

PUBLIC LIBRARY CASE STUDY



Evidence-Based Management

ALACHUA COUNTY
LIBRARY DISTRICT

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The Alachua County Challenge: Homegrown System Difficult to Support

The Alachua County Library District (ACL D) was collecting and managing statistics for state and library board reports in a homegrown system created in FileMaker. As staff left the library it became increasingly difficult to keep up with modifications that had been made.

According to Suzi Blaze, Administrative Services Administrator, the library was collecting two layers of data—standard data for reporting to the state, ALA and PLA and a second layer of interest primarily to public services staff (e.g., the number of laptop checkouts). Some data wasn't being collected, such as the number of library visits to the bookmobiles.

Tom Schulte, Automated Services Administrator, says that even with an IT department, managing the homegrown system was difficult. The Visual Basic reports kept changing and adding new Performance Indicators (PIs) took up valuable staff time. "Library staff liked our system and we had our databases set up with the PIs we wanted to track. But making changes was time consuming and each time a staff member left our department a piece of expertise left with him or her. We needed a better way to manage the data we needed to collect."

The LibPAS Solution: Familiar Workflow with More Consistent Results

Schulte says the library was attracted to Counting Opinions and LibPAS because they could mirror what ACL D had been doing for years with an SQL database. "We're an IT department. We were already generating reports. We already had processes in place so our learning curve wouldn't be too steep. Moving to LibPAS was a natural transition for us."

LibPAS provides the library with ready access to month-over-month and year-to-date comparisons. The

library director uses these statistics with the Library Board and to demonstrate the library's contribution to the community (e.g., ways in which the library has taken on social services responsibilities as other county agencies have lost funding). The statistics also are used for staffing analysis. By analyzing library visits at each location, the library can assess if the right staff with the right skills are in the right places.

What ACL D Gained with LibPAS

Moving from their homegrown system to LibPAS has yielded numerous benefits to ACL D, while simultaneously achieving their objective of retaining their processes and reports.

- **Ability to add new Performance Indicators dynamically.** The flexibility of the system enables the library to gather statistics in areas that weren't previously documented. With LibPAS staff can easily add statistics from their department or branch.
- **Ability to retain their own processes.** Library staff didn't want to change what they were doing—they just wanted it to be easier to do.
- **Ability to provide reports in the format staff was accustomed to.** Schulte says Counting Opinions worked with them to keep the format they were using in their old system. "We provide the library director with one custom report from a lot of tables in a unique format. For us, that was critical. Counting Opinions recreated what we were using in FileMaker to meet our needs."
- **Simplified report.** Counting Opinions created a monthly summary report so that now the Board gets one page instead of seven. This allows the Board to focus on key statistics. Percent changes are calculated automatically, instead of having to be figured manually, as with their previous system.

- **Decentralized input.** Branches, departments, and automated services all have the ability to input statistics for the consolidated monthly report. Blaze says the Counting Opinions training helped staff get up to speed quickly and has resulted in more accurate data than previously. She adds that data input with LibPAS takes less time and gives staff more time to spend with library customers.

As important as the Counting Opinions technology is, the “incredible responsiveness” of the staff is well worth noting, says Schulte. “Working with Counting Opinions is a real partnership and a very positive experience. They recognize what we want to do and help us do it.” Blaze adds, “They are really amazing to work with. The service during and after the sale has exceeded our expectations. They have a work ethic that you don’t find that often in vendors today.”

Basically, Schulte says, life got a lot easier with Counting Opinions. “With tight staffing it’s important to evaluate what types of tasks are better outsourced. Managing data isn’t a full-time job and if you don’t do these things frequently you lose the skill. Using LibPAS lets us manage our data more accurately and makes the data far more accessible to our branch staff. We’re getting a better product and doing it for less than it would cost to do it ourselves.”

About the Alachua County Library District

The Alachua County Library District (ACLD) is an independent special taxing district and the sole provider of public library services to approximately 250,000 residents of Alachua County. Located in northern Florida, ACLD has eleven locations throughout Alachua County, including four locations in Gainesville. The Library also serves the county with two bookmobiles and multiple deposit collections.

About Counting Opinions

Facing constant competitive challenges, libraries and library organizations need better tools to understand and manage customer needs and to compete more effectively for scarce resources. In business since 2004, Counting Opinions provides libraries and library organizations with a cost-effective, evidence-based management solutions' platform for the comprehensive management of their performance and customer satisfaction data. Solutions for custom surveys, open-ended customer feedback, trends, benchmarking, outcomes and peer comparisons are also available.

For more information, www.countingopinions.com.

Note: Interview conducted and case study prepared by JAM Marketing LLC



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