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# Teen Tech Week: Create, Share, Learn @ Your Library

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Waiting for a ride home? by QualityFrog / CC-BY-NC

Have you ever noticed how many special events there are in library-land? National Library Week, Read across America Day, Teen Read Week, National Poetry Month, National Children's Book Week—it becomes difficult to keep track! As much fun as it would be, it's pretty much impossible to celebrate or even acknowledge each and every one of these. When used discriminately, however, they make a great marketing tool for the library to use in promoting programs and materials and can even aid in fulfilling the goals of vision statements and library missions.

One of the newest national initiatives, Teen Tech Week has been celebrated by ALA's Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) since 2007. This year, Teen Tech Week is March 7–13. According to the YALSA website, "The purpose of the initiative is to ensure that teens are competent and ethical users of technologies, especially those that are offered through libraries such as DVDs, databases, audiobooks, and videogames. Teen Tech Week encourages teens to use libraries' nonprint resources for education and recreation, and to recognize that librarians are qualified, trusted professionals in the field of information technology."

I like *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, and I was really pleased when they asked to write an article, especially once we decided that Teen Tech Week would be my topic. One of the things that makes *In the Library* valuable for me is its goal, "to explore new ideas and start conversations; to document our concerns and argue for solutions." Teen Tech week is a great fit with the first part of that goal, but not a great fit for the second. Honestly, I wouldn't know how to criticize Teen Tech Week, constructively or otherwise—there's just not a lot to criticize. (It's not that I think ALA/YALSA is perfect or anything, but that's a different article.) Teen Tech Week is just so open-ended and flexible, you don't pay anything to participate, YALSA's artwork and promotional materials are excellent—and with a free program I think there's not a lot of expectation, so whatever you get from YALSA and provide for your teens seems good. I haven't encountered any problems with it, and other than an aversion to technology in my

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personal life (I **love** my job, don't get me wrong about that—I'm just a little more old-fashioned at heart than your usual early-thirties teen librarian), have no problems with technology-based programming, so I really have no criticisms.

What's great about Teen Tech Week is that it gives us a built-in reason to push ourselves to get creative in our technology programming, to plan gaming events and listening parties, to investigate texting and social networking, and to push our non-print library materials. Many teens use the internet and other technologies almost to the exclusion of books as their source of entertainment and information, which can make me reluctant to immerse myself in the world of chats and playlists and fanvids. I spend my personal time gardening and baking bread, and would prefer to spend more of my work time planning traditional book groups and teen advisory board (TAB) events, but the fact is that many teens prefer texting to talking, RSS to reading a book, and gaming to gardening. The methods and merchandise sold to them—very effectively, I might add—is what they're using, what their friends are using, and, therefore, what we should be using to engage them.

### **Getting Teens Into the Library**

Ultimately, we want teens to visit the library. Besides being, as we are so often reminded, the next crop of voters, teens are energetic, dynamic, and contagious—when teens latch on to something, they tell their friends. Who tell their friends. Who... you get the picture. These are the kind of patrons we want to attract, right? Right. What is this generation known for more than anything else? They are one of the first generations to grow up completely immersed in technology—the internet has always been available to them. To get these kids to make the library 'TheirSpace,' we have to make them aware of all the wonders housed within, not only the books.

Although teens are familiar with the internet and internet-based gadgets (usually before we are) and feel comfortable using them, they don't always use them to their best advantage. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that 71% of teens use the internet as their primary source for school projects, but many of those same students need guidance in using the internet effectively. By promoting Teen Tech Week, you're helping to let teens know that the librarians at your facility are information experts—dynamic, interested, up-to-date adults that they can turn to for help with their information needs, and not just encyclopedia pushers.

Something else to keep in mind when working with teen patrons—you won't necessarily meet them face to face. Their comfort with e-communication means they are more likely to want to text you or ask a question on Facebook chat than to drop by for a visit. A brand new study from Pew mentions that 73% of 'wired teens' now use social networking sites, and 75% of teens surveyed own a cell phone.<sup>3</sup> To really connect with teen patrons, we need to reach out to them where they are, using the channels they're most likely to use, rather than wait for them to come to us.

Granted, some of us may not feel entirely comfortable using these technologies, but celebrating Teen Tech Week in your library is a great excuse to make yourself more comfortable! Every year, YALSA generates a new theme for Teen Tech Week that is general enough to work in a wide variety of ways to get the message across. This year's theme is "Create, Share, Learn @ Your Library."

### **Getting Started**

If you want to celebrate Teen Tech Week at your library, a great place to start is the <u>Teen Tech Week website</u>. Here, you can register for Teen Tech Week (registration closes mid-February, so if you've missed the deadline for this year, keep it in mind for next year), and also find and share program ideas,

resources, and promotional tools. Registration is free, and occasionally sponsors will send you incentives. Posters and bookmarks are available from the ALA store.

One of the best features of the Teen Tech Week initiative is it's flexibility. For instance, many school districts take a spring break in the first few weeks of March. YALSA encourages you to "feel free to celebrate Teen Tech Week at the best time for your library." Each year there is a different theme, but YALSA doesn't get bent out of shape if you prefer not to use it. There's an umbrella theme, "Get Connected @ Your Library," that you can use every year, and the promotional products (like bookmarks) don't always have the dates for Teen Tech Week listed, so you can use them other years.

If you want to start on a small scale, there are plenty of ways to do it. Displays of technology-oriented materials such as Playaways or books on CD, how-to books like <u>Flash Animation for Teens</u> or <u>The Ultimate Guide to Video Game Writing and Design</u>, or how-to-download-ebook demonstrations are great ways to push stuff you already have in-house, and Teen Tech Week helps create the focus to make these items more visible and relevant. The Teen Tech Week website has some great resource lists to get you started.<sup>5</sup>

Passive programs are a great fit for Teen Tech Week, especially if you're just starting out, or if your library staff is pressed for time to program. For instance, you could give prizes to teens in the library if you see them using a handheld device— "Caught you texting!" Holding a week-long scavenger hunt to highlight resources that use or promote the use of popular or emerging technological tools is another low-maintenance idea. You could do a "Name that Acronym" quiz —KWIM? Prizes can be cheap, like candy, ear buds, thumb drives, or stickers and decals to decorate an iPod case—the ALA store even has this last prize for sale.

You don't have to use working technology to have an awesome program during Teen Tech Week. Ask your IT department (or ask around at local companies) for spare computer and machine parts and make jewelry or funky sculptures. If you have a little money (or know some boys who have outgrown their toys), get some R/C car parts, Erector sets, Legos and the like and have a Robot-Building Contest. Even if you can't get working motors, the robot sculptures will be a blast to create and look really cool in the Teen area.

# **Going Virtual**

If you are able to connect with your teens over the internet, and more and more library systems are recognizing the necessity of maintaining an online presence, your possibilities are practically endless. Internet scavenger hunts are easy, cheap, and fun for teens to complete on their own time. Online quizzes can be created on websites like Quizilla or SurveyMonkey—they can be just silly, for-fun, multiple choice quizzes (Who do you text most often?) or be used to gather real information about which web sites your teens prefer, their favorite type of music, which formats are used most frequently, etc. If you're in a real time crunch, it could be something as simple as, "Post a greeting (or comment on a book review, etc.) on the library Facebook page this week, and get a prize! Pick your prize up at the teen desk the next time you visit." Not only are you celebrating Teen Tech Week, but it's also a great way to let the teens know about your library's social networking sites. On the Akron-Summit County Public Library blog/website for teens, we often add quizzes and other interactive posts. They can complement and promote in-house programming as well as stand on their own.

Book discussion groups can be moved to the virtual realm, onto sites like <u>BookBundlz</u> or <u>Shelfari</u>. Sites like these can really come in handy when travel is difficult, for teens who are too busy or can't drive themselves to the library to make a meeting, or for teens who have moved away, but still want to connect

with their friends 'back home.' The Denver Library uses part of their website for a virtual Book Club—when you sign up, they'll send you emails of a five-minute section of a book chapter every day for a week. If your interest is piqued, you can come to the library and check out the book to read the rest.<sup>6</sup>

## **Getting Media Into the Mix**

If you have teen patrons who are more into writing than discussion, you could use the comments function of your library blog to start a Round Robin story that the teens write themselves. Post a paragraph or two of an original story, and let the teens continue it in their comments. You'll need to post a couple of guidelines and monitor submissions, but this can be a lot of fun. This is only one way teens can use the internet to showcase their creativity. Websites like <a href="Scratch">Scratch</a> allow teens to animate tributes to their favorite books, the library, or even create a basic video game. You could form a gallery on the site to collect all submissions from your local teens, and ask them to vote for their favorite projects.

Book trailers and short films are increasingly popular and a great fit for a library-based program. Many teens can shoot short videos with their phones and cameras, but if your library has basic video equipment, you can get far more creative and involve more teens. Our library recently purchased a digital video camera at Target for \$50, and one branch is going to use it, along with our galley copies, to do some unscripted reviews to add to the teen website. That's inexpensive enough that many librarians would feel fine with their TAB using it to create video shorts, film a short-scripted play, or do mockinterviews. Most cameras have USB cords that allow you to connect them directly to your computer, and there is free video-editing software available online.

If \$50 is more than your library can afford, YALSA sometimes holds a mini-grant program specifically for Teen Tech Week. In 2008 and 2009, they awarded forty \$450 grants to school and public libraries to fund special programs and services. Here are a few examples from the list of last year's winners (the rest are available on the YALSA Teen Tech Week website—see footnote):

- Baraboo Public Library in Baraboo, Wisconsin will be using [the] mini grant to improve teen space in the library. A large, dark brick wall will soon be covered with a bright high-tech mural designed by a local teen artist. Teens will learn how to wire LED lights, construct LED clocks, and make a scrolling marquee as [they] combine paint, electronic gadgets, and bling bling to create a unique and eye-catching focal point for [the] teen area.
- The Dorris Van Doren Regional Branch (El Paso Public Library System in Texas) hosts Artech Fun: This program combines art and technology through the use of Wacom's Bamboo Fun Tablet. Funds will be used to purchase two digital drawing tablets and a small collection of digital art books to help teens take their art to the next level. Guest speakers will be invited to show teens how to use a digital drawing tablet and talk about their careers. Teens will then be able to reserve time slots to work on two projects. The first project is to create promotional art for the summer reading club and perhaps create an animated short. The second project is to create or upload their own artwork to be showcased in an art show that they plan at the library.
- Bartow County Library System in Cartersville, Georgia's Teen Advisory Board will use Flip Mino video cameras to create instructional videos for patrons. The teens will answer basic cell phone questions, explain how to use the online library catalog including how to renew items and place holds, and show how to set up an email account. These are just a few of the topics the instructional videos will cover. The teens will film and edit the videos before posting them to the library website, MySpace pages, and making DVDs that patrons can check out and take home.

There are so many different directions you can go! It doesn't have to be just 'fun stuff.' You can make Teen Tech Week a meaningful and educational experience, and even give teens a chance to 'give

back.' Hold an old-cell phone drive in the teen area, and using your TAB or regulars to help spread the word, and donate the phones you collect to a women's shelter or similar charity.

Talk to your children's library staff and see if there is a way the teens can create a special audio or video project reading or telling stories that younger kids could enjoy. Recorded stories on CD for the little kids to take into a story tent or quiet corner to listen to on their own or with a friend could be fun for the teens as well as the kids. Teens could record reader's theater renditions of favorite children's tales, or even film a full-on original play, with costumes and backdrops, to run on a loop on a TV in the corner of the Children's Library.

Teen Tech Week would be a wonderful time to kick off a Teen Tech Volunteer group who uses their techsavvy (with a little guidance and training) to assist adults with basic computer usage, such as navigating the library website, using a search engine, or learning word processing software. Often it's hard to find the time to leave the circulation desk to help patrons lacking these basic technology-use skills, especially at peak hours. Friendly, willing teens could be just the solution, and it can be win-win if they need volunteer hours for scouts, 4-H, or school.

### **Involving Your Peers**

Speaking of school; be sure to let your local teachers and school library know about Teen Tech Week, and how you plan to celebrate. They may want to help you promote your events or even get involved themselves. Although teachers see teens even more often than we public librarians do, sometimes they need a push to relate to them through technological means, just like we do. The teen librarian/branch manager at our Richfield Branch, Jen Stencel, was recently talking to a teacher about our Summer Reading Program, and witnessed firsthand a mini-epiphany.

I was just at a 6-8 grade curriculum meeting this past Friday and afterwards I was approached and spoke with the Special Ed teacher who was absolutely excited that we [the library] count blogs and such for 'reading' during our summer reading. She was excited to realize that reading blogs, posts, walls, emails, texts, IM's, etc., is just as much a reading skill—not a traditional skill, but one just as vital, if not more so in today's world—as reading a book. This would surely excite her students, most of whom are tech-savvy, or at least tech-comfy. We then went on to talking—with exclamation marks flying—and she realized we let the kids count other technologies like Playaways and Kindles/Nooks for reading as well. She was going to introduce her kids to the Richfield Branch Shelfari site. I'm not sure if she was going to do the book club part of it, but she liked the idea of teens 'socializing' over books and the 'fun' way it would get them to write reviews and share comments.<sup>8</sup>

#### Conclusion

The exciting thing about Teen Tech Week is that it gives us an opportunity to explore and learn to use all of the websites, gadgets, and formats that our library is purchasing, our teens are bringing into the building, and we are reading about in professional journals and magazines. It is a chance to let the teens know that libraries and librarians are not all about books. We are interested in learning about and sharing all types of information resources, and prove entertaining and cutting edge programming and services that occasionally dip into the philanthropic or even (gasp!) educational arenas. When you choose to participate in Teen Tech Week, it's not only the teens who "Create, Share and Learn @ your Library." The staff will as well.

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- 1. Young Adult Library Services Association (2007). <u>Teen Tech Week Mission</u>. American Library Association. [?]
- 2. Pew Research Center&mdsh; Internet and American Life Project. [?]
- 3. Pew Research Center—Internet and American Life Project (2010). <u>Social Media and Young Adults—A Report</u>. [?]
- 4. American Library Association (2010). Teen Tech Week Frequently Asked Questions. [?]
- 5. Young Adult Library Services Association (2010). <u>Tech Week Event Planning and Booklists</u>. American Library Association. [?]
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- 7. Teen Tech Week 2009 Mini-Grant Winners [?]
- 8. Stencel, Jennifer. 2010. Retrieved from an email dated 2/15/2010 and edited with her approval. [?]