a fact that this future is going to be the hardest to sell to people who don't see value in this online place to begin with.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/speccoll/collect/history/ext3pg.htm>

# (Digital) Spaces

I think everyone understands that the spaces of tomorrow have to have more outlets, more bandwidth, capacity for local and remote group work, repurposable spaces for both interaction with and creation of content. I am not a futurist in this way. My goal is to make the spaces that we are creating be mindful of both the potentials of what we could do with it (makerbot – ooh shiny) as well as honoring and respecting the fact that people are different distances down that path to our glorious digital future.



So, my agenda, personally, is that we pay as much attention to the usable spaces we create in the online world as we do in the offline world. The ADA and our generally professional push for "access for all" have made libraries some of the most accessible and welcoming spaces out there. Not having a profit motive helps somewhat since, like in my online job, the "product" is actually the community. The term I like from the physical usability world is "barrier free." I'd like to see us doing a better job with this in the bridge between the physical and the digital world. Here are some space-y suggestions.

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/this-is-relevant-to-my-interest>

our (digital)  
spaces will be  
as useable as  
possible

We sometimes act like it's complicated to tell what "usable" means in a digital or web context. This is not the case. It is sometimes the case that we haven't identified our audiences accurately. It is sometimes the case that we have different stakeholders with strong opinions [or color preferences] who override usability guidelines. It is sometimes the case that our vendors do not have usability as a top priority or would prefer to charge us extra for it.

Log in / Sign Up

SUBJECTS

AUTHORS ADD A BOOK

LISTS RECENTLY ABOUT US

OPEN LIBRARY

One web page for every book.

Show only eBooks

Search

More search options

**Open Library is yours to read, search & hack.**

**Books to Read** The World's classic literature at your fingertips. Over [1,000,000 free ebook titles](#) available.

Engineering

GARDEN FLOWERS IN COLOR

The American

World's Great Adventure Stories

THE FOUR SEASONS

THE BARKTON AND PENNS AND THEIR BELONGINGS

However, just as with design, usability is a thing, a real thing, an identifiable and actual measurable thing and we should start identifying and measuring it in every bit of digital content we produce. We should not pay vendors who can't do this for us (this is one of those things that larger library systems can do that tiny rural libraries can not, help us out here).

We should not let politeness get in the way of telling people that their digital content has poor usability.

our (digital)  
spaces will be  
as free as we  
can make  
them

The state of copyright is a regrettable mess at this time. We should not be passing along whatever random vendor-created DRM the digital files we deal in may be encumbered with. There may be necessity in some sort of rights restrictions, but we should be aiming for the least restrictions possible as a usability goal and in the interests of forwarding our other goals of being an institution committed to the dissemination of knowledge ( again this is one of those things that larger library systems can do that tiny rural libraries can not).



This involves taking a bit more of an active and possibly agitating role than we have in the past. I think that's okay and I think that we've earned the right to speak freely about freeing up digital content. Some examples include Open Library, LibraryThing's OverCat, Library Cloud, UMich and their orphan works project, Cornell's decision to make their public domain works actually public domain

our (digital)  
spaces will be  
open as often  
as they can be



One of the reality checks that I deal with in my dealings with the brick and mortar world--I love the post office, the library, the local bookstore, the coffee shop--is the concept of open and closed times. A website is always open, a store is not. When you're the library and you're shifting to more and more digital content and "just in time" types of communication (what is Twitter if not timely?) what are your obligations to people who are using your facilities at all hours. Amtrak doesn't think they need to offer electronic ticketing because they know they won't lose my business. Are we getting to the point where people will eschew our offerings if they can't

Honestly, our humans are what make us unique<sup>4</sup>, but we should allow people to do as much as possible that doesn't require humans 24/7. And we should consider having more humans at more times do deal with what people need on their schedule not ours.

Think of the website with the best customer support. Think of your library's customer support for your digital offerings? How close are they? How far?

librarylab.

# Hive Mind Help

The toughest thing for novice users to get their heads around is the idea that their computer no longer comes with a printed manual and they will need to either interact with the PDF manual on their machine or purchase a book to help them learn. A lot of what I assist people with doing in drop-in time is contacting support and/or checking the help files or googling their error messages. As much as I like to be totally transparent in what I do one of my sekrit strategies [or not so sekrit depending on how busy I am] is a little bit of ... unavailability. Encourage people to explore on their own and find ways to answer their own questions.

While I think that's good advice for students, it's also good advice for anyone looking to expand their horizons. There are now many places online where librarians congregate. Not just in chat rooms or in comments on blogs or on twitter or on facebook, but in more structured Q&A sorts of places where they actually get things done and encourage others to Make It Happen



HIVE MINDY - COMMUNICATION SPACES

<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/This-Week-in-Libraries-3933248>

<http://libraries.stackexchange.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAtthinkTANK/>

<http://news.librarycloud.org/>

others? Sometimes the spaces that you get the most out of aren't really spaces at all.

**Why is Facebook going public?**



**They couldn't figure out  
the privacy settings, either.**

So, to wrap up. This is a funny joke, if you're me. Your mileage may vary. However, understanding, or grokking this joke, relies on a somewhat sophisticated understanding of a number of things you may take for granted that you know: Muppets, Fozzie in particular, facebook, facebook's IPO, facebook's funny privacy settings, and it helps if you've been exposed to an LOLCAT or two. No big deal. You still may think it's a stupid joke. But even getting to the point where you

Thank you.

[librarian.net/talks/lacuny12](http://librarian.net/talks/lacuny12)