

Libraries in the Digital Age

A frequently heard question when discussing public libraries is, “Why do we need libraries when we now have electronic books?” The answer to that question has multiple layers. While “e-books” are convenient and a big part of how we read these days; there is surprising research on print books and their enduring popularity. A recent Pew Research study of over 2,200 people revealed that people firmly believe in the importance of public libraries and librarians.

80% of respondents said it is “very important” for libraries to lend out print books to patrons. Additionally, the same number responded that librarians are needed to help with obtaining information and resources. 77% said libraries are needed to provide free computer and Internet access. 76% stated the need for quiet work and reading spaces, and 74% cited programming for children and teens.

While e-books are a staple in library services, it's important to remember that libraries aren't just repositories for books, they are so much more. Library programs are another option for patrons and they allow users to connect with the library in a different way. If children attend storytimes, they are working on their early literacy skills, fine motor skills, and social skills. Other community programs allow patrons to learn about canning and preservation, seed saving, how to make at-home bath and body products. Outside of programs, libraries offer many digital services such as databases that allow library card holders to learn a new language free of charge. If someone needs to repair something on their car, the library pays for access to automotive repair databases so that people have access to the information they need without having to buy a repair manual. In addition to these services, library card holders can come into the library to use the computers and public WiFi.

Another recent study showed that the age group we would assume would be the most enthusiastic about digital resources prefer print books. A Voxburner study of 1,400 16-24 year olds revealed that 62% of those responding stated they prefer print books to electronic versions. Additionally, studies from the Pew Research Group also show that the vast majority (76%) of young adults read daily for pleasure, as well as schoolwork. Young people respond that they view their public libraries as welcoming places to study, find help from librarians, and just “hang out” after school.

Sources:

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