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Charles County Library System launches new online service

By MICHAEL SYKES II msykes@somdnews.com Aug 19, 2016

Local libraries across the country have struggled to integrate with new technology systems, but the Charles County Library System is doing well keeping up with the times.

And now, they are in a position to do even better with their new Hoopla-Digital online system enabling library members to access more than 500,000 movies, music and e-books with their library card.

Shelby Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for the digital service, said it is accessible both online and via mobile devices including smartphones, tablets, Apple TV and Chromecast.

Charles County's public library system is the 16th system to partner with the organization, Gonzalez said.

Janet Salazar, director of the county's library system, said the service changes the way people have instant access to different material — whether it be books, music or movies.

The most important part, Salazar said, is that there is no longer a waitlist for any e-book that someone may have checked out. With the county's old e-book system, someone often checks a book out and is able to have it for a set amount of time. If that person runs out of time to read it and needs to check the book out again, they are waitlisted for it and it could potentially take months to change hands if all copies are unavailable.

That is no longer a problem, Salazar said.

"On Hoopla, if we both want the same book, we can download it at the same time," Salazar said.

"For me, that's what the big draw for Hoopla is. We have all of these titles and movies, but the delivery of the service is great. Anyone can access it at any time."

The service is free, Salazar said, and will have access to many of the title services like Netflix and Hulu do. The book catalog will remain abundant, she said, and the libraries will also have music, which used to be common.

And now, Salazar said, the streaming service will attract a new generation of readers who are used to having things in the palms of their hands at a moment's notice.

"It answers that niche," she said. "I know for a fact they will be happy with Hoopla."

Jeff Jankowski, the owner and founder of Hoopla Digital, said the service is still expanding after just being started three years ago. But the depth of it, already, he said, is far reaching. And it does not have a wait time.

"It's leveraging technology in a way libraries need to do in order to stay relevant in communities," Jankowski said.

The music titles and e-book selection have the latest material available, Jankowski said. For example, he said, you can find the DC Comics movie "Suicide Squad" soundtrack on the service and the latest albums available on iTunes.



The movie selection is still expanding, Jankowski said, but it includes some classic Disney films, many independent films, some older titles and many documentaries. And it is all at the touch of a button, he said.

For young people and millenials today, Jankowski said, "convenience is a big thing." Hoopla Digital brings libraries new services that are required to stay afloat in today's market, he said.

"Nobody wants to wait for anything so the customer expectation bar has been raised so high by consumer companies. So libraries need to offer similar services," Jankowski said.

County Commissioner Amanda Stewart, who has been a staunch supporter of county libraries and a new mobile book service, said Hoopla Digital is moving the system forward in a way she is excited about.

Not only is the reach in their community expanding offline, but e-services are also continuing to grow, she said. And that is important, she said, because thousands of many people use e-book options today. The county can continue to get content in their hands.

"We will continue to make sure everyone five and older has a library card," Stewart said.

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