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teen space @ Internet Public Library

The Internet Public Library (ipl) launched in 1995 as a project of a graduate seminar at the University of Michigan. The teen space was added in 1996 and is located at <http://www.ipl.org/div/teen/> (“Timeline of ipl2 History”). Earlier this year, ipl merged with the Librarians’ Internet Index (LII) to form ipl2, and the teen area of the site has been renamed “For Teens” (“About ipl2”). The ipl2 is funded by member libraries that manage and contribute to its projects (“ipl.org Membership Info”).

In 2008, ipl2 (then still ipl) adopted a mission and vision statement. Its goals include offering volunteer opportunities to library students and professionals, providing a forum for collaborative research, and shaping library service in a rapidly shifting digital environment (“The Mission and Vision Statements of ipl2”). These goals filter into every part of the site, including the For Teens area. In fact, making libraries more digital friendly is especially important in regard to teens because they are more connected than other demographics. For example, teen cell phone ownership is quickly approaching that of their parents (at 75 percent and 90 percent, respectively, in the autumn of 2009) and 93 percent of teens are online (Purcell, 2010). Engaging teens in the digital landscape is essential to keep libraries relevant to them.

The main page of For Teens has twelve categories that are of interest to teenagers. These categories link to another page that contains information about the category and additional sites related to that topic. For example, the Graphic Novels category links to another page that has links to the history of graphic novels, why Japanese comics are important, et cetera. In addition

to graphic novels, For Teens contains the categories of School & Homework Help, A+ Writing Research Paper Guide, Reading & Writing, TeenSpace Poetry, Procrastinator, Sports Entertainment & Arts, Clubs and Organizations, Answers to Frequently Asked Embarrassing Questions, Health & Sexuality, Handle Your Finances, and Technology Resources. There are no links to databases—For Teens is more like a library of links organized by topic. Within each topic are a number of subtopics, though, so the search can be further narrowed (“For Teens”).

The site makes for excellent browsing, but also has a search capability. The search box at the top of the page allows the user to search either the For Teens area or ipl2 as a whole. While it does not appear to have a fuzzy search capability, a Boolean search works. For example, searching “vido gams” returned no results. There was no suggestion for the correct term “video games.” However, a search for “video AND games” returned results about video games.

It is useful that ipl2 and the For Teens site are hosted on a website because it is accessible from anywhere there is Internet access. There is no special hardware or software required beyond a computer and a web browser. Unlike some sites that contain databases (the Buley Library website, for instance), a user does not need a password to get information. The main ipl2 page has a link to newspapers and magazines, but again, they are links to the web sites of the periodicals, not a database.

Jones and Pfiel (2004) noted that a library’s website for teens should have the following characteristics: graphics that are meaningful to the pages’ content, material organized into logical, well-labeled categories, inclusion of web sites about sexuality and health, and annotations indicating what each site is about. Furthermore, the information needs to be current and, if possible, there should be an area for teens to submit their writing. ipl2’s For Teens site accomplishes these goals—the graphics correlate to the topics, there is an entire category

devoted to health and sexuality, the links provided are annotated and functioning, and there is a poetry wiki for teens to join, submit their writing, and comment on each other's writing. The site is clear and concise. The only visible barrier is getting the word out that For Teens exists.

Luckily, ipl2 has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, and Wordpress, and links to these are available on the bottom of For Teens. As long as ipl2 maintains its site to the level that it's currently at, it should continue to be a valuable resource.

References

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