



Evidence-Based Management

PIMA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Shawn Flecken, Electronic Resources Librarian

The Pima County Challenge: Tracking Data Across Multiple Locations

The Pima County Public Library serves a large geographic area, with the majority of the population in Tucson. This busy library circulates 7.5 million items annually from 28 locations. The library had a homegrown system for tracking statistics, but staff turnover created a void in the knowledge and expertise to maintain and modify the system.

According to Shawn Flecken, Electronic Resources Librarian, as the needs of the library changed they needed more control over what data to track. “We were adding new types of services but we didn’t have an efficient way to collect data on those services,” says Flecken. These new services included job help and computer classes, which were tracked along with all other adult programs. This was a problem for grant-funded programs that required usage and attendance data to be tracked separately.

Each of the 28 branch locations used a standardized form on the library’s intranet to collect much of the data. Other statistics were collected on a myriad of Excel spreadsheets. These disparate spreadsheets then needed to be fed into a centralized spreadsheet.

“Given the loss of support for our homegrown system and the need to expand the data we were collecting, we knew we needed a new solution to gather and manage accurate statistics,” Flecken says.

The LibPAS Solution: Statistics-based Collection Development and ROI

Pima County selected LibPAS from Counting Opinions to collect statistics needed for better management of the library’s resources as well as to provide to the Arizona State Library. Working closely with Counting Opinions staff, a team of Pima County administrators identified the Performance Indicators (PIs) that would be important going forward. These PIs included standard

state library-required data, grant-related data, and a new capability that would allow the library to track statistics related to collection development.

Flecken says collection development statistics play an important role in Pima County because the library uses floating collections. Collection Development staff wanted to track new titles in specific genres and age groups for each branch each month. “Our staff wanted to get a sense of how much was being spent on different types of materials. LibPAS allows us to see where items were shipped originally and what items were moving to different locations each month. This gives us a snapshot of how items are moving throughout the system, which helps both with better patron service as well as budget management.”

The support Pima County receives from Counting Opinions allows the library to gather the statistics they need in the way they need to enable them to report to management and the Library Board, Flecken says. He points to the following key benefits in using LibPAS:

- **Flexibility.** “LibPAS allows you to capture data in accordance with your library’s workflow so it’s essential that the library do a thorough job of advance planning,” says Flecken. For example, Counting Opinions worked with Pima County to create virtual collections so the branches can enter data without affecting the centralized data. Flecken also says that Counting Opinions is very receptive to input and over the past year he has seen new developments that serve multiple branch systems even better. He sees a move to greater flexibility, which is very positive from his perspective.
- **Accuracy of data.** Flecken says that with their old system changes made after initial data entry weren’t tracked or automatically rolled up into the large report. In LibPAS, monthly entries are saved and locked. If a change needs to be made in the master report, the administrator needs to be notified to unlock the report. In this way, all changes are noted

and approved. But, he adds, because LibPAS is easy to use and facilitates faster reporting, branches have more time to enter their data and therefore rarely need to go back in to make changes.

- **Ability to measure ROI of new services.** As Pima County has implemented self-service checkout, some locations are using LibPAS to track checkouts at the circulation desk versus self-check. This statistic wasn't being tracked prior to LibPAS and is providing valuable information to measure the return on investment of the self-check stations. Flecken also uses LibPAS to track digital book checkout so staff at branch locations can see how popular the service is. "I used to do a spreadsheet on digital books, but the information wasn't widely shared," he says. With LibPAS, staff can easily access the data and see the ROI we're getting on our digital books."
- **Ease of reporting.** Pima County pulls data from LibPAS into an Excel spreadsheet to generate a print-friendly monthly report for the Library Board. This report provides a picture of library activity including total circulation, self-check versus staff-assisted checkouts, holds, renewals, digital books usage, laptop usage (required under the terms of a grant), homework help from their tutoring program, and collection development by genre and age group. The data from different locations is rolled together and it's much easier to track year-to-date statistics than previously.
- **Ability to measure performance over time.** Flecken says they have entered historical statistics back to 2008. This will enable them to track year-by-year to see how programs and/or services decline or increase. Having the data in one place will facilitate decision-making about programs and services based on changing statistics. He sees significant value in having this data in one place, accessible on the internet. "Staff

don't have to be in the library to access our data. This ease of access makes the data we collect much more usable."

- **Peace of mind.** Before the library had LibPAS, there were situations where data had to be entered more than once. LibPAS allows staff to login and provide their piece of the data. This spreads the responsibility, rather than being reliant on one or two people to manage the library statistics.

About Pima County Public Library

The Pima County Public Library provides books, movies, music, literacy and job help programming and much more to the over one million residents of Pima County. Currently there are 28 libraries serving Tucson, Marana, Sahuarita, Green Valley, Catalina, Ajo, and Arivaca.

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.

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