

The Mobile Library

By Glen Drexhage.

What is the role of libraries in a world that's becoming increasingly saturated with mobile technologies? In June, that big-picture question was explored in various ways at the Second International m-Libraries Conference, held on the sunny UBC campus. The conference, jointly hosted by UBC, Athabasca University, the UK Open University and Thomson Rivers University, attracted more than 120 participants. Presentations and sessions took place at the First Nations Longhouse and the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.

Adapting to the m-world

Following a round of pre-conference workshops, keynote speaker Lorcan Dempsey officially kicked off the event by delivering an intriguing talk entitled "Concentration, Connection, Diffusion: Mobilizing Library Services."

Dempsey, Vice-President and Chief Strategist for the Online Computer Library Center (www.oclc.org), gave some examples of the broad and growing influence of mobile technology, highlighting the recent U.S. presidential election as a watershed moment in terms of communicating via text messaging, social networking technologies and mobile devices.

Libraries will need to adapt to these new and emerging realities. As Dempsey noted, libraries are used to having users adapt to their workflows. But this situation is changing – and libraries now need to think in terms of how their services fit into other people's workflows.

The mobile world will force other changes as well, according to Dempsey. Previously, activities around space, expertise, collections, and systems and services were vertically integrated around a library's management of its collection. Now, however, in a networked environment, these categories are becoming less tightly bound.

Another observation noted that "Libraries must also demonstrate value in the context of growing competition for resources. This suggests that it is important for the library itself to become more

visible." As a result, libraries will need to place a bigger emphasis on areas such as marketing. These are just a few brief highlights from Dempsey's presentation. For more on his views, visit his blog at <http://orweblog.oclc.org>.

A host of sessions over the next two days followed Dempsey's keynote. The wide range of topics included talks on the role of mobile phones in the developing world, using mobile devices to improve community health, podcasting as an outreach tool, mobile learning and much more. A complete



Keynote speaker Lorcan Dempsey at the Second International m-Libraries Conference, held at UBC.

Photo: Glenn Drexhage/UBC Library

program, along with abstracts and PowerPoint presentations, is available at <http://m-libraries2009.ubc.ca>.

In addition, the UK publication Ariadne features a comprehensive report on the conference, which is available here: <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue60/m-libraries-2009-rpt>.

Thank you to the organizers, and thank you to all participants who attended this timely and thought-provoking event.

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