

February 12, 2009

## New services

-iReader:  
academic e-reader

-YPL: Your  
Personal Librarian

- iResearch:  
social network for academia



## The MIT Libraries delights students and faculty with new e-book reader, personal librarians for each student, and the iResearch social network.

By Nicole Hennig

Do you remember a time when libraries were quiet places, full of book stacks and study carrells? It wasn't so long ago that libraries on university campuses still consisted primarily of book stacks, circulation desks, traditional reference service from 9-5, and several different physical locations on campus.

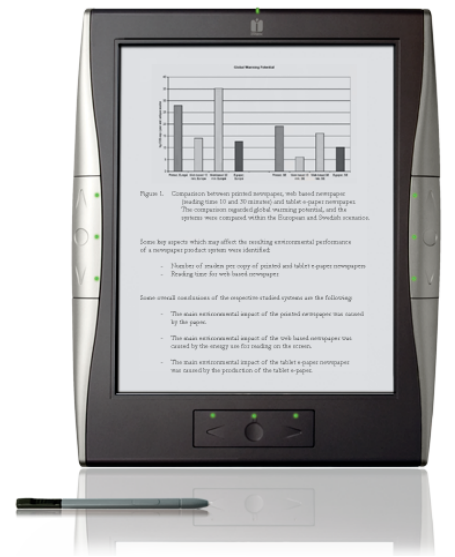
Not anymore. Over the past 5 years (2009-2014) the MIT Libraries has taken the lead among academic libraries in transforming how they see themselves, inventing a new service model that has delighted their students and faculty.

We recently spoke with **Zoe Scholartope**, the head of innovation services for the MIT Libraries.

**So, tell us what new services you have that particularly delight your students and faculty?**



A flexible display preserves the layout of journals & newspapers.



Charts and graphs are easily viewable..

# MIT Libraries iReader instant downloads of scholarly information

**The instant downloading ability of our iReader device is the thing our students and faculty really love.**

When new students, faculty and staff arrive at MIT, they are given the new MIT Libraries "i-Reader" device, which was jointly developed by Amazon and MIT. Where a few years ago, students had iPods, iPhones, or the first-generation Amazon Kindle e-book reader, now everyone has an "i-Reader," combining the best qualities of each.

### Do students pay for these downloads?

The MIT Libraries serve as the "store" for the device, similar to the former iTunes music store, or the Amazon Kindle store. It provides instant downloads of scholarly materials in many formats. Instead of charging students, it loans those items to students, by the semester. When the semester ends, the content expires and is auto-deleted from the device. Before items expire, there is an option to renew for another semester, as long as the person is still affiliated with MIT. At any time there is the option to purchase the item, which unlocks it for permanent use. Students have a choice of setting up a paid account with either the iTunes University Store, the

Amazon University Store, or the Open University Store, and any purchases get charged to their account on the store of their choice.

The i-Reader is set up to access the searchable collections of the MIT Libraries unique materials and collections, as well as Google Books, the Amazon store, the Open Library, and Worldcat (library catalogs from around the world). It also contains a giant library of both traditionally published and open access journal content from nearly every scholarly journal source in world. Students can download items using their MIT Libraries account and the library pays the special academic "loaned item" price on behalf of the student. Publishers have given libraries special pricing for these "loaned items." This is seen by publishers as a marketing opportunity since many who would have never purchased those items now have access to them and often get referred to related items that they do purchase.

# iReaders keep backups on the server lost device? no problem

## Do students pay for the device itself?

Our deal with the publisher covers the cost of the device. After proof of MIT affiliation, access is configured for MIT users in accordance with our license agreements and the student places an order online for their device. They may also pay a small fee for insurance to cover a replacement, or order a replacement devices at \$199 each out of their own pocket. At any one time they are allowed only 1 device, since it gives access to content that is licensed for the MIT community. When they leave MIT, the licensed content expires and it auto-deleted and users have the option to de-register it as an MIT device and register it with Amazon as their personal device instead. (Similar to what happens when someone sells a Tivo or Amazon Kindle as a used device).

## How do you handle providing tech support for the iReader?

The manufacturer of the device is also our outsourced tech support vendor. They provide 24 hour tech support so that our users can get help or a replacement if they lose or break their device. The content is always backed up on the iReader servers (which we outsource to a cloud storage vendor), so anyone who loses their device can re-download their content when they get a new device. Our students love that! The Amazon Kindle was the first to provide this type of service, back in 2009, and that inspired us to do the same.

## So what about obscure and rare items, not available through these stores?

The MIT Libraries continues to house, store, and preserve rare and unique items that aren't available elsewhere. We also continue to offer many items best used in print, such as music scores and art, photography, & architecture books, where the design of the physical item is an important part of its value.

Since 2009 we have been participating in "scan on demand" programs, set up by the Open Library, to keep digital copies of rare items that people have requested for subsequent users to benefit from. If it's the first time something is requested, the user is charged a small fee for scanning and gets a copy auto-downloaded to their device with a 24-hour turnaround. The items previous scanned become part of the Open Library and are searched along with larger collection that is default search on the i-Reader.

About 80% of our book collections are now available electronically for download on the device. And 100% of journal content from the past 30 years. Older journals still sometimes available only in print, but we have a "scan on demand" service for those. And we still have some materials in other formats that are not digital, such as certain photos, maps, high-fidelity music recordings, rare manuscripts, and the like.



Journals preserve their layout in the new iReader device.



Music scores in the stacks.... still not electronic.



# iResearch: academic social network collaborate & use experts as your gateway to information

**Wow, that sounds great. I'd love that service myself! So do you still maintain a web site like you always have, listing your services and hours?**

As you know, social networking sites have truly become the norm, replacing one-way static web sites and catalogs. We now facilitate scholarly collaboration via the academic social networking community site, "**iResearch**," which has replaced our traditional one-way web site. Facebook was one of the early examples of this, now we see academics using these systems to collaborate across disciplines. We collaborated with departments at MIT to create this network using the Ning social software platform, so we didn't have to develop it ourselves from scratch. This has proven so popular that other universities have created their own networks and plans are in the works to create a network of networks for academia.

The iResearch network allows users to create their own specialized groups, share their work, collaborate, communicate and aggregate content in ways that are highly individualized for each person. Librarians are active participants in this, helping to filter, recommend, and aggregate information. There are groups for departments (such as Architecture), labs (such

as the Media Lab), and many more smaller specific groups for student projects.

Our expertise with metadata is now applied to user-contributed content. Faculty and students maintain individual profile pages, upload their content, select their type of license (such as Creative Commons licensing options), and network with others.

We create metadata for this system that helps with findability, and we also preserve content for future generations, including for data sets and other non-text content. Our DSpace system has evolved into a cloud storage back end for all of our user-contributed information, while the iResearch site serves as the primary public user-interface.

Our catalog is now the "store" on the i-Reader device and also an "app" within the iResearch social network. Our community can search either on their device or in the iResearch network and request instant download to their device. Their iResearch page allows them to track their own bibliographies, RSS feeds, favorite e-journals, saved searches, and any other links they would like to aggregate. They can share their reading lists with friends and colleagues.

## Author profile pages

Each member of the MIT community gets a profile page which they can edit and use to publicize and share their work.



Credit: Duncan Rawlinson, 2004, Vancouver, British Columbia  
8 pictures | [add a picture](#)

## Noam Chomsky

Author of **Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance**

Also known as: N Chomsky, Noam Chomsky, Noan Chomsky, Naom Chomsky, Naom Chomsky, et al., Noam Chomsky ... ([see complete list](#))

Members	Reviews	Rating	Favorited	Events
11,253	82	★★★★ (3.78)	73	0

### Books by Noam Chomsky

[combine/separate works](#) ?

**Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance**

1292 copies, 15 reviews

**9-11** 673 copies, 4 reviews

**Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy** 573 copies, 4 reviews

**Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky** 561 copies, 5 reviews

**Chomsky Reader** 426 copies, 5 reviews

**Media Control, Second Edition: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda** 355 copies, 2 reviews

**Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies** 314 copies, 2 reviews

**Profit Over People: Neoliberalism & Global Order** 305 copies

**Deterring Democracy** 278 copies

**Imperial Ambitions: Conversations on the Post-9/11 World** 250 copies, 2 reviews

### Is this you?

If you're an author, consider becoming an official LibraryThing Author.

### Links

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[Publisher Author Profile \(Serpent's Tail Press\)](#)

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20th century **9/11** activism anarchism

**chomsky** **current**

**affairs** current events democracy

economics essays **foreign policy**

globalization government **history**

**imperialism** international relations

interviews **language**

**linguistics** media middle east

**non-fiction** owned

**philosophy** political political

science **politics** power



"I love having my own personal librarian. I know she'll put me in touch with the best resources or experts for any particular project I'm working on. When I changed majors, I still kept the same librarian and she knew all the best people and resources to use when transferring to a new field."

Aya Chang, MIT freshman



## YPL: Your Personal Librarian your own librarian/advisor for your career at MIT

**But what about the value of personal interaction and the face-to-face experience. Don't you value that anymore?**

We long ago realized that what our users value most is the interaction with expert librarians and the personalized service and attention we give them. A few years ago, many of our students didn't realize or take advantage of all we had to offer. They knew we had a catalog and books and e-journals, but beyond that, they were mostly unaware of the broad array of services we offered. Those who did receive our expert help in person, often raved about how incredibly useful it was to them.

So we started a new program in 2010, called **YPL, or "your personal librarian."** Now each student when they arrive at MIT is assigned their own librarian who stays with them throughout their time at MIT. Not everyone takes advantage of this, but everyone knows who their librarian is and how to get in touch with them. We use a variety of communication channels, everything from in-person consultations, to video chat via Skype, IM, email, social networking chat systems, mobile phones, or whatever is most convenient for our users.

We assign librarians to students independently of their subject expertise. The librarian is an expert at putting students in touch with the best people to help them with their question, and has a large referral network of librarians and other experts in all subjects.

Previously some students were hesitant to ask for help, but now they see their librarian as their personal expert advisor who can save them time by putting them in touch with the right expert help be it physical or virtual, for any information need. Many students get to know their librarian over time and vice-versa, and this makes it easier to ask for help without feeling like they are "bothering" someone, or admitting ignorance of something they feel they should be able to figure out on their own (these were documented problems back in the 2006 Photo Diary Study).

Librarians have the expertise of understanding the world of information, publishing, and how to best find and evaluate information. We are also "discipline-agnostic" and well aware of scholarly and publishing practices that are different, depending on the discipline. This knowledge is more valuable than ever, give the rise of interdisciplinary research.

Our public service librarians work flexible schedules, and we hire people from different parts of the world, working in different time zones as part of our team. We strive to have a multi-cultural, multi-generational work force not only because it's the "right thing" to do, but because it's been proven that diverse viewpoints make a smarter and more flexible organization. We provide 24/7 service, since our students & faculty work in all time zones, all over the world. Outsourcing part of our service to staff around the world makes for more efficient use of our small staff.

## So what are the key roles that the MIT Libraries play in today's world?

1. We save people money with our combined academic purchasing power and make it easy for people to get materials they need.
2. We use subject expertise to help with teaching and learning, promote information literacy, and to evaluate, recommend and filter information. We are discipline-agnostic and provide a meta-view for students of how information is organized in the scholarly world.
3. We use our metadata expertise to improve findability of scholarly information, both that published by members of the MIT community and information from the outside world.
3. We preserve content for future generations. (all formats: including data sets and other non-textual information)
4. We assist our community with publishing their work and dealing with licensing and copyright issues.
5. We advocate for open access to scholarly communication. We continue to have great success in working to change the landscape of scholarly publishing.

## How did you manage to make such a huge change in your ways of doing business?

We realized that we needed a vision to guide us. Back in 2009 we came up with a list of "core values" to guide our decision making.

### Core values

1. Strive for simplicity.
2. Go where our users are, virtually and physically. (Leave the library).
3. Observe user behavior and design services that meet real needs.
4. Deliver WOW through service.
5. Advocate for open access and open source.
6. Be flexible. Be ready to change course when it makes sense.

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At the time MIT as a whole was cutting budgets due to the economic downturn. So we were forced to think creatively and we used that as an opportunity to rethink our whole enterprise. We were struggling for quite a few years with trying to build all sorts of new services and meet our users' strong desire to get everything electronically, while still needing to maintain our existing systems and ways of doing things. This was causing great stress for our staff, as you can imagine.

So we imagined a new system, and set about to make it happen. Developing a concrete, agreed-upon vision of where we were going was the first step. Then we restructured our organization and simplified as much as possible. It wasn't always easy, but having the vision to refer to was helpful.

When faced with any decision, we could say, will this lead us "go where the users are?" Are we "collaborating within and outside of MIT?" And are we advocating for "open access" and "open source?"

We then began a series of staff creativity workshops, where we used creative thinking techniques to think of new solutions to problems and to break free from static modes of thinking. We ran these workshops on a regular basis and encouraged staff to apply these techniques on every project being worked on.



"I can now get most any information I need at the moment I need it. Not only that, but I have a personal librarian who saves me time by helping with the more complex research tasks, so I can focus on my own work. The iResearch network allows me to publicize my research and easily collaborate with colleagues around the world. Thanks, MIT Libraries!"

**Leo Praesen, class of 2018**

We also became much more proactive about hiring a diverse workforce in order to stimulate creativity and fresh thinking. We now have a staff that is much more diverse in age, race, gender, class background, and nationality.

We studied methods for how to become more flexible as an organization. We brought in experts from inside and outside MIT to teach us more flexible methods in everything from agile software development to the latest entrepreneurial methods being used by small, virtual businesses who were successful. Many of those techniques got us thinking about how to restructure ourselves for best use of our time and energy. It also taught us how to leverage our skills and resources in order to become smaller, simpler, and less hierarchical.

On a regular basis we began to question why we do things the way we do and to get more real-world feedback to base our decision-making on. We were more frequently able to change course, so that rather than making a 5 or 10-year plan and working on multi-year projects, we learned to gradually test and release new services with a staged approach so that we could get feedback and change direction when needed.

We made it a priority to focus on studying user needs by observation and not just asking users for opinions. We had some success with this as early as 2006 when we

did our first study of the information-seeking behavior of our students (The Photo-Diary Study). We realized the importance of continuing to keep in touch with the daily lives of our users by observation and to base our decision making on evidence from combining this qualitative data with our usual quantitative data and use the creative thinking techniques to come up with innovation solutions.

We found that innovation and creativity is something that can be learned, so we allocated more resources towards the learning of these methods by our whole staff.

This has been an incredible success, as you can see by this delighted user:

"The MIT Libraries rocks! I can now get most any information I need at the moment I need it. Not only that, but I have a personal librarian who saves me time by helping with the more complex research tasks, so I can focus on my own work. The iResearch network allows me to publicize my research and easily collaborate with colleagues around the world. This is a true library of the future, giving me access to the world's information and even providing the serendipity I used to experience by wandering in the stacks by showing me both related and random items on the schedule of my choice. Thanks, MIT Libraries!"

# Addendum: This is fiction.

This is a creative thought exercise. Ideas came from several MIT staff members who worked through some visioning exercises in January of 2009.

It's meant to serve as a model for how a vision could be presented in order to inspire our staff. The content of this particular vision is not meant to be taken literally.

We used exercises from the book, Thinkertoys: a Handbook of Creative Thinking Techniques, by Michael Michalko..

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Photo of stacks on p. 3 are of the Lewis Music Library at MIT.

Author profile of Noam Chomsky on page 4 is a screen shot of his author page on LibraryThing:

<http://librarything.com/>

Librarians pictured on p 5 are MIT Libraries staff, from top left, reading across: Barbara Williams, Michelle Baildon, Robert Kehner, Remlee Green, Alex Caracuzzo, Erja Kajosalo.

Student pictured is a random student found in Creative Commons licensed photos on Flickr, taken by Ian Fuller:

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Student pictured on p. 7 is stock photography from Apple's iWork software, "Pages," used to create this layout. Name is fictional.