

Developing Mobile Technology Lending in a Medical Library

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Background

The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust library service has had a keen interest in mobile technology for a number of years. Personal Digital Assistants were introduced in 2004 and the library service has continued to keep up with new developments in this area.

The Mobile Technology Project

In early 2010 a project was launched to investigate several types of mobile technology that could be made available for lending within the library service. The project started out investigating eBook readers and a Kindle and two Sony eReader models were purchased. These were tested by the librarians within the service to see how they could be used and if there would be value in lending these out to library users. It was discovered that although the eBook readers could be lent to users, the library did not have enough medical and nursing

ebooks which could be used on these devices. This limited them to being able to use free ebooks, which were mostly fiction titles. It was decided that the trial would not be expanded past the initial three readers. During this time other types of mobile technology were investigated; specifically tablet devices such as the iPad which had just been launched.

iPads – the beginning

Initially a couple of iPads were purchased for use within the library team. The clinical librarians and the training librarian used the iPads so that they could more easily provide services away from the library. The iPads were used for searching and providing training in wards and departments as replacements for laptops. The librarians found the iPad to be a very useful tool for the workplace in the initial pilot, so additional iPads were purchased with the aim of setting up a lending service.

Developing a lending strategy

10 iPads were purchased for two of our sites in April 2011. Several weeks were spent preparing for the launch by devising the policies and procedures for how the iPads would be lent. A short one week loan period for the devices was agreed with the option to renew four times. This would allow the user sufficient time to get used to the device and find out how useful it could be in the work environment.

The iPad lending service had a soft launch in April 2011 with limited advertising in and around the libraries. However unprecedented demand for the devices was shown and almost immediately a long waiting list built up at each site.

The initial devices were set up in a very basic fashion as it was not known what the library users would want or need on the iPad. Each device was set up with links to the main library resources, including our ebook collections, ejournals and other electronic resources. No apps were installed to begin with as it was felt that the iPads should be as open to the user as possible. No restrictions were placed on the devices so users could install what they liked and could login with their own Apple accounts and transfer over apps from other devices.

Challenges

A number of problems with lending iPads have been encountered however most of these have been simple to solve. One of the first issues surrounded issuing chargers. iPads and chargers were initially issued as one item, but some were returned without the charger. The procedure was changed so that the charger was issued separately. Another issue with chargers was that some were returned damaged, one was returned with a counterfeit lead and some borrowers returned the wrong charger as there is a difference between iPad and iPhone chargers.

Another challenge was setting up an iTunes account. An account is necessary for downloading apps which are one of

the features we would like to promote more. However iTunes accounts are designed as personal accounts and are usually tied to a credit card. This issue was worked around by letting users login with their own account to install apps rather than pre-installing the apps for the user. An account has now been set up so that the librarians can install apps onto the iPads.

Feedback

A short survey was sent to a proportion of the iPad users to gain some feedback on the usefulness of the iPad for work. The results were not spectacular as only 14 (50%) of respondents found the iPad useful for work. The main reason given was lack of internet access as our IT department was not able to support access to the hospital wi-fi for these devices. This has changed subsequently as wi-fi is now available across all sites at a small charge for the user.

Future Directions

Librarians have been investigating the different apps suggested by clinicians with the aim of preloading these onto the iPads. Apps from our suppliers, which provide quicker or offline access to information, are also being added. There have been a number of changes by ebook providers in recent months; many suppliers now support the downloading of ebooks. This means that it could soon be possible to preload the iPad with a selection of general ebooks which are available offline or provide guidance on how to download the eBooks to the iPad.

The iPads are also being used to signpost the library's resources more effectively as our training videos, guides and direct links to our electronic resources collection are all available in one place.

Conclusions

Our project has shown that there is significant demand from library users for these new devices and that they are a useful tool for promoting electronic resources. Teething problems were encountered at the start but most of these issues have been overcome. However in order for the iPad to be used effectively in the work environment internet access is an essential requirement.