

"THE BEST THING ABOUT MY LIBRARY IS..."

The best thing about my library is the branch I have in my house. The library branch in my home is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and the librarian never has to ask me to be quiet. It's not just me that has one. The San Diego County Library opened a branch in every home with an Internet connection when they went online back in 1997. Since then the library has provided a level of service that previously a librarian could only imagine.

To start with, there is the catalog. Before computers we used the card catalog to find books, filmstrips, and records. It was a chest with long, thin drawers containing index cards. Each card described the location and description of a library resource. It worked, but you had to go to the library to use it. Now the catalog is in my home on my computer. And it's not just the catalog of my local library, but also the catalog of every branch in the county system.

That means I have access to any circulating resource in the San Diego County Library from the comfort of my own home. I can search for it, reserve it, and renew it. I can check it out and return it at my local library. As if that wasn't easy enough, if it's an ebook or a podcast that I want, I can download it immediately and I never have to take it back.

The branch in my house also displays announcements of all the programs and activities that take place at the library. I can have these announcements sent to my email box by subscribing to RSS feeds like Bloglines and My AOL.

And the research possibilities are amazing. I can search through the library's professional information portals, access reference works, and if I get stumped, email my question to a librarian. Try doing that on Google!

Yes, I still go down and spend time at the brick and mortar library. There's nothing like browsing through the stacks to awaken one's imagination. Our new branch library in Ramona will soon be finished and I can't wait to check it out.

But the branch that keeps me plugged in to the library in my town, throughout the county, and the world is the branch I have in my own home.