

# Library Websites for Teens

## Quick Tips

- **Focus on function, not just appearance.** Yes, “cool” graphics do attract teens, but research shows that they prefer a clean, easy-to-use website over a glitzy one that’s slow and confusing.
- **Don’t overload your site with text.** When it comes to using the Web, teens are far less patient than adults. They also have less sophisticated reading and research skills, and don’t like to wade through vast quantities of written information.
- **Make your site interactive, not just informative.** Teens want to “do something” on a website – fill out a form, take a quiz, submit a book review, play a game, post a message, chat with a librarian, and so on.
- **Find out how your teens use technology.** If they are obsessed with Instant Messaging, offer IM reference services. If they never go anywhere without their iPods, start a library podcast. If they’re all into blogging, get them to contribute to a library blog.
- **Teen participation is key.** As you design your site, ask for input from teens along the way. Solicit book reviews, favorite links, creative writing and art, and other content. Better yet, put your student volunteers or Teen Advisory Council in charge of Web projects.
- **Be realistic about how much you can do.** As you add new website features, those features will need to be monitored and updated regularly. Before you start and publicize a blog, online book club, or other service, think about the time commitment required and whether the benefits make it worthwhile.
- **Keep privacy and safety in mind.** If you plan to post photos of teens online, or let them use their real names, be aware of any school or public library policies on doing so. It’s generally better to use first names only, and to avoid posting information such as phone numbers or e-mail addresses.
- **Decide how much risk you can tolerate.** Teens will want to actively participate on your website by posting messages to discussion forums, commenting on the library blog, or contributing the library’s wiki. You will need to weigh the risk of inappropriate postings against the benefits of an open exchange.
- **Don’t be afraid to experiment.** There are so many new and exciting opportunities for enhancing your library website. Stay current and try something cutting edge. Offer audio and video content on your site, start a library wiki, answer reference questions sent by cell phone, add an RSS feed, or come up with something no one has tried before!



For more information contact:

Miranda Doyle  
San Francisco Public Library  
Ocean View Branch  
[mirandadoyle@yahoo.com](mailto:mirandadoyle@yahoo.com)

Miranda is currently writing *101+ Great Ideas for Teen Library Websites* (tentative title) to be published by Neal-Schuman Publishers.