

Broadband for All

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KEY IDEAS

1 INFORMATION ACCESS

The library's primary role is access to information, not just in books, but also online resources and specialty databases.

2 LIFELONG LEARNING

The library can be a key resource for learning new skills, both for casual use and for job training and retraining.

3 VIDEOCONFERENCING

Residents, community leaders, and business people need a well-provisioned meeting room designed to support HD videoconferences.

4 BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As more businesses are located in the home, entrepreneurs and start-up businesses need well-provisioned meeting rooms for client meetings and videoconferences.

5 REFERENCE

Librarians are needed more than ever to identify appropriate and reliable sources of information for community, educational, and business needs.

6 MEETING SPACES

Libraries have an essential role in support of community meetings

7 COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER

Libraries can support the creation of information of all kinds, including texts, video, and audio.

8 SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS

Libraries can provide display space for local artists, and a small auditorium can be designed for live performances.

The Emerging Golden Age of Libraries

The Library of the Future

Libraries have a bright future, particularly in small and medium-sized communities. As the Knowledge Economy continues to change the way business is conducted, both locally and globally, libraries can play an essential economic development role as well as enhance community and civic life. Indeed, by changing and adapting their role and mission slightly, libraries could enter a "Golden Age," where the venerable institution plays a more central role in the community, with a commensurate increase in funding.

Information Access

The traditional role of libraries is not going away. We still need access to books, but just as important, we need access to online resources as well. For more than a decade, libraries have provided free public access to the Internet, often at much higher speeds than are typically available from homes and some businesses. Even though access to the Internet is much more common than it was ten years ago, many libraries are expanding the number of Internet workstations because of steady demand for access. Just as libraries treat books as a shared resource that lowers the cost of access, libraries can subscribe to specialized commercial databases like Lexis/Nexis, legal databases, commercial databases, and other kinds of specialized information. The access to those specialized resources is then available to everyone in the community. Libraries can also share access to specialized local information as well, like GIS databases maintained by local governments. Citizens usually cannot

afford the specialized software needed to make full use of such information, but a GIS workstation in the library makes that available to all.

Lifelong Learning

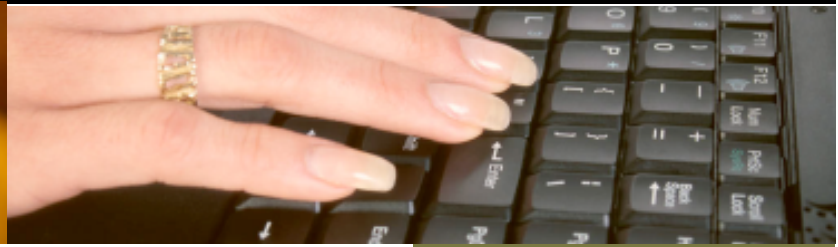
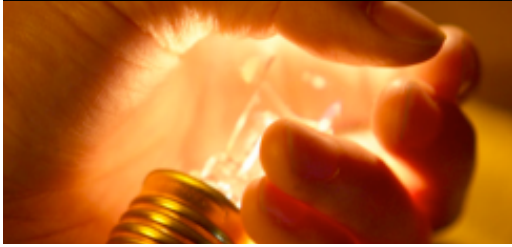
In a time of often drastic economic change, libraries have an important role to play in support of lifelong learning. A classroom equipped with workstations and videoconferencing equipment can support a variety of training and retraining programs, with either a live instructor or video-enabled training with an instructor leading a training session from a distance. Libraries can also provide more casual training, especially on technology topics (but not limited to technology) for citizens who want to learn new skills or how to make better use of computers and the Internet.

Videoconferencing

As the cost of travel continues to increase, videoconferencing will play an increasingly important role as a way to participate in meetings without the expense of travel. The library can provision a conference room for video meetings; the space would be available to local leaders, citizens, and to business people. Business use of the facility would be based on payment of a modest fee, creating a new revenue stream for the library that would help offset the cost of support and maintenance.

Business and Entrepreneurship

Libraries have an important economic development role to play. Small businesses and entrepreneurial start-ups continue to create a large majority of jobs, and these smaller



companies can benefit greatly from library-provided services, including reference desk services, access to online databases, use of “business quality” meeting rooms at the library for client meetings, and use of the videoconference equipment for business and client meetings. Some of these services, like meeting rooms and videoconference facilities, can be provided to businesses for a fee, creating new streams of revenue to support the expanded library mission.

Reference

We need librarians now more than ever, as the Internet has created many new sources of information—so many that it is often hard difficult and time-consuming to identify the right information sources for a particular need. Librarians continue to have an important role to play in providing assistance with the identification of appropriate and reliable information sources of all kinds: books, publications, Web sites, databases, and multimedia materials.

Meeting Spaces

Many communities lack adequate public meeting spaces for community and civic use. Libraries are open and available on nights and weekends when many community, youth, and civic groups meet, and several meeting rooms of various sizes can play an important social networking role in the life of the community.

Community Media Center

When public libraries first became popular, it was difficult and expensive to publish information. Now it is inexpensive to create information, even multimedia materials like video and audio. If a library already has a computer classroom that includes videoconference

equipment, many of the components for a complete community media center are already in place. Some workstations in the library, if equipped with video and audio editing software, will enable citizens and businesses to produce a wide variety of multimedia materials. The library can also now inexpensively host a multimedia server with locally produced audio (e.g. podcasts, music) and video on demand. Even very small communities, using this approach, can have widely accessible community access radio and TV “channels.” Libraries can be not only repositories of information, but can also facilitate the creation of new materials.

Support for the Arts

Libraries already often support the arts by displaying the work of local artists or by hosting movies, story times, and other kinds of live performances. Libraries can have an expanded role by incorporating modest art gallery spaces in the library building, and by including at least one meeting space designed specifically to support live performances and seating capacity appropriate to the size of the community.

Getting Started

Many libraries are already experiencing severe budget pressure from local governments, in part because of the challenging economic times, but also in part because local officials need help understanding that the role of libraries in communities is not over—that is, that the Internet has not made libraries obsolete. Technologically savvy librarians need the help of the community to create a vision of the library of the future as a media-rich repository of information that supports jobs, economic development, and a culturally abundant quality of life in the community.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MODERN LIBRARY

- Very high performance fiber connection to the Internet
- Well-provisioned multi-use classroom for technology training and classes of all kinds
- Expert librarians skilled at identifying appropriate and useful information sources
- One or more meeting rooms and the classroom provisioned to support high quality HD videoconferencing for community and business use
- Support for the development and distribution of all kinds of information, including written texts, video, and audio
- Support for the arts, including gallery space and space for the performing arts, especially music

ABOUT DESIGN NINE

Dr. Cohill is President of Design Nine, which specializes in designing and implementing next generation fiber and wireless broadband infrastructure, with more than seventy years of staff experience. The firm offers broadband planning, design, and project management services, including early stage needs assessment, financial analysis, business model development, organizational design, network design and project implementation.

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