

On Supporting Electronic Devices in Libraries

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On the variety of devices

As librarians and library staff, you are increasingly asked by patrons, students and other stakeholders for support of devices that are neither present in the library, nor well known by staff. If someone walks in with an iPhone, and there has been no formal training or personal experience with the iPhone, for instance, then it can be a case of a disappointed patron, a frustrated staffer, potential for misconfiguration, and so on. This document seeks to provide you with resources and strategies for meeting the needs of stakeholders who bring their own devices (BYOD) to the library for support.

What is your policy?

It's quite possible that you do not have a policy for the scope and depth to which you can/should go in your library to support a device. It is not a given nor a mandate that the device can/should be supported, though every effort should be made to help the patron to the allowed degree. There is no monolithic best practices document, as the support needs and scope change from library to library and patron to patron. If no policy exists, it may be up to the staffer to decide to what lengths they will go to resolve a configuration issue, for example.

However, this is problematic, because if the device is misconfigured, damaged, faulty, or just wrought with malware, the staffer who touches the device may be held accountable to some degree. In my opinion, policies for handling electronic devices that belong to patrons should be developed and well-known by both staffers and patrons. The policy, for instance, could include a waiver of responsibility that is included in the patron account EULA (End User License Agreement) when a device is touched by a staffer. It could also limit support to the key devices in use at the time, such as Android (Kindle included), iOS devices, and laptops. Without a policy though, it can be a free-for-all, and the library could be damaged in the melee. With a policy in place, you might offer (or mandate) a class (or cross-training) on the specific support levels at your library, including devices, limits, and expectations all around.

Some key devices and support information

In my opinion, libraries should be focusing on the big two in mobile and desktop technologies: Google and Apple, with the addition of Microsoft Windows for laptop support.

Android - "Android Quick Start Guide, Android 4.4 (KitKat)" ~ Android Quick Start Guide, Android 4.4 (KitKat) - Books on Google Play - <http://goo.gl/dtPeZz>

Android is an open source operating system developed by Google that is the most installed OS on mobile devices today, and is installed in many different forms in many different devices. For example, the Droid, Kindle, Nexus, Galaxy and Motorola X all run Android. There are differences in the details, but generally, installation, navigation, and customization all work the same across these devices, even though the store, interface, and size (form factor) may change. Many of the apps available on Android are also available on iOS (Apple devices) though it is not a given that any app appears on both platforms. Android runs on both phone and tablet platforms, and can appear in other forms, such as a USB key.

iOS - <https://www.apple.com/ios/ios7-basics/>

iOS is a proprietary operating system developed by Apple that is perhaps the most popular and beloved operating system, and stands out because it compares in popularity with all of Android in its many forms, but resides in the control of one company. The company takes a monolithic approach and offers just a few devices, which allows for a strong extended ecosystem in peripherals and accessories. iPhones and iPads all run iOS. Installation, navigation, customization, the store, interface, and sizes are all very strictly controlled by Apple, which offers simplicity, reliability, and security, though is far less customizable and extensible than Android. Typically, app developers develop for iOS first, and Android second. iOS only ever appears on approved Apple devices.

Windows - <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/windows-basics-all-topics>

Microsoft Windows is a desktop operating system that recently has appeared more like a mobile operating system, with touch screens becoming especially handy in use of the OS. It is likely the most popular OS installed on desktops and laptops in the world, and is especially strong in enterprise environments.

Mac OS - <https://www.apple.com/support/macbasics/>

Mac OS is Apple's desktop and laptop operating system. It has also been affected by the success of the iPhone in that it now uses the app store to deliver applications, but is less affected in its interface than Windows. Much like iOS vs. Android, it tends to have a greater positive emotional effect on its users than Windows.

Chrome OS - <https://support.google.com/chromebook/?hl=en#topic=3399709>

Chrome OS is an odd duck. It is Google's OS for laptops, with a twist: it runs only a browser. With our increased reliance on cloud-based applications and services, this may very well be the way of the future, one in which all we need is a browser and an internet connection to get all of our life and work done. Unless you are doing application programming video production, graphic design or other processor heavy application work, the Chromebook may be all that you need. Word Processing, email, web browsing, research, and media management can all be done very well in the cloud now.