

# Technology Petting Zoo

## What is a Technology Petting Zoo?

The technology petting-zoo is a collection of tech-devices available to patrons and staff at the library to test-drive so they could learn how they operate. The common devices included are e-readers, tablets and digital audio devices. Some zoos include a wider assortment of devices including cameras, laptops, GPS devices, and new technologies such as Chrome Cast or Raspberry Pi.

## Why a Technology Petting Zoo?

Many people already own many of the devices in petting zoos, but under-utilize their devices. Some people are thinking about buying new technology, but are unsure of what they want. Still others are terrified of technology, but understand they will have to 'evolve or die'. Having a petting zoo provides you with a way to service all of these people. In addition, it is one of the best tools available for staff training.

## How are Libraries Using Petting Zoos?

Petting Zoo devices are NOT for circulation to the general public. The devices live at the library and offer staff a way to show patrons devices in a *supervised* setting. Patrons can touch the devices, use them, and ask questions, but in general, they stay in-house. There are many interesting and exciting ways to use your Petting Zoo:

- **One-On-One scheduled visits:** patrons make an appointment to come in and work with a staff member to see a specific device, or perhaps a few of them.
- **Reference Desk Support:** patrons asking questions at the reference desk can be shown in real time, using real devices how things will work when they get home.
- **Technology Fairs/Open Houses:** A full-blown program, technology fairs and open houses are a great way to showcase multiple devices and help multiple users simultaneously. These types of events are very popular and often get interest from the local media.
- **One Time Programs:** Using the devices in the petting zoo, combined with patron devices, I have run an e-book book group. I pre-load the devices from the zoo and distribute them to the group. This was done on a trial basis and was successful, but had problems.
- **Staff Training:** probably one of the best uses of a petting zoo is to train your staff. With our petting zoo, staff members are able to check out the devices and take them home. This way, they can experience firsthand the issues and frustrations people experience when using new technology. In addition, we do an e-book open house for staff each year before Thanksgiving to give them a refresher on e-books and how it works.

# Technology Petting Zoo

## How To Fund a Petting Zoo?

As with all things library, funding is highly specific to each organization. Getting a 'buy-in' for petting zoos can be a bit easier than many ideas because most decision makers understand the need for technology in libraries. Likewise, many Friends groups are willing to fund items because this is exciting—far more exciting than say a display shelf, carpet, etc. However, there are also some innovative ways of getting devices:

- **Old devices of friends, family, co-workers, etc.:** I have always relied on the kindness of strangers...All of my Apple products are donations from employees, from patrons, from personal friends, and from family members. People upgrade quickly, but an old device will often work for your zoo. For example, an old iPod works just like a brand-new iPod. Anytime someone you know is upgrading their phone, ask them for it—you don't have to have a phone plan to use the device on wifi.
- **The NJ State Library & LibraryLinkNJ:** a generous program cosponsored by these two organizations makes a petting zoo available to YOU! Each kit contains three iPads and one of each of the following iPad mini, Nook Color, Kindle Paperwhite, Kindle Fire, Samsung Galaxy Note 8, Microsoft Surface RT; Google Nexus 7; and a Samsung Galaxy tablet. For more information, see Joanne Roukens or <http://tinyurl.com/mhjwqma>

## Some of the Problems of a Petting Zoo?

I'm not going to lie—there are problems with having a petting zoo. The biggest—the devices get old fast and need replacing. There is no way around this fact, but you will get a few years out of each device. Showing a person a Kindle will not give them the Paperwhite experience, but it will allow them to see the process of downloading a book and what it will look like. Similarly, an older tablet might not have all the bells and whistles of the latest version, but the basics are there. Here are some Q&A I normally get:

**What if someone wants to see a device and I'm alone**—well, you have choices here: let them, make an appointment for later, or make this no different than how you would handle any in-depth reference question you would get on the desk when you are alone. It is a complexity/time issue, not a security one.

**How do you know how to use these devices?** You teach yourself, ask coworkers or other professionals for help, attend programs like Tech Speed Dating, go to B&N and ask for a tutorial on Nooks, go to Apple store and get a tutorial, etc. Learning today's technology is now a basic librarian skill. It is not going to become easier. This is exactly why trained professionals—Librarians with a capital L are needed. But you must do the work, and in many ways, this will be work you must do on your own.

**What if someone breaks a device?** You need to consider this before you start the program and put policy in place to deal with it. WebJunction has some policy information and many libraries with petting zoos that can help you with crafting policies. For example: <http://www.maine.gov/msl/digital/techzoo/policy.htm>.