

Draft - Widget Focus Group Findings

Context

Three focus groups were held with teens between the ages of 13 and 18. Focus group size ranged from 4 to 20 participants. A total of 31 teens participated in the groups.

Overarching Themes

- The idea of widgetizing library homework help proved to be a bit **abstract** to the teens that participated in the focus groups. Teens use widgets/gadgets/applications regularly as a part of their social networking lives. However, they don't think of them within a homework context and therefore needed to be pushed to think outside of the box in order to think of how a library might use widgets in order to provide homework support.
- Once the idea of widgets was understood by the teens, they were interested and excited by the possibilities. One teen, at the Bronx Library Center, exclaimed during the focus group **"Widgets are fun."**
- The **ability to exchange information** with classmates and peers is one of the aspects of widgets that draw teens to them. For each widget discussed, when teens were asked if they would like to share the information gathered or created in a widget with a friend or classmate, the answer was always a resounding "yes."
- The **ability to customize widgets** both in terms of content and integration within another tool is key to teens. Teens not only want to be able to use widgets within the tools that they use on a daily basis – Facebook and MySpace for example – but they also want to be able to move the widgets around on the page and customize them for their particular purpose. Teens also liked the idea that they could add and delete widgets as needs arose. (See examples below related to the library catalog for sample customization ideas.)
- As there are already a great number of widgets available to teens and tweens, there is a challenge in **creating unique widgets** that support homework and tween/teen leisure interests. As a teen at the Mott Haven Branch Library said during the focus group held in his branch, "Why would you want to create those widgets when they already exist?" All of the widgets developed will need strong branding and a specific implementation that supports library goals.
- When funding is obtained, the abstract nature of the widget project demonstrates another reason **that tweens and teens need to be integrated into the development process**. The students who are a part of the process will be key partners in explaining the widgets to classmates and in helping to get the word out to peers, teachers, and so on.

Widget Examples

Teens in the focus groups were asked to explore sample widgets – via iGoogle and Facebook – and to brainstorm possibilities for library related widgets. The following list is made up of ideas generated by teens and which teens at more than one focus group reacted positively to.

- **Library catalog** – In each focus group teens were extremely positive about the availability of a library catalog widget that they could access in Facebook, iGoogle, their MAC Dashboard, or on their local computer. Teens want to have the catalog where they are and not have to go to the library web site to find materials. As a teen at the Bloomingdale

Branch said, “That means I won’t have to go to the library.” Some features teens would want to see in a library catalog widget include:

- Basic search functionality – title, author, keyword, etc.
 - Setting the search default to a zip code or specific branch
 - The ability to send search results to a friend.
 - The ability to rate, recommend, and review content found in the catalog.
- **Cross Searching** - In each focus group teens liked the idea of being able to cross-search the library catalog, Google, and Wikipedia. A feature for a cross-search widget suggested more than once is to provide customization so a teen can select the search tools they want to search at any given time. Teens also would like to be able to share search results with friends and classmates.
 - **Resource Lists** – Teens liked the idea of having a widget that would allow them to save links they find while doing research for a particular project. One suggestion for this widget would be to be able to click a button when on a web site and that action would automatically add the site to the student’s widget. (This is similar to what del.icio.us already provides.)

Teens would also like a widget that provides them with the ability to see resources previously selected by other teens on a particular topic. They would like this widget to allow them to review and rate resources, tag the resources for specific homework assignments, and share resources of interest with a classmate or peer.

- **Project-based Widget** – A teen at the Bronx Library Center suggested a science project widget. (His interest in this type of widget was echoed by other teens.) Within the science context, this widget would search only resources available through the library that provide helpful information for student science projects. This type of widget would not just have to be related to science fair projects. Project-based widgets might be developed for a variety of projects that on which students work – both related to homework and to leisure interests.
- **Project-Planning** - In all focus groups teens were very interested in the possibility of a widget that would provide a place for them to keep track of the tasks they need to complete for homework assignments. A to-do list that could be shared with classmates along with a calendar was well received as an extremely useful homework widget.
- **Events** – Teens like the idea of a widget they could use to keep track of events at library (and at other locations) in which they would like to take part. This was another widget that teens wanted to make sure included a share with a friend feature.
- **Librarian Chat** - within the widget context chat with librarians in order to receive homework help was received much more positively than in the previous focus groups. Almost every teen that participated in the focus groups said a widget that enabled chat with a librarian about books, homework help, etc. would be useful.