



MANAGEMENT REPORT

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TO: Services, Finance & Human Resources Committee

FROM: Kay Cahill, Acting Director, Digital Services
Dawn Ibey, Manager, Circulation Services

SUBJECT: DEVICE LENDING PROGRAM

SUMMARY

VPL has been offering a circulating eReader collection since January 2014. Given the age of the technology, user experience challenges, and declining use of the older devices, we are recommending that the program be discontinued as of March 31st 2016 and we focus on tablet lending as the next phase of our device lending program.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The 2013-2015 Strategic Plan includes the goal to “Implement more flexible, patron-centred service models to inspire and support a community of learning and a culture of reading.” Within this goal is the initiative “Introduce device-lending programs to support community access to Internet-based services and eBook content.” The circulating eReader program was introduced in January 2014 to support this initiative, and expanded to include a circulating tablet collection in December 2015.

BACKGROUND

VPL launched its original collection of 60 circulating Sony PRS T3 eReaders in January 2014. The collection initially saw reasonable uptake, with an expected drop to approximately 50% of available inventory circulating once early interest declined. Attrition has reduced the number of eReaders over time, but 30 remain in circulation.

From a user experience perspective, the collection was less successful. The requirement to create an Adobe or Sony account to authorize the device was a barrier for less digitally skilled patrons, exacerbated by poor performance of the OverDrive app (used to access VPL's eBook and eAudio collection) on the Sony eReaders. Following a preliminary evaluation of the program, a working group led by Circulation and Digital Services made the following recommendations:

- Preload the eReaders with content to alleviate the difficulties with authorization and download
- Purchase a collection of circulating tablets to enable easier access to VPL's digital collections through the OverDrive app

30 eReaders were pre-loaded with content licensed directly from BC publishers, and relaunched in April 2015 as the "Read Local" collection.

\$10,000 from the 2014 Literacy Grant was allocated to purchase a small collection of circulating tablets that could be used to test patron interest, improve the eReading experience, and provide access to other VPL digital collections (newspapers, databases) via preloaded apps.

DISCUSSION

The Read Local program will conclude as of March 31st 2016, when the negotiated content licenses expire. Circulation to date (April 7th 2015 – Feb 16th 2016) is as follows:

Fiction: 59 circs (average 3.9 circs per device)

Non-fiction: 36 circs (average 2.4 circs per device)

The maximum number of circulations per device that could have been achieved in this period was 15. It is likely that the age of the devices contributed to the relatively low use levels of the preloaded readers.

The eReaders were purchased in late 2013 and the models are now obsolete and no longer supported by the manufacturer. Given the age of the technology and the low success rates

experienced by users when the devices were circulated without content, we are recommending that the remainder of the collection be retired as of March 31st.

The tablet collection is not yet at the six month evaluation point, but early responses indicate that patrons are using them to access VPL's digital collections successfully and that these will represent a natural evolution of our device lending program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

FINAL REMARKS

The circulating eReader program enabled VPL to test device lending for the first time. In spite of the early challenges, this provided us with a valuable learning experience and information that enabled us to evolve the device lending program in what appears to be a promising direction. A more detailed report on the next phase of device lending will follow when the tablets reach the six month evaluation point.