

LIBRARY MOBILE SERVICES

A variety of library mobile services are in use in higher education libraries and public libraries. Library mobile offerings generally fall into five categories: 1) library mobile website; 2) text messaging services; 3) mobile catalog search; 4) access to resources, and 5) new tools and services.

LIBRARY MOBILE SITE

Often the first step for libraries going mobile is creating a mobile version of the library website. Instead of recreating the entire site, many recommend that libraries “identify and prioritize services for which a mobile version would be ideal” (Trainor, 2010). Most elements of library mobile sites offer simple pieces of information that a patron would want to know while on the go or en route to the library. Library mobile sites often provide simple pieces of information such as hours, directions and maps, news, and floor plans. Jeff Wisniewski from the University of Pittsburg notes that “no mobile user wants to read your circulation policy on his or her handheld while standing in line at the dry cleaners, but he or she does want to know if you’re open later than 5 p.m.” (2010).

Many libraries with mobile sites seem to have adopted this recommendation. A comparative analysis of university library mobile sites found that library hours and directions or maps were two of the top three most common features of library mobile sites. The fourth most common feature was an option to view the full library site; even though the full library site might be difficult to use on a mobile device, a user may wish to access more in depth information functionality anyway.

Some libraries have built request services into their mobile catalog search. Ghent Library in Belgium has a “request item” option on each catalog details page (see Figure 1). The request page (see Figure 2) requires ID numbers and information about the material. The Orange County Library System has a request option on the main page of search results (see Figure 3). The OCLS mobile site also allows patrons to renew library books.



Figure 1 Ghent Library search results with request option



Figure 2 Ghent Library mobile request page



Figure 3 OCLS search result request option

TEXT MESSAGING SERVICES

Text messaging is another way that libraries are making services available to mobile library patrons. These services have the potential to be used by a wider population than mobile internet services because text messaging is available on most feature phones (though there is not conclusive evidence that these services are actually being used more than mobile web services). Text messaging can be used for patrons to contact the library, for patrons to send information to themselves, or for the library to send automated notifications to patrons.

Text a Librarian: Many libraries have created text message versions of the popular “ask a librarian” feature (generally conducted by chat or email on a desktop computer). There are three common ways that a library can implement this feature: 1) send text messages from a mobile phone staffed by reference desk librarian; 2) use a service to translate text messages to emails (and emails from the librarian back to text messages to the patron); 3) use the “AIM hack” in which patrons send text messages to the library’s AOL Instant Messenger chat account by including a short code in the text message followed by the library’s screen name. Most libraries that have implemented a “text a librarian” option find that they only receive 20 to 40 text messages per month (Weimer, 2010). Administrators of a pilot program at the University of Virginia believes that usage will increase over time: “Although usage of text messaging as a means of contacting reference staff remains low when compared to phone, e-mail, chat, or in-person transactions, the overall number of SMS queries has grown steadily over the past year” (Weimer, 2010).

Text a Call Number: UC Berkeley and UC San Diego, along with many other libraries, have implemented a feature to text a call number to yourself (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). This allows users to search for an item on a desktop computer but then have a portable record of the item’s call number to refer to when physically searching the library shelves.

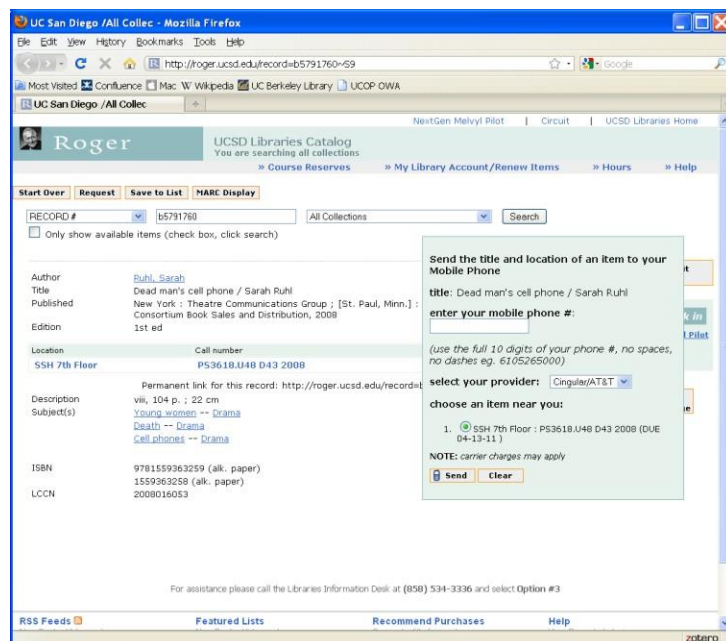


Figure 4 Option to text yourself a call number from UCSD's library catalog



Figure 5 Text message received from UCSD text a call number feature

Library/Patron Communication: Other (but less common) services exist in which a patron can contact the library via text message—and receive a reply via text message—to request a list of items loaned, renew an item; request outstanding fine information, check the availability of an item, or determine library hours. A library may also contact patrons by text message to notify that a requested book is available or send an item due reminder (“M-Libraries - Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki”). Focus groups of higher education students in UK ranked reminders by text as the most desired mobile library service. Overall, this study found “attitudes towards text messaging from the library are overwhelmingly positive” as long as the text messages were for “useful” purposes rather than promotional messages (Walsh, 2010).

CATALOG SEARCH

Another service some libraries provide is the ability to search an online catalog from a mobile device. A survey in the UK found that “55% of total respondents were in favour of being able to access the library catalogue from a mobile phone” (Mills, 2009). Some mobile catalogs reduce the search fields to keyword only, while others provide options to search using more advanced options similar to a traditional desktop online catalog search.

Some libraries have created their own mobile online catalogs, such as Oregon State University (see Figure 6). This mobile online catalog is an example of a well designed interface because it gives users clear, informative results from the results screen. Search results from this catalog show the location and availability of the resource on the results screen, saving users from having to load another page to view details about the item (see Figure 7). The results also indicate if the file is available online and use an icon to indicate whether the file is accessible from a mobile device.

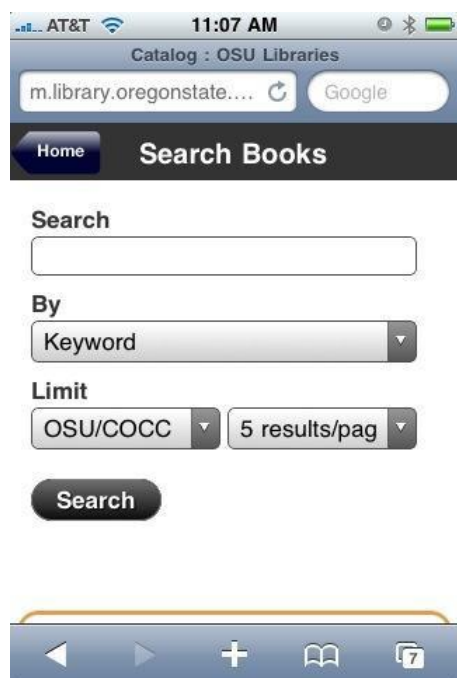


Figure 6 Oregon State University mobile catalog search. This search gives users the option to search by keyword or other parameters, choose the collection to search, and determine how many results to show on each page.



Figure 7 Oregon State University mobile catalog search results. The first page of search results shows the user the location and availability of resources. If it is an electronic file, an icon indicates if it is accessible from a mobile device.

A popular option is WorldCat Mobile, which searches OCLC databases (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). WorldCat Mobile is a native application (rather than a mobile website accessible by any mobile device with Internet) that is available on several major smartphone platforms. The application uses geolocation to display results for libraries near the mobile user. WorldCat has partnered with a company called Boopsie to create WorldCat Mobile.



Figure 8 WorldCat Mobile iPhone Application. This catalog allows users to search by keyword or select a category to search.

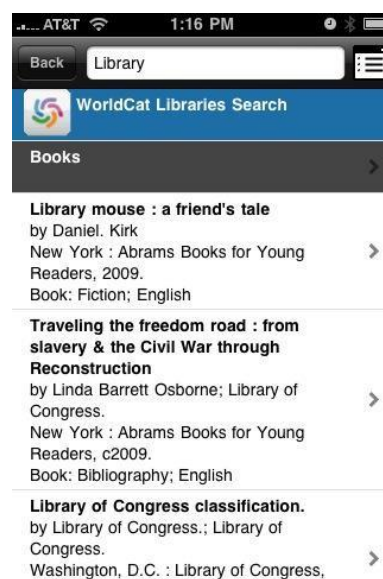


Figure 9 WorldCat Mobile search results. The user must select an individual resource to determine which libraries carry the item.

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