Working Smarter: Reaching Customers Where They Are

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Conference Abstract: A panel of public, academic and special librarians will discuss effective techniques for meeting the changing needs of library users. The focus will be on implementing innovative technology to reach users where they want to use library resources - at home, at the dorm and in business settings. E-books, virtual reference, instant messaging, and other techniques will be discussed. Group discussion and time for questions and answers will be part of the program.

Introduction

Libraries as Libraries/Librarians are taking a proactive approach in providing resources to facilitate literacy, scholarship, and services that complement or enhance the educational process. Transforming our libraries into learning spaces validates our efforts in leading the charge to prepare ourselves and our users for success in this complex twenty-first century. Customer service efforts are sound evidence that libraries are proactive in developing and implementing creative service programs in various library settings throughout Tennessee and around the nation. The conference provided an opportunity to highlight core customer service models and best practices from the academic, the public, and the state libraries.

Thura Mack, University of Tennessee Libraries

Customer service efforts at the University of Tennessee Libraries include a plethora of models for training employees to provide excellent service. The training unit renders training services to all library faculty and staff, as well as to students in the library. A major training goal is to enable this customer population with current skills and information to work smarter when they are providing services to library users. UT Libraries has a service philosophy in place, and it is used as a platform to commit to the highest level of service. To view the service philosophy in its entirety, visit the following URL and select ‘Service Philosophy’ from the menu:
http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/LibraryTraining/employeequide/employeeorientation.html

Consulting One-on-One and Customizing Training

This is one of our most popular training services because it allows learning to be applied at the point of need. Also, this model works well for the trainer and employees because the resources that will be utilized to address the problem are readily available. This method allows flexibility for satisfying specific customer training needs. This flexibility encourages the customer to clear up any related issues they may have while an expert is present. The return of investments as indicated in the Powerpoint at http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/TLAConference/MackPresentation.ppt refers to the concept that time is one of our most heavily invested assets. Therefore, it is important that we make sure our employees are provided with the resources and materials they need at the time of need to ensure their success. Consulting at this level allows training personnel to hear first hand the strengths and weaknesses of their service efforts.

Online Tutorial

Online Tutorial is one of our newest training service projects. This project was created to address learning in a task-oriented manner and to be available on demand. Users can learn to do specific tasks in various software applications by using this Online Tutorial program. See the following URL for more information: http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/RegistrationSystem/tutorialsystem.php
As seen in the URL, the 3 main access points to retrieve this information are online tutorial, podcasting, and downloading to print. The strength of this tool is that it is structured to meet specific needs at the point of need. Another strong point of this tool is that it also includes captions for the hearing impaired. This component is being development in collaboration with contacts from the hearing impaired community. This effort is significant because it is building a sustainable, inclusive learning opportunity. Lastly, this is a great tool for persons with English as a second language. The overall usefulness of this resource is that users have access as often as they need the information.

**Centra**

Centra is an online teaching resource that has been used to facilitate distant education. Centra is a cost effective web based application. UT Libraries have adapted this technology to provide library training at a distance, making our services more accessible for our branch libraries, along with libraries across the state. The following efforts have been made to reach customers where they are:

- Utilize software to train staff at branch libraries from other remote sites.
- Design Training to be more inclusive
- Utilize available resources and technologies to deliver Training programs.
- Tap into different learning styles and individuality of all library employees.

To date, we have used this software to train staff across campus and across the state.

**International**

The University Libraries are excited to challenge and prepare the organization for moving towards an international understanding of global cultures. The University of Tennessee and the libraries are community leaders in activities to increase awareness of international and intercultural enrichment. The University has appointed new cultural programming that will focus on educating university faculty, staff, and students on the value of diversity.

The goal of this initiative is to create a learning forum to address this commitment. Developing this effort will include identifying training resources and partnerships, which will include distinguishing experts and specialized resources. Courses on various cultures, if they are being taught by representatives of the specific culture, will bring a more balanced exchange of understanding, along with tolerance for differences. This approach will strengthen organizational communication along with people skills.

**Perks/Benefits**

What's in it for our customers? It is important to make sure customers know that they are our chief priority. This should be demonstrated by making services pleasant and satisfying. There should be strategies for customers to provide feedback. It is important to insert customer suggestions when appropriate. When possible, reward the customers with door prizes, chocolates, snacks, certificates, etc. Finally, use a variety of communication styles to keep training efforts sizzling. Follow this URL for more information:

[http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/TLAConference/MackPresentation.ppt](http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/TLAConference/MackPresentation.ppt)

**Kam McHugh, Memphis Public Library and Information Center**

The Memphis Public Library and Information Center (MPLIC) has implemented many inexpensive programs and technologies that attempt to service customers online.

**Blogs**

MPLIC utilizes two types of blogs – those intended for external use and those intended for internal use. External blogs are created with the public in mind, such as the Memphis Reads blog [http://memphisreads.blogspot.com](http://memphisreads.blogspot.com). This is a blog that acts as a reader’s advisory tool to inform customers about what new reading materials are available at their public library. Another example of an external blog is [http://memphismusic.wordpress.com](http://memphismusic.wordpress.com).

An internal blog is one that is created with the Library's staff in mind. For instance the Technical Trainer’s blog [http://mplictechtrain.blogspot.com](http://mplictechtrain.blogspot.com) is maintained by the Library’s Staff Development Department and is intended as a learning tool for the Library’s staff. Another internal blog is [http://mplic.wordpress.com](http://mplic.wordpress.com).

Both of these blogs can also be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection and can be useful to librarians outside MPLIC as well as to the general public.

Blogs are very inexpensive – often free – and require minimal maintenance. They are ideal tools for libraries facing budget restraints.
However it is advisable that an organizational policy toward blogs be established so that staff members are aware of what is considered acceptable use of the library's blog.

**Virtual Reference**

Virtual reference is a service offered by MPLIC (see [http://vrlplus.cb.docutek.com/memphislibrary/vrl_entry.asp](http://vrlplus.cb.docutek.com/memphislibrary/vrl_entry.asp)) that allows customers to ask reference questions through live chat or email. Real time chat is offered during certain afternoon hours. Because of staff constraints it cannot be offered all hours the library is open. Email reference is available 24 hours a day, with the goal of answering questions within 48 hours.

Email reference requires only an email address and someone to answer the emails. It is very affordable. Virtual reference is also inexpensive as it mainly requires software – which can be free – to maintain a chat service. MPLIC chose to spend extra money on software that can track statistics of what types of questions are being asked. This has provided a better idea of how the service is used and whether or not it is a viable service for the future. At this time, the service is too new to evaluate its effectiveness.

**Downloadable e-audio books**

Several libraries in Tennessee offer e-audio books. These include MPLIC, Nashville Public Library, Knox County Public Library, and Jackson-Madison County Public Library. Fees and due dates vary according to funding available through the various libraries.

Smaller libraries can offer this service to their customers through their regional library.

**Bookletters**

Bookletters ([http://www.booksite.com/texis/scripts/bookletter?sid=6054](http://www.booksite.com/texis/scripts/bookletter?sid=6054)) is a marketing tool. It is a newsletter that the customer subscribes to through email or RSS feeds. Customers who subscribe gain access to news about the hottest new titles and authors, professional reviews, and staff recommendations. There is a fee for this service that is paid by the library.

**Tricia Bengel, Tennessee State Library and Archives**

Presentation at [http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/TLAConference/BengalPresentation.ppt](http://www.lib.utk.edu/~training/TLAConference/BengalPresentation.ppt)

Tricia Bengal discusses how the Tennessee State Library and Archives is utilizing Web 2.0 technologies to more effectively reach library users. The Tennessee Virtual Archive is highlighted in this presentation.

The state libraries' approach to customer service was a strategic model that empowered the customers to train and learn at their own pace. The organization identified resources that would include rewards for high performance. Tricia reported on the effectiveness and success of this program. See the above PowerPoint for details on Tricia's presentation.

This program ended with group discussions, followed by the presenters engaging in one on one exchange with the attendees.

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Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to [Kanneese Woods](mailto:Kanneese.Woods@tnla.org).

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