Title:
Computers In Libraries Won't Replace Books Anytime Soon

Word Count:
544

Summary:
The idea of a paperless society has been the dream of computer enthusiasts for many years. Along with the "cashless society", the hope that computers would replace the written word has resonated through sections of American society for many years. Although home computer usage has grown incredibly in the last 15 years making this seemingly possible in the near future, government agencies are slow to catch up. Libraries will have shelves of books for many years too come.

Wit...

Keywords:
Refurbished Laptops, Computers, Library, Government Technology

Article Body:
The idea of a paperless society has been the dream of computer enthusiasts for many years. Along with the "cashless society", the hope that computers would replace the written word has resonated through sections of American society for many years. Although home computer usage has grown incredibly in the last 15 years making this seemingly possible in the near future, government agencies are slow to catch up. Libraries will have shelves of books for many years too come.

With home computer and Internet usage at an all time high it is no surprise that public libraries are struggling to make ends meet. Research that would have in the past required the use of a library can now be done much faster using a home PC and a few hours on Google. Couple this with the fact that library computers are generally out of date and over crowded, home research becomes the obvious choice. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in association with the American Library Association (ALA) recently funded a study that shows the demand for computer and Internet services has stretched existing library resources to capacity. The study also shows that "more than 73% of libraries reported that they are the only source of free public access to computers and the Internet on their communities". Although there is clearly great demand for these resources, there is little growth ahead. During peak usage hours it is not uncommon in some communities to have an hour wait time for computer access, and only 25% of all libraries report they have the computers to meet demand according to the ALA.

Most libraries have not had a substantial increase in computers or technology since 2002.

This lack of technology is doing the most harm to the poor. Americans who have home computers and a fast Internet connection may not realize that large portions of society are cut off from the potential this technology can bring. Many Americans are now at the point where they could not imagine not being able to access the Internet, and the knowledge that would be denied is enormous. As a bastion of knowledge it has fallen to libraries to upgrade their capabilities and help more people access the information they need.

Cost is an issue in upgrading the existing public library technology infrastructure. Tax revenue is still the primary method of funding public libraries, but local government taxes have not been enough for a long time. It has become necessary to increase fines associated with library use and solicit donations in order to make ends meet and provide information services to patrons in need of a computer. Even using older refurbished laptops and desktops that have been donated or purchased has not offered enough saving to allow libraries to catch up to demand.

A new method of cutting costs and reducing computer wait time is wireless networking. By using wireless and Satellite Internet more than 17% of libraries claim they can reduce wait time by becoming a "Wireless Hot Spot" and allowing patrons to access the Internet from their own laptops as well as the library's. This solution also solves many bandwidth issues libraries are having, but not all. Considering that some libraries still use dial-up Internet access any improvement in this area would be helpful.