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## Libraries and librarians in the “smartphone age”

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### Abstract:

*At the times of smartphones and new technologies, big opportunities are opening not only for the entire humanity but also for libraries. The terms of entertainment and education has changed drastically. People which do not like reading books, or are not able to use the services of the library have finally the opportunity to do something entertaining and expand their wisdom by using alternative media and services. E-Tutorials, gaming, edutainment, e-books are new terms, born with the growth of new technologies. The idea of a silent library, filled only with books, should be a picture of the past. Meanwhile, coffee and newspapers, magazines and board games, DVDs and CDs, Nintendo Wii and other cool electronic games, electronic media but especially events for all kinds of library´s possible customers should be a part of the services in modern libraries. Who are the potential customers and what would entertain or interest them, how can public relations with the institutions of the region help to attract big groups of future customers, how can the library adopt to the new technologies and use them in order to get more attractive and usable for the customers and at last, which additional skills does the modern librarian should have, are important questions which should be considered in order to expand every library´s customers number.*

**Keywords:** Smartphones, electronic media, new services, new skills, social media.

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## Libraries and librarians in the “smartphone age”

### Introduction

Welcome to the age of smartphones. The age that changed the way we communicate, work, achieve our everyday tasks, entertain and even the way we are thinking.

Our life became so much easier by the Internet and online services: electricity contracts, searching an apartment, online banking and other numerous services, are supplies that made

the achieving of our everyday routine comfortable and fast. After the spread of smartphones, services turned even easier, comfortable, fun and innovative. With the assistance of Google Maps, it is possible to reach any destination, family and friends can be contacted live by video, new features enrich our communication like pictures, emoji's, GIFs, funny stickers. New applications created new opportunities like geocaching, spreading information live through social media, use of interactive books.

This phenomenon has opened great opportunities as well for libraries in order to extend the number of customers. Since further possibilities and alternative ways of informing, entertaining and educating are available, libraries can become suitable for all potential customers. In the past, people which did not like or were even not able to read books or reach the building of the library, were declined to use the services offered.

Additionally to DVDs, CDs, magazines and console games, libraries can offer online services, like e-books, e-magazines, children's e-books with special features, e-tutorials or use applications for organizing an event with the co work of customers. Social media can also be used, in order to inform and remind the customers for upcoming events, new book arrivals, bestseller lists or other services.

In addition, libraries can make a profit out of the lack of non-electronic activities in everyday life. People often miss activities where they can interact with other people, like a public book reading, or to attend an interesting event or seminar. By organizing events, libraries become more popular, the image is improving and a bigger audience can inform about the services as well as the media available, which increases the probability to turn into customers.

## Customer oriented strategies in the smartphone age

### Public Libraries

Adopting to current trends and new media is essential for public libraries. Academic libraries have stable clientele, since they serve in first line the academic community of the institution they belong to. Students and professors are forced to use literature for the field they work for, but citizens not.

In order to make a strategic plan for offering a good service in public libraries, which is the key to attract more customers, there are few criteria and factors, which have to be taken in account. A first step is to consider the possible customers, their needs and interests. Customers can be subdivided in groups such as children, teens, adults, seniors as well as people with special needs.

### Children´s sector

This is maybe the most important sector of a library. Kids learn to love the library and get used reading books. They are the present and future customers of a library. Books are important in this age because by reading, the phantasy development of a child is being facilitated. Also the skills to read, talk and communicate are being build. In addition, the curiosity of children can be fulfilled by numerous books and media available. They grow to understand their feelings more effective, since they can choose books with stories about feelings.

Media should be up to date and in a good condition regardless of the form: books, CDs, DVDs, console games, e-book-readers, board games, comics, Tonies, journals, etc. and to cover all kind of interests. A good and up to date collection is the most important step to attract customers in the library.

There are several kind of events and seminars that can be offered for children and their parents. The easiest way to organize seminars for children is to contact local schools or kindergartens in order to invite them for a library excursion. It is the simplest way, because there is no need of advertising of the event as well as the number of customers is settled. In addition, the age, the level of education and the interests of the children are known.

Library introduction: children are getting to know the public library. In this age, less information is sometimes more. The concepts should not contain too much information, should be fun, interactive and easy to understand. Asking many questions to children is important in order to activate their learning process and keep their interest. An effective technique is to explore the library by letting children discover themselves all the information of the seminar by forming simple questions instead of using the affirmative form. It is important to not criticize but to encourage the young explorers of the library by praising them.

Children are usually excited to do craftworks, it facilitates their skills of being creative and hand motor proficiency. In addition, it is a good way to inform the parents afterwards how nice and important the visit to the library was.

Events about specific topics like “creative craftworks”, “the forest and trees” are subjects that can be presented. These seminars can be realised in the form of reading out a relevant story to the subject. A concept with craftworks or other activities, like making a quiz with the topic of the event, can be easily made. Media relevant to this topic, available in the library should be presented at the end of the seminar, so customers can borrow them. This is also a good opportunity to promote subjects of media that are not being borrowed so well like knitting, sports etc.

Simple reading out of stories is as well a good service offered by public libraries. These events can be advertised by social media, in order to spread this information to a larger amount of people than with posters. Liking or declaring to attend an event through Facebook for example, makes it visible to all contacts of the person, even if they are not connected to the library’s Facebook account.

### Teen’s sector

Teens are a difficult group of customers for the library, because it is not easy to understand what their demands are. Often there are trends in media, which attract teens. In opposite older trends are rapidly outdated so teens lose their interest. In this age, there is often a cut in terms of not visiting the library, but it is significant to keep this group of customers in frames of a lifelong education. (Kerstin Keller-Loibl, 2011)

Teens want to be cool; they want to be alternative from the usual. They do not want to be with children and usually they do not want to be in the adults sector either. Therefore, it is important to have a separate room or at least a separate corner or corridor in the library for teens. In order to achieve that, techniques like using different colour on the walls, a graffiti, posters of bands or different style of furniture like cushions can help marking out the teen’s sector, as well as inviting teens to relax or to feel comfortable in the library.

Libraries have the benefit that they are not school, so teens can feel there more free and comfortable. (Kagan, 2017) (Kerstin Keller-Loibl, 2011)Therefore, public libraries should concentrate on providing entertaining media and activities that teens would like to do in their free time. In addition, to support their extra needs in education, future studies or applications for higher education or career.

Teens like to be integrated in activities therefore, it is smart to let them organize their own events and ask them what they prefer to read, hear, and have in the library. Even creating a consulting team of teens can be beneficial for libraries: teens can work for the library in terms of express ideas and topics of events, as well as influence other teens, so enough people are attending. Asking teens what they wish to read saves a lot of time and finance for librarians responsible for acquisition. In addition, teens can give advice in terms of new trends and technologies like gaming, features of new console games, manga's, social media, complex terms that not all librarians are able to learn in short time. (Tiffany McClary, 2013)

Social media provide great opportunities in order to inform, advertise, organize, spread and approach customers. It is an easy way to reach many people by little work, anytime and anywhere. Library`s presence in the social media represents also a modern image and a proof that the library is developing to the media of times.

Some social media like Facebook offer extras, for example event's activity that help to organize a complete event easily and very efficient, by sending invitations, reminders etc. The possibility of creating a survey is also useful: titles of possible events can be listed so users can vote for one or more favourites. It is also possible for users to add their own proposals of events. The same can be done for other decisions, for example about ordering new titles of books and media. This action has the benefit that libraries can find out easily what clients want, but also that the clients feel as a part of the library since their opinion is important and appreciated.

Another interesting option that Facebook provide is the possibility to create a smaller, closed group of users. This option is helpful for specific groups of interest like a "Harry Potter" or "Star Wars" society. These groups can organize their own events, parties, offer events to the rest of the teens like presenting the best volumes in the form of a poetry slam, or exchange opinions about the books they read. In this way, teens stay inspired for reading and keeping the contact to the library. (Tiffany McClary, 2013)

Twitter is also a good medium to keep in contact with teens since it is more conversational. By formulating questions and asking for feedback, users are involved in the library's activity. (Tiffany McClary, 2013)

Because of the evolution of visual information through social media, Pinterest, Instagram and Snapchat provide the opportunity to transfer a big amount of information in an easy and fast way. These social media are suitable to present new media or collections of media. Pinterest offers collaborative boards so users can for instance add their favourite titles of books. (Tiffany McClary, 2013)

On the other hand, libraries should not encourage or even push teens to sign into the social media in order to participate in these actions. Analog alternatives like a black board in the teen`s department, a ballot box for voting, as well as contacting by email or library chat should be provided. All communication ways should be considered equally in order to serve the needs of taking decisions and giving power to clients.

Organizing contests like writing competitions, poetry slams or art shows for teens can motivate young people to develop their talents and skills; also to keep the contact to the library and to spend more free time there. (Kerstin Keller-Loibl, 2011)

Offering console games can attract young customers to visit the library. Console games are expensive and there is no alternative to get affordable access by providers similar to music or movies.\* Another idea is to offer consoles and/or computers for internet games and create a gaming corner for young customers.

An innovative concept is to provide music by a music pool of the library. Young people usually download music by providers like Spotify. \*CDs are outdated; it is even difficult to get a CD-player in order to listen to audio CDs. The library in comparison to vendors can offer music without advertising and without being online constantly. An alternative idea for using the numerous CDs of the library is to provide CD players and good headsets, in order to listen to music or audios in the library. Teenagers can use the library as a place to relax and enjoy a story or music. The same concept can be done for DVDs.

Seminars or workshops about paper writing are also important for teens. Teens have a lot of homework to do, also they have to write a skilled work. Often teens need help in terms of evaluating reliable sources, especially in the age of information overflow and fake news. A seminar about knowing the library and how to use library's tools like the online catalogue, plus an introduction to literature research and how to write a good paper, is an excellent example of a useful seminar offered by the library. A similar seminar but in the form of an interactive workshop can be offered, in order to provide a step-by-step practical support for the skilled work.

In this case, cooperation with schools are essential. Educational seminars and workshops are significant in terms of serving the community but also an easy way to get customers in the library. There is no need of any advertising, taking care of the registrations or worrying about having excessive amount or too many participants for the seminars.

### Adult's sector

The group of adults is an easier group of customers in terms of choosing suitable media and motivating them to visit the library in comparison to teens. However, also for this group, new technologies brought new opportunities: audio books are a good solution for working parents, experiencing unsuitable conditions to concentrate on a book. Audio books can be used while doing household or while driving the car. Visiting the library is not necessary since audios can be downloaded directly on the smartphone or tablet.

All electronic media can be a useful solution for different situations in adult life, for example while waiting for the child's sport course to be over, while travelling or being on vacation, since media are anytime and anywhere available by the means of a virtual library. There is no need of worrying about bringing the media back on time or carrying them. With the spread of smartphones, everybody is a holder of a device in order to download e-books, e-journals, audios etc. Libraries can advertise these new services resulting to the increase of the number of customers without expanding the visits in the library. This contributes to a balanced library function in consideration that the premises are not too crowded and librarians are not being overwhelmed.

Many interesting events can be organized in order to present books and media of the library: cooking events, seminars about reducing stress and meditation, seminars about effective use of the smartphone, You Tube and social media are a few ideas of concepts. In order to organize these events it is important to care for cooperation's with regional institutions or individuals who can help. The University of the region, can provide PhD students or even professors volunteering to share their knowledge about attractive topics to the public. Independent workers who need more clients, for example a new yoga teacher in town, could offer a course in the library for free in order to attract future customers. The same is for other professions like musicians, doctors, florists.

For easier topics of seminars, for example how to use your smartphone or tablet effectively, how to use the internet etc., librarians can offer a series of courses or individual seminars. Libraries should also consider how to receive voluntary work or help for the seminars. Some ideas of seminars offered on the voluntary basis are knitting courses, reading romans out for public, making an easy workshop for basic knowledge the Internet, Microsoft Office or tax return.

Important events or seminars for a region are historical, folklore and regional presentations. Interesting topics or even fun facts of the region can be presented. Cooperation with the archives and museums of the region are vital in this case. Regional artists can present their masterpieces in the form of an exhibition or a small workshop in the library. In addition, international weeks can support the better function and sympathy to other cultures in the community.

Classical events like presentations of new novels, especially by the author, exhibitions of art in the library are important events, which every library should organize. Also for this kind of events, the contact to regional institutions and person plays an important role. All events can be advertised by social media in order to expand the audiene attending.

### Senior citizens

Seniors is a group of customers which have usually a lot of time available. This sensitive group of people in our society faces often the problem of loneliness. Seniors can socialize, learn, entertain and offer their help through the library. Seniors can benefit from media available and lend them in order to spend their free time with interesting activities and amusing media. Older people with seeing or moving disabilities can make a profit out of audio books and electronic media.

In addition, seniors appreciate events in terms of their own interests. An computer workshop with basic explanation of Internet and function of computers, research and access methods of You Tube videos, creating an email account, use of What's App on the smartphone are important issues for seniors. It is not easy for them to understand the new media but in order to stay in contact with their families, they are motivated schooling.

### Citizens with special needs

Especially for disabled people, the new media and technologies brought great opportunities in order to break the barriers in education, information and entertainment.

There are different kind of disabilities and barriers, but in terms of not being able to visit the building of the library, especially electronic media provide excellent solutions. People, who

have to stay a lot at home, a hospital or nursing home, can use the services of the library by downloading e-books, music, audio books, e-journals and e-newspapers on their tablet, smartphone or computer. Having a full virtual library, the choice between numerous media, 24/7, is a big benefit for this group of customers. The library can also consider borrowing e-books-readers.

Another idea, for disabled people, which prefer to read printed books, is to organize a small book collection and borrow them to institutions like hospitals or nursing homes. Books can be placed into boxes and be borrowed for a specific time to an institution. For this service of the library, it is important to make cooperation's with regional institutions. The public library of Chemnitz in Germany, offers a delivery service of books to seniors and customers with special needs.

If the barrier is connected to the ability to see or to understand the text, for instance visual impairment, illiteracy or weakness of reading, the library can offer a plenty of opportunities to inform, educate and entertain. Some examples are audio books, music, movies, console games, board games, e-tutorials.

### Academic libraries

Academic libraries can make a profit out of the availability of smartphones and use them for seminars offered, like library introductions, literature research seminars etc. Applications like *Kahoot!*, *Biparcours* and *Action Bound* offer a platform in order to create a full seminar or a part of it in a amusing and efficient way.

Users can download the app and are immediately ready to participate to a library quiz, library rally, library introduction and other.

Users can be informed about library's events and seminars through social media as well as declare if they are attending, apply and are notified about changes or get reminders.

### Librarians in the smartphone age

Librarians have to inform about new trends, new media and the opportunities offered through new technologies for the services of the libraries. It is important to attend further education seminars about these topics as well as informing by forums, trade journals, webinars and congresses. (Internationaler Verband der Bibliothekarischen Vereine und InstitutionenI, 1996)

Librarians have to develop their skills for creating didactic concepts, organizing and present seminars efficiently for the public. Therefore is necessary to receive further education in these terms. New concepts with the use of apps and smartphones, correct presentation and body language are helpful subjects for further education. (Internationaler Verband der Bibliothekarischen Vereine und InstitutionenI, 1996)

Customers expect the same client friendly and useful services they receive in stores. Being friendly and helpful is necessary not only in the smartphone age; this is a timeless skill of a librarian working for the public service. Further education can be useful also in this topic. Conflict management is a serious issue in order to avoid unhappy customers and a resulting bad reputation of the library.

Furthermore, it is important to realize that the times have changed. Libraries are not rooms for books being stored but places that events and seminars are taking place, pleasant rooms for



reading, playing games, doing activities, and meeting with family and friends are available. The *Oodi* public library of Helsinki is a restaurant, cinema, concert hall, 3D place for presentations, music instruments rental and much more. This should constitute an example and source of inspiration for all libraries

## Conclusions

The spread of smartphones has changed drastically the way we live. It is impossible to imagine our lives without them. People have more opportunities and enjoy comfort because of smartphones. Disabled person have finally the chance to enjoy the services of the library because of the alternatives provided by the new media. Libraries have to adopt to this new situation and benefit from the new opportunities opening. In addition, to develop with changes of time, otherwise the result is to be considered as a dusty place with old books that people do not want to visit. It is our duty to be advantageous for the society and to make use of the public finance as good as possible.

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