

## Leading the Water to the Horse

Librarians and teachers, along with parents and other involved adults, have that long and dubious task of wresting young people from their carefree life of leisure and attempting to infiltrate those developing brains with the facts and knowledge that will make for an enriched and purposeful future. Through experience and our own training, we adults understand that the knowledge that helps us engage with the world around us does not always come easily or naturally. So, using any variety of means, we try desperately, often through coercion or cajoling, to force young people to ingest as much information as we think appropriate.

In a school setting, younger children may be willing to conform themselves to a curriculum for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, a real thirst to learn, the desire to please authority figures, or the novelty of the school atmosphere. As children develop into young adults, however, we often begin to see them balk against these forces for change over which they feel they have no control. Even though the need for more knowledge exists, young people are no longer willing to just allow themselves to be indoctrinated.

Think of it like this. All people need water. When a child needs water, they will take what they find or what is offered. They'll drink it. Need met. When a young person needs water, they have a more discerning taste. They have tasted different qualities of water. Now, they will only drink what is found or offered if it lives up to their more discerning standards. Though they may be causing irreparable harm, they will not drink water that they've deemed unsuitable.



So, what does that mean for the teen librarian? We are still in the business of education – that is, connecting our patrons the information they need to be successful. In contrast to schools, however, we cannot force young people to play by our information rules. Anthony Bernier has discussed the importance of librarians understanding the information landscape of teenagers. The more librarians can embrace the technology and understand how it has an impact on teen literacy, the more success they will have connecting resources of the real-life experiences of



## Online Watering Holes

There are hundreds of thousands of electronic resources available in a variety of formats (CD-Rom, DVD, websites, etc.) Here are a few examples of how websites have been used to connect users with information (both print and electronic).

### United States of America

#### *Web-based Pathfinder*

<http://mypage.iu.edu/~rfrasur/Pathfinder>

This pathfinder provides access to both online and print resources. There are also extension activities that let learners explore and interact in virtual and face-to-face environments.

### Testing & Education Reference Center Tutorial

#### *Web-based Database Tutorial*

[http://mypage.iu.edu/~rfrasur/terc\\_tutorial](http://mypage.iu.edu/~rfrasur/terc_tutorial)

This tutorial allows learners to discover various aspects of the Testing & Education Reference Center in either a formal education environment or on their own. The site includes instructions for use but they are not required. Audio and downloadables also allow users to customize their experience.

### UCPL 2011 Teen Summer Library Program

<http://summer.ucplteens.org>

This website brings together many aspects of the pathfinder and tutorial as well as an expanded base of information. Audio, video, interaction opportunities as well as resource lists and activities make this site a robust addition and enhancement to the traditional summer library program.

teens. We have to learn the rules for how teens learn and then we have to play by them.(Braun)

Stephen Abrams, an executive from Sirsi-Dynix (a library system software company) points out that while our text-based collections (those familiar books, shelves row after row) are totally necessary, many learners need interactivity, visuals, and sound. Books are great. If we can't find a way, however, to make them relevant in a society where technology is ubiquitous and content is dynamic, we will become increasingly ineffective in our role as matchmaker between teens and information. We can no longer rely on bringing the learner to the information. We have to bring the information to the learner.

What? That's right. We have to figure out where our audience is. Are they on YouTube? Are they on AddictingGames? Are they on Facebook, Twitter or Myspace? Wherever they are, we know that it involves the internet. Is that internet on a computer, their cell phone, or gaming device? Once we have figured out where they are, we need to be there with tools to help them find the information they need (and information they want). By packing up the information and taking it to teens where they are at, we accomplish several tasks. First, we validate who they are and how they learn. Second, we let them know that we respect them as partners in information hunting. Third, we publicly put into practice our mission of serving all library users. Finally, we show teens that information can be presented in many different packages (think about how literature is disseminated in our culture – print, ebook, audiobook, etc.) with each package having more or less value depending on an individual. When we are willing to play by the information rules of teens, trust is built and relationships develop. Horses are much more likely to drink the water when it is offered by someone they trust.



*Ruth Frasur is the teen librarian at Union County Public Library in Liberty, Indiana.*

## **References**

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