



*Editorial*

## **The Price of Innovation**

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I live on an island in the middle of the Niagara River. Most Sunday mornings when the weather cooperates, I along with several family members and friends, ride bicycles around the island. It's a little over 20 miles around with the wind at your back on the east side and the wind in your face on the west side. It's not hilly but there are some steep climbs, so a good bicycle makes the ride easier. One incentive for us to participate in this gruelling exercise is that after the ride my sister-in-law prepares a big breakfast and a venue to swap good natured insults and tall tales as well as discuss what's new in the bicycle marketplace.

I own a fairly new bicycle specifically designed for women with carbon forks and a carbon seat post. When I test rode this model at a local bicycle shop three years ago, I thought it surely had to be the most technologically advanced bicycle made. It was much lighter and trimmer than my old bike. I didn't feel I had to muscle it around to reach the speeds I wanted. It took me less than 30 minutes to plop \$900 on the counter. This bicycle was the best I could hope for at the time and for the price.

Each new generation of bicycles promises greater performance – stronger, lighter materials and more efficient gears and brake systems that help bicycle enthusiasts ride faster while improving comfort. Those of you who know anything about bicycles know that \$900 is on the lower end of the price scale for a quality bicycle. It's not unheard of for avid bikers to pay around \$5,000 for a road bike and then invest thousands more in upgraded components. In my family, speed is everything, so I am looking at ways to increase mine. One thought was to upgrade to an all carbon frame road bike with

dropped handlebars. However, after some preliminary research, I found it is going to be a greater expense than I expected. Instead, I am considering alternatives such as installing a pair of aerobars on my bike that would bring my elbows closer to my body decreasing the wind drag while increasing my speed. This cheaper alternative may be just as effective as the more expensive one which entailed purchasing a new bike. However, as my father-in-law always says “it’s the rider not the machine” that dictates performance and that technology is one of many components in determining success.

Technology is improving at a rapid rate. It can influence a consumer’s understanding of how a product should work. Just as it is in a company’s best interest to continually improve, update, or change the products they sell to guarantee future purchases and encourage repeat buyers or users, libraries must also continuously assess their services. There will always be new bicycle models and components available to improve a rider’s performance. Yet, the average biker does not need every new add-on feature or product to ensure a quick and comfortable ride because much of what’s available on the market would be overkill and a waste of money. Like consumers, libraries must sift through the new products and available technologies almost on a daily basis while keeping the cost of implementation in mind. Incorporating the “latest and greatest” can be a huge challenge even though librarians have traditionally been at the forefront in the adoption of technology. Still, at the end of the day, it is the user’s response to a new service or product that indicates its success. If a library offers an excellent product that uses the latest technology but it doesn’t meet the personal goals of the users, then it isn’t really relevant no matter how cost effective the service or product might be. Nor does innovation have to be expensive; sometimes even the smallest change can reap huge rewards. Check out the article on using QR codes for enhancing library displays by Laura Baker. By using a relatively new but inexpensive technology, the Abilene Christian University in Texas is able to provide the viewer with more information on the objects in an interactive setting. This is an example of a useful feature that is low cost but has great impact on a user’s ability to locate information and enhance their understanding of the object or artwork.

It’s also important to note that not investing in change can also be costly. With the current fiscal picture in New York State and around the country, libraries must justify why they should continue to receive state and local funding. Providing services that are both visible to and needed by current and possibly future users is critical for long term viability of the library and to ensure fiscal sustainability. A library that does not adapt or change risks fewer visits, fewer tax dollars, and less community support. In this issue, you will also be exposed to new ways of providing services that may easily be adapted by any library. Read how a university in Ontario, Canada provides services to unaffiliated users and how zombie-hunting helps students develop information literacy skills on a college campus. Hopefully, the lessons learned by the authors of these articles can inspire you to try new ways of bringing greater recognition to your own library through improved marketing and increased visibility while also improving the experiences of your users with innovative services and products.

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