



2015

Library Tour Evolution: Analog, Digital, Mobile

Michael J. Whitchurch

Brigham Young University - Provo, michael_whitchurch@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub>

 Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

M-Libraries 5: From Devices to People

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Whitchurch, Michael J., "Library Tour Evolution: Analog, Digital, Mobile" (2015). *All Faculty Publications*. 1546.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1546>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Library Tour Evolution

Analog→Digital→Mobile

Michael J. Whitchurch, MLIS
Virtual Services/Learning Commons Librarian
3325 Harold B. Lee Library
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602
(801) 422-6345
michael_whitchurch@byu.edu

Introduction

Evolution is a progressive change from something inadequate in a given circumstance or environment to a new or modified state with the ability to perform better in that new environment or situation.

Evolution occurs in organizations, organisms and processes. One aspect of evolution is the 'survival of the fittest' which is that the most adept at survival will continue and propagate. In technology it is much the same as one technology becomes obsolete (dies), it gives way to the next better able to serve. For examples consider the cassette tape or the LP record and their demise. Often technology changes occur as a result of what the patron is using at the time, or in other words from external forces. It is also the case that changes occur because of internal forces or pressures from within the organization. Academic libraries have moved to mobile technologies because of both these reasons: handheld devices are the main means of access to information for university students, faculty and parents (external); and mobile technologies are also useful for librarians in their day-to-day management of the library and services (internal).

Libraries, like other organizations, often make changes to procedures, processes or services in an evolutionary manner. These changes or adaptations are made to organizational schemes, technology and other services. Libraries have changed the tours of the library building, its organization, services and resources in a similar manner.

Being the main consumers of academic library information, students have the ability to influence the direction of library technology and services. These consumers determine how they want to utilize the information and it is up to librarians to provide the information in a way that it will be best appreciated.

This paper will describe changes that occurred throughout the history of the library tour in the Harold B Lee Library (HBLL) at Brigham Young University (BYU). Specifically, how the tour evolved from in person to analog to digital to mobile. The benefits and drawbacks of each mode will be mentioned as well as the compelling reasons for following the path to the current implementation of the tour.

Introduction to BYU, First-Year Students and FYW

Brigham Young University is a private religious university sitting in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains. The campus serves a student body of about 30,000 FTE with 4,000 faculty and staff. The technology landscape on campus is one of dichotomies. On the one hand the majority of students come to campus heavily influenced by technology, using multiple personal mobile devices (smart phone, laptop computer, etc.). On the other hand, a smaller contingent come to campus and, either because of age or disinterest, lack the same technology and the skills to use it.

New students are offered a variety of university programs to introduce them to campus life and the academic rigor of higher education. These programs include the Freshman Mentoring, New Student Orientation and Freshman Seminars, all coordinated through the Office of First-Year Experience.

Incoming freshmen in 2013 totaled just over 4,400 with 2,500 of those enrolled in the First-Year writing course, Writing 150, during the first year of their college experience. This introductory writing course,

Writing and Rhetoric, is required for all students who begin their BYU academic career, except those who have taken and passed the Advanced Placement English test in high school. The purpose of the course is to 'introduce students to college-level writing, reading, and research with an emphasis on argumentation and rhetorical analysis. WRTG 150 pays particular attention to the ways arguments work within discourse communities.' (University Writing Program) As a part of the course each instructor collaborates with a librarian to develop and deliver a research unit. This requires the class to visit the library for instruction sessions and complete assignments based on the knowledge gained during the sessions. Prior to attending the sessions with the librarian each student is required to complete the library tour and an accompanying worksheet/quiz. This tour provides an introduction to the most important sections of the library for new students and introduces students to the layout and magnitude of the library.

Tour Evolution

In-person to analog

For decades library tours have been provided to give patrons insight into the library building as well as the important collections and services housed therein. As society progressed technologically and academically the library tours changed to adapt to needs and to technologies. The technology of the book and the collections that followed shortly after demanded beautiful and ornate buildings constructed to house them. With any large collection, finding items becomes difficult as the collection grows. With the opening of libraries to the public finding items in libraries, once the sole purview of librarians, became even more important, and so did a way to help users find those items. To accommodate this need libraries instituted tours to introduce users to the building and collection.

The HBLL at BYU began conducting tours of the library informally to individuals or groups with a librarian as tour guide. The personal touch with a guided tour was one of the primary benefits, especially the ability to respond to questions or concerns in a direct, personalized way. However, it was too overwhelming to present a tour to the thousands of new students every year. The cost in time was impractical.

In the early 1980s the library determined that a better way to introduce new students to the library would be to require an audio cassette tape tour and subsequent quiz. This was done in collaboration with the required First-Year English class. A passing grade in the class required completion of the tour and passing the quiz. The tour began and ended at the Learning Resource Center where the tape players were checked out and the quiz was taken. The tour audio directed students in a logical/linear manner throughout the whole library while explaining information important to new academics. The quiz, taken right after finishing the tour, reviewed important library information. Though the tour was dreaded by most freshmen it was an important part of the experience to adjust from high school to higher education, especially when dealing with the enormity of the change from a small library to a large academic institution using a different classification system, LC as opposed to Dewey.

Analog to Digital

After many years of minor modifications to the audio tape tour content, in the year 2000 the library converted the tour to the technology of the compact disk (CD). However, the linear format of and the quiz after the tour did not change, though the ability to easily skip tracks came with the technology of the CD. The starting point of the tour, the LRC, changed locations but the tour remained largely the same as it had been for nearly 20 years.

Again, in the year 2005 a look to newer technology guided the library to change the technology used for tour delivery. The tour content was only changed minimally to accommodate changes in the library layout or services but the new mode of delivery became the MP3 player, still checked out from the Media Center (formerly LRC). It allowed for more flexibility to the student who could now control which tracks to listen to, though total freedom was not attained until later. Around this time the quiz also went online in a Blackboard course where the scores could be tracked and reported to class instructors.

As the academic environment continued to move toward the virtual/online environment the library experimented with a virtual tour. This tour was developed to encourage students who did not want to enter the library to complete the tour. Students were given the option to take the tour via the checked out MP3 player or complete the virtual tour. The students were still required to complete a quiz on Blackboard. Though this manner of taking the tour was appreciated and preferred by many students, the personal contact with library personnel and the collection was severely lacking. This lack of familiarity with the library was troubling since the intent of the tour was to introduce students not only to library resources and services but also where to find those within the physical building. The virtual tour was discontinued after only two years of use.

Digital to Mobile

As student use of mobile technology increased on campus other modes of presenting the tour were explored. Mobile technology presented an opportunity to blend the virtual and the physical worlds; what some call augmented reality; improving interaction with the physical world by augmenting the physical world with information available in the virtual world.

One technology available to augment reality was introduced to the world in Japan in 1994 by Denso Wave, a division of Denso Corporation (History of QR code.) QR codes are two-dimensional codes that, when scanned like a bar code, display much more information than the one-dimensional bar codes are capable of. When scanned with an Internet enabled device the code can link to any information available online.

QR codes at the BYU library were first explored in 2010 with a proposal to use the codes for location specific mobile group study room reservations, marketing materials, exhibit/event information, and the library tour. The library tour implementation of QR codes was done first alongside the MP3 tour. The MP3 audio tracks were simply placed online and a QR coded was created to link the student to that file by scanning the code. The amount of tour information was not reduced but the directional information was removed, reducing the amount of audio. A map showing the QR code locations was provided to students taking the tour. While the idea was sound, not many students preferred that method of taking

the tour. We received constant feedback that the tour was still too long and presented information that was not useful to first-year students.

To alleviate the length of the tour the instruction section of the library, in conjunction with other library departments, condensed the information presented in the tour to the most important or salient tidbits of information that new students should know about the specific areas of the library. As the tour evolved, not only did the amount of information presented at each stop shrink significantly but the number of required stops was also reduced. When the tour was first changed to QR codes there were still 16 stops scattered throughout the library, an onerous task for anyone to complete. When the QR codes were revamped the number of codes was reduced to ten. This phase of evolution is detailed in the article *QR codes and the library: The library audio tour* (Whitchurch, 2011). The revamped QR code tour tried to improve the tour experience. We purchased ten iPods and made them available for checkout at the Learning Commons desk. These iPods had the Wi-Fi connected and all the necessary apps available to complete the tour.

Students were still required to complete a quiz, but it was in the form of a handout that they completed as they took the tour. Questions were developed that reinforced knowledge gained by listening and watching the tour. These quizzes were then graded by the Help Desk student employees and recorded and distributed to each instructor for credit in the class. This form of assessing information was not only preferred by the students but also seemed to improve later recall. This recall could also be attributed to the drastic reduction in required information download.

The next step involved creating videos for each tour stop that could be viewed on the iPod. The videos were created by the iLearning group of the HBLL who produces tutorials and short instructional videos for the library. The students did prefer watching a video instead of just listening but the infrastructure did not facilitate the process. The initial group was excited to use the mobile devices to complete the tour. However a problem was discovered rather quickly after the fall semester began: due to the large number of mobile devices, the Wi-Fi could not handle such a heavy load and many of the videos either lagged greatly or simply would not load. To deal with this we had to post the tour script near the stations so the information could still be obtained.

Mobile to Affixed iPad

Due to the inadequacy of the Wi-Fi to accommodate so many connections another solution was needed. In fall of 2012 another mode of taking the tour was developed that provided a much simpler and yet still complete experience taking the tour. Since the videos had already been developed we did not want to abandon that concept completely. To that end we decided to use iPads (previously purchased for another library project) and affix those in tour stop locations. These iPads were each programmed to show the video for a specific tour stop/library location.

In addition to changing the mode of completing the tour the number of required tour stops was again reduced. We reduced the number of stops because students at an academic institution often pick a major or area of studies to pursue. Knowing about the entire library as a freshman is unnecessary at this stage of the educational experience. Therefore, the tour was changed to require five stops (i.e.

Circulation, Learning Commons, Media Center, Special Collections and Periodicals) as well as one additional stop of the student's choice/interest (one of five subject areas). We felt this was better for the students to become familiar with the area of the library that addresses their pertinent interests and students were very receptive to this idea. Keeping the students from being overwhelmed was a major reason for reducing the number of stops and the amount of information being disseminated.

Students still complete the quiz worksheet and the scores are distributed to their instructors. The questions have not been altered from the QR Code version of the tour, though the students are required to answer fewer questions, since they are asked only to visit one of the subject areas.

Is this last adaptation to fixed stations from mobile QR codes a devolution? In this era of mobile preferences moving from mobile to fixed could be seen as a step backward. However, moving to a prior technology is not always a step backward. In this case the change significantly improved the student experience of taking the tour. As a service organization it is imperative to provide the best experience possible. Sometimes the most current technology is not the best for the solution of the problem. For example, the QR code tool was not suitable for the tour with the existing implementation of wireless connection. However, it does not mean that sometime in the future the technology will not be sophisticated enough to support that mode of taking the tour. But the technology, as a tool, should not drive the experience, rather patron needs should drive the use of technology for an optimal user experience.

Conclusion

Now that the tour is functioning well we are committed to maintaining the content and improving navigation throughout the building. As technology changes or curriculum needs shift the tour will continue to evolve providing the best information in the most appropriate way using technology as a tool. To do so the tour content and technology need to be continually assessed and reevaluated in the context of changing information use and dissemination standards or practices.

Continual evaluation of the service needs to be implemented. Currently we use only anecdotal information gathered when teaching classes to determine changes needed to the system. A more formal assessment will be implemented. Possible assessments methods include a short survey completed right after the tour or focus groups.

Specifically it is important to receive feedback regarding the technology used for the tour, especially as newer technologies become mainstream. However, as discussed earlier, these technologies need to be considered within the scope and mission of the library tour, always keeping in mind that it is a tool or a means to an end, not implemented for technologies sake.

Student preferences should also be considered in light of the curriculum, especially of the First-Year writing program where most students are required to complete the tour. Adapting to student preferences *may* require multiple ways of presenting the tour to the students. For example, when the Wi-Fi system is upgraded to handle more connections it may be important to provide the QR code option again for those students who want to complete the tour on their own mobile device.

The library tour remains the best option at the HBLL for providing an introduction to the library of a large academic institution. Through continual assessment and improvement the tour can remain an innovative information resource for students on campus.

References

History of QR code. Retrieved, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.qrcode.com/en/history/>

University Writing Program. **Writing and rhetoric (writing 150/150H)**. Retrieved, 2014, Retrieved from <http://writing.byu.edu/writing150/>

Whitchurch, M. J. (2011). QR codes and libraries: The library audio tour. Paper presented at the ACRL Conference, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/events/national/2011/papers/qr_codes.pdf