Cellular phones and other mobile devices present a new and exciting opportunity for libraries of all types to provide information to people of all ages on the go wherever they are. Cellular phone access rates are much higher than broadband internet access via computers. Mobile technology has been more widely and quickly adopted than any other technology ever. New applications are being developed and introduced on a daily basis. This article will discuss a few of the new and exciting services libraries are offering on mobile devices.

SMS or Text-Messaging Services

The number of SMS or text messages sent has increased more than 250% over the last 2 years. As of June 2008, more than 75 billion text messages were sent every month, compared to 18 billion in December 2006. Text messaging is the only universal mobile platform for the masses. It does not require special downloads as it is already available on 98% of all cell phones.

What is SMS? SMS stands for short message service for text messages of 160 characters or less sent from one mobile phone to another. Like instant messaging and TiVo, texting started as something for the young, but adults are increasingly tapping into this tool. As of the second quarter 2008, a typical U.S. mobile subscriber sends or receives 357 text messages per month, compared to placing or receiving 204 phone calls. The ALS 2009 Trends Report [http://www.alliancelibrarysystem.com] discusses the impact of text messaging. Although a number of libraries use AIM to provide text-messaging reference, two more prominent vendors also offer this service to
The My Info Quest Project

Although several vendors have provided text-messaging services for libraries during the last few years, only a handful of libraries have offered the service. South Eastern Louisiana University has offered a text-messaging reference service through Altarama for the last 3 years. TextaLibrarian, powered by Mosio, has entered the library reference market and signed up a number of libraries. Mosio has collaborated with OCLC to co-market its services with QuestionPoint, the suite of virtual reference tools and services offered by OCLC. [For details, read the Information Today, Inc. NewsBreak, “Texting Coming to QuestionPoint via OCLC Collaboration With Mosio,” Feb. 8, 2010, http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/NewsBreaks/Texting-Coming-to-QuestionPoint-via-OCLC-Collaboration-with-Mosio-61001.asp.—bq] Many libraries providing the service are using AIM. The “Online Reference” article at the Library Success wiki [http://www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Online_Reference] provides a list of libraries using various services and platforms.

Here at Alliance Library System (ALS), a regional library system in central Illinois, we are spearheading an effort to provide a collaborative text message reference service, inviting libraries of all types across the country (and internationally) to work together to increase coverage, reference expertise, and allow libraries to test the service and the software before venturing out on their own. ALS is located in East Peoria, Ill., and serves 260 libraries of all types over a 14,000 square mile area. ALS has provided leadership for a number of innovative national and international projects.

Budget and staffing are tight. Most libraries do not have funds or personnel to implement a new service. Yet libraries more than ever need to innovate and offer services to their patrons, wherever their patrons are. Although ALS is seeking alternate funding sources, the group is moving forward on the project. Both Altarama and Peoplewhere, the scheduling
software, generously donated 6 months of trial service. This project gives libraries the opportunity to learn how to use the technology, work together to see how their patrons respond to the service, and share promotion and coverage.

The service kicked off in July 2009 and has funding to continue through at least December 2010. By the first month, ALS had recruited more than 50 libraries, including library cooperatives, special, medical, academic, public and school libraries, to participate in the free pilot project.

With a minimal investment of time and no outlay of funds, libraries can test this service and see how their patrons respond. One of the key differences between responding to questions asked via email and instant messaging and questions posed using text messages is the length of the message. While email and instant messaging questions and answers can be of any length, text messages have the 160-character limit.

One project goal is to get enough libraries of different types to eventually cover the service 24/7. All project meetings and training will take place online using various web conferencing products. The training will include strategies for responding to reference questions using 160 characters or less. Messages longer than 160 characters are automatically broken up into multiple, sequentially delivered messages. The InfoQuest project answers will be limited to two sequential text messages. The training will also include information on project guidelines developed by the policies and procedures committee, e.g., where to refer individuals for more in-depth reference assistance and how to use the technology to log in and respond to questions via web interface or shared email accounts.

The Altarama text-messaging software converts text messages into email messages that librarians can view from their computers and then convert replies into text messages sent back to the user's mobile phone. The InfoQuest group has decided to use a shared Gmail account to answer questions via text messaging. Altarama's product works across all major carriers, mobile phones, and email systems.

### Digital Collections

Libraries and museums are moving forward in providing access to digital collections via mobile devices. No longer do visitors have to visit a library or museum to find a computer with Internet access. Now they can experience digital collections in the palm of their hand through a mobile phone. Duke University now offers the most comprehensive digital image collection especially formatted for an iPhone or iTouch device. There are more than 32,000 images from 20 collections available. The DukeMobile Version 1.1 applications, available in the iTunes store, includes an expanded schedule of courses and improvements to the campus map. Duke's Office of Information Technology and Office of Public Affairs and Government Relations have developed DukeMobile in partnership with TerriblyClever Design, a California-based web services company. The application can be downloaded from iTunes.

Learning Times [http://www.learningtimes.net](http://www.learningtimes.net) is developing some exciting multimedia applications for museums and libraries. Learning Times is working with Alliance Library System on ATLAS (Alliance Trail to Learning and Syndicated Sites) [http://www.atlaspodcasts.org](http://www.atlaspodcasts.org), which combines historical digital images with an audio podcast, a video cast, on a podmap of the state of Illinois. The service can be accessed online with images saved to a hand-held device. These multimedia products will be available via the iTunes store and an RSS feed for a playlist. This site debuted in June 2009 and was funded with an LSTA grant from the Illinois State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State. Bradley University, located in Peoria, Ill., is working with ALS on this project, providing archival images and information, and will supervise students who will continue to add content to the project.

Learning Times is also working with the New York Transit Authority on a similar project. The podmap features subway
stops with multimedia stores or podcasts with images about
the history of the stop and other information.

**Audiobooks**

Digital audiobooks continue to grow in popularity. It is
difficult to believe that the service was initially offered in libraries
only as recently as 2005. Audiobook vendors, such as NetLibrary, OverDrive, Ingram, and others, offer libraries subscriptions to an online library using various licensing models. Until
recently, most mobile devices did not have the memory
needed to house huge audiobook files. As mobile devices have
increased storage and memory, the number of phones and
other devices that can now accommodate audio files continues to increase. Audiobook vendors now offer downloadabl
audiobooks compatible with the iPod. Playaway offers libraries
the opportunity to loan out audiobooks on a portable player
so an individual does not have to have a computer or even own
a mobile device.

An iPhone user can download Amazon content without a
Kindle through an iPhone application for access to Kindle
content. This could revolutionize the textbook market; howev
er, although a few public libraries loan Kindles to patrons,
Amazon has not made any institutional agreements available
except with a select few universities that make Kindle 2,
modeled for textbooks, available. With the launch of Apple’s
iPad, rumors are circulating that Amazon plans to add many
more web app capabilities to its next Kindle release.

**WorldCat Mobile Beta**

OCLC WorldCat Mobile allows users to search for library
materials and libraries, to call libraries, and to map a route
to libraries. WorldCat partnered with mobile technology
leader Boopsie to increase the number of search channels
that allow users to access popular web applications. Users
are invited to http://worldcat.boopsie.com/home/worldcat/
to test the application.

**Medical Library Applications**

Medical libraries were among the first to adapt to and
offer services via mobile devices as early as 2000. PubMed
On Tap is an iPhone/iTouch application that allows patrons
to search PubMed on a mobile device. Users can even
access and order full-text articles. A number of publishers
have begun releasing medical textbooks especially for use
on mobile devices.

**Mobile-Friendly Websites**

The University of Virginia has released a version of its web­
site designed especially for hand-held mobile devices. The
initial release targeted iPhone and iTouch users with plans
to expand to a much broader range of devices. The University
of Virginia Pocket-sized Mobile [http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/mobile] will share the project's design and imple­
mentation specifications, project management documents,
feedback, and other information.

**District of Columbia Online Application**

The District of Columbia Public Library has built an
iPhone application to search its online catalog, CityCat, on
a mobile device.

**Keeping Up**

This is a fast-moving development for librarians. Our
advice is to keep reading and learning. Gerry McKiernan has
started a blog entitled the Mobile Libraries Blog [http://
www.mobile-libraries.blogspot.com] with the latest news on
library use of mobile services and devices. [This month’s
issue of Searcher also launches a column by McKiernan enti­
tled Library Mobile. — bq] Two authors of this article — Lori
Bell and Tom Peters — have launched a group on Google
to discuss mobile services in libraries. Join us at Mobile
Libraries Google Group [http://groups.google.com/group/
mobilelibraries].