

Consult the Cat

by Shannon Roy, Continuing Education Coordinator



Someone mentioned TechAtlas to me, so I went to WebJunction, clicked the TechAtlas link, and signed up for an account (it was free). I must admit I was overwhelmed. Technology planning is already difficult. Will this really make it easier? How are libraries actually using WebJunction's TechAtlas?

The Cat received questions on TechAtlas several times in the past few months. The Cat, like all cats, is very wise. The Cat, therefore, called her friend Brenda Hough, Technology Consultant at the Northeast System, and asked for an assessment of the most useful features of TechAtlas. Brenda has been working with TechAtlas since it was first featured by WebJunction.



TechAtlas is a comprehensive technology planning tool. Although I am sure there are some libraries out there that are using every resource in TechAtlas, most libraries pick and choose the parts of the tool that are most useful to them. I don't think it will make technology planning *easier*, but I do think it will make your library's technology planning *better*.

Three popular uses of TechAtlas include:

1. The Inventory

If I walked into your library today and asked, "How many computers does your library have? What are the hardware specifications for each machine? What software is loaded? When was each computer purchased and does it have a warranty and service plan?" Would you know the answers to those questions for your library? If so, give yourself kudos!!! If not, please take comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Many libraries (and organizations in general) do not have a current and accurate inventory of their current technology assets.

TechAtlas can help. Knowing where you are at is a crucial first step in planning where you want to go. The inventory tool in TechAtlas is automated, which means that it can gather the specifications for each of your library's computers without you having to type in detailed information. Libraries that have completed the inventory process often immediately feel more on top of their library's technology. It's

like knowing how much money you have in the bank (sort of)!

2. Event Tracker

A second popular use of TechAtlas is the Event Tracker. If the inventory tool mentioned above is kind of like a check register, then the event tracker is kind of like a diary. Instead of tracking issues with love and life, however, event tracker provides a form for tracking computer issues. You can decide how much information you want to log. Some libraries might log details like “The anti-virus software on this machine was updated today,” but other libraries might only use Event Tracker to note problems or significant changes that occur, such as “The computer turned itself off several times today and here’s how I fixed it...” It is all about keeping a history of issues and resolutions, which can be used in numerous ways: to look at equipment that might need to be replaced, to serve as a technology troubleshooting resource, and to help other staff (or future staff) stay aware of problems and issues that occur when they are not there.

3. Assessments

When creating technology plans, it is common to worry that there are areas and items that are being forgotten or about which you are unaware. After all, we don’t know what we don’t know! The assessments in TechAtlas (there are a bunch of them) can help. If a library performs the “Basic Technology Assessment” and the “Staff Professional Development Assessment,” for example, they will receive a bunch of potential ideas for inclusion in their technology plan. The planners will ultimately have to make decisions and select goals that best reflect the needs of their particular library in their particular community, but the assessments can help the process be more systematic and guided.

Try not to feel overwhelmed! Just take baby steps into making the most of this powerful resource. Browse the information at <http://www.webjunction.org/techatlas> for more ideas and inspiration.