

Review: Library Programs Online: Possibilities and Practicalities of Web Conferencing

Reviewed by Ellie Dworak

Library Programs Online: Possibilities and Practicalities of Web Conferencing

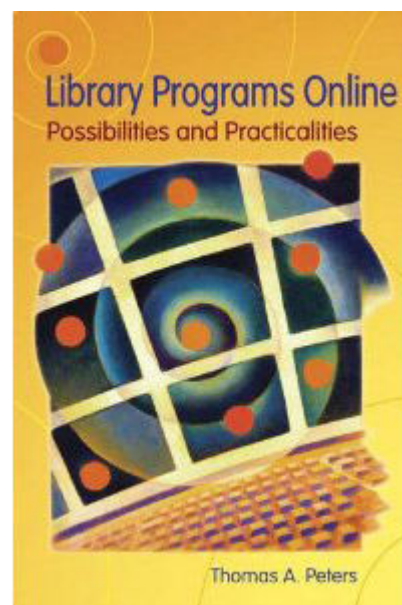
Thomas A. Peters

Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2009

978-1-59158-349-3, Paperback

159 pages, \$40

As a librarian, I have often slogged through material written for professionals in other fields in order to glean what I need to know about a new topic. It is invaluable to find a book that outlines a particular technology or methodology with libraries in mind, especially when the book is comprehensive, detailed, and practical. *Library Programs Online* is such a book. While not especially long, the 150 pages are jam-packed with concrete information about what, why, where, and how to implement online programs using Web conferencing software. From selecting the appropriate Web conferencing system (and which features are crucial) to evaluating your online programs, this book covers the entire topic. Though the book focuses on online programs, it also addresses other possible uses of Web conferencing such as meetings and professional development. While the book is written with public libraries in mind, it addresses and would be equally valuable for those working in a variety of library settings.



The author, Thomas Peters, appears to have written the book that he wishes had been available when he started the **Online Programming for All Libraries** (OPAL) book discussion service in 2003. Over the six years that Peters has managed OPAL, it has grown into "an international collaborative effort by libraries and other organizations of all types to provide web-based programs and training for library users and library staff members." Lucky for us, because we can learn from Peters' trials and tribulations. Because of his extensive experience with the topic, his book is full of practical information, such as his discovery that the ideal length for the online event appears to be about an hour and the fact that training materials should be broken into small segments so that they are easier to update.

Before reading this book, my experience with Web conferencing software was limited to attending meetings, conference presentations, and technology training sessions. As a customer, I knew what worked for me, so it was interesting and relevant for me to read the behind-the-scenes information. For example, one of the benefits of attending events online is the fact that one can multi-task, but from the presenter's side this creates the challenge of keeping the attention of attendees. Peters offers tips for developing engaging, interactive events, while acknowledging that people's online attention spans are brief.

As I noted at the start of this review, the library-specific focus of this book is helpful. This is true for two reasons. First, Web conferencing systems are generally designed for, and marketed to, a corporate audience with very different needs from libraries. Many Web conferencing systems have features that are not necessary for a library setting, and may in fact be confusing to everybody involved. It is helpful to see a list of possible features that addresses their value for library programs. Second, the book goes beyond Web conferencing as a technical topic to address online programming concerns. The information about selecting topics and speakers, promotion and marketing, archiving events, and evaluating the service is at least as useful as the discussion of selecting and managing the software, and is certainly more timeless.

This is the only book I have seen that specifically addresses library applications, and it is also one of the most recent books available on Web conferencing software. As such, this is an invaluable reference for any librarian at any stage of a Web conferencing or online programming project.

Related Titles

Bates, T. (2005). *Technology, e-learning and distance education*. London: Routledge. Spielman, S. (2003). *The web conferencing book*. New York: AMACOM.

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