

10 Ways The Library Of The Future Will Be Different

Libraries have acted as community cornerstones for millennia, and every April marks School Library Month, celebrating how they promote education and awareness in an open, nurturing space.

What makes them such lasting institutions, though, isn't the mere act of preserving books and promoting knowledge. Rather, it's the almost uncanny ability to consistently adapt to the changing demands of the local populace and emerging technology alike. The library system probably won't disappear anytime soon, but rather, see itself blossoming into something new and exciting in congruence with today's myriad informational demands.

1. **More technology**

Probably the most obvious direction libraries will trend involves more seamless integration of technologies at a faster, more sophisticated pace than even now. With so many exciting new gadgets and concepts such as ebook readers, tablet PCs, open source, and more, they have plenty of resources on hand to meet community demands. Books, sadly, do not hold the same collective appeal as the shiny and new gadgets, but enterprising librarians know they can still bring literature to the masses by utilizing its lust for technology.

2. **Sensory story times**

As awareness of the needs of autism spectrum and developmentally disabled children swells, more and more libraries are scheduling sensory story times making sure they get to enjoy literature in a manner most comfortable to them. Many libraries who have developed such programming recommend visual schedules so kids know what's coming up next, carpet tiles or cushions for sitting, and hands-on activities. Even mainstream children can enjoy these events, so all members of the community benefit from creating a more inclusive space.

3. **Better outreach to ESOL and ESL adults and children**

New York's public library system, in an effort to make sure as many patrons take advantage of their offerings as possible, has put forth the time, money, and energy to improve upon its ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) and ESL (English as a second language) programming. Increasing globalization means more multilingual cities, and because libraries stand as integral pillars of the community, they make for excellent introductions to what new neighbors might come to expect. And greater engagement means greater communication and closer relationships.

4. **Automation**

If the automated system at the Joe and Rika Mansueto Library at University of Chicago catches on, readers might say, "Sayonara!" to stacks. Not only are almost all of its holdings available for online retrieval, visitors can also access them in person without having to navigate the often baffling academic library cataloging system. Instead, they input their desired read and a complicated system of machinery burrows 50 feet underground to fetch and deliver it. No browsing required. Because of the expense however, it will probably be quite a while before full automation catches on in libraries worldwide.

5. **Emphasizing community space**

6. Placing more stock in technologies obviously frees up quite a bit of library space, and leaders at the Anoka County Library in Minneapolis know just how to put it to good use. More room means they can start offering a wider range of programming, serving as a community center focused on learning rather than just literature. Some of their plans include genealogy classes targeting seniors wanting to know more about their family histories and giant letter blocks for children. Libraries probably won't disappear to digitization, but their shape will likely change over time.

6. **More social media savvy**

As with the latest in literary gadgetry creeping into libraries, social media has already started ingraining itself as integral to the experience. It offers greater community outreach, promoting and answering questions about events, and provides a forum in which to share cool book news. Social media also makes it easier than ever for libraries to receive feedback about what sort of programming the community wants most, suggestions about how to improve offerings, and talks about what books need to make their way to the shelves. Hosting online discussions certainly holds its merits as well!

7. **Digital media labs**

In an effort to lure in more teenagers, Chicago Public Library hybridized the traditional system with a digital media lab dubbed YOUmedia. There, they can take advantage of the video recording and editing equipment, computers, recording studio (complete with keyboards and turntables!), and classes on graphic design, podcasting, and photography. YOUmedia also hosts an Internet-based literary magazine. With so many seriously amazing offerings, high school kids can learn even more about the potential career paths that interest them most; seeing as how libraries are all about education, these offerings don't stray from their core values.

8. **Electronic outposts**

Similar to the satellite system already in place for county libraries in larger towns and cities, futurist Thomas Frey thinks that – over time, of course – they might start the same thing with a more digital bent. Rather than acting as an extension of a central library's physical holdings, they would work as almost a "cyber cafe" where patrons go to access digital archives. Many of the holdings would revolve around preserving the history of the surrounding communities, adding a more personalized dimension to the experience.

9. **Crowdsourcing**

New Jersey's Madison Public Library is one of many libraries who understand that their survival depends on how well they interface with the neighborhoods that support them. So they've turned towards crowdsourcing their future, hosting focus groups and opening up to suggestions from professionals, patrons, and professional patrons alike. Much of what the people had to say of course involved technology, like training reference librarians in resources like YouTube, Wikipedia, Google, and more. They also wanted to see more programming aimed at engaging the growing Latin American community. All these responses help MPL better provide exactly what their visitors needs for a well-rounded educational experience.

10. **More active librarians**

Once again, the precedent has already been set here, with most libraries around the world asking their staff to pull double duty as event planners and class leaders. Seth Godin thinks

the librarians of the future will almost universally be tasked with tutoring students on their homework, teaching patrons computer basics, and other responsibilities putting them at the front lines. But this transition is a positive one, as it nurtures a heightened sense of community and destigmatizes the librarian profession, painting them as neighborly mentors instead of silencing book police.

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