To: Library Lab Committee
From: Thomas Ma (HL/ITS)
Date: February 26, 2013
Subject: Can we buy this? A smartphone app to facilitate user driven collection development

Description:

HOLLIS is one of the primary tools that researchers use to locate material that the various libraries on campus own. The focus for this app is on acquisition & collection development. As a lot of collection development is increasingly driven by the user, the library needs to make acquisition requests as easy as possible. The second focus is on ease of use for our patrons. The ability to simply scan the barcode containing the ISBN information using a smartphone's camera would make searches and purchase requests very simple. There is currently access to mobile HOLLIS, but it does not provide quick searches for individual items via a scanner.

Project goal:

What I propose is a mobile app that will allow researchers (faculty, students, staff etc) to search HOLLIS by scanning an ISBN with the camera on their mobile phones or other devices. One scenario is a faculty member, for example, at book store or other library. The person finds a book in his/her field, scans the ISBN of the book and instantly will see if Harvard owns the title. In the case that Harvard does not already own the book, the user will be directed to a Harvard Library acquisition website where they may request the item. The user would be able to set a default to which schools' acquisition unit the request will be sent. [Currently all requests go through Widener, which is rather cumbersome.] I envision that the book metadata (extracted from Amazon?) could populate the form and the user will only need to submit the request. Acquistions staff can then process the request or consult a bibliographer as required.

One real life example is the Walgreens app. To request a refill, I could go to the Walgreens website, log in, match the prescription number, etc. Instead, like most people, my smartphone is nearby. I merely have to open the app, scan the barcode on the label and my prescription refill request is submitted.

Project Steps:

Phase 1. Investigate the possibility of integrating the app with the library portal or other library mobile apps.
Phase 2. Build a prototype/testing
Phase 3. Finished product

Resources needed:

I do not currently have the knowledge and skills to develop such a mobile app. I anticipate learning about the process of building mobile apps. Chip Gomes (LTS) has expressed the willingness to be part of the development team. He has built a similar app for accessing DRS material through a grant funded by the Library Lab. I expect the project to take 12 months and perhaps $25,000-$30,000 depending on the development help I can find on campus.

Measurement of success or failure:

One simple measurement of success would be an increase in user requests in the acquisition of library material. A second method may be a survey to query if people use the app, frequency of use and satisfaction. Or a built in ability to record the number of requests submitted.

Project team:

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