

SCOTTSDALE PUBLIC LIBRARY ACHIEVES EFFECTIVE USE OF BUDGET AND STAFF TIME BY ADOPTING COLLECTIONHQ.

The Scottsdale Public Library is a medium-sized library system in the Phoenix area. It has a fully floating collection of about 525,000 items that serve a wide variety of customers, from the wealthy to retirees to people of middle and lower-income levels.

After a period of budget cuts and staff reductions, the library's director heard about collectionHQ at an industry conference and was interested in how it could help manage the collection and assist with budgeting decisions.



THE CHALLENGE

LEANER TIMES | For more than 20 years, Scottsdale had an experienced collection-development manager who worked closely with the library branches to manage the collection, and the library system had sufficient staffing to focus on the collection and customer service at the branches. But when that collection-development manager retired and the system endured painful budget cuts beginning in 2009, the library changed its approach to collection management.

First, it implemented a floating circulation system, in which titles are not assigned to a home library but rather are shelved where they are returned. That cuts down on transporting materials among libraries and exposes patrons to different titles. Second, the library tried to automate more to compensate for reductions in staff. In a five-year period, for instance, the share of new materials delivered shelf-ready rose from 3 percent to 85 percent.

Cuts also hit the library's budget for new titles. In a five-year period, its collections budget shrank by \$500,000, or one-third.

GRUBBY MATERIALS | There were advantages to improving automation. However, new challenges also arose. For instance, the library soon realized that a lot of worn titles were moving from its oldest library to its newest branch, Arabian. (The system's branches are named after breeds of horses, recalling Scottsdale's origins as an Old West town.) Librarians at Arabian occasionally did not want to place items from the main library on the shelves because they were in poor condition.

The library realized it needed to establish standards for weeding its collection. It formed a task force, which wrote guidelines and empowered librarians to remove worn and outdated titles. It was effective but manually intensive.

In a short period of time, Scottsdale had adapted to changing conditions as best it could. Even with a smaller budget and fewer staff, it was working to automate many of its processes. Yet with its existing systems, there were limits to the information at librarians' disposal.

KEY BENEFITS

The adoption of collectionHQ has enabled Scottsdale Public Library to:

- Manage and replace stock effectively despite staff reductions and budget cuts.
- Efficiently identify and replace overused stock.
- Make use of underused items by moving such materials to locations where they are of more interest.
- Order new stock based on evidence of what items are circulating well and what will interest their patrons
- Put staff time to good use due to the simple and thorough process involved in the software which eliminates the use of manual reports and analysis.

THE OUTCOME

In 2011, Scottsdale began using collectionHQ, the evidence-based collection-management tool from Baker & Taylor. Aimee Fifarek, the library system's senior manager for technologies and content, says the time was right.

"We were ideally positioned to take advantage of the tools that collectionHQ offered us," she says. "We were trying to do our best with analytics, operating with a shoestring staff. It wasn't just that we needed data, but we needed to crunch data and decide what to do with it. collectionHQ gave us reliable suggestions about what to do."

IDENTIFYING UNDERUSED MATERIALS | For instance, with the data from collectionHQ, Fifarek and her team were able to maximize the shelf life of underutilized materials by shifting them to other libraries. In a floating collection, materials typically remain at a branch until checked out or requested elsewhere. But now, Scottsdale can spot trends and move materials to increase circulation – something it would not have been able to do otherwise.

"We never had a plan for deliberately shifting materials between libraries," she says. "Now we're able to say, 'This type of material is not being used much at Appaloosa, but it's doing gangbusters at Mustang.'"

Instead of weeding material that hasn't circulated and might be outdated, collectionHQ helps librarians see where that material might circulate. "That was a piece of the puzzle we never had," Fifarek says. "One of the things librarians hate to do is throw away books. Now, before we weed it, we can give it one last shot to see if it's going to go anywhere. We want to be good stewards of public funds."

MORE EFFICIENT USE OF STAFF TIME | Before collectionHQ, Scottsdale devoted a lot of time to training librarians how to run reports using existing technology. It was a time-consuming process. Librarians also spent time identifying and weeding old or obsolete materials.

Now, though, collectionHQ has made those processes easier, freeing up staff for other responsibilities. "collectionHQ gives us very simple and easy-to-run reporting, as opposed to manual reports that we were doing that took forever. The nice thing about collectionHQ is you put in two or three clicks, and you get a spreadsheet of the data you're looking for."

ENHANCED MARKETING | Librarians in Scottsdale used to have a general sense of what was circulating in their branches. But now that they're seeing monthly reports on circulation trends using collectionHQ, they have a much better idea of the topics that interest their patrons, and they can design displays to tap into those interests and boost circulation. For instance, that information helped inspire librarians at the main library to develop "Librarians' Picks of the Day" – typically overlooked titles in a popular category.

"The fact that we have staff in all of our libraries involved in collectionHQ puts them more in the mindset that there are higher- and lower-circulating titles," Fifarek says. "They've realized that doing little extra things to bump up circulation on quality items that are overlooked is worth spending time on."

EFFECTIVE BUDGETING | collectionHQ has also helped improve Scottsdale's budgeting. In 2011, when the system received an unexpected \$180,000, librarians used the software's budgeting tool to help decide where to spend the money. The library has also used collectionHQ to identify popular authors of series and ensure that the library has full series available of its most requested authors.

Overall, collectionHQ has helped Scottsdale improve its service to patrons, despite budget and staff constraints. It gives librarians information they need to make sound decisions about their collections. The library's customers are the ultimate winners: "We receive very few complaints about books that we don't have, or about the overall volume of titles," Fifarek says. "collectionHQ has helped us use all of our tools to do a darn good job. We are able to focus our limited dollars on what our customers want."

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