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TechNook 365

Harvard Business Professor Clayton Christensen's signature book, "The Innovator's Dilemma," first appeared in 1997. The Dilemma is that corporations, once innovative on their rise, eventually seek to just protect the technology they already sell in the marketplace, and thus look ahead only with an incremental mindset. If you need a well-known example of such a decline, it is that of the typewriter industry.

Christensen's lead-off example is the disc drive industry. He used it because it presented him, at the time, with a manageable 30 years of tangible advances, as disc drives shrank in size from 14" in diameter (who remembers that?) to 8" to 5 ¾" to 3 ½" and so on. It's a story of outsiders, with each size reduction, overwhelming established companies, leapfrogging them because of their mire in near-term profit margins, and thus enabling new innovations such as minicomputers, desktop PCs, and laptops. It's not always best to listen too closely to existing customers! The book is a great and telling read.

Public libraries face a similar dilemma when they do not innovate themselves, when they do not take seriously information and reading needs beyond print. For that reason, we look to reinvent. One reinvention on my to-do list has been dubbed by my wife as TechNook 365. At Murrysville Community Library (MCL), the idea of it has evolved into three points of discussion, as follows.

1. Indoor Streaming: Building an open, children-friendly "theater" or TechNook within the library, featuring large-screen TV. Streamed content is available, for example, from NASA, professional societies such as the American Chemical Society, other libraries locally and nationally, museums locally and globally, musical venues, and theaters, all of which are resources for high quality, free content that is educational and fun. It is not that patrons cannot stream that content on their own: it is that they need guidance to find it amidst the Internet maelstrom. I already gave you examples in the previous "The Magic Library Card!" article about informed streaming sites.
2. Outdoor Venue: The same purpose as defined above except for using an outside space that can be developed at any WLN library with available space - a small outdoor pavilion/amphitheater that allows for outdoor programming with much reduced risk to COVID-19 and the like. Motivation for it grew out of the local COVID-19 onset in March, 2020.
3. Home Streaming: Programming guides for patrons at library web sites for recommended streaming features from around the world. This online guide would be available to patrons 365 days/year; hence, the title name TechNook 365. It would supplement the live features of pieces #1 and #2 above

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“Indoor Streaming” is already financially seeded by a memorial gift to the Murrysville Community Library Foundation from a very generous Murrysville family, and the Murrysville Library Board has approved going forward; however, COVID-19 has momentarily caused some reflection on timing.

Storytime STEM-packs, the subject of an earlier “The Magic Library Card!” article, is about the introduction of a new value-added proposition for WLN libraries, one that goes toward redefining the library as a place of informal, informed and PA educational standards-based learning. TechNook can be that too. Both address the Dilemma about which Christensen wrote. And in the sense that both have components for online learning, they are especially appropriate to the Coronavirus at hand. Our challenge is to keep working at such new offerings in a way that out-of-business enterprises did not.

Charles B. Greenberg
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