Appendix F: Comparative Timeline

Library and Information Technology

Today’s virtual communities and social networking software represent the natural progression of communication and community-building technology that started more than a century ago with the telegraph and telephone.

Libraries have been at the forefront of adopting collaborative technology and delivering content and services on emerging community platforms to better serve users and streamline operations. Below are a few U.S. highlights. For more information, see the “Comparative Timeline on Information Technology and U.S. Library Milestones” insert.


1919  American Library Association (ALA) adopts its first resource sharing code.

1952  ALA revises interlibrary loan code, adopting standardized interlibrary loan form.

1969  The first online public access catalog is in use at the IBM Advanced System Development Division library.

1971  Libraries begin sharing cataloging resources electronically.

1979  Libraries begin lending and borrowing resources using a computer-driven interlibrary loan system.

1992  Librarian Jean Armour Polly coins the phrase “surfing the Internet.”

1994  Library Web sites launch at Virginia Tech University, the University of Michigan and the U.S. Naval Research library.

1995  Jenny Levine creates the first library technology blog.

1998  Bill Drew at the State University of New York at Morrisville offers real-time reference service using instant messaging (IM).

2006  Libraries start providing services in Second Life, an online, 3D virtual world.

2006  Launch of WorldCat.org—sharing the library holdings of more than 10,000 libraries on the Web.

2007  More than 25,000 videos on YouTube tagged or described with the term “library” or “librarian” as of September 2007.
In 1901, collaborative cataloging began when the Library of Congress first implemented a new technology: printed cards. This medium was used to store and share information about available library materials. Just two years later, Mary Wright Plummer—who would go on to be President of the American Library Association in 1915—presented the first code of ethics for librarians.

Since then, issues of technology, professional ethics, privacy, and trust have often proceeded hand in hand. Mary Wright Plummer’s suggested code reflected the landscape and technology of her time and helped prepare the profession for the future.