



Professional Information Services

Q & A

Q. Your news announcement states that “Information Powers Growth”...what do you mean by that?

Whether as an individual, an entrepreneur, a business or an organization, information is a necessary ingredient to help you get ahead. A person needs to discover career options, what fields offer the best opportunities, how to search for jobs, and how to apply for jobs.

A business startup needs reliable data to support its business model, understanding of sound business practices, and how to find local assistance.

Montana’s libraries and information professionals provide all of these things. The information services and access to information that libraries provide are critical in helping people, businesses and communities thrive and grow.

Q. What prompted the need to talk about public information services? Doesn’t everybody love libraries?

Two reasons...

First, we live in a changing world, where an avalanche of information comes at us all day, every day. When something is so pervasive, our perception of its value can erode. There are lots of other and more reliable methods of searching for information than Google. The one most trusted by Americans is their librarian.¹

Second, not everyone is aware of what is going on in libraries today. Libraries in the 21st century are about a lot more than books. Libraries supply many services in their communities that could not be easily or affordably replaced.

Q. What is it that libraries contribute to their communities?

Building literacy, fostering curiosity and a love of life-long learning...those are obvious.

But did you know that many people rely on the library to help them enter the workforce? Access to the Internet is pretty much mandatory today, to search for a job, apply for a job, or train for a job. The library provides the access, AND provides help with using the computer.

The library also provides resources for teens to prepare to enter the workforce, choose a career, or explore fields in science, technology, engineering and math.

More and more people are taking online classes to improve their opportunities. Some take classes online at the library and many more rely on librarians to proctor their exams.

Besides providing computers and connection to the Internet, libraries also provide human connections. They host all kinds of clubs, from writing to robotics. The library is a wholesome place for youth to spend time. People of all ages attend programs, classes and events at the library. In the course of a year, more than 350,000 people attend programs at a Montana library.



Libraries are cornerstone institutions in their community. A library is really a community center, a hub used by lots of organizations including local government. The library is a public space that is neutral, welcoming to everyone—so it is an ideal location for public meetings and hearings on the issues that affect a community.

Q. You said libraries are trusted sources—that seems important, especially since misinformation can spread so easily these days.

Pew Research Center reported last year that 78 percent of U.S. adults and 87 percent of young adults age 18 to 35 think the public library helps them find information that is trustworthy and reliable.

In Montana, librarians answer 470,000 research questions a year.

We need to think about libraries in terms of the professional information services they supply. Librarians have skills—they understand information retrieval systems, whether the needed information is in a book, a periodical, online, or from another source. They know their community; they know people. Every day they connect people to information they need, even if the person only has a general idea of what to ask for. Librarians refine your search. Their job is to help you find what you want to know.

Q. What kinds of questions do people bring to the library?

The New York Public Library has a very popular Instagram account #Letmelibrarianthatforyou. It's filled with index cards of weird and funny questions people have asked, like "what time of day does a bluebird sing?"

Sometimes, the questions are related to a homework assignment or research for a project. It might be genealogy or community history.

But, often, people come to the library because something has happened and they need to learn how to deal with it. Maybe it's a cancer diagnosis or a medical decision. Maybe it's a legal matter, a business investment or career change. A knowledgeable, caring person can provide assistance with local insight and personal relevance—that an online search engine can't.

Librarians and information professionals empower people to move forward...and that's how information powers communities.

Q. Your "Information" campaign emphasizes the value of libraries for economic development—can you explain more about the connection between information and the local economy?

Even though we think more often of their cultural, educational and social benefits, libraries and professional information services have significant value for workers, employers, business and commerce, business startups and business recruitment.

Libraries provide computers, Internet access and technical support to help people search for jobs, apply for jobs, build their job skills, take online exams, and enter the workforce.

Libraries are also an asset that helps attract employees and hold working age adults in rural areas.

Libraries provide services and resources to help business startups and small business. Access to public information creates an environment of opportunity for incubating new business. Sarah Calhoun, the founder of Red Ants



Pants in White Sulphur Springs, is one of the business community speaking for this campaign. She got started with her successful retail business and charitable foundation at the Bozeman Public Library.

Q. Being able to bring in new business and new jobs is vital in Montana—how do library information services figure in?

Resources available through libraries and information professionals help to recruit new business to Montana communities. Information about demographics, infrastructure, land use, previous development, growth trends is critical to identify business and commercial opportunities. Easy access to reliable information is the key to everything—and libraries have it.

Economic and community developers utilize databases of information about Montana land and property every day. This geographic information is professionally managed by staff at the Montana State Library. Again, it's a trusted source. Because it's the authoritative source for Montana land information, developers, investors, lenders and local government have reliable information on which to base their decisions.

Easy public access to Montana geospatial data managed by the Montana State Library provides a great advantage to businesses located in or looking to locate in our state.

Q. What do you want people to do with their new awareness about the value of professional information services?

Power your community. Support your library.

Come to the library and see what's happening. Discover how people are using their library today.

Encourage others to visit the library or attend a program or event.

Ask your librarian how to show your support for professional public information services.

Please support the campaign by liking our Facebook page. Go to Facebook and search @InformationPowersMT.

Q. Besides the library, where can we go for more information?

Facebook: Powering MT or @InformationPowersMT

YouTube: Powering MT

[<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoQ8RHYFU2AYNa8LEI4jbbg>]

Local phone number

¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/30/most-americans-especially-millennials-say-libraries-can-help-them-find-reliable-trustworthy-information/>