

Using the Internet for...

Public Libraries



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Note: words in red appear in the glossary at the end of this module.

Introduction

Irish public libraries provide access to information for all members of the community. Increasingly new technologies blend with traditional collections to enhance library services. Now, people can use their local library 24 hours per day, thanks to the application of new technologies. The public library service was quick to recognise the value that technology and in particular the **Internet**, could add to their service. All public library authorities, therefore, have **web** pages. Varying levels of information are provided, from joining requirements and branch opening hours, to digitised content from local studies collections and Ordnance Survey maps. In this guide we will highlight some of the information available on library **websites**.

Libraries are committed to providing access to information, and the services that they provide in the branches reflect the changes that new technology has made to the delivery of information. Core research and book-based services remain central, however, they are now supported and enhanced by online services. The Internet is available in all library branches. Many libraries also offer access to **online** reference tools such as newspapers and encyclopaedias. In this guide we will highlight how the Internet has been incorporated into library service, using some specific examples.

Need to Know

A basic familiarity with a **PC** and the Internet is required.

Need to Have

You will need to have access to a PC with Internet access. All public libraries have public access, Internet enabled PCs. You will need your library membership number and personal identification number (PIN) – available from your local library – for some services. In some cases, an **email** address is required.

Related Guides

'**Internet Basics**' covers the 'Need to Know' requirements for this guide.

Step-by-Step Guide

Library Services Available Online

This section explains how to find your local library's website, how to search its collection, how to order titles, how to use reference resources and how to do local studies research from home.

Finding your local library's website

There are a large number of services available on the Internet. By checking your local library's website you can access information that will ensure you derive maximum benefit from your next visit to the library. To find the website of your local library authority, enter www.library.ie in your address bar.



Library.ie is a **portal** site linking to all of the 32 library authorities in Ireland, as well as a number of academic and special libraries. Clicking **Public Libraries** will give you access to the list.

To find the library nearest to you, locate your local authority on the list and click on its web address.

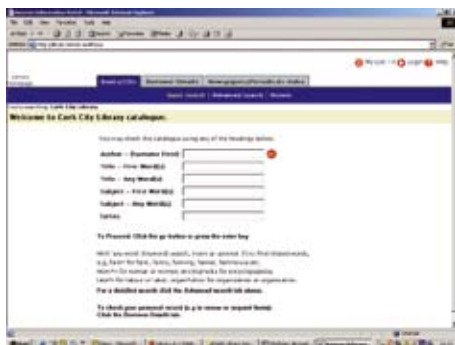
The local library authority websites provide you with a range of services, available 24 hours a day, from anywhere with Internet access. There are a wide range of such services available, and authorities differ in the type and extent of the services they offer on their websites.

Library Catalogues - online

Most library authorities in Ireland now have their catalogues available online – you can find out if your local library authority does, by checking on www.library.ie. This means that you can examine their collections and undertake preliminary research when it suits you, even if the library is closed. You can also check the status of an item – whether it is in stock, either in your own branch or in another branch, whether it is out on loan, and when it is due back. In most cases you can do this even if you are not a member of the library authority.

Many authorities offer extra services for library members. Once supplied with a PIN number, available from your local library, you can check your account details, you can reserve items and you can renew items you already have out on loan.

To enter the Cork City Library online catalogue, enter www.library.ie into the address bar again, choose Cork City from the public libraries list and click on the link <http://libcat.corkcity.ie> to the right of the Catalogue heading. This will bring you into the Cork City catalogue.



The catalogue allows you to search using several fields, including by author or title. It also allows you to undertake other tasks such as perform an advanced search, search the newspaper/periodicals, or even check your borrower details.

Searching through a library catalogue

Remaining with Cork City Library's catalogue, we are now going to search for a specific item. Please type in '*transformation of Ireland*' into the **Title – First Words** search box, and click on **GO**.

Reference material

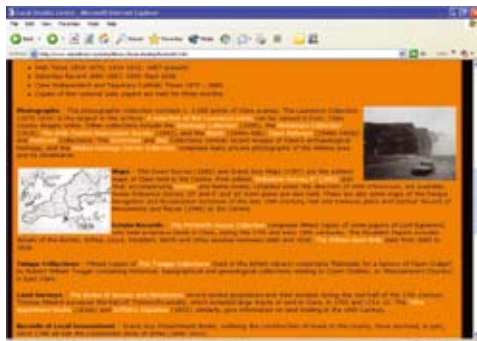
All libraries have reference materials in their branches. Many of these reference materials are now also available online. As we shall see a large number of libraries offer access to these services in their branches and some are now also offering access on their websites. By obtaining a PIN from your branch you can access online reference resources, such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Local Studies

The development of local studies collections – containing a wide variety of historical and contemporary materials relating to a city or county – is a core function of all public library authorities. Some material is rare and much is of great interest. Most library websites have a local studies section. Information on holdings and instructions on how to access them are included (in many cases it is necessary to make an appointment to view material). Other websites show examples of their collections on the websites – in some cases a significant amount of local studies information/material is available online, everything from local maps and letters to Ordnance Survey maps and photographs.

The Clare County Library website (www.clarelibrary.ie) is such an example.

Click on 'local studies' on the left-hand side of the home page. On the local studies page there are contact details and opening hours for the local studies collection, detailed descriptions of the local studies collection as well as links to a considerable amount of online material. For example you can view items such as photographs and maps.



Book-related Services

A number of library websites have a book review section, or a staff recommendations section. There is also information about book clubs and, occasionally, an online book club. An example of this is the Galway County library home page www.galwaylibrary.ie. On this site (also accessible from www.library.ie) there are two sections directly relating to books. One is 'Reading matters' which contains a collection of thoughts on reading from a variety of sources, as well as reading-related news. There is also a 'book review' section, where a number of selected books are discussed. Readers are also invited to submit their own reviews.



Kids



Children are valued library users. Irish public libraries invest considerable time, effort and resources in developing services for children and young adults. A number of library websites have sections specifically devoted to services for younger users, giving you information on the services available, upcoming or regular activities and recommended books. More libraries are developing similar sections on their websites – check your local library authority websites for more information.

Other Services

Irish public libraries offer a wide variety of online services, and are involved in a number of Internet-based initiatives. The following services are just some examples of the online initiatives offered by Irish public libraries.

Ask About Ireland

www.askaboutireland.ie



Ask about Ireland is a portal site for Irish public libraries, museums and archives. Here, as well as finding information and contact details for these institutions, you will also have access to a large amount of new information on everything from adventure sports to the history of postcards in Ireland. This content is a showcase of material contained in Irish public libraries, museums and archives. There are contact details on the site if you wish to find out more about these materials or how to view the full collections.

A range of articles, or 'features,' on different subjects are written by experts in the subject area and illustrated by materials from library and museum collections.

There is also a **Student Zone**, containing lots of information and activities to help primary and secondary school students with a number of subjects. The content, which includes a large number of images, maps, audio, video and many different games and activities, has been prepared by teams of local studies librarians and primary school teachers and has a local focus.

BorrowBooks

www.borrowbooks.ie



You can now find the item you need by searching across all of the online catalogues of the Irish public library authorities simultaneously.

BorrowBooks.ie is an online library loans service which, for the first time, brings together all of the online public library catalogues in one website. With the BorrowBooks.ie service, you can now search for an item of your choice across all of the online catalogues of the public library authorities simultaneously. Once the item is located, you can request the delivery of the item, via your local library service to your local branch. BorrowBooks allows members of the public, wherever they are in Ireland, to find the material they are searching for in one place.

Lifesteps

www.lifesteps.ie



Lifesteps consists of a series of guides, designed to help you complete a number of 'life steps,' using the Internet. They are prepared in a basic, jargon-free manner in order to be of help to people with little knowledge of the Internet, how it works, and how to access the information available there. Library staff members prepared all of these guides, and chose the subjects covered from the range of information-related queries they receive on a daily basis. There is a full list of the subjects on the left-hand side of the homepage. Many people are unaware that this information is easily accessible on the Internet, and the Lifesteps guides help them access this, and therefore help also to acquire basic Internet skills. You can read these step-by-step guides on the site, or you can easily print off the guides you require. You can use each guide to link to a number of websites relevant to the subject you are interested in. Published versions of the guides are also available from your local public library.

CultureNet

www.culturenet.ie



The CultureNet website is an initiative of the main Irish cultural organisations, including Irish public libraries. The website contains listings, contact details and links to these institutions (libraries, museums and archives) throughout Ireland.

Online services available within your local library

This section describes how the Internet, and Internet resources are used within the public library branches.

Internet Access



There are computers with Internet access available to members of the public, in all public library branches. Rules governing the use of these PCs vary from authority to authority. While not all libraries require you to be a full member, most require some kind of registration. In busy branches you will need to book a PC in advance, and you will be limited to a specific time period. Some library authorities charge a fee for Internet use.

Check your local library website, or call into your local branch, to find out about Internet access.

Many libraries will have a PC, or a number of PCs, available to the public to search their online catalogues (OPAC). In some cases, OPACs are enabled for visually impaired users.

Some branch libraries are also WiFi enabled, or what are known as 'hot spots'. This means that users with a WiFi enabled laptop can access the Internet on their own laptops, free of charge, in the library building. All of the branches in South Dublin County Library, for example, are enabled with this facility. Check with your own local library if this service is available.

Reference sites

Many reference sources, such as encyclopaedia and dictionaries are available online. This means that the companies producing these resources are able to update their information as soon as it changes. Therefore, the online versions of these resources can often contain the most up-to-date information. In response to these developments many library authorities offer access to these resources. There is a larger variety of options and you should check with the reference section of your local library to find out what they offer. Examples of the resources now available online are the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Oxford English Dictionary and The Irish Times.

Internet training courses

Some library authorities offer training workshops and courses. They may be specifically about computer use and using the Internet or they may incorporate technical learning within a more general subject such as travel or health for example.

Glossary

- Address Bar:** The long, narrow window at the top of the browser, which shows the Web address (URL) of the site you are currently viewing. In Internet Explorer, the word 'Address' appears just to the left of the window. The address bar is automatically filled when you visit a Web page. Alternatively, you can type in the address of a Web page you wish to visit, and click the 'Go' button at the right-hand end of the window, to view that Web page.
- Browser:** A computer program, running on the human user's PC, which gets information from Web servers and displays it on the screen. These instructions are usually in the computer language HTML.
- Email:** Email or electronic mail is a service that sends messages across the Internet from one human user to another. Like a letter, email is person-to-person and its stores messages until they are read.
- Internet:** A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.
- Link:** A link, or hyperlink, is a part of a Web page that, if clicked with a mouse, opens a different Web page. Links are usually shown in blue and underlined on a web page.
- Online:** A word used as shorthand for 'on the Internet' or 'connected to the Internet.'
- OPAC:** (Online Public Access Catalogue)
A library OPAC, is the online version of the catalogue of the library's holdings. This catalogue will give you information in relation to the item you are looking for, including its location, its status (whether it is in stock or out on loan).
- Portal site:** A website that acts as a directory, providing links to many related sites.
- PC:** Personal Computer.

- Web:** Also called the WWW or the World Wide Web. A service that sends information over the Internet from Web server programs to Web browser programs. The browser then displays this information to the user on his computer screen.
- Website:** A website is a collection of Web pages which displays information on a particular topic. Common types of websites include company websites (all about a company), online shops (where you buy goods and services any pay by credit card) and personal websites (where individuals share their interests). A website may consist of just one page of information, but will usually contain several pages, all linked together. All the pages in a website usually share the same 'domain' name. For example, all the pages in the large online shop 'Amazon' have an address (URL) that starts with 'www.amazon.com'.
- WiFi** Wireless Fidelity, a network allowing Internet access without the need for wires with a compatible laptop (or other device). Places, such as some libraries and airports, that provide access to a WiFi network are called 'Hot Spots'.

Links

Library.ie, www.library.ie:

Portal site to Ireland's libraries - includes links to public library online catalogues.

Ask About Ireland, www.askaboutireland.ie: Cultural heritage portal

Borrowbooks, www.borrowbooks.ie: Search online catalogues

Lifesteps, www.lifesteps.ie: Online guides to help you use the Internet

Culturenet, www.culturenet.ie: Portal for Irish cultural institutions

Library Association of Ireland (LAI), www.libraryassociation.ie:

Professional body representing libraries and those engaged in library and information management in Ireland.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) www.librarycouncil.ie:

Advisory body on public libraries to national and local government in Ireland.

Final Notes

Irish public libraries offer a variety of online services. Some are covered in this guide but there are many more. For the full range of services offered from your local library call in and talk to the staff, or check out your local library website.

