

Technology Watch: What's New, What's Coming, What You Need to Know

Presenter: Stephen Abram

Section: Technical Services Section

Reporter: Jacqueline Toce, SCSU

The CLA Technical Services Section invited Stephen Abram to speak about trends in technology related to libraries. Mr. Abram is a dynamic leader in the library world. He is the Vice President for Innovation for SirsiDynix as well as the current Special Libraries Association President. The session was well-attended and the audience included a diverse group of librarians from public services, technical services and library administration.

Mr. Abram's presentation described the many ways that libraries and society are changing because of the increasing role of technology in the way we access and exchange information. He challenged the audience to think of new ways to deliver services and to be more receptive to the needs and preferences of our patrons.

He emphasized the importance in understanding the new generation of library user and to understand that they learn and think very differently than the previous generation. He said that as they learn, they do not memorize lists and facts but they are visual learners. This makes them better at problem-solving, working in groups, and they are more assertive and confident.

Mr. Abram said that the library should make all the tools that the user needs available to them. This means much more than the library catalog and an Internet browser. For example, the library should ensure that each terminal is equipped with Unicode compliant character sets. He described the need for libraries to take a more active role in streaming media and said that libraries historically have had a tendency to only value textual information. He also talked about the use of cell phones in libraries. Very soon more and more patrons will be using their cell phones instead of their laptops to access and store information. So, he asked libraries to revisit their policies on cell phones and to understand their role as an important information tool.

He also spoke about the value of social networking sites and addressed the need for librarians to advocate for the patron's right to use these sites in the library. Mr. Abram said that 90 percent of people between the ages of 16 and 23 have MySpace or Facebook accounts. He also described the trend in microblogging interfaces (like Twitter) and said that it will replace regular blogging in the next five years.

Libraries should prepare more for the virtual user and realize that they are now serving more than just the physical user. People will continue to want more information faster and through the Internet. Abram noted that people don't know that search engines like Google and Yahoo accept payment for their top results. So, this along with the fact that searches yield thousands of results it will make it harder for people to access accurate information without the help of librarians.

In the final part of his presentation, Abram recommended that libraries embrace change and plan better to react to changes in the environments, especially when it comes to technology. Librarians should take chances and not "study strategies to death". They should try new ideas and, if things don't work out, move on and try to make the next project better.

For more information on Steven Abram, visit his blog <http://stephenslighthouse.sirsidynix.com/>. Slides from his presentation will be uploaded there.