Libraries and the Internet – Drew Brookhart Librarian's Shelf

Before there were books there were libraries. Humans have forever known the power of sharing knowledge and progress has been built on our ability to achieve that sharing. The earliest libraries were elders with long memories. Cuneiform tablets were stored and shared. The more knowledge that was recorded and made available the more prevalent the need for libraries and librarians. "The universal library has been talked about for millennia," Richard Ovenden, the head of Oxford's Bodleian Libraries, has said. "It was possible to think in the Renaissance that you might be able to amass the whole of published knowledge in a single room or a single institution." Today there is a troubling, and dangerous misunderstanding that the "internet" is rendering libraries obsolete. In fact the internet is making libraries more important and more relevant than ever before. The argument that is most turned against libraries is in fact more true in reverse, the internet would not exist without libraries. Whether those libraries are troves of scientific data, sports statistics, articles, movies, or songs these pieces of content are all items in a library connected by the internet. The internet did not magically give rise to the content as some critics of libraries suggest. You are reading this in the Columbus Telegram whether you discovered it in print or online I assure you it was not the internet that created it. The Telegram is also storing a digital copy somewhere and kindly making it available to you, in some cases of the online version you may be enjoying free access. It is a widely held belief that books remain the highest-quality way to present knowledge, whether in digital format or print. A great book available at Columbus Public Library on the subject is *The Internet of us: knowing more and understanding less in the age of Big Data* by Michael Lynch. Despite the ego and noise of many websites there are a lot of books online and some of them are available through Columbus Public Library. One of the most ambitious book/internet projects conducted in history was the Google book scanning project started with the University of Michigan. Another resource for online books is Project Gutenburg. A couple of good books that offer insight into how the internet works can be checked out from Columbus Public Library, *Broadcast hysteria : Orson Welles's War of the worlds and the art of fake news* by Brad Schwartz and *Virtual unreality : just because the Internet told you, how do you know it's true?* by Charles Seife. One of the incredible things about books is they are not networked. They are not indexed by search engines and categorized by commercially developed algorithms geared toward generating advertising dollars. No, books remain a source for free discovery. Online library catalogs are one of the few places on the internet where the database is not trying to tell you what to read, or pushing you toward your next click. Librarians are hard at work to make the best use of internet technology to share knowledge. The physical space of the library will change overtime, and the changes will be positive. Libraries will always have books, both physical and digital, and they will always be connected to the internet. A community's investment in their library stands as a symbol of their dedication to equal access to information, lifelong learning, and shared economic progress. Columbus Public Library is conducting a survey about the recently defeated bond issue to improve the physical library in Columbus. Please take the survey and help us provide the right project. The survey can be accessed online at columbusne.us/library.