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What are mobile friendly library sites offering? A survey

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What are mobile friendly library sites offering? A survey.

Published in Musing about Librarianship by Aaron Tay

<http://musingsaboutlibrarianship.blogspot.sg/2010/04/comparison-of-40-mobile-library-sites.html>

Everyone knows mobile is hot now, and many libraries are scrambling to add mobile friendly pages. Currently the most complete listing of libraries with mobile sites can be found at the [Library Success Wiki site](#) , which lists over 40 such sites.

I thought it would be helpful to look at these 40+ sites to see what are the common services that have being offered to mobile users. To that end, I have created a google doc of the 40 sites comparing their common features. I grouped each feature below according to whether it exists in a mobile site and then choose representative examples with images to be displayed below and direct link to the specific mobile friendly page shown in the image.

Hopefully this will be helpful to those librarians building a new mobile site and would like to compare or get some ideas on how others have done it.

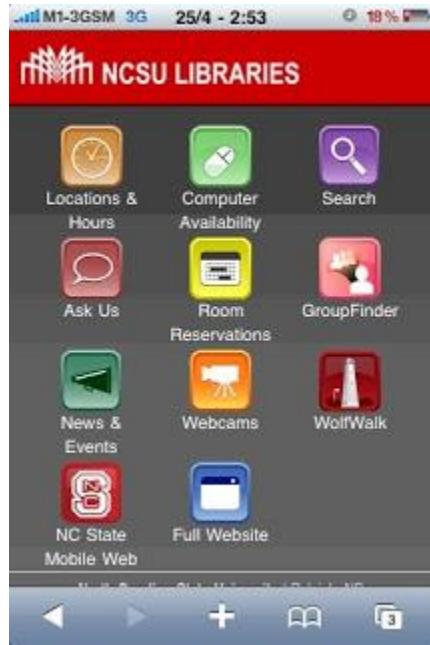
Do note, I'm testing with just iPhone with Safari mobile (would be interesting to try with the newly released Opera Mini), some of the sites don't render nicely though, displaying only in a small part of the screen. My guess is these were designed for a older generation of phones (windows mobile?)

Note: the links below each picture goes directly to the mobile version of the site (mobile homepage or specific internal mobile page). You might also want to view [this post using the mobile version](#).

Layout

It seems that the mobile library sites reviewed almost always fall into 3 main styles

The newest style seems to be those that mimic iPhone app layouts. Examples include



[North Carolina State University Library](#)



[University of Pennsylvania](#)

This style of mobile pages seems designed for higher end smart phones with touchscreens. They are a lot nicer visually, but incur more band-width charges. Not the most popular style currently, but rising in popularity since

the [webinar given by NCSU on building mobile libraries](#).

Typically mobile libraries using this style tend to have the most sophisticated services as well.

At the opposite extreme there are bare-bones text based layouts. Usually options are numbered. Some examples below



[Cal Poly Pomona University Library](#)

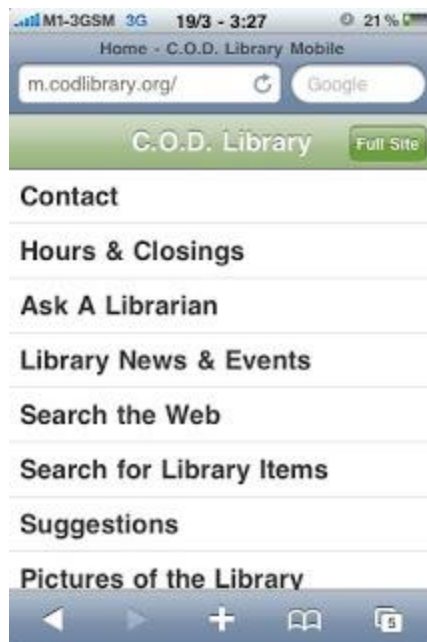


[Duke Libraries](#)

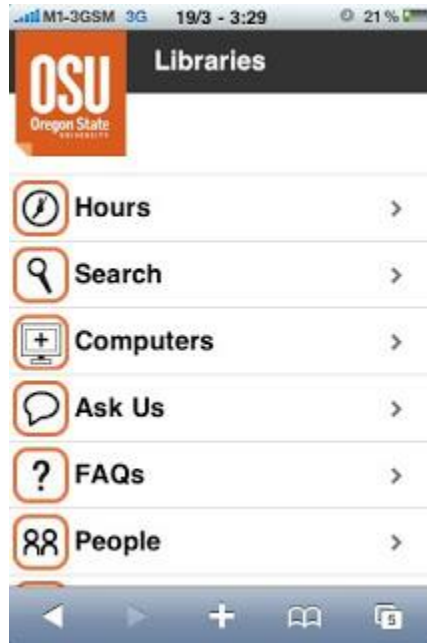


[University of Denver \(Penrose Library\)](#)

Most library mobile sites typically lie behind these 2 extremes. There is some use of graphics for icons, horizontal lines to create rows etc. Some examples below



[College of DuPage Library](#)



[Oregon State University](http://www.library.oregonstate.edu)



[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](http://www.lib.unc.edu)



[Auburn University Libraries](#)

There are other variants, that are rarer. Basically some include a search box at the mobile home page which makes sense, since searching is a very common option.



[St. John's University, College of St. Benedict \(Clemens Library\)](#)



[University of British Columbia Library](#)



[University of Virginia Library](#)



[University of Virginia Library \(Staff page\)](#)

Iowa Libraries has an interesting variant, with expanding and collapsible options. See also [Miami University Libraries \(Ohio\)](#)



[University of Iowa Libraries](#)

The essentials - Opening hours, contact us/directories, Directions & Floormaps

Almost every mobile library site lists opening hours as well as a way to contact the library and/or staff directories. I didn't notice anything particularly interesting about how libraries are displaying opening hours on mobile, though there seems to be diverse ways one can set up the contact page due to the numerous channels libraries are using these days.

One can setup a general "Ask us" contact page to email, phone, SMS reference and IM, or choose to have a staff directory or department directory with individual contacts. On an iPhone touching any of these options will usually open email, make a call, send SMS etc.





[North Carolina State University Library](#)

Both [Oregon State University MobileLib](#) and [North Carolina State University Library](#) provide almost every possible feedback channel (except Skype?). A nice touch is that the very last option "Reference hours" and "Visit us in-person" respectively provides information for users who want to see the librarian in person. For the later, not only are the reference hours listed but also directions to the reference desk are given.

Supporting IM chat is tricky. While some libraries like [College of DuPage Library](#) give out IM handles (see below), probably what most libraries want to do is to embed web chat boxes.



[College of DuPage Library](#)

Given that most phones don't support Flash, the chat box embedded needs to be using purely html not Flash. So this means something like say Meebo Me doesn't work. I haven't looked at which chat boxes are not using flash, but I notice some libraries are using [Libraryh3lp](#), or [QuestionPoint](#).



[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#)

A slightly different tack is taken by the National Library Board, while questions can be submitted via the web form, answers will be sent via SMS.

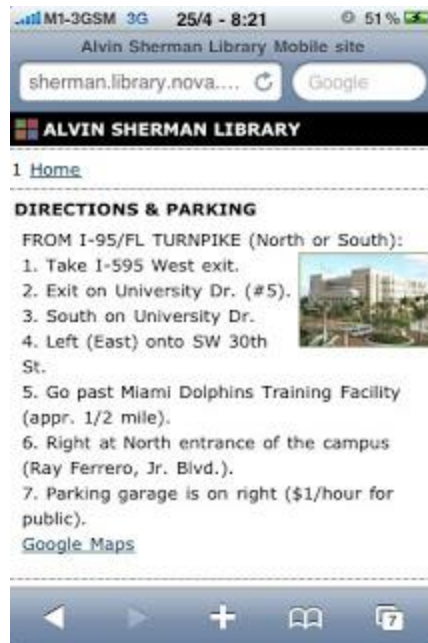


Besides contacts, and opening hours, the third most common item listed on mobile sites are directions to the library.

Many libraries such as [Auburn University Libraries](#) simply provide a link to Google maps for directions to their library. Clicking on the link in iPhone will open it in the Maps apps (see below).



It might be perhaps better to offer other options as well. A combined approach would be to include directions in text plus link to Google Map.



[Nova Southeastern University - Alvin Sherman Library](#)

[Oregon State University MobileLib](#) allows one to text the directions and/or library contacts.



[Oregon State University MobileLib](#)

[Rice University, Fondren Library, Houston, TX](#) offers more options including pdf/gif maps



[Rice University, Fondren Library, Houston, TX](#)

How about a floor plan of the library? I'm somewhat disappointed that libraries that have this, display merely static maps. See for example [Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library](#)



or [Adelphi University Libraries](#)



One wonders though, if there could be something more sophisticated. In any case, some libraries [provide mobile tours of libraries typically podcasts/MP3s](#)

Mobile Catalogue and Loan related

As one of the major tasks that users do on the library portal is searching the library catalogue, it makes little sense to launch a mobile library site without a mobile friendly catalogue.

Unfortunately, converting your library catalogue to a mobile friendly site isn't trivial unless there is already built-in support to display results in mobile friendly mode (it's fairly easy to just make the search box mobile friendly). As a result, many libraries offering mobile library catalogues either don't have a mobile version or are actually using [Innovative Interfaces](#) products because they offer AirPac a mobile version of their library catalogue. Another option that might become common in the future seems to be [LibraryThing Mobile](#).

I would make a wild guess and say it would be helpful to have loan services (check loan record, reserve books etc) available in mobile as well, but I'm not sure how easy to do it, if the ILS you are using does not allow this.

There might be other library catalogues with mobile friendly versions, I haven't done the research yet.

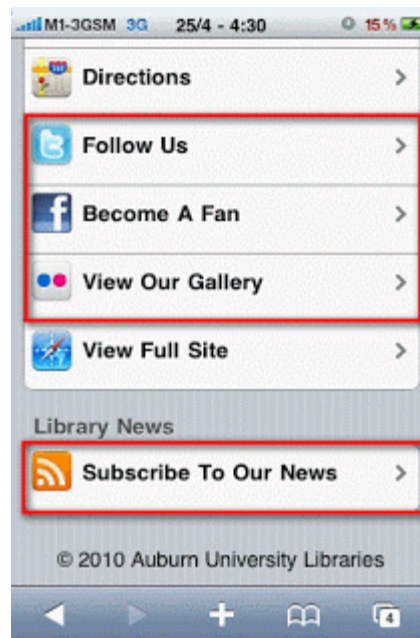
Edit : [Found Mobile Library Catalogs by Eric Rumsey, compares 18 mobile catalogues \(with images\)](#)

Libraries without mobile versions but are on WorldCat could link to the [WorldCat mobile](#) . I've noticed a couple of mobile sites even have article finders ([University of Pennsylvania](#) and [University of Minnesota Library](#))

Mobile enabled third party sites - Social Networking sites

These days many major web pages offer mobile versions of their pages. This is particularly true for many web 2 services. As most libraries today are heavily into web2/social networking services, it makes a lot of sense to link to such pages that are already mobile ready!

Some of such services linked to in library mobile sites includes Twitter, Blogs, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, MySpace etc. Some examples below



[Auburn University Libraries](http://www.auburn.edu/libraries)



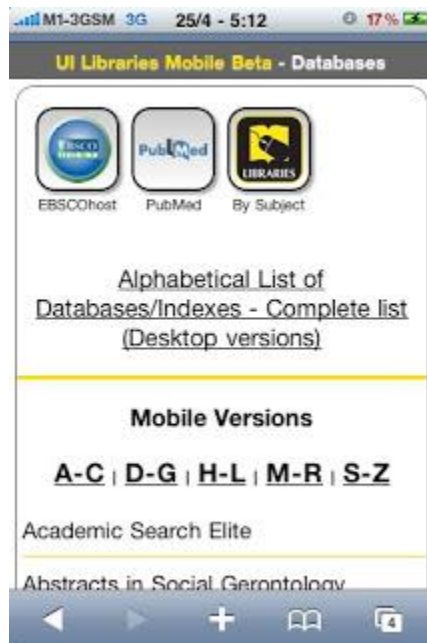
[Mississippi State University Libraries](http://library.msstate.edu/m/)

Mobile enabled third party sites - Mobile databases, academic sources

Many libraries also provide links to mobile enabled databases (and some link to all databases either directly or via library catalogue). Currently there isn't that many, though libraries that depend heavily on EBSCOhost have the edge here since the databases they form on this platform are mobile friendly. Medical libraries also have an edge since PubMed is mobile friendly. Others include IEEEExplore, Naxos etc. See list [here](#) .



[Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library](http://www.lib.byu.edu/m/dat...)

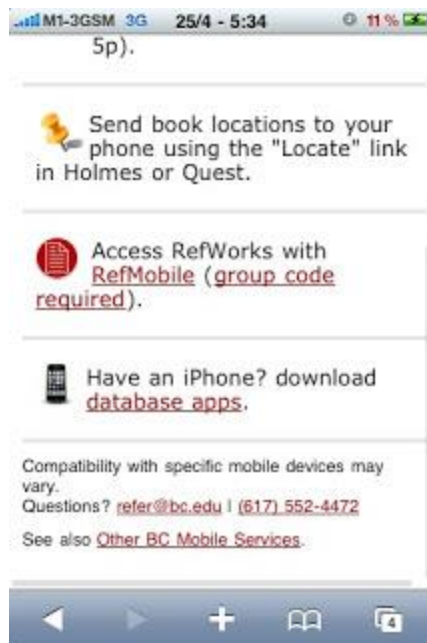


[University of Iowa Libraries](http://ui-libraries.org)



[University of Minnesota Library](http://www.lib.umn.edu/mobi...)

Quite a few libraries also provide links to the mobile version of Refworks. (What about other web-based reference managers like Mendeley? Do they have mobile versions or iPhone apps?)



[Boston College University Library](http://www.bostoncollege.edu/library)



[T. Carney Library, Mass Dartmouth](#)



[University of Alberta](#)

A slightly different tack would be to offer links to iPhone apps either university specific or database specific. See [my list of iPhone apps related to libraries here](#).



[Boston College University Library](http://bc.edu)

Other search related mobile links that are offered include Google books, Google Scholar, web search engines which all provide mobile versions.



[University of Nebraska Omaha Library](http://unomaha.edu)



I wonder if any of the digital repositories have mobile friendly versions?

Though I have not seen libraries that done so, but [LibGuides](#) currently has a print/mobile version (which will be further improved) , so that could be linked. I also wonder about ebook collections and [linking to other library mobile collections.](#)

Extras - Web Cam, Computer availability, booking discussion room

While most of the services above are relatively easy to offer, some libraries have begun to offer extra services. In particular checking of availability of computers in libraries is available in the mobile versions of some libraries. [Oregon State University](#) has a "computers" option but at the time of writing, I got an error when accessing the page (library wasn't open at the time?)

M1-3GSM 3G 25/4 - 5:00 19%

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY**

**LIBRARY COMPUTER
AVAILABILITY**

FLOOR	NO. AVAIL.	% AVAIL.
Lower Level	27/52	52%
First Floor	83/142	58%
Second Floor	15/26	58%
Third Floor	59/64	92%
Fourth Floor	32/41	78%
Architecture	14/14	100%

Navigation icons: back, forward, home, search, tabs (4)

[Ball State University](#)

M1-3GSM 3G 25/4 - 6:01 5%

Available Computers

library.duke.edu/mobil... Google

Duke Libraries

Available Computers

How many computers are available right now?

- Bostock First Floor: 13 (out of 31)
- Bostock Lower Level: 7 (out of 20)
- Perkins First Floor: 23 (out of 59)
- The Link: 4 (out of 12)
- Lilly Library: 17 (out of 30)
- Music Library: 5 (out of 6)

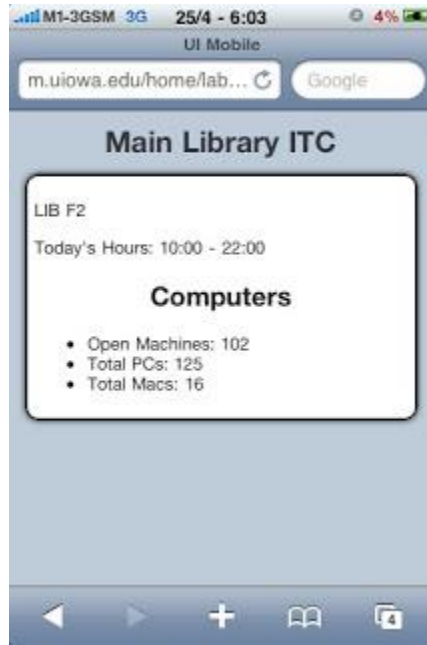
9 [Mobile Library Home](#)

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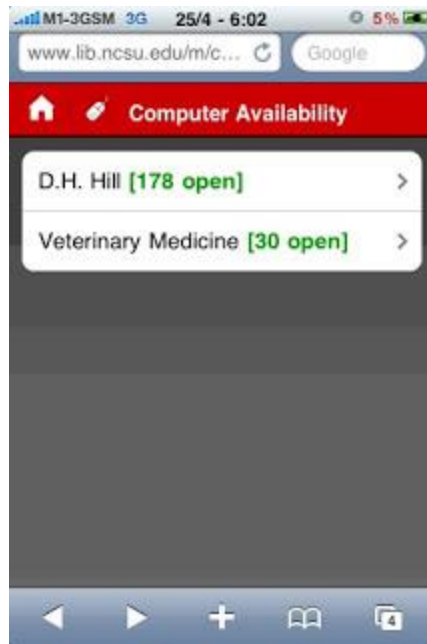
Perkins Circulation Desk: 919-660-5870

Navigation icons: back, forward, home, search, tabs (4)

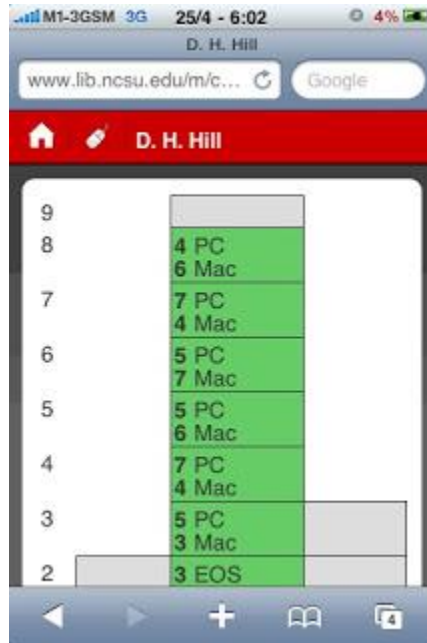
[Duke University](#)



[University of Iowa Libraries](#)



[North Carolina State University Library \(number\)](#)



[North Carolina State University Library \(exact machines available\)](#)

In a somewhat similar vein, it is possible to link to webcams in the library to help users see how busy certain parts of the library are so they can decide whether to walk over to use the facilities.



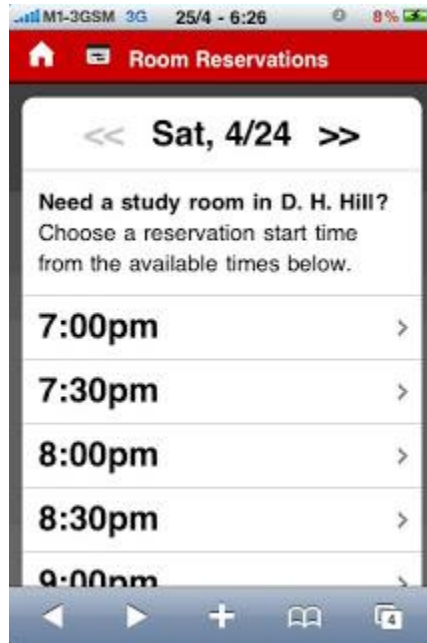
[North Carolina State University Library, webcam selection](#)



[North Carolina State University Library, webcam example](#)



[University of Nebraska Omaha Library](#)



[North Carolina State University Library, Room Reservation](#)



[Ryerson University Library and Archives](#)

News, FAQ , Podcasts

It probably also makes sense for a mobile site to list news , and this can be done with blogs, Twitter etc (see above), but news can also be offered as RSS (yes, Twitter and blogs generate RSS feeds too).



[University of Iowa Libraries](http://www.libraries.uiowa.edu)

The image below shows how a RSS feed looks like in Iphone Safari.



[Auburn University Libraries](http://www.libraries.auburn.edu)

Besides news & events, libraries can and should also offer podcasts, videos for download.



[Rice University, Fondren Library, Houston, TX](#)

Adelphi University Libraries [offers to stream music via Naxos](#)



Similarly videos can be offered for download (as opposed to hosted on YouTube)



[University of Pennsylvania](http://www.library.upenn.edu)

One thing I don't quite understand is why not many libraries have made their Library loan rules, FAQ etc mobile friendly. If FAQ systems like LibAnswers, offer mobile friendly pages, things would be a lot easier.

Conclusion

There are other features that don't quite fall nicely into the categories above but these seem to be the main features. To reiterate the main features in most library mobile sites include

1. Mobile library catalogue + loan related services
2. Information about opening hours
3. Directions to the library
4. How to contact library via multiple channels of communication (Chat/SMS/Phone/Email)
5. Links to mobile enabled databases
6. Links to mobile enabled web2.0 accounts such as Twitter/Flickr/YouTube/Facebook
7. Floor maps
8. Checking computer availability, book discussion rooms
9. Web cam to check congestion in libraries
10. Library news events and offering content for download Podcasts, videos

I would add that it is almost always a good idea to add a button or link that allows the user to switch from mobile mode to normal mode.

Any other interesting idea I missed? If you are aware of any mobile library site but isn't listed [here](#) , please comment below. Thanks

Posted 25th April 2010 by [Aaron Tay](#)

Labels: [mobile survey](#)