INSPIRATION REPORT

Innovating Access

The Global Shift Toward 24-Hour Library Models with Open+ Technology
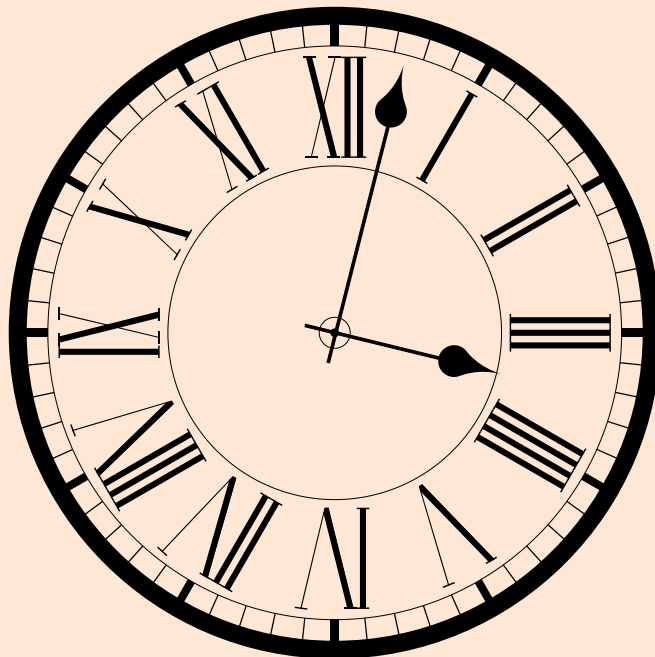
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Introduction

Time is a finite and valuable resource, influencing individual's priorities, decisions, and how the world is navigated. It holds different meanings, shaping responsibilities, priorities, and the overall experience of life. Libraries worldwide are understanding that the needs of individuals are often influenced by time, and one of the issues individuals are facing is that they do not have enough time. Open+ technology is a solution to the problem of time. As a system that allows libraries the ability to provide their patrons more accessibility to library resources and spaces, the reach of libraries can extend beyond regular library hours (Bibliotheca, 2024). Libraries have an important role to the community as a dynamic community space that provides its members and patrons with free services and programs, however the community only benefits if the library is open (Bibliotheca, 2024). The introduction of the Open+ technology into library systems expands access beyond traditional operating hours, accommodating the various schedules and diverse situations that are present in society and the community.

What is Open+ Technology?

Open+ access is a technological model that provides patrons access to the library beyond regular operating hours (Bibliotheca, 2024). Designed to function as a secure, self-service library complementary to staff, Open+ is a system that runs the library system when staff is not present, controlling essential processes and ensuring proper safety measures such as door access, security gates, lights, announcements, devices such as computers and kiosks, cameras, and alarms (Bibliotheca, n.d.). This 24-hour library model is designed to give libraries a choice by enabling them to make their own decisions of how much access can be provided to the community. The purpose of this system is that patrons can access the library at any time, every single day of the week allowing the library to be a reliable resource in the community.

Pioneering Open+ Technology

Denmark was the first to develop and implement Open+ technology into the library in "response to community needs for longer opening hours and to meet the challenge of limited operating budget" (Cowell, 2017). Most individuals that need library resources, such as third shift workers, students, and those with barriers such as transportation often have the least access to the library due to their available hours not falling under operational library hours (Bibliotheca, 2023). Keeping libraries open can alleviate these issues and provide greater access for all populations, especially those that are vulnerable. In Denmark, there is a strong prioritization on community. Libraries have an important role in society. For many, the role of libraries is to provide books. However, libraries can provide connections, resources, knowledge, communication, safe spaces to be, making them diverse spaces that can foster community solidarity (Heath, 2019). By implementing Open+ technology into library spaces, libraries in Denmark have not only enhanced the library experience, but they have continued to build and foster greater trust between the library and the community (Cowell, 2017). This cost-effective solution has pioneered the Open+ technology to all part of the world and is aiding in developing and enhancing libraries are diverse, dynamic community hubs.

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Advantages and Disvantages of Open+

There are several advantages that Open+ technologies can provide to libraries to transform and enhance library services. One primary benefit is extended access, allowing libraries to remain open to the public during all hours of the day, every day of the week. This can include hours that are normally closed such as evenings, weekends, and holidays, accommodating for the diverse schedules of individuals. As well, it can be considered a cost-effect solution as no additional staff is needed. Due to this, Open+ can be considered by institutions with limited funding, and can potentially even aide in allocating library staff time and efforts more effectively (Bibliotheca, n.d.). One of Denmark's priorities is the community and Open+ enables libraries to be multipurpose spaces for the community, supporting engagement. Libraries can accommodate and be flexible with their spaces and ensuring that learning and collaboration can occur within the community (Cowell, 2017). This highlights the importance of reaching new users and building connections that associate the library with positive associations (Stephens, 2014). Through expanding library hours, we allow more opportunities for "interaction across virtual and physical planes" (Stephens, 2014, p. 41).

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Advantages and Disvantages of Open+

However, it is important to consider concerns with this technology as Issues like safety and security can comprise this library model for individuals (Lambert, 2017). Without the presence of library staff, risks such as property damage, theft, or even inappropriate behaviour to take place in library environments (Lambert, 2017). As well, digital divide can occur, especially if there is no library staff to aid. Those that are unfamiliar with how to use technology, or other barriers such as speaking a different language or ability concerns may face barriers in properly accessing and utilizing the systems to its full extent (Lambert, 2017). This can cause issues as trouble-shooting issues might not be able to be completed in a timely manner due to library systems potentially working with other vendors to provide safety and security to their locations (Lambert, 2017). It is important to consider the cost. Open+ access boasts long term pay-off, however, the initial installation and continuous maintenance might not be worth for some library systems. Libraries must address these issues and ensuring that monitoring and procedures are set in place to mitigate these risks and continue this 24-hour service model for its patrons (Bajwa-Zschocke, 2022; Lambert, 2017).

By considering the advantages and disadvantages of implementing Open+ technology and committing to a 24-hour library model, libraries must make informed decisions about how they can address accessibility, inclusivity, and safety to further enhance the library experience.

Success Stories

Denmark's adaptation of this service model has garnered a lot of success, as over 80% of libraries have implemented this technology. Bibliotheca has highlighted in their reports that patron visits have risen as much as 60% in libraries that have implement this model. This highlights the role of libraries as "palaces of the people" and "for the people," expanding beyond to embrace its role as a dynamic community hub and resource (Stephens, 2022). Due to this success, other countries have begun to implement this model into their library systems, this aides in the further development of the model.

Global Impacts

The United Kingdom has over 100 libraries in both urban and suburban areas that have adopted this system. It has been noted that there has been increased usage and a more positive perception of the library due to its accessibility. Australia is using the system to address the need for space in specific areas of the city, specifically near schools where study and meeting spaces are often needed. This has benefited students and community groups, especially with the ability to gather after hours. Countries such as China and the Turkey have not only implemented 24-hours access libraries but have also begun to offer food and beverage options to their patrons. This encourages patrons to have longer visits in the library and feel comfortable in the space (Celik, 2018; GT staff reporters, 2024).

Gradually adopting this model is Canada, where staffing and budget constraints are the reason why libraries cannot stay open. Rural libraries are making accommodations to ensure that patrons can get access to library resources on their own schedules.

Not only is this model being adopted globally, but innovative additions are furthering the evolution of what this model is capable of. Open+ access technology is expanding beyond traditional library hours, but by improving patrons needs, the user experience can continue to build positive associations with the library as a reliable and helpful community resource.

Implementation of Open+ Technology in Libraries

Implementing Open+ technology in library systems must be strategic to ensure success. Throughout this entire process, evaluation is crucial to the success. Libraries should continually track data, gather feedback, and assess the system. When piloting this initiative, libraries should begin with one branch to test its effectivity, troubleshoot any issues, and gather feedback to refine the service model. Staff training should be prioritized to make sure employees are equipped with the tools for the patrons and to set the technologies in place when the day ends. Clear procedures must be set in place for safety and security measures so that patrons using the library without the presence of library staff can be properly alerted and follow the proper protocols in the event of an emergency. Promotion of this service model is crucial to improving the Open+ access technology and help track trends taking place throughout the 24-hours the library is open. Providing accessible and user-friendly services and devices for self-service, managing patrons' concerns can safeguard the overall experience and instill patron confidence in the service model and library. It is through clear communication between the groups that the benefits of Open+ can be shared and properly utilized. By focusing on these elements, the benefits of the technology can be maximized and the transition of this service model into libraries can be seamless, safe, and accessible.

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