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# Tablet technology in support of professional productivity

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## **"Tablet Technology in Support of Professional Productivity"**

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In 1987, Apple Computer, as it was then known, produced a five-minute video about potential human-computer interaction, set in a time approximately 25 years in the future (coincidentally, about the time in which these words are being written). The video depicted a university professor interacting with a touch-activated tablet-like device and a voice-activated artificial intelligence (AI) agent, communicating with students and colleagues, reviewing his daily agenda, and preparing a presentation for later delivery. It appears that the hypothetical "Knowledge Navigator" tablet device was imagined as a great aid to professional productivity.

In 2012, our reality involves the existence of touch-activated tablets and voice-activated AI agents (namely Siri) as aids to our professional productivity. In this chapter, we'll look at how tablets are already being used to communicate with students and colleagues, to review daily agendas, to prepare and give presentations, and to engage in a variety of other activities that help to manage the professional lives of academic librarians.

## **Literature Review**

Outside the world of libraries, business trade publications have discussed the increasing use of tablet computing within organizations. Meister, Kaganer, and Von Feldt (2011) reported in their article “2011: The Year of the Media Tablet As a Learning Tool” that a recent online survey had indicated that “nearly 40 percent of executives plan to incorporate media tablets into learning and development initiatives in 2011,” and other findings from the same survey pointed to significant managerial interest in using tablets to coach and mentor employees.

In the popular library press, several recent articles have addressed specific professional productivity issues and discussed specific tablet-based apps that can address them. In 2011, Robin Hastings of the Missouri River Regional Library discussed using tablet software in her article “Using GTD to Get Things Done at Your Library,” and in 2012, Georgia Tech librarians Mary Axford and Crystal Renfro compared the use of note-taking applications OneNote and Evernote specifically for librarians in their article “Noteworthy Productivity Tools for Personal Knowledge Management.”

A search for (*tablet computers or tablet devices or iPad*) in Library Literature and Information Science Full Text yielded only 38 results in scholarly journals, with many relating to the use of tablets for reading or managing e-books and other e-resources. Add *productivity* to that search and open the search to all literature sources, and the results drop to two. One of those is “Productivity-Enhancing,” a

2011 article by Curtis Brundy (Library Director at Western Nebraska Community College), which provides reviews of specific iPad apps that can be used to enhance the productivity of information professionals. There are also several online trade publications, blogs, and websites that provide similar app reviews and functionality comparisons of popular apps.

Given their two-year existence, it is not surprising that scholarly literature on the use of tablet devices in libraries is sparse at this time. As the ownership of these devices by academic librarians grows, research on their professional application and usefulness will surely increase and be disseminated in librarians' professional literature. One area that should be included in that research is the use of tablets to enhance and increase the productivity of library professionals.

## **Communication**

Some academic librarians, the authors included, would like constant access to email, text messages, and social networks. Tablets provide another device to satisfy that need. The built-in email apps can connect to most email services. The authors have told their colleagues to email handouts for meetings instead of producing paper, and then the authors refer to their email during the meetings in order to read the handouts. The attached documents can also be opened in other tablet apps for annotation purposes during the meeting.

Messenger on the iPad allows the librarian to send and receive SMS text messages. Tablet apps are also available for many social networking services, including Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Foursquare. In addition, as will be discussed in the Meetings section, tablets also provide many solutions for remotely attending meetings and presentations. For the academic librarian who wants to stay connected, tablet devices can supply the tools.

### **Time/task management**

For some academic librarians, access to their calendar and to do lists is supremely important. For those who have migrated away from paper planners to electronic solutions on their desktop computers, access could be an issue when not at their desk. Tablet devices provide that access via calendar and task management apps.

Most tablets come with a calendar app, which can be sync'd with one or many calendars, including Outlook, iCal, and/or Google Calendar. These apps can provide pop-up or audio alerts of meetings, reminding the librarian of their schedule. Librarians can also check their availability and enter new appointments whenever they need. However, some professionals are not satisfied with the functionality of the built-in calendars. Calvetica Calendar for the

iPad provides all of features of the standard device calendars, but adds improved views, continuous scrolling and integrated task list. Similarly, Business Calendar for Androids provides improved views, including the ability to show any 1-14 day range, and continuous scrolling, but doesn't have an integrated task list yet. One shortcoming of tablet calendars, as compared to desktop calendar software, is the ability to view other people's calendars, since adding a calendar is typically predicated on access to the other person's account.

Task management or to do list apps are available in abundance on tablet devices and enables the academic librarian to add, update, and record the completion tasks whenever needed. The authors both use Toodledo, an app available for iPads and Androids that also has a web interface, which automatically syncs changes between devices. In addition, Toodledo accepts new tasks via email, allowing the librarian to forward an existing message and create a reminder without having to rekey the information. Toodledo tasks can also be sync'd with Outlook using a third-party tool, but the vendor is quick to point out that they do not support those tools. One of the authors noticed that his tablet, together with the Toodledo app, could be used to implement some of the popular time-management techniques, such as David Allen's Getting Things Done® and Michael Linenberger's Master Your Now. As a result, the author is able to use the MYN technique on his desktop computers, his tablet, and his smartphone.

Similar apps include Wunderlist, Remember the Milk, and TeuxDeux, all available for iPads and Android devices (TeuxDeux Android apps are available from third-party suppliers) and via a web interface.

## **File access**

Whether in meetings, at a conference, or collaborating with peers, instant access to important files is paramount to the productivity of academic librarians. In the past, reams of paper would be used to print documents. Or, USB devices were used to move files from one computer to another in an attempt to maintain and have access to the most current version.

Today, librarians can store those files in “the cloud” via online services such as Dropbox, iCloud, Google Docs, and Box. With the service’s companion app installed on a tablet device, the files can be uploaded or accessed anywhere, anytime Wi-Fi is available. Cloud storage solutions also provide the ability to share folders with others, enabling librarians to easily collaborate on documents, such as articles, books/chapters, or other professional documents. The authors have created a Dropbox folder shared between the two of them, in which they place articles and other kinds of files so that they can collaborate on projects, publications, and presentations. This means that they are able to view these files on their tablets whenever they meet or need to discuss them on the phone. Most

cloud storage services provide at least 2GB of free storage, with the option to purchase additional space if necessary.

In addition, apps such as Pages, Numbers, and Quickoffice provide the ability to modify a text, spreadsheet, and presentation document on a tablet and upload the revised file back to the cloud storage service. Files are automatically synchronized between devices so that the librarian always has access to the current version.

## **Meetings**

Meetings are ubiquitous in the professional life of the academic librarian, but may not always be well managed or properly documented, sometimes resulting in inefficient use of valuable time. Tablet devices offer several options for managing meetings and to optimize productivity during meetings.

There are several factors in the execution of an effective meeting. Creation of an agenda and recording of minutes are two factors with which tablet apps, such as PeakMeetings, Meeting+, or Meeting Mate, can assist. Apps such as these provide a structured framework that enables the librarian to create an agenda, note attendees (integrated with the device's address book/contacts database), record minutes, and assign action items. Meeting logistics, such as name,



date/time, and location, can be imported from or exported to desktop calendar applications and meeting invitations and minutes can be emailed to attendees.

When collaborating with peers or participating on a professional committee, the participants are often not co-located in the same institution, requiring online services to facilitate the meeting. Hence the growth of services such as GoToMeeting, WebEx, Connect, and join.me, which are available via the web on the desktop computers. For librarians on the go, each of these services also provides a tablet app, freeing librarians from the desktop and allowing them to attend meetings no matter where they are. One librarian that was interviewed uses WebEx and Skype at professional conferences to attend meetings at her library. FaceTime on the iPad is another option for calling into remote meetings.

Time is a precious commodity, so productivity during meetings is of the utmost importance. As discussed above, tablet devices enable academic librarians to access their files stored in the cloud. During a meeting, a tablet device may also be used to search the web or access the library catalog and databases for pertinent information. Many e-resource providers, such as ScienceDirect, EBSCO, and Emerald have already developed apps to facilitate easy access to their contents and apps like Junos Pulse allows librarians to connect to their institution's virtual private network to ensure full text access. Some providers, such as EBSCO, also require the library to acquire an authorization key for full access to the library's subscriptions. Finally, as everyone has experienced, there

are times when your full attention may not be required during a meeting. As one library director commented, he uses his tablet to alleviate “meeting boredom” by using the device to check and respond to email and read librarian, technology, and geology/geography blogs.

### **Generating and preserving ideas and other notes**

Because tablets are often with us at times and places where larger devices (laptops and desktops) are unlikely to be, and because tablets provide more screen space than smartphones and the possibility of a virtual or physical keyboard (as well as a stylus), they are good devices for quickly getting our ideas and other notes out of our heads and into a format that can be preserved and shared with others. However, some librarians may find that some tablet keyboards aren't large enough to make notetaking comfortable.

While the tablet OS might come with a built-in app for taking simple notes (such as Notes for the iPad), professionals may look for more powerful apps for the kinds of notes they want to create. Some professionals use an app intended either for word processing (such as Pages for the iPad or Quickoffice Pro HD for both iPad and Android) or for email, and others use an app intended specifically for notetaking and management (such as Evernote for both iPad and Android).

Some tablet apps, such as Notesshelf for the iPad, are designed to capture handwritten notes, which can then be exported as email messages or into other apps for file management. Another example in the note-taking category is PaperPort Notes, an iPad app originally produced by Noterize and now offered by Nuance Communications, the same company already well known for its popular speech recognition products. Both authors have begun to use Evernote to capture notes during any meeting they attend. For instance, when interviewing librarians for this chapter, one of the authors used Evernote to display the list of interview questions, to take notes of the responses, and to record the audio of the interviews.

Tablets are also useful for visual brainstorming, using mind-mapping techniques. An example app on the iPad for this function is iThoughtsHD.

## **Professional Presentations**

Academic librarians often have a need to give presentations, whether as part of on-campus library instruction sessions and faculty meetings, or on the road at conferences for librarians and higher education professionals. Using the appropriate hardware to connect a tablet to a projector, librarians may find that the tablet is a reasonably good substitute for a heavier laptop.

However, tablet-based presentations may not have all of the functionality of presentations created and viewed on a laptop or desktop system, especially in the areas of animations and transitions. Although it is entirely feasible to create new presentations on a tablet (especially useful for last-minute, ad hoc presentations), a logical professional practice is to create the presentation on a laptop or desktop system and then to transfer the final version to the tablet for actual presentation.

One option is to access Google Docs from the tablet's browser, but some tablet apps (such as Keynote for the iPad and Quickoffice Pro HD for both iPad and Android) allow for storing the presentation on the tablet and then displaying it as a slideshow. One of the authors has been using Keynote on his tablet for more than two years to make presentations at conferences, and has more recently begun to use Keynote Remote on his iPhone linked to his iPad via Bluetooth, in order to control the presentation remotely.

### **Keeping up with professional news**

Academic librarians find it important to stay on top of the latest news in their field, including not only items specific to academic librarianship (and to their subject specialty), but also items more broadly related to technology and to higher education. While one option is to subscribe to electronic newsletters and read

them as part of our email, putting even more content into our already overflowing inboxes may not be the most effective method for keeping up.

Subscribing to librarian, higher education, and technology blogs represents a way to keep aware of the latest news and ideas, and tablets can be an ideal tool for viewing blogs at times and places where other professional activities are impractical. A large number of blog reading apps exist for both iPad and Android (examples for iPad include NewsRack and Reeder). These apps can often sync with browser-based services (especially Google Reader), so that the browser-based service can be used to locate, subscribe to, and organize blogs for later reading, while the tablet app is used primarily for the actual reading. Both of the authors use their tablets to read professional blogs when they have downtime from other activities, such as while waiting for someone to show up for an appointment, waiting for colleagues to arrive for a meeting, waiting at the doctor's office, waiting in an airport lounge, or sitting at the library coffee shop.

## **Travel management**

Because of their portability, tablets are excellent devices for managing the documents associated with travel to conferences. We spoke with some librarians who keep their travel-related documents in email folders for easy access, but specific apps exist to manage the travel experience.

A popular example of an app (and associated online service) designed specifically to manage travel is Triplt, which one of the authors uses regularly to organize multiple trips and to keep track of air travel documents, hotel reservations, and conference itineraries. Because airlines and hotels now email confirmations to travellers, Triplt can monitor the traveller's email and automatically add the travel documents to the trip management screen. Triplt can even be used to monitor changes to flights so that the trip management screen always contains updated information. Triplt can even be set up to share travel details with library colleagues, making it easy for supervisors and co-travellers to stay coordinated.

Beyond travel management, numerous tablet apps have been created that facilitate some aspect of the travel experience. In addition to such obvious choices as Google Maps, there are also apps for displaying city subway systems, airport gate facilities, nearby taxi services, and luggage packing lists. Another app associated with an online travel service is Hipmunk (available for both iPad and Android), which can be used to find the least expensive airfare for a planned trip. Specific airlines, such as Delta, also offer iOS and Android versions of their app to manage many aspects of the air travel experience.

**Other uses (real or hoped for)**

As librarians go into the stacks to do collection development work or to assist a patron, they are finding that having a tablet along makes it easier to check the library's catalog. Librarians also use their tablets for watching videos, listening to audio files, and reading books that are related to their professional work. A librarian responsible for a rare physical collection uses hurricane tracker apps, and one whose development funding depends upon financial contributions uses apps that track the business market.

The biggest drawbacks to current tablet technology in the view of librarians appear to be the difficulties in working with a virtual keyboard, and the lack of being able to transfer all kinds of files using a USB adaptor. Some librarians are waiting for an actual implementation of Microsoft Word on their tablet so that they can be more productive with their word processing.

## **Conclusion**

Predicting the future more than a few years in advance is a tricky business (just ask anyone who wants to know where their flying car is or when we'll have vacation homes on the Moon). But twenty-five years ago, Apple imagined a future world in which academic professionals would manage their busy work lives with the help of a tablet computer. And there is no question that we have been

living in that world for the past two years, with each day seeing new or improved apps for facilitating some aspect of our professional productivity. This chapter has attempted to give the reader a general idea of how the professional lives of academic librarians can be and are already being enhanced by current tablet technology.

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