

Project Description

Digital Media Workshop for Humboldt Park Library

I decided that for a starting point, my proposal would be for a technology-oriented project for a library, since that is an area where I have the most expertise to offer. That led to the decision to think about public libraries; public and school libraries tend to have the least access to expertise in digital technology, and I don't anticipate working in a school library, so this seemed like the most realistic scenario for this exercise. My first thought was a digital media workshop of some kind; not the most original idea, as many libraries are implementing them, but it seemed like something that a lot of small branch libraries might have an interest in without necessarily having the knowledge base needed to implement one. A digital media workshop (DMW) in a library is generally oriented towards the library's educational mission, and built for audiovisual production; at a smaller branch library where there might be some interest, but not an overwhelming demand, for these services, a DMW might not get enough use to be seen as a good use of resources.

So I thought about ways to increase the general utility of the initial investment in hardware and space that goes into setting up a DMW, and I realized that a service many people might find useful that has a considerable overlap in terms of the technological capital needed is a media conversion service: the ability to turn old and obsolete AV materials like VHS tapes or cassettes into digital files. This is of course something that libraries have been doing for a while, usually in the context of preserving special collections of some sort, but generally the conversion work is done by librarians. Since there are commercial services in existence that do this kind of work, I feel confident that offering a "self-serve" version at the library is something that there would be an interest in, and is very much within the public library's historic mission of providing their local community with free access to information and information technology services.

The main barrier to adding media conversion capabilities to the library's available services is the greater need for technical support than for most library offerings - transferring a video from an VHS tape to a digital file is a bit more complicated than using a photocopier or browsing the internet. However, there are a couple of factors that help overcome this problem; one is that standalone devices that are designed for exactly this sort of process and are made for the consumer market have become relatively affordable in the past few years. Another is the relative ubiquity of smartphones with video capability; the library can create an instructional video for each piece of equipment or process that they provide for their patrons, provide quick access to this video with QR code that displayed near the equipment, and the patron will be able to follow along the instructional video on their phone at their own pace. A tablet preloaded with instructional videos could also be part of the workstation. Having video instruction on demand will reduce the need for support from librarians; a patron with modest technical aptitude would just need an orientation session of a few minutes to be up and running.

For the library for my "job interview" where I would pitch this proposal, I chose my local CPL branch, Humboldt Park. One of the first issues that would confront a library branch that was potentially interested in implementing a digital media workshop is "where would we put it", and as I visit this branch once in a while I know they have some extra space that seems to only be

open when they are doing early voting - somewhat of a compromise, since obviously you couldn't use the room for both things at once, but it provides a place to set up the station for at least a few months and do an assessment of its usage and demand, since early voting only takes place for a few months every other year or so.