



New Technologies, Citizen Empowerment, and Civic Life

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The Internet has dramatically expanded the range and variety of information available to people worldwide. The World Wide Web, powerful search engines, and the rapid expansion of broadband service have made this information readily accessible to individuals. Mobile technologies have made this information accessible anywhere, anytime. New communication tools built on the Web—blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, social networks, and online communities—have modified the channels and the ways that many people seek, receive, and share information. Prior to this abundance of information and the proliferation of information creators and providers, the cost of producing and disseminating information sources—primarily in printed form—required a system of gatekeepers. Editors and publishers acted as channels for information dissemination. Both by economic necessity and selectivity based on principles of quality, accuracy, and authority, there was a relative scarcity of recorded information in the pre-Web world compared to today, more than a decade after the Web appeared and grew rapidly. These changes pose challenges for civic life. The 2008 presidential campaign in the United States offers significant examples that clearly demonstrate the need for greater civic literacy founded on greater information literacy. Publishers and librarians have a role to play, not so much as gatekeepers, but as educators to assure that civic life is not degraded by a proliferation of misinformation and by deliberate disinformation campaigns.

Librarians' and publishers' biggest challenge will be making their voices heard in ways that the citizenry will:

- recognize and value the role of reliable information, especially in civic life
- and recognize and value the contribution publishers and librarians make to civic life by providing high quality, accurate, reliable information

Information literacy and civic literacy intersect in ways that are important to society and that demonstrate the value of librarians and publishers. Librarians and publishers play an important role in cultivating information literacy in the populace so that citizens can carry out their civic responsibilities in an informed and responsible way.