LIBRARIES POST-COVID:
HOW CAN THE NEW DIGITAL SPACE COMPLEMENT THE PHYSICAL?
A conversation with Tony Ageh - Chief Digital Officer, New York Public Library
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Public libraries were forced to shut their physical doors with little or no
notice and no firm time for when they will reopen. Yet, the online presence of the
library service has been the primary outlet for the
continuation of services and activities.
When they do reopen, how can their newfound online presence better support the
physical space for those who now rely on both?
What new digital tools and strategies can libraries implement to ensure they can
continue to build strong communities online?

5 key messages from this conversation:
- Striking a balance between the physical and digital space is crucial. One will never replace the other as each realm has its advantages and limitations. However, libraries cannot ignore the digital realm otherwise they will be at the mercy of service providers and will lost sight of what their role can be in a digital world
- The digital world is like a fire. It cannot be left unattended otherwise it will burn everything in its path. Rather, it must be controlled, channeled, focused, and directed in a specific way to be beneficial to users and library professionals alike. The library sector must not allow itself to be at the mercy of digital service providers and needs to understand its relationship with these actors.
- In a way similar to Joseph Lister's surgical methodology, library professionals are responsible for the "cleanliness" of the digital tools they bring into the library for digital services. To maintain the library as a sanctuary, it must be clear how these tools can be used in a library context as well as what they ask from the user in return.
- Public libraries should be able to provide a forum for discussions between library users in both the physical and digital form. However, library professionals must keep in mind that this is an opportunity to support their

communities rather than a manner to push to users the library's channels and tools.

- Libraries must not be building on what they had yesterday. As the digital world develops in unprecedented ways, libraries and their staff must be building on what can be tomorrow to accompany their communities as the world evolves.