

# From Page to Screen Libraries embrace technology to welcome readers

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Libraries have reacted to the explosion of knowledge available to their users by welcoming it — and making sure people are able to put it to use.

A library is the place to find a Stephen King novel or a politician’s autobiography, but it’s also a multifaceted resource. Non-fiction books offer information and history. There are areas for public speakers and community events. The library building itself is a place to work quietly or in a small group within a private space.

Highlighting the options beyond the literature is one way in which libraries are staying relevant in a world where users can find plenty of reading material online, said Scott Duimstra, director of the Capital Area District Libraries (CADL) in Lansing.

“You get your information from the internet, but we teach you how to use that information,” he said.

## Teaching in Person and Online

Library staff are more like teachers than reference tools. They can still help a reader find a volume on the shelf or answer a student’s question for a book report, but they also encourage literacy. This comes in the form of courses for English as a second language or for story time, where preschoolers are guided to learn their alphabet; it also extends beyond actually learning to read.

CADL South Lansing aids in applying for jobs and writing resumes, while several libraries offer training for computer basics like using an Android or iPhone device. The most advanced class with an instructor in the room is a digital seminar on online marketing and promotion.

Dozens of library systems including Lansing's CADL locations, Kent County and the University of Michigan offer access to Lynda.com: a virtual warehouse of several thousand training videos on subjects from Excel fundamentals to becoming a singer or songwriter.

While Lynda requires a subscription and instructional videos can be found on YouTube for free, the value of Lynda is in its consistency, with the site offering experts in the field they're discussing; it's also in quality, with videos providing clear instruction without being hidden among images of cats and movie reviews.

Duimstra said information on writing a computer program or learning software is proving to be better in a video format. "If I'm going to fix my car, I'll watch a video," Duimstra said. "I don't want to get out a manual."

Libraries affiliated with colleges and universities also offer plenty of electronic resources, but theirs are often more academic. Judy Fales, director of the Olivet College's Burrage Library, estimates about a quarter of the library's budget each year — some \$32,000 — is spent on subscriptions to professional databases for specific industries: the social sciences, Project MUSE; business, Hoover's Guide; and biology, BioOne. The school is planning to add subscriptions for nursing and more in criminal justice.

Opened in 1889, the Burrage Library is the longest continuously operating library in Michigan, financed by the college but open to the public. And its popularity of online resources means it's becoming more of a destination.

Fales said the library has 30 computers available: two specifically for the public, as well as study rooms where students can pull up an online presentation or do research. Most students — and many Olivet-area residents — own their own computer, tablet or phone, making materials always available.

"It's as if the library never closes," she said. "If they have a tablet, they have the library."

## **By the Numbers**

Computers are a draw for libraries. Duimstra said a sizable portion of former collections of newspapers and magazines — if they're even published now — are found online instead of in print.

The circulation of physical books actually being checked-out from CADLs has dropped from 1 million in 2007 to about 980,000 in 2017. There aren't comparable statistics for other libraries in the state, though the Library of Michigan reports an average increase in circulation from 205,000 to 262,000 in the same 10-year period. The growth is strong in the number of computers available to the public at libraries — from 9,550 statewide in 2007 to 12,102 in 2016.

The book publishing industry, like the newspaper business, has been slow to adjust to the accessibility of its product on the internet. CADL, like many library systems, use Hoopla: a streaming service where users can check out electronic versions of books, movies and audio.

Hoopla is free for library visitors, but the libraries themselves pay for access to the system and are charged each time someone borrows a novel or a film. That's the reason for the restriction on the number of e-books available at one time — the limit isn't the availability of the item, it's the amount of money the library has budgeted for paying for those e-books.

The interest in specific books depends on a lot of outside influences. Library staff can talk about books they think a reader would like, but many readers come in looking for a book they've heard promoted in an interview or stories made into their favorite films.

In the first half of 2017, *Publishers Weekly* reports that adult romance — think “50 Shades of Grey” and Danielle Steele books — and thrillers novels sold more copies than any other single genre, including fantasy or graphic novels.

The best-selling book in the two fastest-growing categories, adult history and juvenile biography, was “Hidden Figures” by Margot Lee Shetterly, which became a film released in December 2016. Other popular genres include young adult fantasy like “Harry Potter” and suspenseful stories.

“It's very much commercial-driven — what people hear on the radio or see in movies,” Duimstra said. “People are always looking for an escape.”

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