



Trends and Comments From Tech Planning Conversations

Held September, October, November, and December 2006

1. Why has technology become so important to library services?

- Patrons want convenient access to information without worrying about the delivery mechanism or library hours of operation
- Today's kids have grown up with technology and this requires rethinking for librarians. Kids are not afraid to try new technologies and expect libraries and schools to follow suit or risk becoming irrelevant.
- Technology is increasingly at the center of everything libraries do
- Technology is increasingly required to function within society, putting those without technology equipment or skills at a disadvantage. Example: online job applications and food stamp applications.
- Because so much information is available online, technology is changing collection development. Online information is more up-to-date and often more affordable.
- Technology allows libraries to reach patrons that are not otherwise accessible (seniors, shut-ins, etc). Special libraries often have patrons dispersed over a wide geographic area; technology is often the most efficient way to deliver services to this group.
- Technology often enhances communication with patrons and is essential for filling patron requests
- Technology enables better decision-making by the library
- Technology is often the most time-efficient way to accomplish tasks
- Online education is becoming more popular, increasing demand on public PCs
- *"People have expectations that the library will be able to help them understand and use technology. They expect the library to have hardware, software, and staff expertise. Expectations of expertise are increasing."*
- *"Without technology, we would be barely able to do anything. It's the center of everything."*
- *"We rely heavily on technology for managing information and searching in complex ways not possible before. It also makes inter-library cooperation much easier and effective."*
- *"It's easier to do research on the web than it is in libraries. That makes it important to keep libraries relevant."*

2. Who has the responsibility for technology planning at your library? Does your library have a technology plan? Has it been useful? What advice would you offer SELCO/SELS to be sure to address in the new joint SELCO/SELS Technology Plan?

- Several libraries use a technology group, whether formal or informal, to steer decisions and plan. Groups may consist of library staff, trustees, Friends, funding and/or administrative authorities.
- Other libraries place responsibility for planning on the Director, usually within the context of budget planning

- Libraries that are part of a larger educational organization have to work within an administrative structure that provides overall technology planning
- Libraries with technology plans find them useful to steer decisions on new technology and prioritize projects while other libraries indicate that it is difficult to find time for a planning process and are unsure of their immediate benefit.
- SELCO urged to keep local flexibility in mind with the new plan
- Planning is difficult because it is so demand-based. Demand is hard to predict and decisions are made year-by-year as funds are available. Often, it is all libraries can do just to provide the basics and keep up.
- Planning is also complicated because technology is so volatile and hard to predict.
- *“SELCO drives the library.”*
- *“Our planning is by the seat of the pants.”*

3. What new technology have you recently introduced into your library operation? How was the decision made to begin using it? How has it been received?

- Technologies recently implemented by SELCO/SELS libraries include:
 - Wireless Internet is increasingly in demand and libraries offering it continue to see increased use and new customers. Cities are discussing city-wide wireless projects which will affect library decisions.
 - Several libraries have successfully launched podcasts (audio and video)
 - Recent Pharos installations are proving useful for patrons and productive for staff. SELCO group contract enabled a pricing scheme for Pharos that put it in reach of both small and large libraries.
 - Instant Messaging is increasingly seen as a more effective means of reaching Young Adults
 - Front USB ports are increasingly required on new PCs as patrons bring in personal technology devices such as digital cameras
 - Blogs, webpages to survey patrons and foster interactions, digital audio books.
 - Playaways (self-contained digital audio books) are being tried for a year
 - Purchase of additional PCs was made possible by expansion of library facility
 - Digital audiobooks
 - Educational libraries may have students using school-supplied laptops, creating many opportunities and challenges
- New technologies create new concerns:
 - Social networking websites such as MySpace generate community concerns about safety and appropriate use for children and young adults.
 - New technologies emerge ever more quickly, leaving no time to carefully evaluate these things
 - Patrons demand support and access for personal devices, many of which have never been seen by library staff which creates a whole new dynamic and requires tech-savvy, agile staff
 - Providing instruction on library-provided equipment and services for inexperienced patrons is extremely time-consuming, especially when additional staff have not been added
 - Library staff find it hard to keep up with technology
 - Patrons are not always enticed to use new technologies such as downloadable audio books or video
- *“Wireless is moving all over”*
- *”Patrons show up assuming that we will have wireless because we are a public library.”*

- *“Money for equipment is often easier to get than the staff resources to teach and support the services with patrons.”*
- *“The library becomes a study center regardless of type of library.”*
- *The library is increasingly becoming a “Kinkos” providing tools and facilities for production of documents and content.”*

4. What technologies have your library customers/patrons or library staff recently requested? Have you been able to respond? Explain how you accomplished this or describe the barriers.

- Technologies requested but not implemented include:
 - More PCs
 - Single Search
 - Downloading to iPods has been unsuccessful due to Digital Rights Management restrictions
 - Wireless Internet access
 - Patrons want faster (i.e. newer) PCs and more time to use them
 - Streaming video, such TV show episodes made available on the TV network webpage
 - Accepting credit cards for all patron fees
 - Public-access CD burners
 - Need for PCs designed for patrons with disabilities not implemented due to high cost and low demand
- New uses for the Internet are increasingly ravenous for bandwidth. Even in areas with available home broadband, dial-up users sometimes come to the library for the increased bandwidth.
- Libraries face PC management dilemmas such as
 - Demands that the library prioritize PC use and disallow “less important” or “non library” use
 - Balancing peak PC use with non-peak times when making purchasing and staffing decisions
 - Deciding if library PCs should be restricted to specialized uses (Internet, PAC, word processing, etc.) or whether all PCs be available for all uses and ages
 - Implementing new technologies, such as RFID and mapping technologies, that are in demand but still expensive and not readily available
- Other barriers to new technology include:
 - Implementing new solutions to search legacy databases is often difficult
 - Patrons don’t understand the distinction between library databases and Google
 - Lack of space for additional PCs and supporting equipment such as Public Management systems and kiosks
- *“Bandwidth is an issue that is not going away.”*
- *“Money is the biggest barrier.”*

5. What resources do you regularly turn to for technology information?

- SELCO
 - Help Desk
 - Meetings and training sessions, offering information about existing services and emerging technologies
 - Blogs
 - ILS Bulletins and other SELCO communications
- Peers

- Periodicals and other resources:
 - PC World
 - E-Week
 - CNET
 - PC Magazine
 - University of Minnesota TV programs
 - SirsiDynix Institute
 - WebJunction
- *“It is difficult for library staff to find time on the clock to pursue this kind of information.”*
- *“The community in general tells us what is out there and what is desired.”*
- *“SELCO is the reference library for technology.”*

6. What are your expectations for the future? How might SELCO/SELS aid you to meet the technology needs for your library?

- SELCO plays a role in getting staff more adept with technology and should explore possibility of SELCO assisting with training for the public. Example: Sr. Techies project.
- Providing technology training online (as streaming video sessions) would be useful
- Outside speakers can stimulate thought and innovation. Example: Michael Stephens.
- SELCO should play a role helping libraries combine resources to get more out of less
- Need help to integrate expanding options for digital audiobooks, reintroduce ebooks and explore digital video
- Some interest in using Users Group meeting to focus on broad technology information rather than nuts and bolts information
- SELCO should explore technology for the libraries' benefit and facilitate experimentation at libraries
- Digitization of library resources will continue to increase in importance, particularly digitization of local resources
- Patrons want everything delivered electronically; don't want to step in the building
- Looking for technology to help libraries fit in with administrative units marketing efforts
- Timely notification of new services is essential for libraries to make decisions about budgeting and marketing
- Interest growing in PC leasing to facilitate regular budgeting for PC replacement, removing reliance on one-time funding
- Interest in SELCO-created bank of loaner PCs for programming needs or emergency use
- SELCO should select solutions that are open and interoperate with other solutions. Example: Horizon ILS and Unique Management Debt Collection services
- Job exchange between libraries and/or SELCO
- *“SELCO's leadership in making recommendations to libraries on technology questions is important.”*
- *“We need more information, but selective information.”*
- *“SELCO should continue to cultivate a culture of exploration.”*

7. What is SELCO's role in providing technology for libraries?

- SELCO needs to stay innovative and cutting-edge to support the libraries
- SELCO's role should be to equalize basic services between libraries.
- Basic/Value-Added/Special automation fee structure has been a step forward in allowing libraries to pick and choose what is important to them, increasing flexibility

- SELCO is on the front line and best positioned to see what is coming and recommend solutions for libraries that will integrate with the network and fit local needs.
- As appropriate, SELCO staff and board members may be needed to communicate directly with local library boards regarding technology issues
- Comfort level and basic understanding of what goes on under the hood of the PC are often the key for library staff developing technology skills
- ILS support is huge and library automation something local libraries could not do on their own with losing tremendous functionality
- PC Support, cooperative purchases, and consultation are important SELCO services.
- Value Added Services may be costing more but offer more flexibility for libraries
- Online Databases are popular but state choices for ELM have not been well received.
- MnLINK is a wonderful resource but needs a lot fine-tuning
- Inform libraries of new technology, share best practices and guidelines, and share tips for implementation
- Training is important for keeping staff current and can provide opportunities for librarians to discuss and learn about emerging technologies
- Communication is the key for keeping all partners informed about technology decisions.
- Best role for SELCO in local planning may be as consultant
- SELCO should serve as a clearinghouse to connect skilled tech workers and libraries
- *“Libraries depend on SELCO for information and support to make many patron services possible.”*
- *“SELCO plays a role as futurist for displaying and explaining emerging technologies.”*

8. What skills do you, your staff, your administration need for working with technology? What role can SELCO/SELS play in assisting you with technology learning?

- SELCO has a role to play in educating library staff so they know what they need to know
- There is concern that local library staff are being required to acquire ever-greater technology skills
- SELCO could work in conjunction with public libraries to create and share programming via public access television
- SELCO needs to provide a variety of training opportunities on a wide range of technologies and skill levels
- Libraries could use help with recycling, discarding, and/or decommissioning old PCs
- Real-time sharing of information by SELCO staff at conferences is useful for library staff back home
- SELCO should consider promoting new technologies directly to patrons
- Seamless access needs to include services from local to regional to state and beyond without obvious or difficult transitions
- Bibliographic instruction is of limited value; it's difficult to shape patron behavior
- The Internet makes it possible for patrons to use state resources without understanding the value of local collections
- Patrons increasingly bypass library resources for Google so library staff need to understand what is available on resources like ELM
- The library needs to keep up with consumer technology and updated equipment is required for all services to work
- Standardization of equipment and training would be useful. SELCO should consider offering leased PCs.
- Great interest in online training for library staff

- Website design is increasingly required for delivering services. SELCO could provide consultation.
- Circulation training should be before school starts
- In addition to basic services training, SELCO Users Group meetings should educate library staff on broad range of technology topics
- *“Patrons get frustrated when staff cannot help.”*

9. Do you feel certain demographic groups need more attention in your libraries technology planning and services? In the region’s services and support?

- Hispanics
- Deaf patrons
- Teens
- Seniors
- Kids at special libraries with limited hours (no nights)
- Individuals with no PC at home
- Library staff not comfortable with technology
- Making the OPAC less finicky on spelling would be helpful to get reluctant users involved
- SELCO should offer more Sr. Techies classes

10. What can SELCO/SELS do to help share information about new technology with your community?

- Regional advertising can be a problem for libraries on the edge of the region as patrons don't understand the boundaries between regions
- More information about the reference databases and what they can do from home via the Internet
- Billboards! Generic library promotional billboards around the region on major roads would be great.
- Need additional publicity, flyers, etc. for Online Databases
- Flyers touting Chilton’s online for distribution at auto parts shops
- Flyers describing online databases for home-schoolers
- Need updated general information brochure describing SELCO, revise the “your library has 35 branches” brochure
- Need SELCO to provide collective purchasing power for libraries with local media
- Marketing and PR information provided by SELCO to help reach underserved groups
- *“Library message needs to be more pervasive.”*