

Access the Web - Mobile Apps for Librarians

by June L. Power

In an increasing mobile environment, library and reading related activities often take place on a phone or tablet device. Not only does this mean that library web sites must keep mobile navigability in mind, but also that apps will into how people interact with information and with libraries. While apps don't serve every purpose, and sometimes a simply designed mobile web site is a better choice that I as a librarian find myself turning to on a regular basis. What are your favorite apps? Write me at june.power@uncp.edu and tell me which apps you can't do without.

These apps are free and should work on Apple, Google, and PC platforms that support app use. Due to the variety of mobile platforms, I am not providing the usual URLs I include when reviewing web sites. These apps can be found through the app store specific to your device. As with all apps and online networks, please be aware of security risks to your phone due to both viruses and hacking. Because many of these apps interact with each other and with sites on the Internet, though they are vetted sites be wary and use secure and frequently changed passwords to decrease your vulnerability to malicious interference.

Goodreads

I use Goodreads all the time, both the app and the web site. It is social networking for readers, and integrates with Facebook and other social networking sites. It allows you to see what your friends are reading, allows you to find reading groups in a number of genres, get book recommendations, find book and author information, and so much more. You can maintain personal to-read and currently reading lists, as well as rate books you have finished and write reviews about them. The app includes a barcode scanner that allows you to quickly search for books - very handy in libraries and bookstores. I often use the app to update my reading progress in a book, which in turn updates my Twitter and Facebook statuses. If the app also provided the ability to read e-books it would be perfect. While the app is not as robust as the web site - the Goodreads quotes aren't accessible for example, I still find it extremely useful and one of my favorite apps.

Dropbox

I love Dropbox. I have it installed on all of my computing and mobile devices. It provides free cloud storage and file synchronization. When you install it on a computer, it creates a folder with your other document folders to which you can save files to as you would any other computer folder. This folder then is accessible across platforms, machines, and also

via web access, and can be further subdivided and organized like any other folder on your computer. You can purchase additional space, but you may also just take advantage of the 5 GB of free space provided when you sign up for the service. With add-ons like “Send it to Dropbox,” which allows you to save files to Dropbox via email, and cloudHQ, which allows synchronization with Google Docs; I have found Dropbox to be extraordinarily useful. Since I am constantly switching workstations due to desk coverage and working from home, as well as being consistently on the go, I can’t have my files tied up in the memory of one workstation. Dropbox solves that problem for me. The phone app syncs your phone to your Dropbox cloud allowing you to access all your files on the go. Additionally, pictures taken with your phone can be automatically added to Dropbox so that they aren’t accidentally deleted, or if your phone gets lost, or you need to free up your phone memory, which I am always running out of.

Wikipedia/Wikipanion

Ok, I am ready for the criticism. What self-respecting librarian turns to Wikipedia for reference work? I admit - this one does. Saying that in this field is almost tantamount to saying that I did my research using only Google searching. Do I consider it equal to a peer reviewed piece in an academic journal? No, but I do think it is incredibly useful as a ready reference tool. While I won’t complete deep research using only Wikipedia, being able to find quick information about a topic is something that Wikipedia serves as an excellent tool to accomplish. A few tools from the regular web page, such as random page, saving pages, and searching within a page, are missing, but overall I am impressed with the app and use it frequently. The only improvement I really want badly is the ability to view more than one page at a time, but I am perfectly content with the app as it is now. Wikipanion is the Apple version of the application, and provides a number of additional features not available in other versions of the app. It provides the in-page search feature, the ability to save pages, foreign language support, and much more. It would be nice if the apps on the different platforms were given the same functionality, however since both platforms have the app I have included it here.

IMDB

If you have never used the Internet Movie Database before, you are in for a treat. I am a confessed movie and TV junkie, and often turn to IMDB when stumped by a “now what did I see that guy in before” or “what was the name of the prequel” type of question that pops up when watching a movie or show. IMDB is an extremely large database of movie, TV, and celebrity information. You can watch trailers, get show times and TV listings, or look up virtually any detail about a movie or show - from the actors and production staff, to reviews, quotes, trivia, and more. The app allows you to search this database, personalize it (with ratings, special lists, favoriting your local theatre), and access the IMDB message boards. It also integrates with Facebook and other social media, allowing you to share what you find

entertaining. I am equally addicted to the Internet Broadway Database - or IBDB - which provides the same sort of information for stage productions as IMDB does for movies and television. I love being able to access this information on my mobile device, as it always seems to be a spur of moment type of thing for which I don't want to waste time having to boot up my laptop. Having it at my fingertips allows me to better integrate using this resource into my entertainment sources seamlessly.

EasyBib

This is an app that is great for students, faculty, library staff - anyone who has to deal with creating citations, managing bibliographies, or other such work. Simply by scanning the ISBN barcode on the book, or by typing in the title, a user can create an accurate citation using their preferred citation style - whether Chicago, MLA, or APA. Once the item(s) have been entered, the citations can be exported to the app's bibliography management device. One problem with this app is that it does not integrate well with the EasyBib web site, making this more of a separate program than a mobile version of the existing program. For the scanning function to work, your device must have a built in camera, which sometimes takes a second to focus. However, with the amount of work this saves in looking up how to properly format your citations, I consider that a minor flaw that I can live with in this app.

WorldCat Mobile

I love to be able to look up books wherever I am, which is often while seeing one featured on TV, or walking through a store, or other times when I don't have a computer handy. Even at work, I often turn to WorldCat for a catalog before using our local one, just because I prefer searching using their interface. I love being able to set a location and get a list of libraries that have an item ranked by distance from me. This is especially handy when traveling and you are unfamiliar with the local libraries. The app allows you to search for materials just like you would an online public access catalog, using title, author, or keyword. You can either specify a zip code or allow the app to track your location, in order to get your ranked list of local libraries with the material. If you are using the app on a mobile phone, you are also able to click on the library's phone number and instantly connect via telephone. The app will also help you map a route to the library, another great feature that I use a lot when traveling. The mobile app really highlights the strengths of the WorldCat database. At this moment, it is a web app rather than an app you download, but I have found it easy to use and highly convenient.

An e-reader (iBooks, Kindle, Aldiko, etc.)

E-readers are becoming increasingly common, and electronic books are increasing in

number and variety as well. E-readers tend to be very platform specific. Whether you have a Nook, a Kindle, an iPad, or a Droid powered device, will inform which e-reader app(s) you will have available to you. Aldiko is the predominant e-reader for the Droid platform and is also the only application I found that lets you load e-books (in EPUB format) via a manual micro SD card transfer. It would be nice if support were added for Adobe Digital Editions so that library books in e-book format would be more accessible. Bookmarking features would also be a nice improvement. The free version used to be very robust, but a lot of functionality is now only available in the for purchase version, though in my opinion it is worth the purchase price. This app allows you to adjust both brightness and page size, which are important functions for me as I have horrid vision. The Amazon Kindle app is available both for Droid and Apple products, but works only with e-books purchased from Amazon. This app allows you to access Amazon e-books through the Kindle cloud, which allows you to create an account and store e-books without having to purchase the Kindle device. It is not my favorite app, as sometimes I find it has display issues as well as a complete lack of organizing tools, but I use it for books I only have in Kindle format for which I would otherwise have to log onto the Kindle Cloud on my computer. iBooks is of course the Apple e-reader, meaning the books read on this reader must be purchased from iTunes. Overall, I like the appearance of this reader and its ease of use and ability to annotate/highlight, but its lack of ability to organize items is a big drawback to this platform. However, big pluses are its support of ePub and PDF formats.

Pocket (Formerly ReadItLater)

I am constantly bombarded with information on a daily basis, and like most of you, I am so swamped it often ends up in piles to read or do later. This is especially true of Internet browsing, where I have been known to have too many tabs open to count, simply as a way to save something to read later without having to print it. Pocket to the rescue! This is a handy little app, that was originally known as ReadItLater (a name I like better for its intuitiveness), and allows for you to bookmark all those things you come across in your day that you just don't have time to read at the moment. Bookmark articles, videos, and web pages, and they will be synced across your phone, tablet, and computer for you to view later - even if you are offline. It interacts with a number of other apps to make bookmarking easy from Facebook, Twitter, or any of 300 other apps. You are able to add tags, comments, or share to Evernote. Another nice feature is that it declutters web sites, getting down to the basics and making reading a lot easier on the eyes. The listen feature is also a huge bonus, allowing you to listen to your news rather than read it.

Evernote

At first I didn't realize this was a multi-platform app, but when I did it made this useful app that much greater. Evernote is a lifesaver for me, as I swear my memory is going earlier than it should. Evernote lets you take notes, capture photos, create to-do lists, record voice

reminders, basically helps you remember everything across all of the devices you use. Not just are the notes made, but Evernote makes these notes completely searchable across devices as well. This app is highly versatile, and can be utilized in so many ways both professionally and in your personal life to help keep yourself organized. I am constantly finding new ways of using this app. One of my favorite features is being able to attach files to the notes, so that related materials can be easily grouped for meetings. Fair warning though that this app is highly addictive. The free version has some limits to usage and more advertising, but still well worth the download. The pay version is well worth the money.

Scan2PDF Mobile

As an Access Services/Reference Librarian, I have found this app to be especially helpful for quick document delivery when the document delivery office is closed. It is also useful for quickly sharing material with patrons and colleagues for other reasons. Using the camera built into your device, you can convert single or multiple pages into a PDF file. It's like having a pocket scanner, and makes me feel like I am James Bond. (Humming the James Bond music to yourself while scanning definitely enhances the experience.) That said, lighting is incredibly important. While you don't have to be a professional photographer, there still is this consideration to make, especially if your device is not equipped with a flash and your library's fluorescent lighting makes dark pictures worse. In my opinion, the pay version is worth it, but if you don't mind a watermark the light version is just as good. It's not a replacement for document delivery with quality scanning, but it is definitely handy in a pinch.