

Digital Divide's last mile

Who are people who are left? What is their deal?
Five things to know.

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1

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

15%

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

PewResearchCenter

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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 used to move and it doesn't anymore. Those 15% are staying put.

WTF

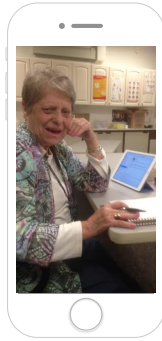
Really? Don't they want to see their grandchildren, get cheap printer ink, send people photos of their genitals and apply for health care? No? No.

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The question many people ask is this one.

Marian

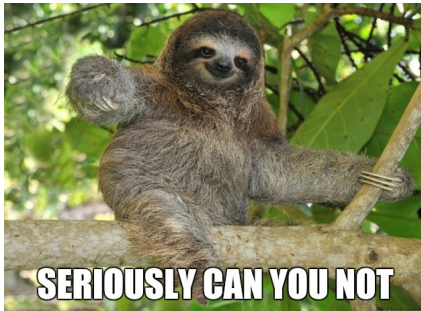


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This is Marian and she is one of the many people who comes to my computer drop-in time, a thing I have been doing weekly for a decade where I live in rural Vermont answering any and all computer questions. Marian wants a Scrabble game for the iPad 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.**



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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 a few things here. There will be time for questions afterwards.

1

Understanding the issue

Why are people really offline?

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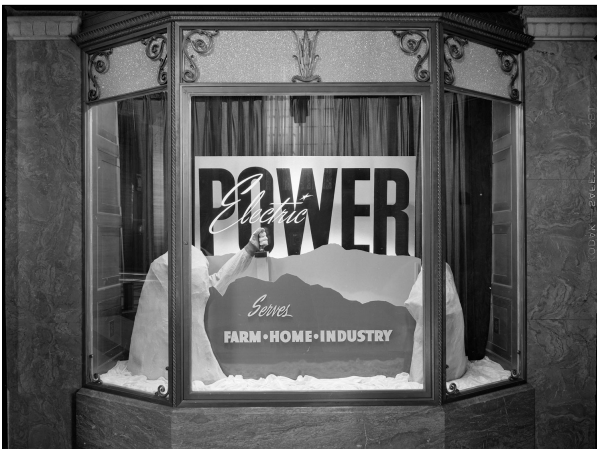
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This is you guys getting electricity sometime before the 1950s. Here is us getting broadband in ****2012**** It's harder to give people internet where there are mountains and rivers and winter. You know who has some of the best broadband penetration? Oklahoma. Flattish.



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 person. Let them cook over a fire. COME THE FUCK ON.

2

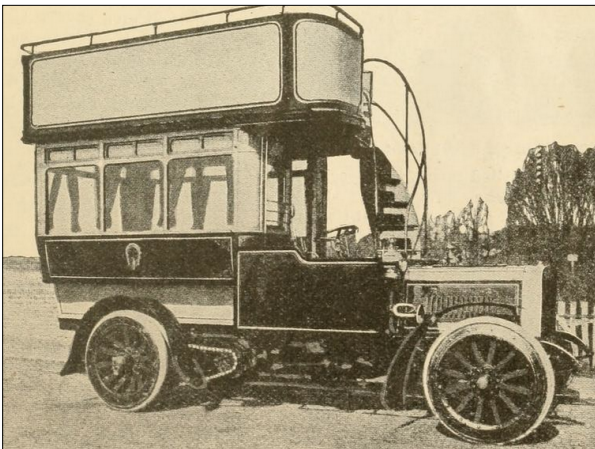
We sell this poorly.

Sure computers are a pain in the ass, but we (society) needs to do better at helping the offline people get happily online.

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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 \$\$



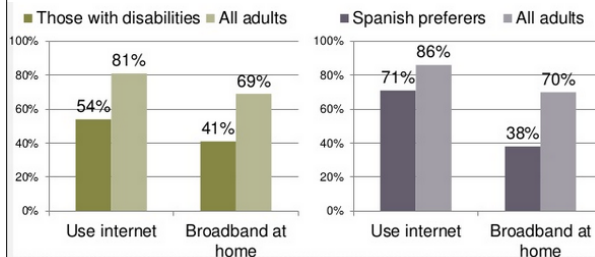
UNCLE SAM: "I think I ought to put a luxury tax on you, Santa."
CHORUS OF CHILDREN: "Oh, no. He's a necessity."

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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 \$. Or "Internet is good for dating and porn and telling people what you had for breakfast" That is not really selling it. Watching the Twitter backlash this month while I'm still trying to explain to people why they might like it, that's a challenge.

Who is left offline?



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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?

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

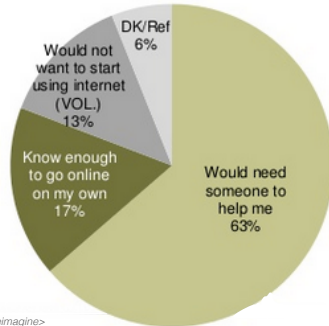
People don't "see themselves" in online spaces and don't see it as a place where they belong.

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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.

What do they need?



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More importantly, those people offline? 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.

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



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So look, a lot most of these people are afraid, trepidatious, anxious. And so we're going to look at working on their anxiety issue as a way of solving the real problem. Here are some things that I do.

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Uniting against a common enemy.

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

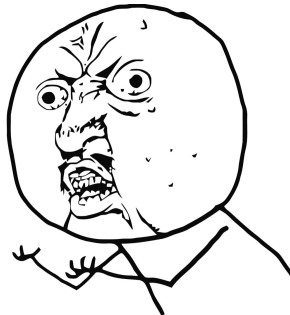
"Why you need a bazillion character password"



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

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Government monitors repeatedly warned of IRS computer security risks long before Tuesday's disclosure that identity thieves had stolen tax agency data for roughly 100,000 U.S. households.

- TaxProf Blog



I mean since we're talking about the IRS, let's talk about their insecure website feature that let people download old tax forms (for themselves or, as it turned out, other people) and ruined it for the rest of us.

"Why you can't copy that DVD"



A little bit of this, I will admit, is in the Blame California 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!

"Why you have another OS 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 California (I'm sorry)

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 ...

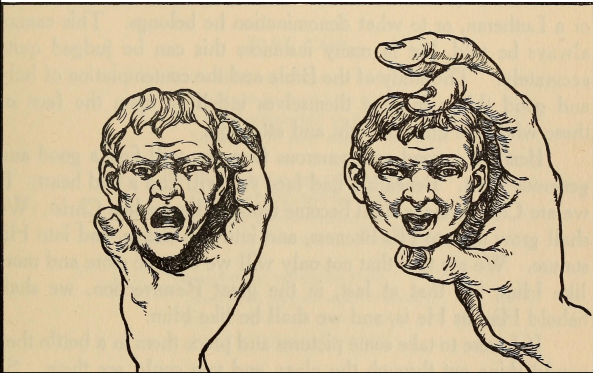


People love public libraries, but they aren't using them
Most people say public libraries provide communities with essential resources for literacy and education, but the number of people who actually take advantage of

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Like look at the way PBS CHOSE to spin this. Really PBS? I thought we were friends...

Reframing the narrative.



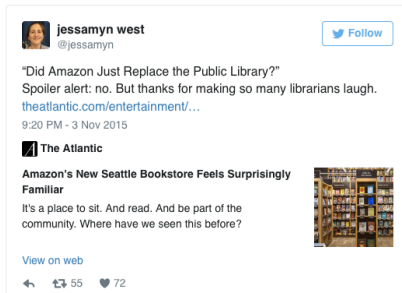
I don't want to be all "turn that frown upside down" but just finding better ways to talk about tech that aren't all as if you were in a bad relationship with it.

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?

Clickbait = trolling



I swear this will not just be "things I tweeted about this week" but it's important to have a narrative for your patrons and one, maybe a different one, for your professional peeps. WTF Atlantic, did you just say that? We all had a good laugh here. I don't bother trying to explain this to patrons.

These fucking people.



And then there is shit like this. These bsigns (and bill boards) lasted less than two days in the Bay Area.

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.

“

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

- Me

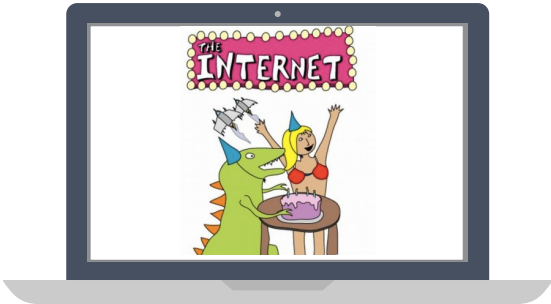


A screenshot of a Twitter post from Sona Charaipotra (@sona_c). The tweet reads: "Awesome crowd for #WNDB @diversebooks panel at #NYCC. Rock on!" and is dated 12:00 PM - 11 Oct 2015 - Manhattan, NY, United States. The image shows a large group of people seated in a room, attending a panel discussion.

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

Internet




An illustration of a laptop screen. On the screen, a green dinosaur with a blue party hat is holding a purple cake on a table. A blonde woman in a red bikini and blue party hat is standing next to the dinosaur, holding a party blower. Above them is a sign that says "THE INTERNET" in a bubbly font.

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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



An illustration of a laptop screen. On the screen, four librarians are standing in a library. They are wearing large, white paper cutouts of their faces. The cutouts have large eyes and a wide smile. They are holding signs that say "We're here to help!"

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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 last week. 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.

Library Internet



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YOU are the resource.

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

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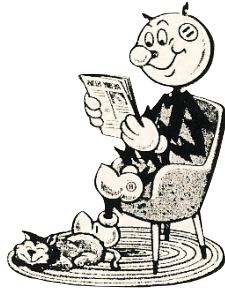
Back to Marian



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Thanks! Questions?



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