



Libraries and Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia Victoria and Vancouver, BC

Interview with Susan Laidlaw, Manager; Kyle Armour, Training and Data Coordinator; Mari Martin, Library Consultant

The Libraries and Literacy Branch (LLB), a provincial government agency, provides leadership for coordinating library service through British Columbia, working with 71 public library systems and six library federations. The organization encourages cooperation and collaboration to build capacity and strengthen services in the library community throughout the province. From BC OneCard and Interlibrary Loan to library website content management systems and a provincial Integrated Library System, LLB helps libraries work together more effectively.

The Challenge: Integrating data from a variety of surveys into annual statistics

LLB engages with libraries to support the best quality library service for British Columbians. As part of the mandate, LLB is charged with collecting statistics annually from the public libraries throughout British Columbia. Susan Laidlaw, Manager, says “We collect statistics so that libraries can measure and assess how they are performing, both internally and against other comparable libraries in the province. Our data collection serves two purposes. First, it demonstrates accountability for public library funding. Second, it allows us to offer a service that libraries can use for their evaluation purposes.”

According to Kyle Armour, Training and Data Coordinator, LLB needed a robust and flexible reporting tool to manage their complex annual survey of 200 questions. In addition, he says, LLB wanted to conduct other surveys and have the data integrated with the annual survey data. “We needed a system that would be easy for libraries to use and would enable us to create complex reports,” he says.

The LibPAS Solution: Multiple surveys that interact with each other

Each year, public libraries conduct a Typical Week Survey. Libraries choose the week they want to use to gather data not collected on the annual survey. Questions

include in-library use of materials; reference transactions for both adults and children; use of public access workstations; and number of people coming into the library. The numbers for the week are then annualized for the year. “The beauty of LibPAS is the libraries enter their data for the week and then Counting Opinions creates the annual estimate, which then becomes part of the Annual Survey data,” says Armour. “This puts our data in one place and also makes it easy for our libraries because they just need to use one tool rather than multiple data collection tools.”

LLB also uses LibPAS to implement an **ILL Exceptions Survey** to track ILL transactions not counted in their standard ILL reporting software. This includes ILL transactions outside their ILS as well as phone transactions. ILL Exceptions are reported monthly, with anywhere from twenty to seventy-one libraries reporting each month (the number of libraries changes from month to month). Armour says that integrating this data with the LibPAS data is “a real LibPAS strength. It enables us to have various surveys that we can then compile into multiple data sets.” Laidlaw adds that “implementing LibPAS freed us up from having to program and maintain a separate database and enabled us to pull a variety of survey data into one place”.

Using data at the local and provincial levels

“The data we collect through LibPAS has multiple uses,” says Laidlaw. “We use it to evaluate the programs we administer at the provincial level, such as the BC OneCard program. But we also encourage libraries to use the data to talk with their library boards about funding and collection development.”

Mari Martin, Library Consultant, says that LLB is working to participate in and support the Open Data Movement in Canada. Toward that end, the organization publishes publicly accessible library data sets.

Laidlaw, Martin and Armour highlighted the following benefits of using LibPAS:

- **Robust, flexible tool for data gathering.** Armour appreciates how easy it is to customize LibPAS for collecting data and its reliability for holding data. “We have ten years of data in LibPAS. We can compare across years and pull out what we need. With so much data to look after, quality assurance and data integrity become very important to us.”
- **Easy-to-produce, customizable visual reports.** Armour says that LibPAS offers a variety of report formats with tables, charts and graphs. He has created templates that libraries can use to produce reports quickly with their own data. Libraries can pull any chart into a Word document to create visual reports. Libraries can also create reports to compare themselves with other libraries across multiple data elements.
- **Administrative management.** LibPAS makes it easy to follow up with libraries. It provides a messaging system that can send reminders to libraries to complete the survey, making the task of administering the survey much easier than in the past. Laidlaw adds that LLB recently launched a new online library community network site and was able to use the single sign-on function of Counting Opinions to simplify access to LibPAS through the new site.
- **Measuring performance over time.** While the LLB takes the data and creates reports for a variety of uses, the intent is that libraries will use the data and the templates to create reports that help them to tell their stories effectively, Laidlaw says.
- **Quality and responsiveness of support.** Armour says, “With Counting Opinions, we have a dedicated person who helped us through implementation and provides ongoing support. Within the LibPAS software, we can make many changes ourselves, while knowing that if we need advanced help it’s there for us.”

Looking Ahead

LLB has experimented with using LibPAS to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data. Their goal is to use one easy and flexible reporting tool for multiple purposes so that libraries don’t have to learn to use a variety of tools.

Armour plans to explore the reporting functions in greater detail because he knows there is more they could be doing, especially with graphs and charts. Martin is also interested in this, noting there is a movement to use Infographics to present reports more visually. And they are all interested in how LibPAS may potentially help them address the growing needs from the Open Data online community, such as by offering a quick and easy means of data export in a more compatible format.

“Counting Opinions has been very responsive to our interest in using LibPAS beyond standard data gathering,” says Laidlaw. “As with any new tool there are growing pains, but we’ve really appreciated the way Counting Opinions has listened to us and continues to work with us to help meet our needs.”

About Counting Opinions

Facing constant competitive challenges, libraries and library organizations need better tools to understand and manage performance metrics and customer needs in order to compete more effectively for scarce resources. Since 2004, Counting Opinions has been providing libraries and library organizations with cost-effective evidence-based management solutions for their performance and customer satisfaction data. And as well, solutions for custom surveys, open-ended customer feedback, trends, benchmarking, outcomes and peer comparisons are also available. For more information,

www.countingopinions.com/province

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



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