Learning User Context

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Background & Introduction

After being contacted by the Allen Public Library for a website redesign focusing on enhancing the current information architecture, visual design, and site upkeep process, it was clear that a better understanding of library users and their context for using the site was needed.

In order to better understand library users and the context for why they use the current site, two user interviews were conducted via phone with librarians local to central Virginia. These interviews helped learn:
- who common library users are
- what they are on the library site to do and why
- how well they are able to complete their tasks

Once these interviews were completed, the data was complied and analyzed against online resources that furthered the understanding of library users.

Data analysis concluded three personas, which are fictional representations of each type of library user. User experience designers are able to use personas as a tool to base design decisions off of based on user goals, tasks, and frustrations - all core data points that were learned through research.

Interview Questions

The following questions were asked during each interview:

1. **Who are the most common library users for your website? (e.g. students, teachers, parents, etc.)**

2. **What is each user using the site for?**

3. **What areas of the site are visited most frequently?**

4. **What about least frequently visited areas?**

5. **What do library users struggle the most to do on your website and why?**

Interview Responses

The user interviews conducted with two librarians resulted in the following responses:

1. **Who are the most common library users for your website? (e.g. students, teachers, parents, etc.)**
   - Mostly higher education faculty/staff, with a good mix of working professionals, students, and an older community

2. **What is each user using the site for?**
   - Higher education users: searching articles and finding resources for classes

   - Working professionals: researching data about their job or hobbies, posting job ads, and finding others to connect with

   - Students: finding class materials, renting study rooms, asking library staff for help

   - Older community users: looking for events and books for pleasure, connecting with others that have similar interests and free time

3. **What areas of the site are visited most frequently?**
   - Library catalog, Events, Get a library card

4. **What about least frequently visited areas?**
   - About the library, forms pages (e.g. Suggest a purchase)

5. **What do library users struggle the most to do on your website and why?**
   - Navigating back to our site because we are a piece of the larger city website; users have to go to a lot of different sites to find what they want

   - Finding fees for various things, like late return fees

   - Knowing where they are in the site, because not all pages look the same

User Goals

After analyzing the responses given from the research participants, the goals of a library user can be summarized into the following three points:

1. **Library users want to be able to easily and efficiently search for the information they are looking to obtain.**

2. **Library users want to be able to connect with the community that suits them best.**

3. **Library users want to be able to get help when needed from experienced library staff.**

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to find additional resources that aided in the understanding of library users. The following data and resources were found:

Data

- Users are often broken down into categories based off of their information and computer technology (ICT) skills / experience:
    - **Inexperienced:** A computer illiterate user who is unable to use the library site. Data is incredibly difficult to access.
    - **Semi-experienced:** A semi-computer literate user who is able to use the library site with little help. Basic data is found through simple searching, but advanced features are not utilized due to lack of advanced ICT skills.
    - **Experienced:** A computer literate user who can find data easily and efficiently. Advanced site features are utilized in order to find detailed information not directly presented on main site pages.

- Library users all visit the library website for one common goal: *to obtain information*. The quality and quantity of information that users find is directly related to their level of ICT skills.

- Library website users are most commonly:
    - Female
    - Parent
    - 16-49
    - College+ education
    - $75K+ household income
    - Black, non-Hispanic
    - Urban community type

- User have increased in the following website activities:
    - Read book reviews or get book recommendations
    - Borrow or download an e-book

Resources

Anyira, Isaac Echezonam (2011). The Anatomy of Library Users in the 21st Century. Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1566&context=libphilprac#:~:text=Who%20is%20a%20library%20user,the%20library%20portal%20or%20website

Horrigan, J. B. (2019, December 31). Which Americans use libraries and what they do there. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.
https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/09/15/who-uses-libraries-and-what-they-do-at-their-libraries/

Personas

SHANNON *(Experienced User)*

Age: 37

Family: Married with two kids

Education: M.S in Cybersecurity

Job Title: Computer Science Professor

NARRATIVE

Shannon is a professor for a local university who strives to have a positive impact on her student's lives.

She takes the responsibiliy on herself to find materials for courses that is reliable and factual. Her students count on her to reserve study sessions to ensure complete understanding of course topics.

GOALS & TASKS

- Efficiently search for peer reviewed articles for her students

- Connect with staff members via chat for assistance reserving rooms for studying

- Filter database content to find new course projects

ALLISON *(Semi-experienced User)*

Age: 44

Family: Married with three kids

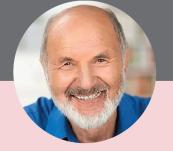**Education:** Some college

Job Title: Human Resources Associate

NARRATIVE

Allison is a working mom who enjoys socializing with other working professionals. She aspires to become a Human Resources Manager one day.

She encourages her kids to learn about something new every week by picking out their own books and involving them in local volunteer projects.

GOALS & TASKS

- Find materials for career development based on reviews and ratings

- Rent / purchase books appropriate for her kids ages

- Sign her family up for volunteer work

DAVID *(Inexperienced User)*

Age: 63

Family: Married

Education: High school diploma

Job Title: Retired construction worker and war veteran

NARRATIVE

David is a retired worker and veteran who enjoys spending time with his wife. They enjoy reading together and watching documenteries.

David recently moved and wants to get a library card at the local library. He has never been good with "computers" so fears he may struggle with even this minor task.

GOALS & TASKS

- Locate entertainment materials with ease

- Discover upcoming events to attend

- Learn library hours and get contact info from helpful library staff

- Get a library card

Persona Table

The table below maps out highest to lowest priority tasks that each persona would be on the Allen Public Library site to do.

Persona Tasks	Shannon (Experienced) Primary	Allison (Semi-experienced) Secondary	David (Inexperienced) Secondary
High Priority Tasks			
Search content in library catalog	X	X	
Rent materials	X	X	X
Get library card		X	X
Find upcoming events	X	X	X
Reserve conference space	X		
Medium Priority Tasks			
Find late fees for material returns	X	X	
Find volunteer information		X	X
Low Priority Tasks			
Learn about library		X	X
Post job ad		X	
Suggest a purchase	X	X	
Read library news			X