Introduction

Appropriate use of the World Wide Web and social technologies by teens is of great interest and often concern to adults.   These technologies provide adolescents with opportunities to interact with others, of all ages, in a variety of ways and presents new opportunities for learning, communicating and creating. However, the complexity of the online environment can be difficult for teens to grasp on their own and may lead them to make bad choices, from sexting, to bullying, to providing too much personal information, and for misuse of the online resources that are available. It is imperative, then, that all teens have access to resources and trained experts to help them gain digital literacy skills that will lead them to making smart choices online.

Librarians are uniquely positioned to support teens in their quest for learning how to use social technologies responsibly and ethically. Libraries provide teens with access to high speed Internet, digital technologies and informal and formal learning opportunities so that they can gain skills and knowledge in a wide variety of areas, including digital literacy skills and safe and smart use of technology.

Teens and Libraries

Today's teens are power library users. Census data shows that in 2010 there were over 42 million young people aged 10 -19 (comprising 13.6% of the population) in the US. In 2010, half of the nation's 14 - 18 year olds reported visiting a library to use a computer. [1]The *Opportunity for All* study reported that youth ages 14-24 make up 25% of all library users, which makes them the largest group in study, and that youth were drawn to libraries to use computers, receive help with homework, socialize, and participate in programming. [2] Similarly, school libraries are available to about 62% of youth enrolled in public schools and youth turn to their school libraries for recreational reading, learning support, and technology access.[3]

Libraries are also key in bridging the digital divides that exist, including access to appropriate technologies, high speed Internet and to individuals who are experts at using them. While millions of Americans now have Internet access, many of them--especially minorities—rely on Internet access via their phones. The problem is that "smartphone access is not a substitute for wired. The vast majority of jobs require online applications, but it is hard to type up a résumé on a hand-held device; it is hard to get a college degree from a remote location using wireless. Few people would start a business using only a wireless connection."[4]

Besides using the library for Internet access, teens do value their libraries as a place to find information

users; 91.8% of the students appreciated the school library's help in sorting and analyzing information and gaining media literacy." [5] In addition to the acquisition of digital fsency and technical skills, a growing body ofliterature frther suggests that on line spaces help youth develop language and writing

- Inform adults about how to successfully support teens in their use and understanding of digital technologies

Each year, as a part of Teen Tech Week, libraries around the United States sponsor events that promote smart and safe technology use by teens.

Today's librarians continually monitor and educate themselves about the online social environments that teens use. They use their knowledge and expertise to develop programs, services, and educational opportunities to help teens successfully navigate the Internet and social media.

Teens and Social Sites

In November 2011, the Pew Internet and American Life project released a report on teen "kindness and cruelty" on social network si rt

know more than just how to use the tools - they need to understand the structures around them."
[14]

Educating teens to be safe online is challenging to adults because these environments are new to many of them, and because the issues are varied and complicated. Librarians educate themselves about these issues in order to discuss them knowledgeably with teens.

Conclusion

Social technologies, online media, and all manner of web-based information are now fixtures of contemporary life, and are only expected to grow in importance and variety. Teenagers will persist in using these new tools for social, educational, and work place tasks. As new technologies appear, librarians are uniquely positioned to integrate them into informal and formal learning experiences for teens. Through this integration teens have high-quality opportunities to gain digital literacy and problem solving skills that allow them to make smart decisions about being safe and private online.

Resources

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