The Last 15%

libraries easing the
empowerment divide

<librarian.net/talks/stls>

Hi thanks for having me, you can see cites to my talk as well as the slides themselves at this URL.

my background

Open Library

I help people borrow free ebooks via the Internet Archive

RTCC

I do a Drop-In Time for digitally divided folks in Central Vermont

UH/VTC

I teach college, graduate school, write for Computers in Libraries magazine and do public speaking like this.

I work mainly in or with public libraries but I think these ideas have wider applicability.

15%

15% of American adults do not use the internet at all.
Additionally, 9% of adults use the internet but not at home.

Let's start here. This is a true fact. And what's weird is I've been doing variants on this talk for a decade and the number which was a little over 20% used to move and it doesn't anymore. Those 15% are staying put. So my question is …
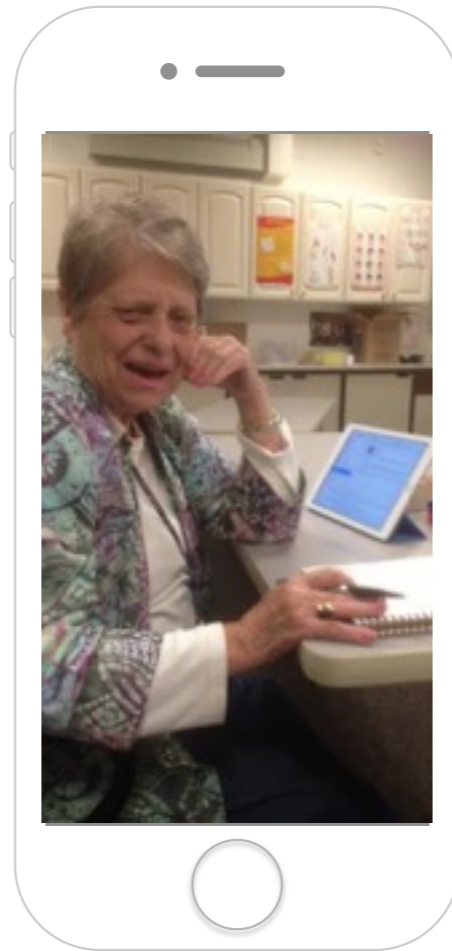
Really?

Don't they want to see their grandchildren, get cheap printer ink, send people endless selfies, and apply for health care?

No? No.

The question many people ask is this one.

Marian

This is Marian and she is one of the many people who comes to my computer drop-in time, a thing I have been doing weekly for a decade where I live in rural Vermont answering any and all computer questions. Marian wants a Scrabble game for the iPad but only one that used the 5th Edition dictionary. Good luck Marian. In addition to drop-in time, I also teach college classes (HTML and CSS in a classroom with a chalkboard and an LCD projector and no computers, some kids have them, most don't) and so I feel like my finger is on the pulse of the digitally divided.

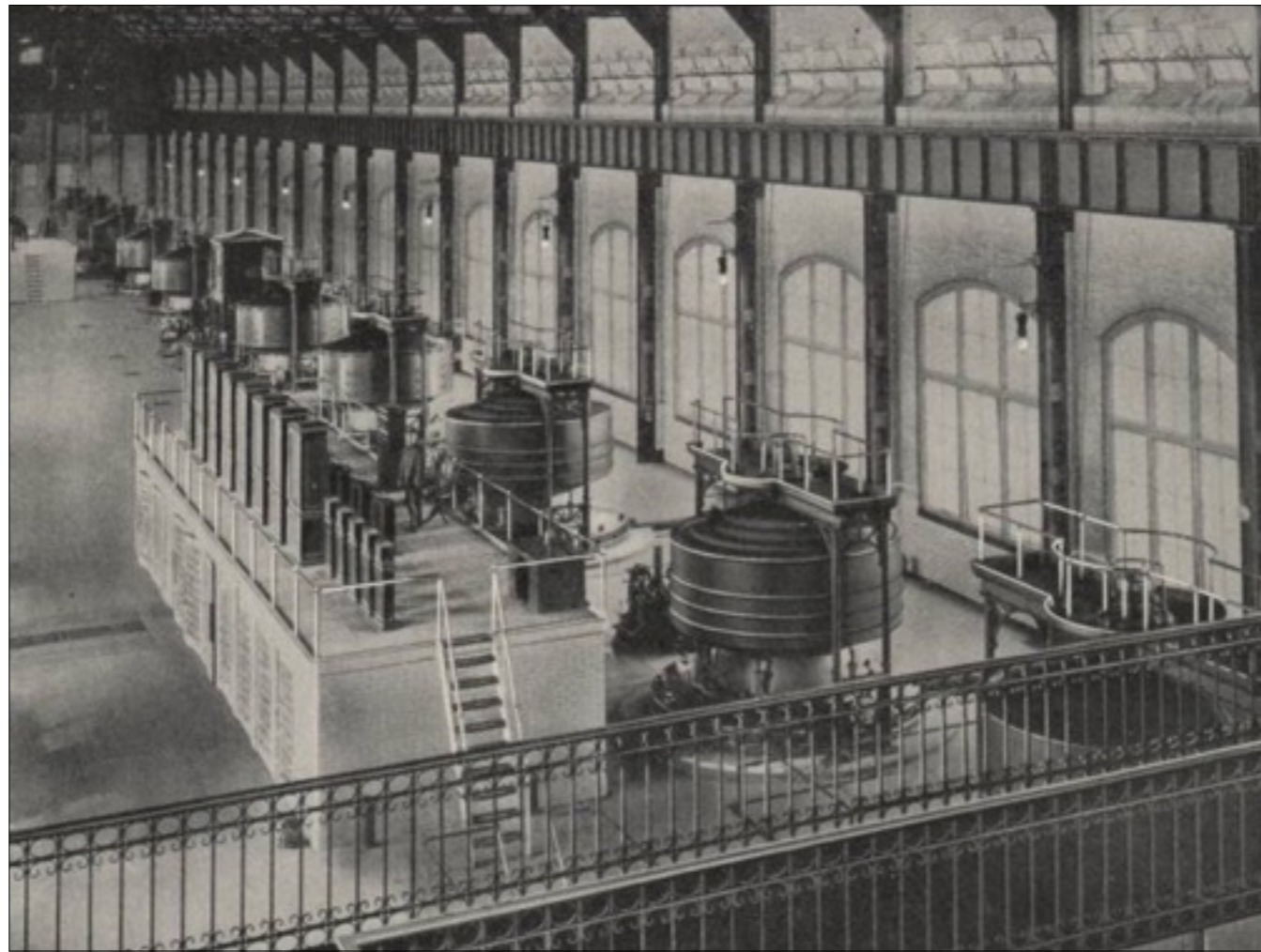When someone tells me the digital divide is over.

SERIOUSLY CAN YOU NOT

People like to be all "Oh hey aren't libraries so last century?" and I'm all "No, no way, not really at all, nope." But the problem has shifted as have the challenges that come along with those shifts. I'll outline five key points here.

1

Understanding the issue

The history of "offline" people and places.

People talk about rural electrification when they talk about broadband adoption. This is New York's hydroelectric generator at Niagara Falls in 1895 (Westinghouse). The first large scale power station was in NY in 1882!! Here is us getting broadband in **2012** It's harder to give people internet where there are mountains and rivers and winter. You know who has some of the best broadband penetration? Oklahoma. Flattish. Oh I'm sorry that money is in Singapore dollars it's really (click) this. I pay about that to get broadband that isn't even considered broadband anymore.

StarHub Dual Broadband 1000

$59.90 per month

Subscribe now >

1Gbps for fibre broadband (No speed throttling)

100Mbps for cable broadband

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But here's the thing about electricity. It was (mostly) centralized and it was MARKETED. These photos were taken by Edison as part of a huge marketing strategy to get everyone wanting to buy lightbulbs. He hired artists that you've heard of to sell this stuff. Maxfield Parrish.

And the thing they stressed was that this was for everyone. Farmers. Homemakers. Businesses. You.

Assuming you were cool. And it was cool, they said. Come on, this is the good life. But then once they connected MOST people, businesses we're like "We're good" and left the government to get the last people. The last people in VT to get on the electric grid were in Victory Vermont in **1962** It's not really worth it to get those last mile people. Let them cook over a fire. COME ON.

> **"**
> **The Steuben Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc. was formed in 1941 by rural people in Steuben County, who were told by the local power company that it was uneconomical to serve them.**
>
> *Steuben Rural Electric Cooperative Newsletter*

Thins are not so dissimilar out in this area.

D_____ Interesting. Kinda like rural broadband today.
Like · Reply · January 12 at 10:50am

Steuben County Historical Society That's an interesting observation. The Grange was a key influence in bringing about Rural Free Delivery of mail. Later they agitated for rural electrification. And these days they're working to bring broadband access.
Like · Reply · 3 · January 12 at 11:59am

Credit: Steuben County Historical Society

13

Rural electrification was completed here in the early 1950s. So part of the answer to "Why are people still offline?" is "They got a late start" We'll look at some other reasons….

2

We sell this poorly.

Computers can be a pain! But society needs to do better at helping the offline people get **happily** online.

So part of what we are doing now in the library world is not just helping people, but working on their attitude, and ours. Getting a grip on this stuff is no longer optional and we shouldn't act like it is.
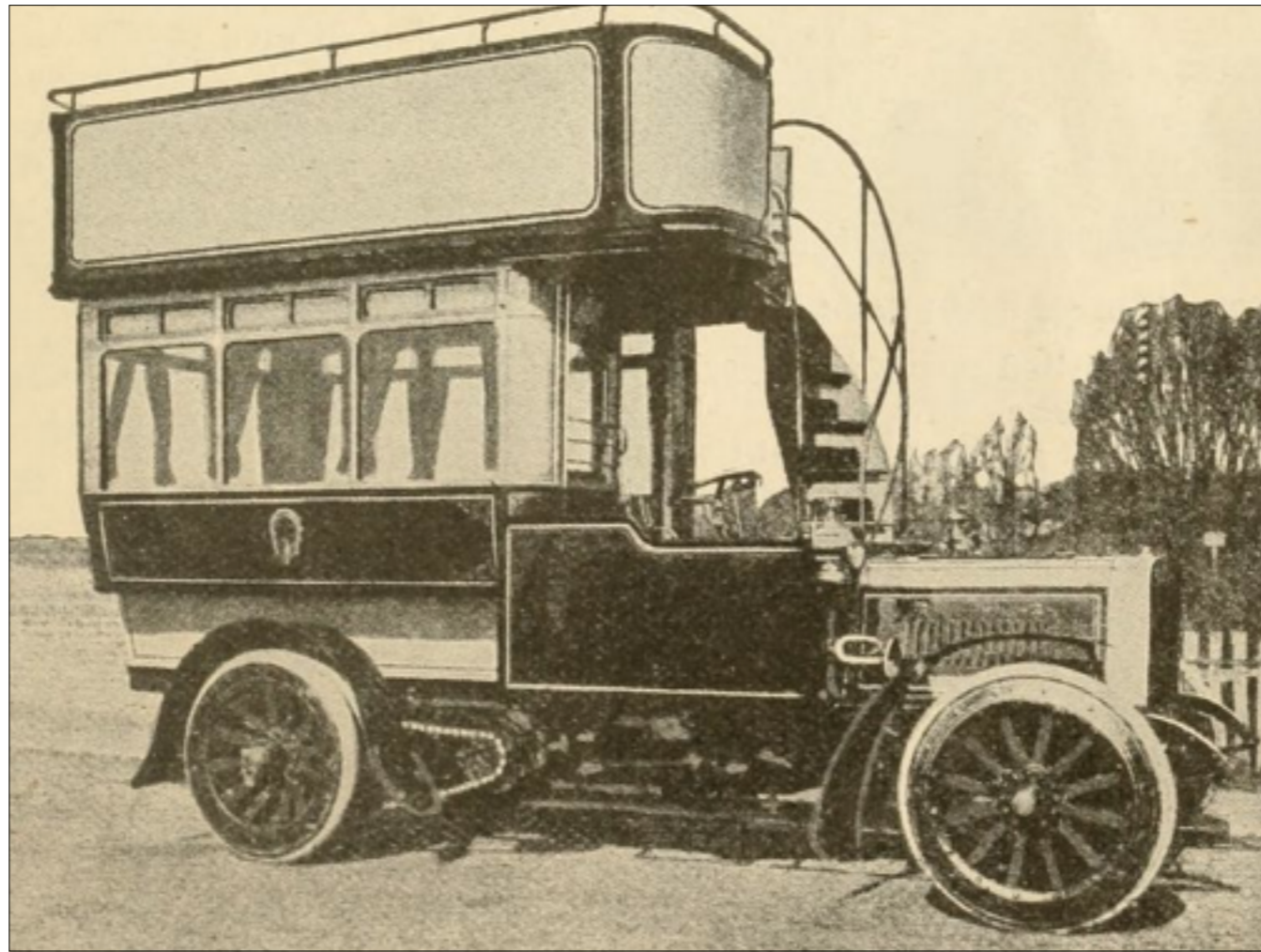
My feeling about the digital divide is like this…. it's fine if you don't want to use a computer. But it's like not driving a car. The person who can't drive understands the realities of using public transportation or asking other people for rides. They understand the costs. This is not the same for people not using computers. The costs of remaining offline are hidden, or at least they are right up until your town floods and the only way to interact with FEMA is through a web page. Awkward.
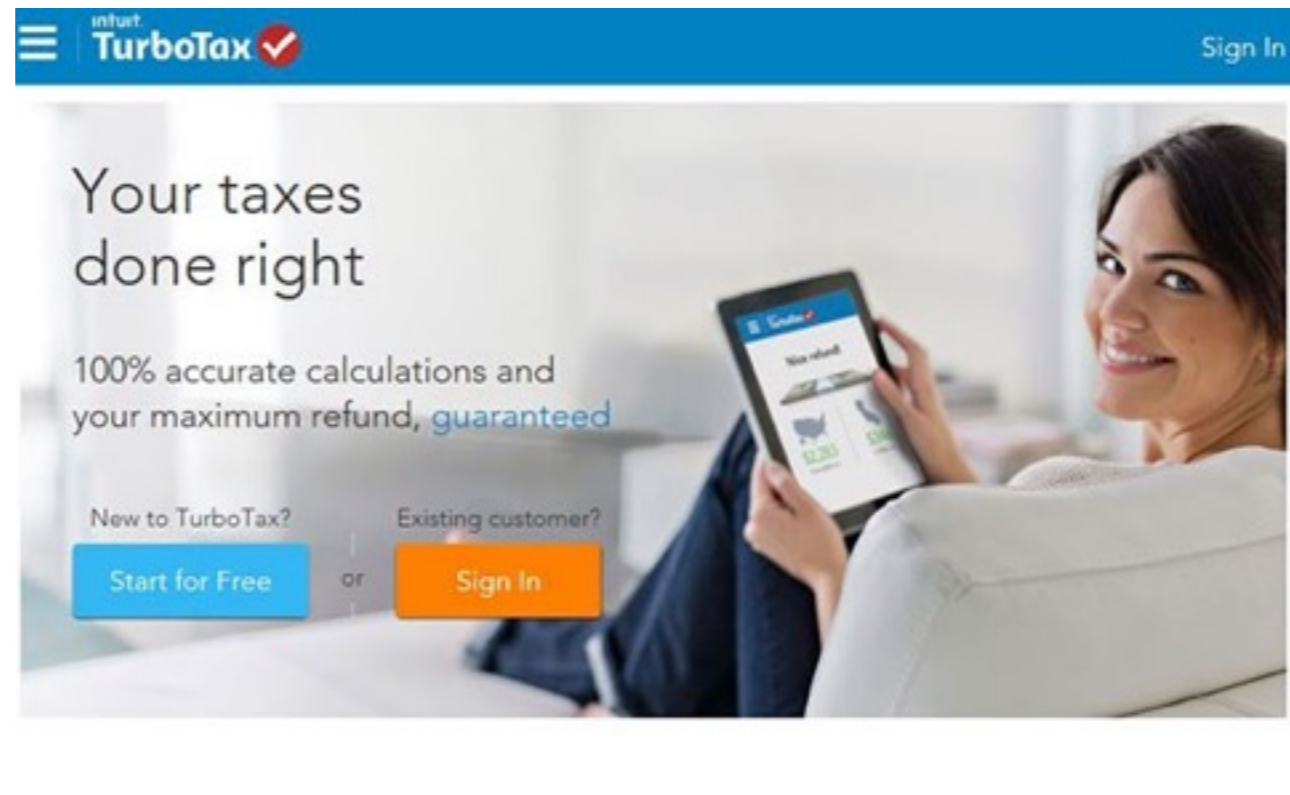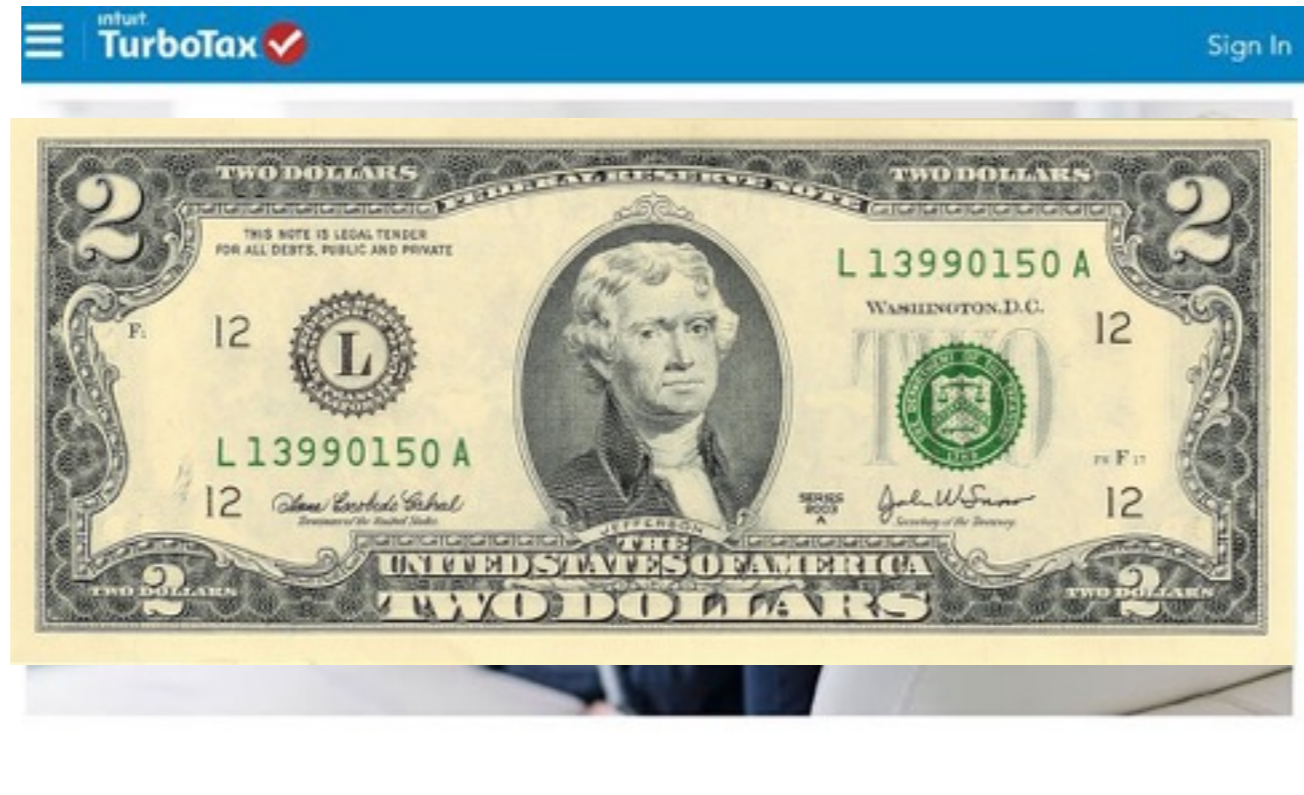
Taxes save us $$

The best we seem to be able to do is say "Um if you do your taxes online, you can save the government $2!" which should be good because hey that saves America money!

Watching social media backlash ("email is dead!" "No one uses Twitter anymore!") this month while I'm still trying to explain to people why they might like it, that's a challenge.

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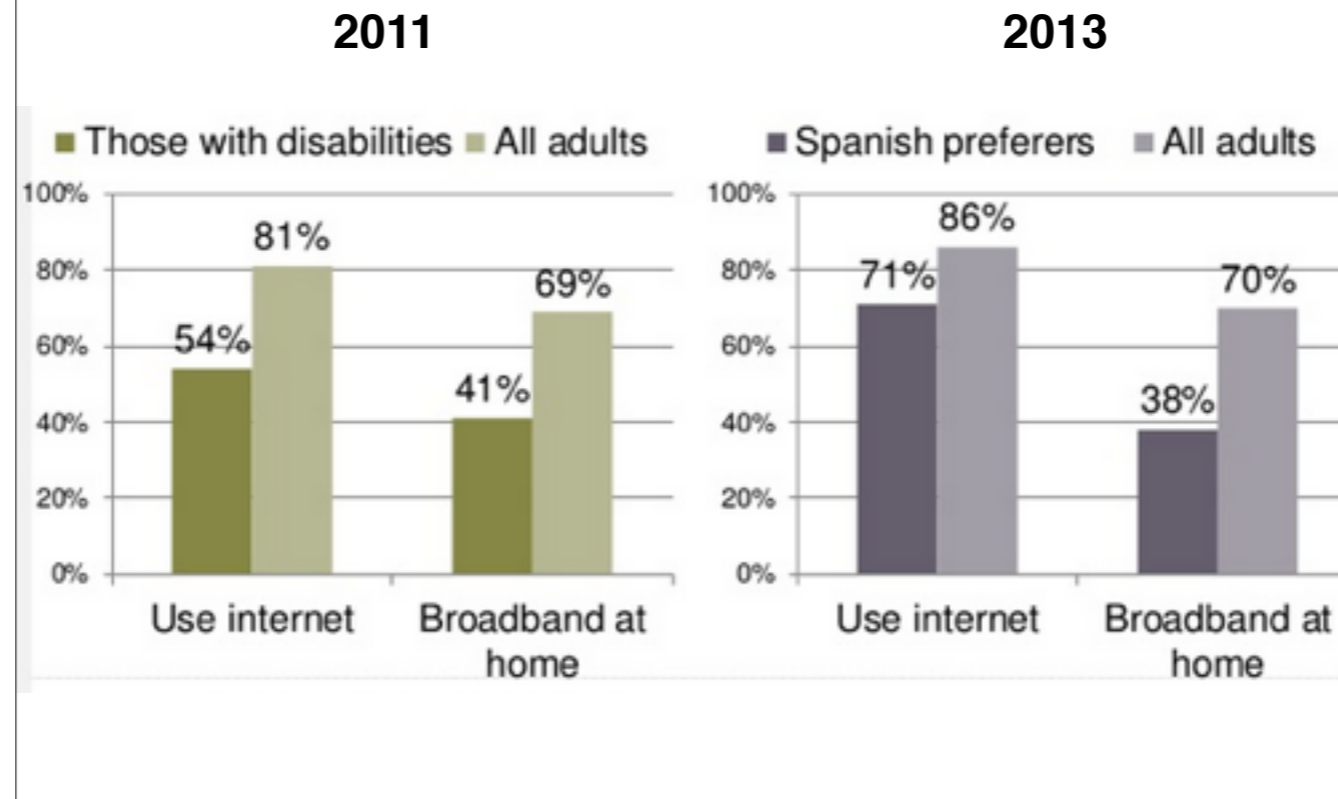
Who is left offline?

2011 — Those with disabilities, All adults
- Use internet: 54% (those with disabilities), 81% (all adults)
- Broadband at home: 41% (those with disabilities), 69% (all adults)

2013 — Spanish preferers, All adults
- Use internet: 71% (Spanish preferers), 86% (all adults)
- Broadband at home: 38% (Spanish preferers), 70% (all adults)

When we look at the numbers—the numbers barely anyone is counting because they don't like the story they tell—we realize that the people who are getting left behind are the people with all the other challenges - economic, education, mental, physical. And if we know this, isn't it our responsibility to make sure they can live the dumb good life too? The hardest to serve have alwats been the hardest to serve, and they are society's responsibility.

Death is not the answer.

And we used to think the problem was old people. You know, old people like me and you. But the research shows that is not the case. I mean it sort of is, but … So we need another plan.

Three digital divides

Financial

People couldn't afford computers or broadband. Some still can't but libraries have filled that gap for most Americans.

Usability

Websites are hard to use and people have issues (cognitive and physical challenges) that make this harder than it needs to be.

Empowerment

People don't "see themselves" in online spaces and don't see it as a place where they belong.

Really we are seeing three separate issues. The first one we've done a good job on. Yay us. The second one we're working on. Better websites. UX all the way. The third one is the challenge because **inclusion is difficult in general** and because some of us don't feel included already. It's hard to try to work on inclusion when you are feeling excluded yourself.
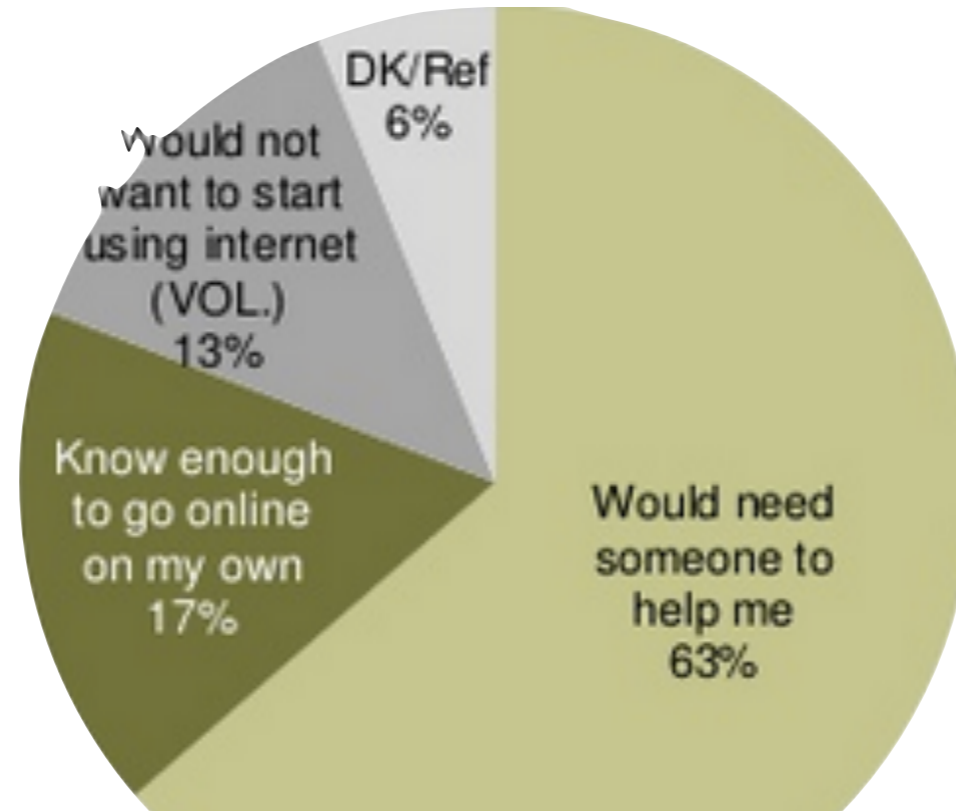
another approach: digital readiness

Skill + **Trust** = **Use**
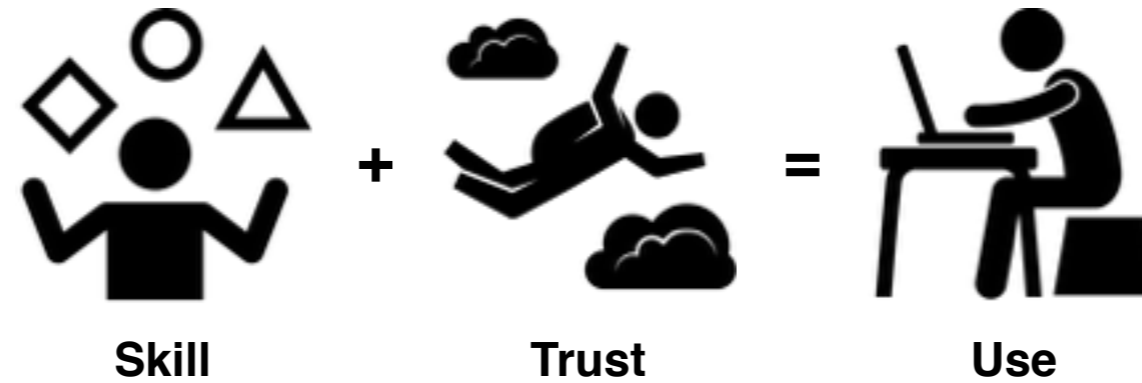
*digital readiness: whether people have the **skills** to use information technology, as well as the **digital literacy tools** to help people determine whether the online information they access is trustworthy.*

Are people PRIMED TO LEARN? With lots of learning opportunities shifting to online spaces, people need digital readiness to take advantage of other opportunities. We should understand this issue.

What do they need?

- DK/Ref 6%
- Would not want to start using internet (VOL.) 13%
- Know enough to go online on my own 17%
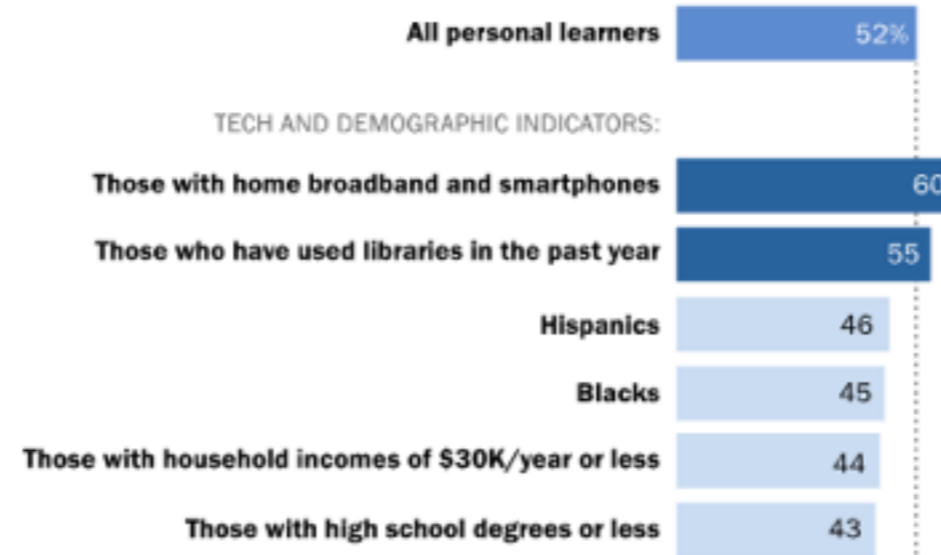- Would need someone to help me 63%

Offline people? They can't get online alone. As the digital divide has been shrinking this piece of the pie gets bigger. They need help, they need our help.

library usage as indicator

Library users and the highly wired are more likely to use the internet in personal learning

% of personal learners who use the internet for learning among ...

All personal learners	52%

TECH AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS:

Those with home broadband and smartphones	60
Those who have used libraries in the past year	55
Hispanics	46
Blacks	45
Those with household incomes of $30K/year or less	44
Those with high school degrees or less	43

Turns out people who use the library are already more likely to be digitally ready. Cause/effect thing.

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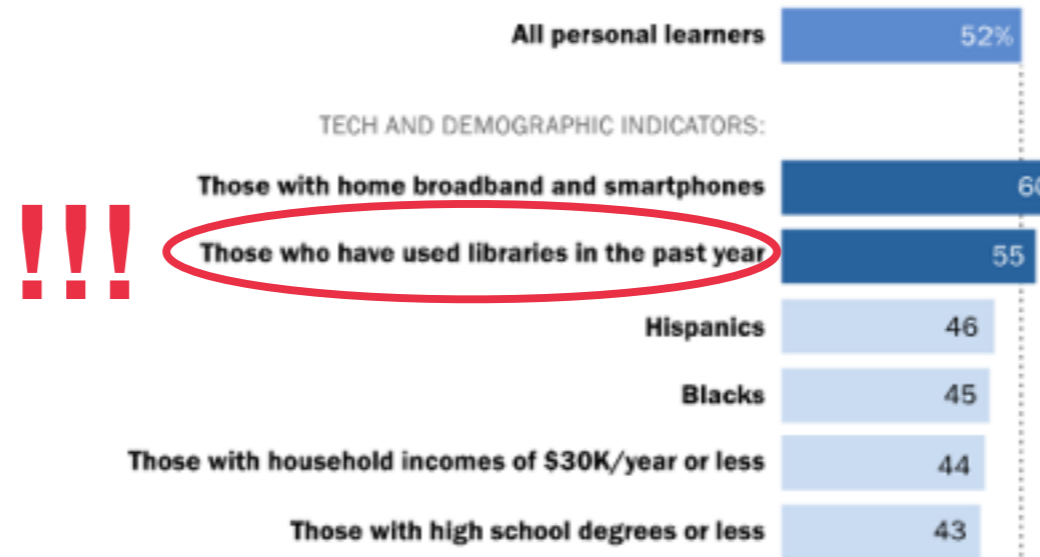*% of personal learners who use the internet for learning among ...*

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!!!

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> No supplemental funding is allocated to provide training, technology, and the necessary resources to provide a government service… adding up to an *unfunded mandate* for libraries.

- Nancy Kranich, ALA President (2008)

I sometimes refer to this as the "unfunded mandate" of these technology economies of scale which are supposedly saving us money with "egovernment" Part of the way they do this is shift costs from government to libraries.

> ❝
> *The only thing we have to fear is...fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror … I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.*
>
> — - FDR

So back to the users…. a lot, most of these people need help because of the TRUST aspect of the thing. They are afraid, trepidatious, anxious. And so we're going to look at working on their anxiety issues as a way of solving the real problem. Here are some things that I do.

3

Uniting against a common enemy.

The only negative talk allowed: against the institutions which make this difficult for us.

I know it can sound a little woo but I find that "positive self talk" is actually one of my most useful digital divide strategies. Offering positive options and the only thing you're allowed to say negative things about is the technology.

"Why you need a bazillion character password."

People have a lot of things that they are upset about, I try to explain without overexplanining, why some things are like this.

"Why you don't recycle passwords."

Yahoo blames "state sponsored" data hackers

"Why you can't copy that DVD."

A little bit of this, I will admit, is in what I call the the Blame the Bi City category. I mean we have the MPAA and RIAA and APA to thank for DRM and all those threats you have to sit through before you watch a DVD. Hollywood! There's a subtlety in being able to tell someone that a thing is technically possible but practically speaking illegal.

"Why you have another update."

I taught an ipad class in the spring and one day we had class and I told everyone "Hey we're going to learn about software updates because you all have updates to do…" They looked at me like I was a magician but sure enough they did. Why? Because the Apple Watch had just come out. Explaining the Apple Watch to my neighbors is a bit like trying to explain Uber…. But in short it's Blame the Big City

4

Minding your language.

This is not a tone argument.

And a lot of it, more than you would think, is about how you say what you say.

The words you use matter

jessamyn west
@jessamyn

US libraries: 146 million unique visitors in the last year. PBS says "People aren't using them." #mathishard pbs.org/newshour/rundo …

Ninja Librarian

People love public libraries, but they aren't using them
Most people say public libraries provide communities with essential resources for literacy and education, but the number of people who actually take advantage of ...

This is from a while ago but I think it's still useful. There was a Pew report. PBS ran a story. Look at the way PBS CHOSE to spin this. Really PBS? I thought we were friends…
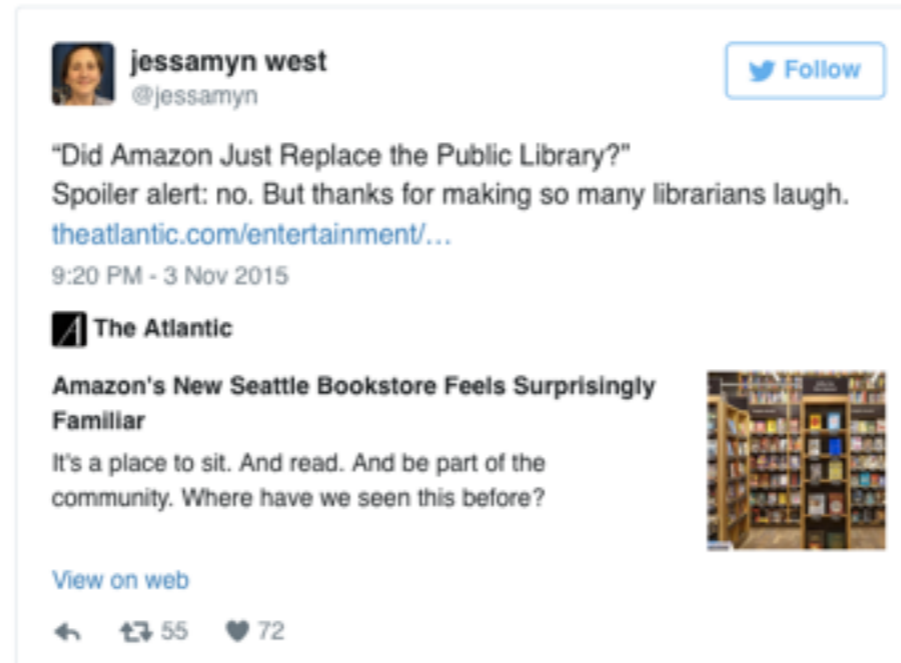
Reframing the narrative.
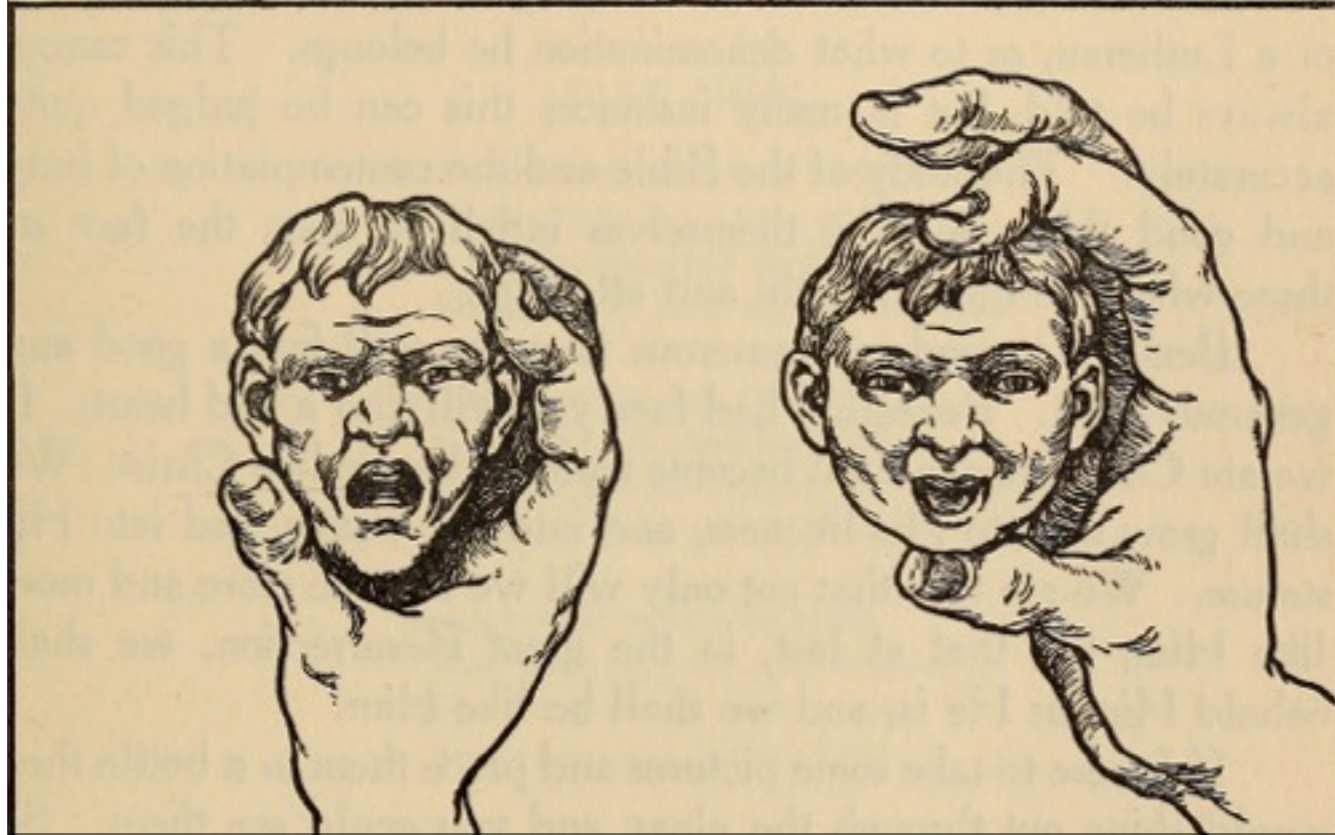
I don't want to be all "turn that frown upside down" but just finding better ways to talk about tech that aren't all as if you were in a bad relationship with it can go a long way. Computer don't have issues, they don't hate you, they are big calculators that are only as good as the flawed humans who made them.

Attitude upgrades.

Put another way: You don't tell your patrons when you are fighting with your partner, why do you tell them when you are fighting with your computer? I can't think of a single time I have called an online support person (for anything, magazine subscriptions, health care, newspaper subscription) where some of our phone call did not involve blaming the computer.

public/private stances are OK

jessamyn west
@jessamyn

"Did Amazon Just Replace the Public Library?"
Spoiler alert: no. But thanks for making so many librarians laugh.
theatlantic.com/entertainment/...

9:20 PM - 3 Nov 2015

The Atlantic

Amazon's New Seattle Bookstore Feels Surprisingly Familiar

It's a place to sit. And read. And be part of the community. Where have we seen this before?

View on web

55   72

It's also important to have a narrative for your patrons and one, maybe a different one, for your professional peeps. Atlantic, did you just say that? We all had a good laugh here. I don't bother trying to explain this sort of weird stuff to patrons.

Language upgrades

Sucks

Things are merely suboptimal, for now.

Computer hates me

"The computer is a dumb calculator who does what other people have programmed it to do"

I am stupid

"You are not a bad person; this is a bad website"

So I work on my language, and how I phrase things. A few examples. And this is not just with patrons this is with the public, with the media (who I speak to as often as possible, we seem to have a problem with promotion of our institutions and our values and suspicion of those who do this)

> **Yeah I know Twitter seems stupid when you read about it in the paper, but here's what I like about it.**
>
> - Me

Acknowledge their feelings. Share your own experiences. Illustrate using accessible examples.

Internet

Because really, the internet for me is a lot of good things. It's people to talk to when my town is asleep. It's places to get free photos for my talks. It's a way to keep up with my professional development. It's where I can look for a book in a thousand libraries. Or where I go to work in my (California) Library.

Library Internet

And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

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5

YOU are the resource.

Or someone needs to be. These are human problems, not technological ones, and need human solutions.

Back to Marian
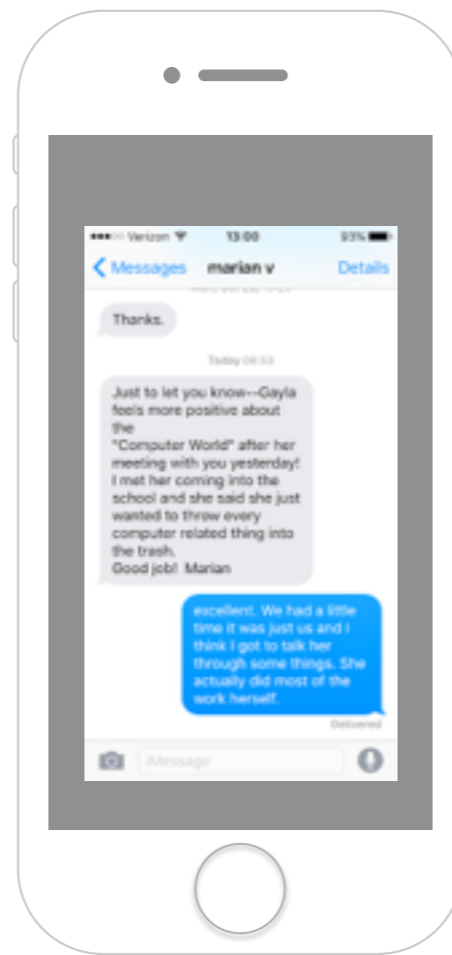
> " The inclusion of the creation of a digital inclusion plan in the Lifeline order means the FCC heard what we were saying.

-   Angela Siefer, NDIA

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Thanks!

Jessamyn West

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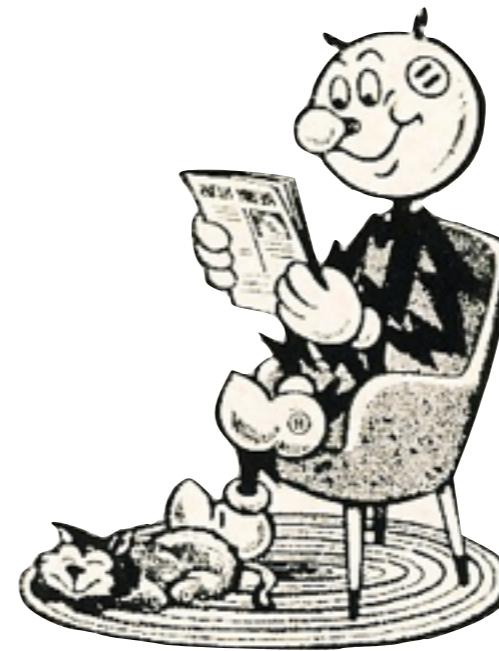
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