

Chapter 6

Developing In-House Digital Tools: Case Studies From the UMKC School of Law Library

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ABSTRACT

The author describes his experiences working in the Leon E. Bloch Law Library designing and prototyping in-house digital tools to improve communication among internal and external stakeholders. The projects discussed include a custom study room schedule application syncing university calendar to affordable tablets to increase staff productivity, an online data visualization dashboard to help digest large and complex sets of data for better understanding and decision making, and a mobile application to offer students and community an easy access to library resources and services. In addition, the author calls for the need to engage in innovative and experimental practices in libraries by encouraging collaboration with external partners to help develop new services and improve existing ones.

INTRODUCTION

Makerspaces, innovation labs, and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movements became in the recent years one of the important development in technology for academic and research libraries (Johnson, et al., 2015). Perhaps it is due to their ability to engage and allow for hands-on exploration and participatory learning. In their short existence,

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however, they have demonstrated how libraries can reach new constituencies by redefining themselves as community spaces and intellectual hubs and not just a print warehouse.

In the age of information abundance, libraries learned to adapt to cultural, technological and educational shifts to meet the needs of their communities. By bringing innovation into libraries, users now have a place to build, learn, and experiment in a new collaborative and engaging environment. However, innovation in libraries should not be limited to physical spaces and services we provide to our users. Libraries should also adopt innovation into their operations and practices by building, learning, and experimenting with new services and workflows that can support their communities and increase staff productivity.

In this chapter, we describe three prototypes launched with the help and in collaboration with computing and engineering students. Among the projects highlighted are: a custom study room schedule display, an online data visualization dashboard, and a mobile application. While these prototypes are still in their early development stages, they nevertheless demonstrate how working with partners outside of your library and school can open the door to new opportunities for professional and personal growth and success.

Bringing innovation to your library is not clear or easy path. Engaging in developing new, untested and unproven services is often risky (Bieraugel, 2015). In this chapter, we share the experience we gained through successes and failures while exploring the projects libraries can engage in without necessarily benefiting from an institutional “top-down” approach to innovation but rather a “bottom-top” push for the sake of our users and profession.

ABOUT THE LEON E. BLOCH LAW LIBRARY

The Leon E. Bloch Law Library is located within the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, the urban law school of the University of Missouri System. It supports the School of Law’s mission of providing students with a comprehensive and affordable legal education. It aims at improving the legal information and technological literacy of law students and faculty while also providing access to its legal resources to members of the public. The law librarians are heavily involved in the educational programs by supporting the pedagogical needs of law school faculty curriculum and teaching in the first-year program and upper-level advanced research courses. Facing a rapidly changing landscape of library services and infrastructures, the library created in 2013 a new librarian position, the Digital Communications and Learning Initiatives librarian, to be responsible for the law school’s website and

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