

Strategic Mobile Library Development: the place of library apps and the options for creating them

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In 2012 the UCD Library Outreach team received a small grant which enabled us to undertake research to expand our knowledge and understanding of native and web-based applications and other ways to develop our mobile library environment, a strategic priority for us. Here we describe our activities and findings, and conclude by summarising the practical demonstrator applications that we are currently developing to round off this research.

The content of our presentation will include:

- The complexity of the options for small screen online environments - mobile websites, native apps, web apps and responsive web design approaches which lead to considerable questions as to whether there is a place for the app at all
- The need to factor in the mobile device user when deciding which solution or combination to implement: the dominance of student ownership of laptops and smartphones combined with the emergence of tablets
- Results and analysis of an informal survey of UCD students, which includes their current mobile device ownership, awareness of existing library mobile offerings, and their view of library app development
- Presentation of research into the current situation in the Republic of Ireland – including the findings of a survey which show the fairly low level of mobile development and some reasons why
- An overview of case studies from the UK and Ireland gleaned from visits and interviews focusing on mobile services libraries are offering and how they built these services
- The issue of whether to add library content to university-wide apps or build library-specific apps; the “general purpose” library app versus specialist niche applications
- Demonstration of a general purpose web app that mimics a native app in look and feel as a mobile homepage for UCD Library; developing a niche application for our cultural heritage or research support area.
- Consideration of different software tools for different situations: taking into account the technical skill sets (or lack thereof) of library staff and deciding whether or not to collaborate with colleagues on campus or other third parties to create mobile apps.

As an alternative to a paper, we are also willing to create a poster based on the results of our research.