

InfoTech Column

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Computer Peripherals Aren't Peripheral

Peripheral: *borderline, exterior, external, incidental, inessential, irrelevant, minor, outer, outermost, frivolous, secondary, superficial, surface, tangential, unimportant, exoteric, external, extraneous, extrinsic, foreign, marginal, outermost, outlying, outmost, outward, over, superficial, surface, extraneous, immaterial, impertinent, inadmissible, inapplicable, inapposite, inappropriate, incidental, needless, nonessential, pointless, redundant, superfluous, supplementary, unconnected, unessential, unnecessary, unrelated ...*

Frill: amenity, decoration, doodad, extravagance, fandangle, flounce, foppery, frippery, furbelow, fuss, garbage*, gathering, gewgaw, gimcrack, gingerbread, gore, jazz, lace, nice touch, ruffle, spinach, superfluity, thing, tuck, ...

Accessory: accent, addition, adjunct, adornment, appendage, appendix, appliance, appurtenance, attachment, component, decoration, extension, extra, *frill*, help, supplement, trim, trimming ...

Extravagance: absurdity, amenity, dissipation, exaggeration, excess, exorbitance, expenditures, folly, *frill*, immoderation, improvidence, lavishness, luxury, outrageousness, over-indulgence, overdoing, overspending, preposterousness, prodigality, profligacy, profusion, recklessness, squander, squandering, superfluity, unreasonableness, unrestraint, unthrift, waste, wastefulness, wildness . . .

Sometimes we think that new technology accessories as a frill, sometimes even an extravagance. Sometimes our host organizations push back about needed tools by asking for excessive justification. With librarians' well-earned reputation as good budget managers and penny pinchers, we sometimes shy away from acquiring the needed innovative and improved accessories for our jobs. I hope this column helps to disavow you of that notion. There are some things that just make our lives easier and that is good enough justification.

In the past I recall when colleagues would tell me that they were only going to ask for a desktop PC, because they worried that a laptop would be perceived as a wasteful extravagance by their boss or clients! I even remember library colleagues paying EXTRA to have "frills" removed from standard PC's! These

included such items as graphic cards, speakers, CD ROM drives, DVD drives, and the like! Luckily that era has gone by the wayside (except for a few dinosaurs) and we're no longer trapped at our desks in our fundamentally mobile and customer-focused profession. Our tools need to be with us when we travel, even if it's just across the hall to the partner's office or upstairs to the boardroom. The expectation is that you will now work from a hotel, an archive, your local public library collection, etc. You should be able to download, scan, print, and be productive anywhere, anytime. With wireless connectivity you can even send the answer to your client from almost anywhere, as soon as you find it. Why should they wait for you to return to the office? Client service happens when the client is interacting with us – anywhere – not just where we might be pigeonholed in an old image.

Anyway, there are a few neat tools that I try to have with me all the time and a few that I covet and I've added them to my wish list. This is what makes it fun to shop in those computer stores – looking at all the fine gadgets. Here are a few affordable basics where there's often a lot of choice in style and price-range:

Headphones

I am startled at how few of our colleagues use headphones at work. I hear that some are afraid of appearing to be listening to music. Personally, I have no problem with music in the office, as long as you can see your clients walk in to interrupt your reverie and as long as you can hear the phone. There are plenty of studies showing how music increases creativity and office productivity. Of course, it can also increase office tension since people like different genres of music. Hence, headphones in the cube farm make a nice compromise. I love the customized, free radio channels you can create using *Pandora.com* or *last.fm*. Bring a little Zen to your workplace.

But music isn't the primary reason I am advocating headphones. How are you going to participate in the multi-media world of knowledge sharing, information and learning if you're tied to reading a screen of dead transcripts or closed captions? How are you going to take advantage of e-learning, distance education, press conferences, podcasts, streaming media, if you don't have the ability to access and experience them in real time?

Headphones can be very cheap, even free if you keep the ones they give away in the airplane. The cool sound dampening headphones are a little pricier but they are my preference. I'm usually trying to hear over the engines of a plane. Your standard work environment may be a little calmer. Your iPod or M3 player head sets will work too. (And just as an aside, I know folks who use their iPod as a back-up device too. They're often more cost-effective than a 40 GB dedicated back up!)

Speakers:

Add an inexpensive speaker set to your office desktop set-up. They're easily moved from PC to PC and you can share training events and corporate video announcements. By using speakers you create a collaboration atmosphere and everyone reacts and shares their views. This is an essential part of information, knowledge and learning dynamic. Libraries should be exemplars of making the right delivery choices. With so much information coming in formats other than print now, we need to show that we can deliver the stock market briefings and analyses, streaming video press conferences, learning events and podcasts, just as well as we do other formats. They're great for livening up your open houses and training breaks too.

Remote Control

I couldn't live with out this cheap little thing! Running about \$60.00, my remote control for PowerPoint presentations is just the thing to look professional and keep your eye on the audience and not on your keyboard. These remotes now don't require installation and run anywhere just by plugging them in to the USB port. My remote control is a model of simplicity and ease of use. It only does four things: move slide forward, move slide back, blank the screen to return the audience attention to the presenter, and it's a laser pointer to draw attention to specific points on the slide. Cool. No more being Mr. Mumbly Fingers on the keyboard – head down staring in the dim light at a keyboard, trying to find the key you need – instead of facing your audience. If you do speeches of any length, train, or teach, you should have a remote control and practice at becoming proficient. It won't take long and you'll look like the pro you are.

Portable Scanners

There are some simple pen scanners out there now. They're ultra light and some can wirelessly add scans to your PC (right away or later). Are you often doing research in other libraries, government offices, reading rooms, etc.? Do you have multiple copicards for the photocopiers or silly bags of nickels, dimes or quarters? Why? You could be more efficient with a portable scanner and get the information you need quickly, sometimes without even removing the book or journal from the stacks! It takes a little practice, but for the peripatetic researcher it can be a godsend. A simple hand held scanner may pay for itself quickly in copying costs, let alone your valuable time! It's worth trying at the store. When something is sold in airline magazines, it's mainstream.

Wireless Mouse

These new computer mice (mice?) rid you of the annoyance of the mouse's tail cord. And why do the mouse cords' lengths shrink overnight? Wireless mice can be used as remotes too within short distances. Most of us have thrown away those old-fashioned mouse pads since they are unnecessary with the modern

mouse, which has no trackball. If you have PC's that jointly support people who are left-handed and right-handed, it's certainly a whole lot easier to move the mouse around. I just like the clean desktop appearance without cords and pads. It seems more professional to me. As a technology- adept profession it's good to present an up-to-date image.

PC Projector

How's your PC projector doing? How old is it? I occasionally go to libraries where they're still resuscitating the original PC projector they acquired long ago. These dinosaurs are rolled in on big carts with bags-o-cables. They weigh a ton and support a color palette that is the equivalent of the mid-size package of *Crayola*[™] crayons. Combined with the support of a pixel count that comes from the era of the original *Super Mario* graphics, the projection quality is pixilated, dim and the colors are wrong. It was an expensive purchase years ago and the lamps are treated with the respect given to the Holy Grail. It's time to upgrade if you recognize this scenario.

Generally when librarians are doing presentations it involves PowerPoint and loads of screenshots or actual live web and software demonstrations. It is important (essential in my view for this sort of teaching situation) that the screen images look like they do in real life when people return to their workstations or go on the web. Good web sites and modern software developers invest in making their interactions more effective with nice color palettes, good typefaces, and relevant graphics and pictures. They know this helps with both usability and user satisfaction. If your projector makes the site or software look bad, it makes you look bad. Modern computer projectors are also ultra-light and you can take them anywhere you need to present. You connect with your community. They support all colors well and can show the tiniest detail in the manner of the best monitor. You can even correct keystoneing and other display irregularities. You can show a DVD in widescreen theatre style too. And best of all, prices have dropped a lot. You only get one chance to make a good impression.

My bigger ticket wish list items

I don't have any of these but if you're looking for a holiday present, I wouldn't refuse one. Don't you think laminators are fun? Every school librarian that I know is addicted to creating washable, spit-proof signs, covers, learning tools, etc. With cheap color printers these are attractive and such things as end-user guides and shortcuts are more usable. There must be a creative use for one of these in special libraries, beyond cool luggage tags. I also love those cool Smart Boards that you can surf just by touching the full-size projected image of the web browser. Cool. If you do lot of web demos, these are more necessary than a frill. Now my favorite thing I saw at a show lately is a 3D copier. Yes, you can put an object on the platen (like a dinosaur bone) and it makes a 3D version of that object, not a 3D picture – a full scale replica of the object! You can also feed the

copier CAD-CAM designs and it will create an object that exactly models your virtual design. These are apparently sold to schools, colleges, consumer product companies and R&D labs. I can't wait for the home version. It's got to be coming to a Toys R Us near me soon!

Necessary: all-important, basic, binding, bottom line, cardinal, chief, compelling, compulsory, crucial, de rigueur, decisive, elementary, exigent, expedient, fundamental, imperative, incumbent on, indispensable, mandatory, momentous, needed, needful, nitty-gritty, nub, nuts-and-bolts, obligatory, paramount, plain vanilla, prerequisite, pressing, prime, principal, quintessential, required, requisite, significant, specified, unavoidable, urgent, vital, inescapable, ineluctable, inexorable, infallible, undeniable, required, wanted.

So there you have it. Pat yourself on the back if you have most of these needed peripherals that make your life easier, make you more productive, and visibly demonstrate your professionalism and mastery of the technological world.

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