

IMPROVING CANADA’S DIGITAL ADVANTAGE

SUBMISSION BY

THE CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION /

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES

The Canadian Library Association (CLA) is Canada’s largest national and broad-based library association, representing the interests of public, academic, school and special libraries, professional librarians, library workers, library trustees, and all those concerned about enhancing the quality of life of Canadians through information and literacy. The Canadian Library Association applauds the Government of Canada for initiating this consultation. Canada has been a world leader of digital technology but has not taken full advantage of its infrastructure.

As you will see, it is our opinion that *Improving Canada’s Digital Advantage* stops short of the commitments that are needed to make Canada a leader again; the described initiatives may help Canada to catch other countries, but leading countries are already moving beyond the strategies outlined in the consultation paper.

The introduction to *Improving Canada’s Digital Advantage* states that "The Government of Canada invites your views on the goals of a Canadian digital economy strategy, the concrete steps needed to reach these goals and how governments, the private sector and not-for-profit sectors can best collaborate to create a strategy for future success." We welcome the opportunity to focus on goals that we believe are important and relevant.

Seamless Service on a Solid Foundation

Digital Literacy in Schools

The introduction to *Improving Canada’s Digital Advantage* states that new ICT technologies offer the opportunity to change “the way our children learn and study.”¹ We support this statement and feel it should be expanded.

School libraries and librarians have a valuable role to play both in helping to design and teach digital literacy and in helping to assure that both teachers and students are aware of how to use electronic media wisely.

Seamless Access for all Canadians

¹ *Improving Canada’s Digital Advantage*, page 8.

As Canada begins to place more emphasis on teaching students how to use both the Internet and electronic copyrighted resources wisely, these same resources must become seamlessly available to students after they graduate. This will require support for the creation and purchase of digital content available to Canadians through academic and public libraries and in work environments.

It is our belief that *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage* places too much faith in the Internet, as it currently exists, to provide content. To emphasize this point, we will use the example of health information. *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage* states that "Public sector services such as health care and education would also benefit from greater adoption and use of digital technologies."² While this is true, it should be remembered that millions of Canadians as individuals use the Internet to self-assess personal health issues or to better understand what their health professionals have told them.

A 2008 research study from the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*³ indicates that use of web-based health information sites is growing rapidly and that even educated users tend to believe or to rely on content from sites that provide biased information aimed at selling specific products and services. These same findings have been repeated in other studies.

Understanding how consumers use the internet is critical to Canada's digital economy. Staying with the example of health care, a search for "Lung Cancer" on google.ca – a search engine designed to highlight Canadian material - displays American-based private sector alternative medicine sites as the top three choices. These are followed by the Wikipedia site on lung cancer, another U.S. alternative medicine site and then, in sixth place, the website for the Canadian Lung Association. One of the top three sites most often visited by Canadians seeking information on lung cancer even offers, in small print, the disclaimer that the statements on their site "have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration."⁴

The Government of Canada needs to ensure that, in addition to investments in ICT infrastructure, there is also investment in content and in virtual aids which ensure that appropriate Canadian businesses and Canadian services are highlighted. Canada needs to do a more effective job of positioning our infrastructure to serve Canadian business and services by placing citizens and consumers as the primary focus of attention.

Digital Heritage

We agree with the position on digital heritage taken in the response to this consultation by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries. The Government of Canada can and should do more to ensure that important heritage documents are preserved and accessible. Helping to preserve Canada's heritage will help the Government of Canada to achieve some of its other strategic goals related to the digital economy. For example, genealogy is reported to

² *Improving Canada's Digital Economy*, page 12

³ <http://www.jmir.org/2008/2/e17/HTML>

⁴ <http://www.cancerfightingstrategies.com/lungcancer.html>

be one of the fastest growing activities adopted by young seniors. If it becomes easier for genealogists to find the material that they seek on-line, the Government of Canada can create a demand by many seniors to become more computer literate.

Canada's libraries and their staff in both the public and private sectors possess the knowledge and expertise to help ensure that Canada's ICT infrastructure points to Canadian produced content and to content that adds value to the lives of Canadian citizens.

Copyright and Digital Locks

The Canadian Library Association has a position paper on copyright, and we will not repeat our position in this submission. *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage* does, however, make several assumptions about copyright that need to be mentioned. The consultation paper makes encouraging statements about open access to government information to aid and assist the research community. Balanced copyright legislation is also a critical tool to assure that knowledge can be shared and concepts can be built upon to create wealth.

We are concerned that Bill C32, as written, is not balanced. It provides copyright holders of material in an electronic format with almost unlimited power to determine the conditions under which people may use material. Libraries are built on the concept that most creative and innovative individuals cannot afford to purchase all of the material they must consult during their lives. All copyrighted material should be reasonably available through libraries, and copyright holders should not be allowed to lock out public use.

Under U.S. copyright legislation, which allows the use of digital locks with few limitations, we are witnessing unexpected and profound changes to the marketplace. Apple's iPad and iPod, as examples, include software locks that prevent the downloading of applications other than that purchased through Apple itself. Amazon's Kindle works in much the same way, and Kindle and Apple are engaged in a battle to sign bestselling authors who will produce works only available through their respective websites. The problems that digital locks were designed to correct can and should be addressed without resorting to such an extreme measure.

To illustrate one of the inherent problems of the proposed legislation, all publishers are required to deposit copies of their books with Library and Archives Canada. Established publishers are talking about producing some of their books only in electronic formats while there are new publishers who intend to avoid paper completely. Unless Library and Archives Canada can unlock formats, they will not be able to preserve the future works of many Canadian authors and creators. The Government of Canada itself, then, would be one of the first organizations seeking relief from its own legislation.

The Availability of Broadband and Services

Improving Canada's Digital Advantage speaks of the opportunities that new media present to Canadian creators and businesses. We agree. The Government of Canada needs to recognize, however, that access to new media requires increasingly faster Internet connections. While the number of Canadians with home Internet access continues to grow, the number of homes with bandwidth sufficient to meet increasing broadband demands is still quite low. Public libraries have become havens for people seeking broadband Internet access, even when they have access at home. A recent American study found that public

libraries offered the only public internet access in more than 65% of all American communities.⁵ There is no reason to believe that the findings would be any different in Canada.

Rural and Urban Bandwidth Needs

We agree with the intent, expressed in *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage*, that Canada must move toward business practices that make better use of digital technology. At the same time we should caution that such a strategy means there is a need to ensure that all Canadians have the means to access services and cultural content.

Improving Canada's Digital Advantage comments on the lack of rural bandwidth and recognizes that this can be a hindrance to the creation of a digital economy. The report fails, however, to recognize that while there is sufficient bandwidth in most Canadian cities, cities are also places where the economically disadvantaged, new Canadians and people who require special needs and services tend to reside. These Canadians cannot afford broadband access, even when it is physically available. For a digital economy to thrive, many urban residents also need high speed Internet access in public places.

Accessibility

Both the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments are taking enormous and important steps to provide information in formats that are potentially accessible to persons with disabilities. We agree with the position taken in the Canadian Association of Research Libraries submission that these initiatives' need to include funding for the hardware and software necessary to make these services available through public access computers.

Net Neutrality

Improving Canada's Digital Advantage makes almost no mention of the growing trend for businesses and organizations to use networked productivity tools that enable long distance collaboration but which also create more bandwidth demands. We are witnessing emerging competition between the social and entertainment possibilities of the Internet and the productivity demands. It is the official position of the Canadian Library Association that ISPs must be as "neutral" as possible in their traffic management practices⁶.

For the economy to grow and for businesses to use efficient and effective productivity tools, companies and organizations will need reliable bandwidth that supports their business goals. For consumers to remain engaged and on-line, they will need to know that downloads and social networking sites are accessible and can be accessed easily and quickly. The only true solution is the constant encouragement of cheaper bandwidth and of more bandwidth.

The necessity to ensure that all Canadians can access private and public sector services is noticeably absent both in the consultation paper and in government actions. The

⁵ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/learning/Documents/OpportunityForAll.pdf>

⁶ http://www.cla.ca/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCLA/Governance/AnnualGeneralMeetings/AGM2008/default.htm#Resolution_2008_4

Community Access Program (CAP), which offers rudimentary support for those Canadians without home broadband access, still has not received secure government funding. We believe that the CAP program needs to be strengthened and guaranteed.

We have noticed that both the Canadian Association of Research Libraries and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council submissions support the continuation of the CAP program in libraries.

Role of Libraries as Broadband Providers

As Canada adopts digital solutions, more Canadians – rural and urban – will turn to libraries for assistance. The reasons are clear. Libraries offer direction, assistance and access to the technologies they require in life. For example, it is almost impossible for unemployed or under-employed Canadians to find appropriate jobs without regularly checking on-line sites and having the ability to submit résumés electronically.

Improving Canada's Digital Advantage highlights the need for governments to act as model ICT users. Again, there should be an equal emphasis on the ability of consumers to access government services. For this to occur there needs to be model agreements with Canada's libraries to ensure that Canadians can receive the services they deserve. As an example, it is common for government agencies to publicize that citizens without computers can access government services through libraries, but when people appear in libraries to request such a service, they rarely want to wait for a computer or even want to use a computer. They expect the library to provide a print copy of whatever form or brochure they have been told is available; they expect it for free.

Our Open Access Future

Canada's Public Sector Information and Data

Canada's digital content advantage must include policies that provide open access to Canada's public sector information and data. Data is a core infrastructure element in the new digital economy; technological, service and educational innovations are powered by access to data. The United Nations E-Government Survey 2010 explains the opportunities afforded by open data, "...if governments provide data in a non-proprietary and predictable format, third parties are more likely to maximize the value of this information, hence providing services that better respond to users' expectations and needs."⁷

In keeping with the Canadian Library Association's core value to support access to information for all Canadians, we agree with the open data movement's goals to see government information freely available based on common standards and in machine-readable formats that can be exploited without the use of any given piece of software.

⁷ http://www2.unpan.org/egovkb/global_reports/10report.htm
United Nations E-Government Survey, Chapter 1.3 Data access and Civil Society

Canada's Publicly-Funded Research

The Canadian Library Association's Position Statement on Open Access supports and encourages the development of policies requiring open access to research supported by Canadian public funding.⁸ Canada's Digital Content Advantage should include a mandate from all major federal granting agencies requiring open access to publicly-funded research. Canada can increase the visibility and impact of its research by requiring all researchers supported by the Canadian taxpayer to make the published results of their research and research data freely available to everyone, everywhere, with an embargo period of no more than six months. This step has already been taken or started by other countries – for example, all research councils in the UK require open access to funded research, and the U.S. is considering the Federal Research Public Access Act.

Summary of Key Messages

1. Improving the digital literacy of all Canadians must be priority of governments, starting with school age children. School libraries and librarians are uniquely positioned to provide this training in schools.
2. Licensed electronic resources that students learn to use in school must be available to these same students as adults through libraries and through places of work.
3. The Government of Canada should ensure that it invests in the Canadian public as a key strategy in the development of a digital economy. Libraries and librarians can assist, using their expertise to ensure that, when they search the web, Canadians are more likely to discover Canadian services and content.
4. The Government of Canada should strengthen Canadian culture and heritage by making it easier for Canadians to find valuable heritage material on-line. This will give Canadians more reasons why they should become digitally literate, allowing them to use computers for other purposes.
5. Digital locks, as proposed in Bill-32, will act as a brake on the development of new applications and services. Allowing copyright holders the almost unlimited ability to determine how their products will be used creates a digital economy that cannot be monitored or regulated in the public interest.
6. The demand for greater broadband access is not a rural issue alone. Canadians who live in poverty, new Canadians, and people with special needs tend to congregate in Canada's cities. While broadband may technically be available in those cities, it is not available to many urban or rural Canadians without public access computing. Canada's Community Access Program needs to be strengthened and guaranteed on an on-going basis.

⁸ Canadian Library Association Position Statement on Open Access for Canadian Libraries - http://www.cla.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Position_Statements&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5306

7. The explosion of social networking services and the anticipated explosion of the use of on-line productivity tools mean that today's acceptable broadband access will soon become far too slow for many Canadians.
8. All levels of government in Canada are committed to ensure that Canadians, regardless of special or unique needs, have equitable access to information and services. ICT offers unprecedented potential to make information and services available. So far, government commitment to accessibility has not been matched by any commitment to fund the transition to equitable and accessible service. We encourage the Government of Canada to support the goals of accessible and equitable information services with realistic targets based on funding.
9. Agencies and departments of the Government of Canada commonly tell people that they can access government forms, documents and services through a website or through libraries. People who then come to libraries become angry at library staff for not instantly providing them with the forms they had been told were available. The Government of Canada needs to work with CLA to develop model service agreements for government services in libraries.
10. *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage* frequently mentions the necessity of governments to act as model users of ICT. The Government of Canada has the opportunity to become a model by ensuring that the public sector data and information it collects is openly accessible, using open standards that can be migrated to any software platform.
11. Research that is supported, even in part, by public funding should be visible to all, with an embargo period of no more than six months.

Concluding Comments

The Canadian Library Association agrees in principle with the directions outlined in *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage*. We believe that Canada's libraries can and should play an important role in the development of a stronger digital economy. At the same time, we feel that *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage* places too little emphasis on individual Canadians as consumers of digital services and on the value of content and roadmaps to assist Canadians.

The Canadian Library Association has long maintained that Canada needs to place as much emphasis on the content of the broadband highway it is creating as it does on the highway itself. If not, Canada runs the risk that the highway we build will direct Canadians to other countries and to other economies.

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