

## Do Space's Virtual Interview Lab

Using Simple Technology to Serve the Public in a Time of Crisis

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As we start to pull ourselves out of the COVID-19 pandemic it's time to start thinking about what changes we made at our libraries in response and decide which ones we should keep and which ones need to end along with the pandemic itself.

Do Space in Omaha, Nebraska is the country's first Community Technology Library run by Community Information Trust, a privately funded non-profit. Since our opening in November 2015, we have been providing access to a variety of technologies like a computer lab, laptops, high-speed Internet and more along with innovative educational programs on a range of technological topics for individuals and small businesses. Membership and the vast majority of services are free and anyone is welcome to join.

As a result of the pandemic, we were closed to the public for three months in early 2020 and reopened under limited services to the public in June 2020. Both while we were closed and since, we have implemented many changes to our services and programming including limiting the number of available computers to support social distancing and moving our all-in-person educational programming to all-online programming to just name two of the bigger changes. But what I'd like to talk about is one new service we implemented that was simple, easy to set up, and has had a significant impact on a number of our members: Do Space's Virtual Interview Lab.

When we reopened to the public with limited services in June 2020, one of the questions we asked ourselves was what new services could we provide in the circumstances and, under those same circumstances, what new service might the public need. We considered the reality of social distancing, and the fact that our meeting rooms could no longer be used for meetings with multiple members. Then, although Nebraska has historically had a low unemployment rate, we realized that many employers that had not yet moved to online interviews, COVID pretty much forced many to do so.

This was combined with the fact that COVID only reinforced the already significant digital divide. Someone needing to attend a job interview online could easily be lacking something as simple as a good quality Webcam or microphone, or not have the bandwidth available to them at their home to successfully video conference. Worst case, they may not have a computer at all. These are exactly the situations that Do Space was created for; to offer the public access to the hardware, software, and bandwidth that they need to become successful.

With this in mind we decided to turn our small conference room into a Virtual Interview Lab. The room already had a good-sized table, excellent available WiFi, generally good lighting, and plain white walls, perfect as a simple background. Previous users of this room would generally use a laptop to connect to our WiFi and a large screen in the room. Instead, for this setup we added a small microPC which we connected via an Ethernet port to our gigabit fiber Internet connection.

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To this PC we added a 27" monitor, 1080p webcam, a Blue Yeti microphone, and headphones. On the PC we installed every virtual meeting platform we could think of including Zoom, Adobe Connect, Microsoft Teams, GoToWebinar/Meeting, and more, placing direct shortcuts to all of the programs and online services right on the desktop for easy access.

With our setup complete we opened the lab for bookings starting July 1, 2020. Use has been slow and steady, possibly due to our low unemployment rate, but the members that have used it are grateful for its existence. Our marketing was first just on our website and social media but after a month or two we gathered a list of over 50 area groups and organizations that assisted folks with finding work and mailed them a stash of postcards that they could hand out and asked them to let us know if they needed any more. One group was so inspired by the project that in their thank you they said that they'd be starting their own Virtual Interview Lab at their location.

In the past year the lab hasn't changed all that much with the exception of moving to a different room and a broadening of the use case. We quickly realized that members were wishing to use the room for events beyond job interviews. Those using the lab have done so for attending GED and language classes, business meetings, attending Do Space's own online programming, and even participating in our virtual tech mentoring program.

Have there been any problems? We're dealing with technology here so of course the answer is yes, but luckily, they have been minor. For example, one person commented that our blue headphones didn't look as "professional" as they would have liked. Other times Zoom needed a last-minute update which staff quickly addressed. (We encourage everyone to book the start of their session 30 minutes in advance to give us a chance to fix such issues.) Otherwise, feedback has been overall very positive. Here's just a few examples:

- "Thank you! I actually used the room on short notice for several conference calls (plumbing disaster at my house!). It's not the intended use, but it was open and your team was kind enough to let me use it. I sincerely appreciate it. The room, by the way, has an excellent set up. WiFi was lightning fast, lighting was perfect and I love that you have a microphone to focus the sound. Oh, and that cute coat rack dressed up my background when I had to talk to a large client. It's fantastic that you offer this resource to the community. Thanks again for letting me use it!"
- "Wanted to note a few things. I used this space for a research interview where I was a participant. I wasn't strictly using this space for a job interview. That said, it suited my needs perfectly. I was very happy to utilize this space. It was quiet, clean, and accommodated what I was looking for. Customer service was also excellent. The service desk worker was able to promptly get me set up when I was already running a bit late for my interview. Thank you for making this service available and also making it intuitive and easy to utilize. I will probably look to use it again in the future."
- "The room is ideal, quiet, no distractions, I was able to connect clearly using Teams, no glitches, the volume was loud enough. Was able to hear clearly and see interviewers faces clearly. Staff at Do Space were available and prompt to assist before the interview when I needed set-up help adjusting the appearance / display of my head within the frame/screen."
- "You are a Godsend! I am so grateful, especially in these times, that you are here. The staff are kind, patient and thoroughly knowledgeable. I love you."

This experience has reminded me that while all the advanced experimenting and complex coding we create to better assist our users is all well and good, sometimes just a simple computer, Internet connection, and webcam can make all the difference in someone's life. While some of the changes that we've made over the past year, such as moving all programming online, will be either ending or slowly transitioning to pre-pandemic states, our virtual interview lab is one new service that we will be definitely keeping for the foreseeable future.