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Public Libraries in Palestine: Next Generation One-Stop-Shops

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Abstract

Moving from second to third millennium proved to be the critical point where public libraries in particular and all libraries in general had to make new steps towards change in the way libraries serve their customers. This is more visible when implementing this judgment on some developing countries like Palestine. Moving from traditional library service to modern and electronic service took place in the 1990s. However this move is spontaneous and needs further systemization compared to the same experience in developed countries. Move to using e-resources and digitizing information services lacked two important things: legal framework to accommodate this quick and rapid move and lack of experienced librarians and information specialists to manage this change. Public and academic libraries could have led this move more efficiently but there seems to be lack of financial resources to encourage such initiatives. Academic and university libraries made a quicker pace as a result of the huge demand on information services by students and researchers. Public libraries remained at a late stage of development as they provide services to less educated beneficiaries and accordingly did not make the quick move towards using more modern and e-resources. This happened in spite of the important role that communities expect from public libraries to plan in introducing modern services to their customers.

This paper will present practical ideas and steps towards creating information and knowledge one-stop-shops for diverse communities using electronic means and serving all levels of beneficiaries.

Public Libraries in Palestine: Next Generation One-Stop-Shops

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Background

Moving from second to third millennium proved to be the critical point where public libraries in particular and all libraries in general had to make new steps towards change in the way libraries serve their customers. This is more visible when implementing this judgment on some developing countries like Palestine. Moving from traditional library service to modern and electronic service took place in the 1990s. However this move is spontaneous and needs further systemization compared to the same experience in developed countries. Move to using e-resources and digitizing information services lacked two important things: legal framework to accommodate this quick and rapid move and lack of experienced librarians and information specialists to manage this change. Public and academic libraries could have led this move more efficiently but there seems to be lack of financial resources to encourage such initiatives. Academic and university libraries made a quicker pace as a result of the huge demand on information services by students and researchers. Public libraries remained at a late stage of development as they provide services to less educated beneficiaries and accordingly did not make the quick move towards using more modern and e-resources. This happened in spite of the important role that communities expect from public libraries to plan in introducing modern services to their customers.



About PALTEL

PALTEL is the national telecommunications provider in Palestine. With the pace of technology rapidly changing, PALTEL today leads Palestine into the new era of communications through its state-of-the-art technology and advanced services.

PALTEL offers a range of services including local and international telephone services, internet, data communications, mobile, value-added services, Payphones, and next generation services in addition to creating the backbone for other related telecom service.

The ADSL technology offers customers a consistent, fast, and cost-effective way to optimize usage of the Internet and all its facets including multimedia, data, voice, and video services. DSL technology allows simultaneous analog voice or fax and DSL data transmission over the same telephone line.

ADSL

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) technology, known as fast internet, is a modem technology that uses existing twisted-pair copper wire telephone lines to transport high-bandwidth data to service subscribers. It delivers high-bandwidth data rates to dispersed locations with relatively small changes to the existing telecommunications; therefore there is no need to place or buy any new wires infrastructure.



ADSL Benefits

ADSL provide several benefits to the customers:

High connection speed with no interruption. 10 times quicker than a regular internet connection.

ADSL to simultaneously surf the internet while using the telephone or sending a fax.

ADSL allows easy access to audio/video contents (such as downloading video movies, subscribing to electronic training courses, and exchanging photo albums, etc) that was not accessible through a regular dial-up connection.

ADSL has a fixed monthly fee with no time restriction or download volume limitation. Unlike the dial-up connections required for analog modems, your ADSL connection is always on (24 hours) with no additional costs.

ADSL is the most cost effective means for networking libraries especially public and research libraries that serve remote communities under the current movement restrictions imposed in Palestinian citizens.



The proposed model

With the existence of the ADSL service, it is proposed that public-access libraries serve as One-Stop-Shops (OSS) for information services to the public at reasonable prices, high speed and using up-to-date means.

The proposed OSS will provide the following services:

- Permanent high speed internet access at symbolic rates
- Use of online resources/ journals and databases
- Networking public access libraries and sharing resources/ catalogues
- Networking with university libraries and formal bodies
- Securing access to national libraries in the world
- Providing training sessions on using e-resources
- Encouraging e-learning initiatives
- Access to specialized newsgroups and listservs



OSS model benefits

- Cost effectiveness
- Using modern technologies that match and respond to people's needs
- Global access and local networking
- Building capacity of libraries and their teams
- Saves space and enables for opening more OSS
- Self-service and reducing running costs
- Reaches all community groups and members
- Secures equal opportunities for women, children and the disabled
- Spreads the tech-culture in the community
- Encourages understanding between nations through live dialogue online and exchange of resources
- Shifts from traditional to e-learning models
- Meets current requirements of open and distance learning system
- Meets support from local and international donor bodies



Obstacles against libraries in Palestine

- Movement restrictions
- Limitedness of funds
- Lack of resources
- Shortage in staff development
- High cost of networking
- Deterioration in number of permanent users
- Need for a more clear and comprehensive national strategy
- Existence of other priorities in the community



Available technology alternatives

- SFI connection for remote and small locations (villages)
- ADSL for public access libraries and research centers (towns and camps)
- Lease lines for university libraries and official bodies (cities)

The know-how is available for the above three alternatives

Implementing stakeholders

Universities
Municipalities
Ministries
NGOs/ research bodies
Donor organizations
Private companies

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