Rural internet access "challenges and opportunities"

Intro to me: RTCC instructor, Open Library aide, did "online community management" for over a decade, well known for library activism and digital divide work.

ΙΛΙΑΣ

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεὰ, Πηληιάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί᾽ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε᾽ ἔθηκε,
πολλὰς δ᾽ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι· Διὸς δ᾽ ἐτελείετο βουλή·
ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε
Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

NEW LIBRARY BUILDING, U. OF M.

Confession: Iliad epic war tale but really it's I–LEAD. (also name of an ereader that has a parent company that went bankrupt in 2010)

Innovative Librarians Explore, Apply and Discover. Cool.

My favorite part of this project, as I understand it, is the DIME: develop, implement, manage and evaluate – DIME

I'm big into evaluating. In my world E is ALSO all about engaging. More on that later.

BEADLE'S HALF DIME Library

5°

Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.

Copyrighted 1904, by BEADLE AND ADAMS.

December 25, 1904.

No. 909. $2.50 a Year. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK. Price, 5 cents. Vol. XXXV.

MIDSHIPMAN DARE THE PIRATE CATCHER

And of course it's super evocative of the dime store novels and dime libraries, so that's nifty

So let's talk local. Vermont & Maine, we are the same – we're 82% percent rural you're 73–ish % This is you putting in electricity in 1900, this is us putting in broadband lines in 2012.

Let me talk to you a little bit about what things are like in our region for libraries.

libraries & technology

183 public libraries in VT – our trends
– circing & buying fewer books – open more & offering more programs but with fewer visits
– 82% of funding comes from local taxes – more $$ coming in (taxes and grants)

– fewer computers overall – 1052 total computers
– increase in training & computer sessions generally
– 161 have broadband & public access, 138 offer "databases"
– one of the things we know as an institution is that libraries are generally the ONLY place where people have access to free computers and broadband outside of specific contexts (schools, voc education, socail services)
This lack of context is good news and bad news however…. we deal with a lot of different populations with different needs, or unknown needs.

digital divide is still a thing?

I got buttonholed by this guy at a college reunion thing last weekend who basically said... "the digital divide, that's still a thing?" and I was like "yeah, sort of..." but really it's a little more complicated than just that. The nature of just WHAT the digital divide is (and why libraries care) has been changing over the past 20 years since I started teaching people how to use computers. Let me outline where we've gone....

The basic divide in the beginning was always "some people don't have computers and others do" This was a financial issue in some ways and a cultural issue in others. We sort of handled that, at a public level. Schools and libraries across the US all have public computer access, computers have come down in price, tablets and phones "compute" now.

Then, in this same category, it was who had internet access, dial-up at first and then broadband. At first this was just ... well the internet was useful to move files more quickly, look at web pages (scientists were sending data sets around, sure). Now decent broadband part of the fabric of a lot of people's social and entertainment lives in addition to work lives: streaming music, Netflix, even looking up directions via a map **doesn't work anymore** via dial-up.

And the people I work with only sort of understand: the world is changing around them. Some of this is the nature of what's "normal" now, some of it isn't. So we talk about "kids today and their beep beep beep" (more on that in a bit). But we still know that about 15-18% of American adults are "offline" and that number which was going down for a decade is not budging as much as it was. And libraries have broadband now, nearly all of them. But it's different having access to broadband in your own, and having access to it in your home.

EDISON
MAZDA
LAMPS

There's a Right
EDISON MAZDA LAMP
For every Fixture

People look at this broadband thing as a rural electrification program, almost. There's a "if you build it, they will come" aspect, but this totally ignores the immense amount of marketing that went in to "selling" electricity to people.

This is Reddy Kilowatt was the symbol of electric companies across the country. [**Wired! How Electricity Came to Maine – maine historical society**]. This is a Maxfield Parrish designed light bulb display

I mean think about it: many people were fine without electricity. And they had no electric bill to pay. Businesses needed to make electricity "worth it" to people. People still got to make a choice to connect. Not as dissimilar from today. It's not just having broadband available, it's explaining to people why they should care. Electric Shop Augusta Maine 1925. Hold that thought.
And there are good indicators for uptake, and maine (like Vermont) doesn't do great with them.

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1. technological/economic divide

Factors that increase use/subscribership	Maine's ranking relative to all US States
Households with one or more children under the age of 18	48th out of 50 in % of households with one or more children under 18.
Households with more than 3 people	48th out of 50 in % of households with more than 3 people
Small businesses in the finance and insurance industry	48th out of 50 in % of small businesses in the finance and insurance sector

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FIND YOUR HEALTH PLAN

1. Lower literacy

2. Seniors & mobility/vision impaired

you looking for coverage for self or your family?

Are you getting health insurance through your job?

Employers, are you planning to offer health insurance?

Start Here ▶

Start Here ▶

Start Here ▶

REAL QUESTIONS

2014 Health Plans
Learn more about the private and public plans and what they

MVP

Second step is usability divide. Most websites are terrible. More and more people have to navigate technological hurdles to interact with friends, stores, their government. I buy health care through my state exchange.... I bet every single person in this room knows that you don't build a website with a Logout button and no Login button. Why didn't these people? Two groups of people for whom this is a big thing....

I teach some pretty basic classes in Randolph including "where are my files" but I might as well call the facebook class "where are the tiny triangles that are hiding all of my stuff?" because that's the main thing people want to know. We work on this almost at a one-on-one pace. It doesn't scale. People love the web because you build one thing and it can be used (optimally) by 100,000 people... except the people who can't use it at all.

Helping people use bad websites, building self esteem so they'll try, advocating for better websites from ourselves and others. This is a hearts and minds category, and we can't do it alone.
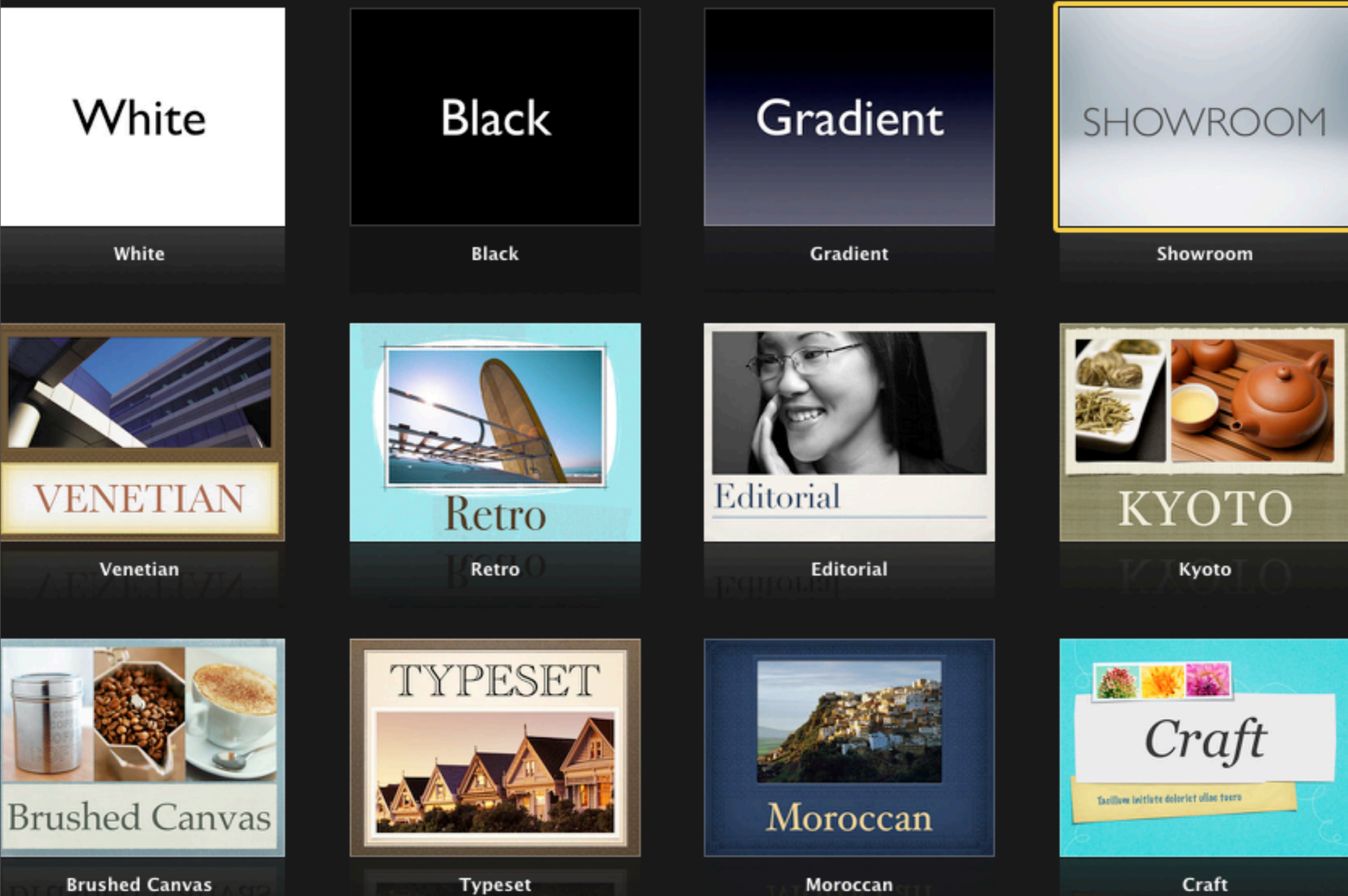
Last category: empowerment divide, inclusivity divide.

So this picture. Is part of a larger exercise. Some people see baseball, hey american apple pie, summer etc. Some people see "jocks." (I see jocks) some people see all men, some people see all white people, all young people, all short haircuts all able-bodied. Those things are all there. And the extent to which you see yourself in there can affect how empowered you feel to interact with those people, in that place, in that way.

3. empowerment divide

Here's another example. Here's all the options I see on the first page of "choose a theme" on the slide software I use. One face, an Asian woman.

One more example: Ads for broadband. Look at these goofy people. Is this what people want? Is this how they want to interact with their family?

This is huge and in my professional opinion it's what's keeping that last 15–20% of people offline. They don't see a place for themselves there. It's not FOR them. It's confusing, dangerous and full of jerks. AND it doesn't solve problems for them. There's a lot of talk online about the internet is all for everyone. It's not. (we read about Uber and are like "huh"... Explaining the Apple Watch to my neighbors reads like stand up comedy) but then you look into it and the heavily online people (including myself) are still a really small subset of everyone. Who talk a lot. Who engage. Who take up a lot of air in the room.

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"I expected to find something like an 80-20 rule: 80% of the work being done by 20% of the users... But it turns out over 50% of all the edits are done by just .7% of the users ... 524 people. The most active 2% (1400 people) have done 73% of all the edits."
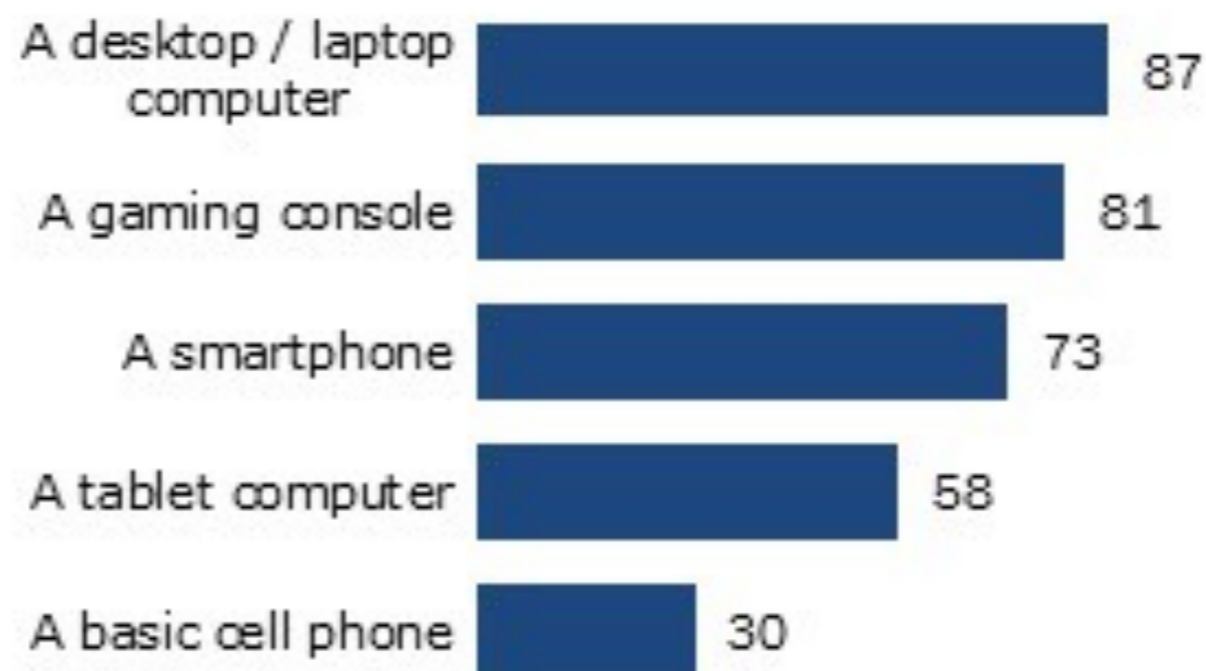
- Jimmy Wales, on Wikipedia

And the words we use matter here. So wikipedia is "the encyclopedia that anybody can edit" (sort of true) but also let's see what Jimmy Wales has to say about it. 1400 people doing 3/4 of the edits. Now there's been some analysis of this study and it's not quite this bad (many of these edits are minor, article creation still done by a wide range of users).

"born digital" generations

Teens' Phone, Computer & Console Access

% of all teens who have or have access to the following:

A desktop / laptop computer	87
A gaming console	81
A smartphone	73
A tablet computer	58
A basic cell phone	30

Source: Pew Research Center's Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014 and Feb. 10-Mar. 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).
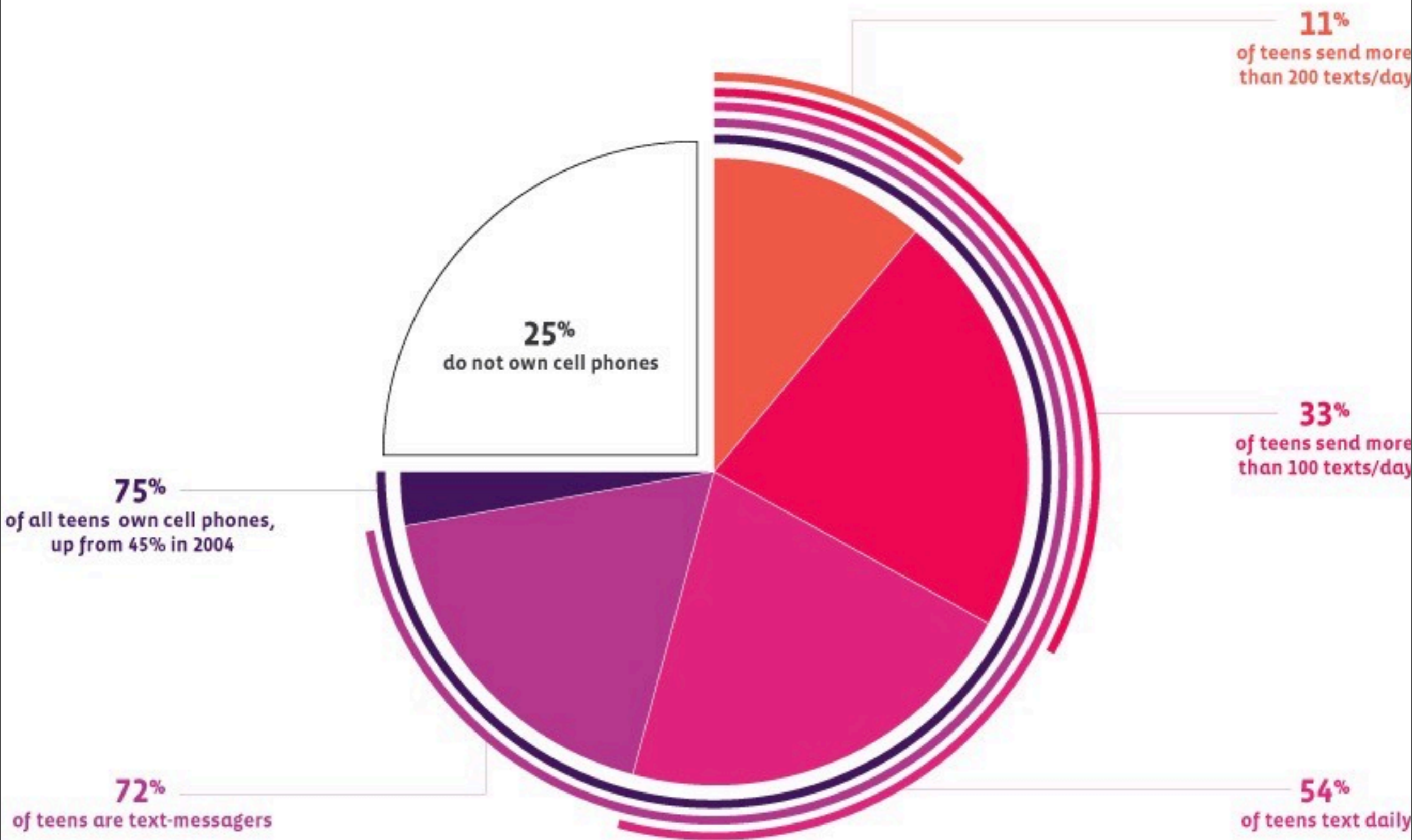
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

And the empowerment divide has real life effects too, it's not just emo "I don't fit in" stuff. So those born with a chip kids I mentioned earlier, the ones everyone thinks just "get" everything technological....

88% of American teens ages 13 to 17 have or have access to a mobile phone (12% don't)
73% of teens have smartphones (27% don't, over 1/4th)
64% of teens from families earning less than 50K own one (worse for poor kids, significantly)

We're not only talking about teens, of course, but there's definitely this sense that the older generation (I include myself) are the digitally divided problem here, and that's not really true at all. Not everyone is online. And the people who are offline usually have other challenges: they are poor, they don't speak english, they are disabled... (hot tub convo) And their user experience is really different. And this affects inclusivity.

digital inclusion

Cell phone use, all teens (ages 12-17)

11% of teens send more than 200 texts/day

33% of teens send more than 100 texts/day

54% of teens text daily

25% do not own cell phones

75% of all teens own cell phones, up from 45% in 2004
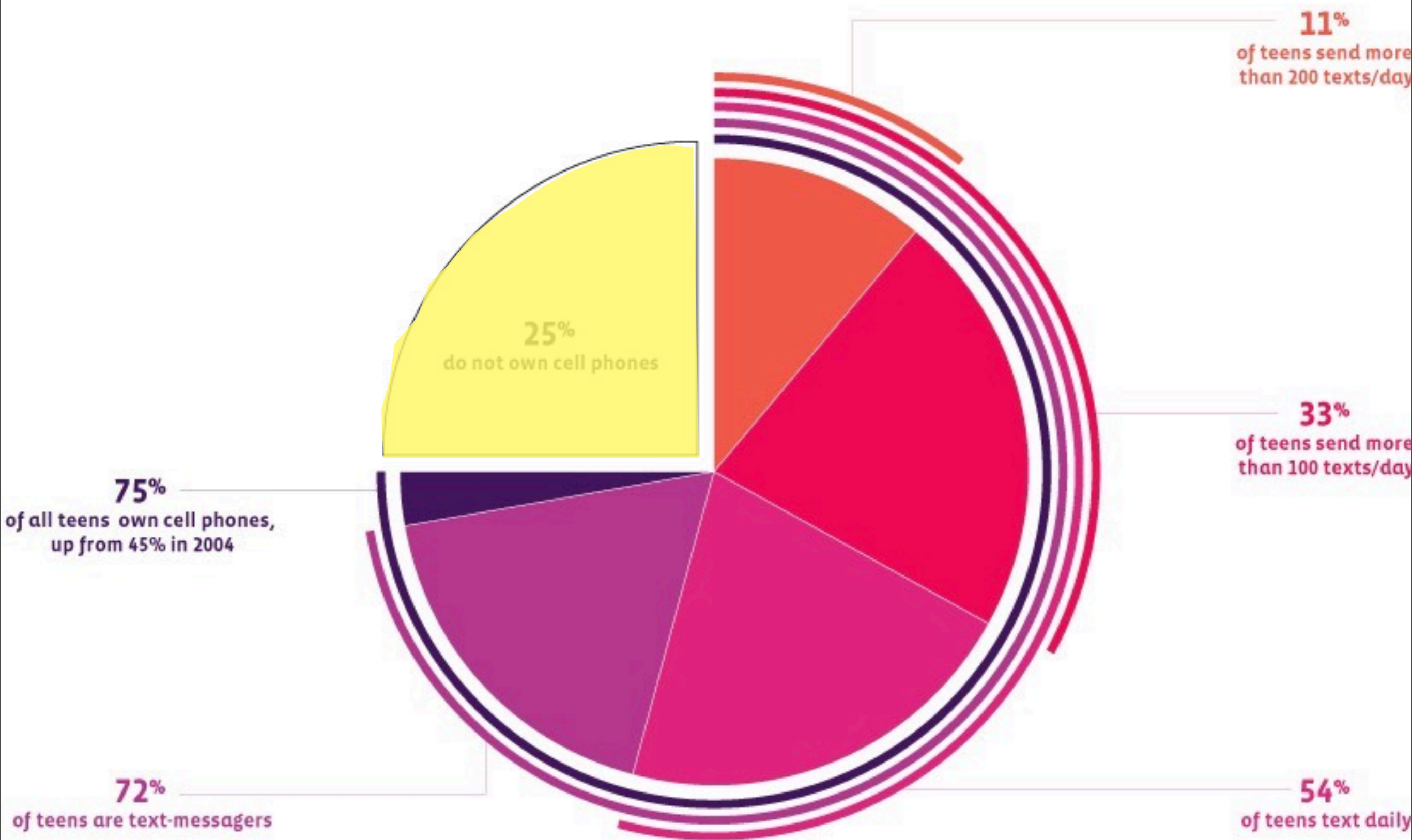
72% of teens are text-messagers

(this image is a few years old, the numbers are a little different) Because the big thing now isn't just you heavily interacting with content, it's you interacting with others. So these kids? They're heavily interacting with each other, forming networks, making plans, trading photos, and those kids? They're not.

Part of what we have to do to help the empowerment and inclusivity divide is get everyone talking to each other.

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engaging Bengali users

And this is another example of the TONs of examples out there. It's tough to ask people "Why don't you use a thing?" (in the library world it's outreach, right. See who is in your community, see who is at the library, subtract the latter from the former, go find those people.) We don't do it as much with the web.

We figure if we're a business and people don't want to interact with us online, maybe it's just okay if we don't have their business. This is a luxury that we don't have, shouldn't have, at the library. Wikipedia is another non-profit with a broad mission, they have 200+ Wikipedias in other languages and they care about how they're doing. This is the Bengali Wikipedia. It's small. They want to help people interact with it and so they did a survey: Hey why don't you interact more...? They got some data. And then the next step... is to take that data and do something and see if it helps solve the problem. It won't, always, but at least you're up front about there being a problem.

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CC → EE

In addition to doing this sort of thing and working at Open Library, I write for Computers in Libraries as well as an online writing platform called Medium. It's sort of a start up. CiL pays me one amount, regularly, when I write. My article isn't linkable online but that's mostly okay. Medium, until recently paid me partly to write and partly to ... get attention. We had an attention based bonus which could be up to 100% of what we earned. And things are changing in the online world of "what counts" in startups.

CC to EE – counting clicks to evaluating engagement. The online world sort of hates engagement as a new metric (which a lot of big companies are switching to: Twitter, Medium, etc) because it's unclear how to monetize it. Fortunately, this is not a problem for libraries.

from LOOK AT ME to INTERACT WITH ME. This is a good thing generally but it can be tougher to measure as we get started.

engagement > clicks

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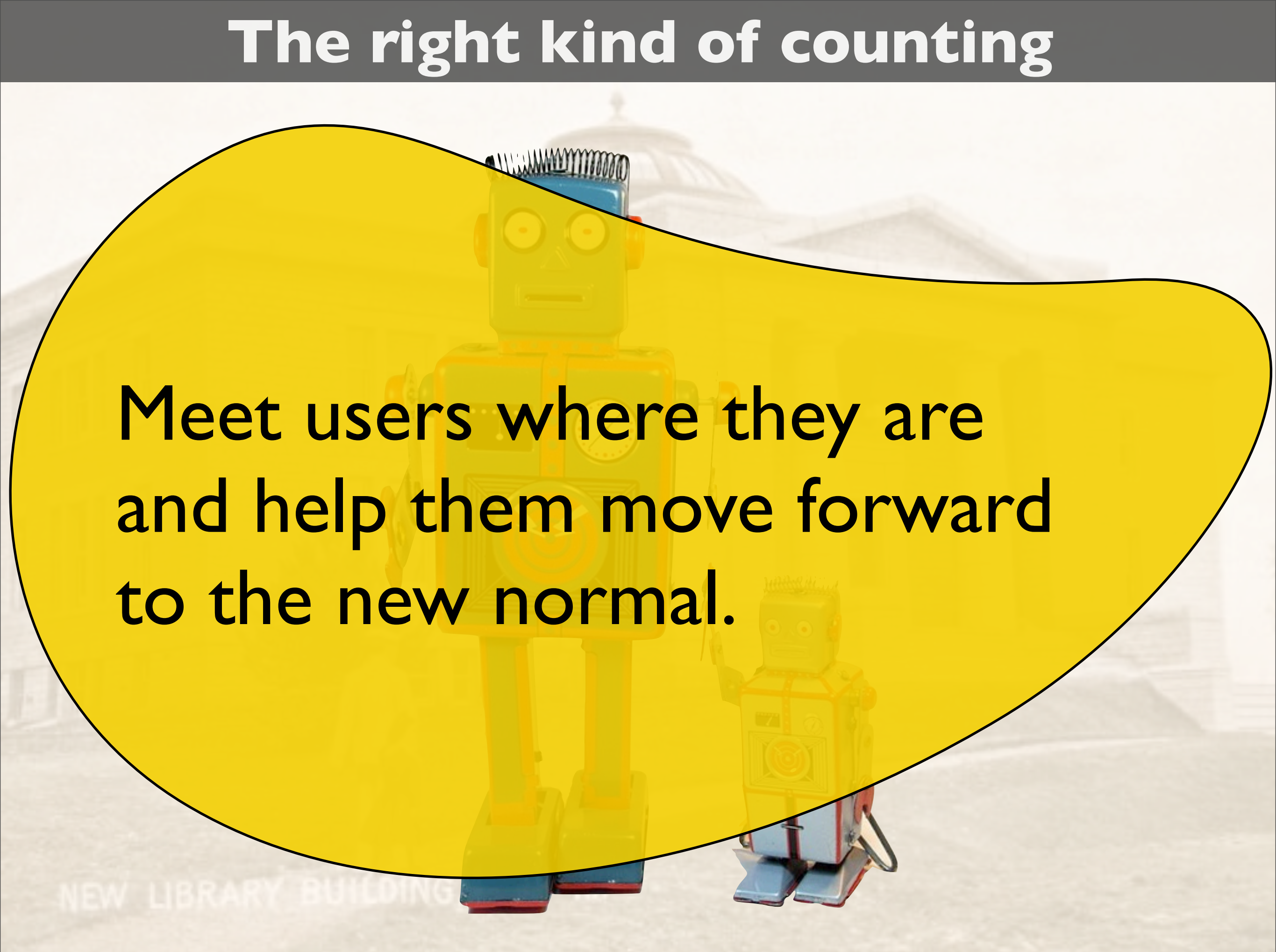
Meet users where they are and help them move forward to the new normal.

NEW LIBRARY BUILDING, U. OF M.

What this means is that the E in your assessment, evaluating, also needs to make sure you're looking at and counting the right things. Aside from the obvious like Build good websites we also need to fight bad websites. Tell people "you are not a bad person, this is a bad website"

Some of this is attitude: Help users have their own tech successes and model good user behavior. That ref desk line we use "I don't know but I can find out?" it refers to tech stuff as well.

Most importantly ask "Who should be here who isn't?" Who is not involved? Who is discouraged from using this? Who lacks the tools or the talents to make use of this? How can we make this a genuine option for people in their real lives?
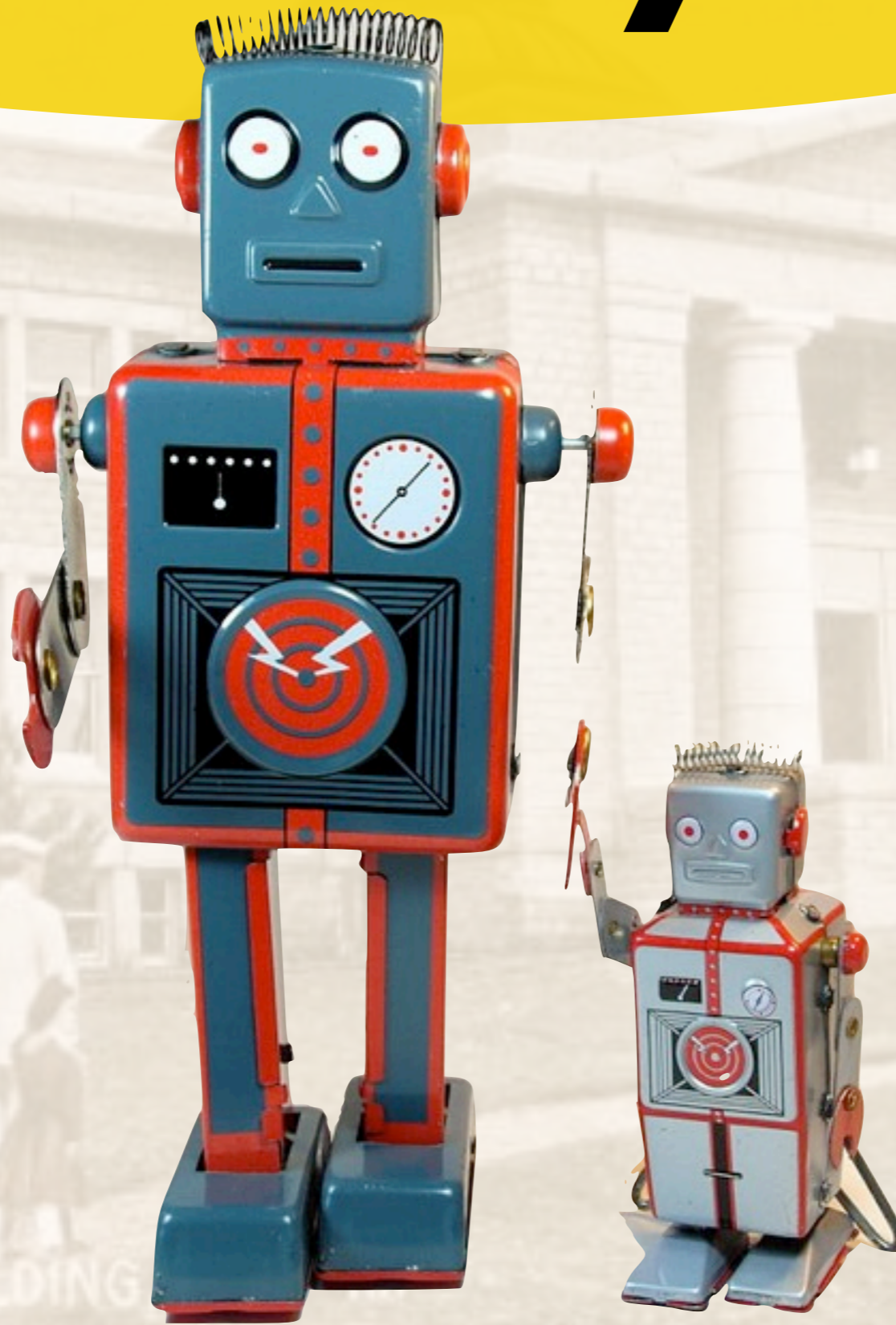
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Thank you!