

EVANSVILLE-VANDEBURGH PUBLIC LIBRARY TRANSFORMS COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

LibraryIQ Service Enables EVPL to Optimize Digital and Print Collections to Better Serve Needs of Community

Evansville-Vanderburgh Public Library (EVPL) is an important community resource for the 180,000-person community of Vanderburgh County, Indiana. In addition to its eight well-used library branches, EVPL has a ninth facility that provides wellness support for nonprofits and small businesses in the greater Evansville area.

THE CHALLENGE:

While it is no secret that a strong collection is a key component to excellent library service, collection management has never been simple. Multiple material formats, limited staff resources and a lack of access to and analysis of critical performance data all contribute to the challenge. Like many libraries, collection management was a struggle for EVPL.



“We were spending a lot of money on our collections, but we really didn’t know how they were performing,” explained Cyndee Landrum, CEO-Director of EVPL. “We were basing our acquisition decisions on assessments that had been made quite some time ago. One of our library’s strategic goals is to be more ‘evidence-based’ in all our decisions to ensure that we’re serving our community in the most optimal way. Unfortunately, we didn’t have access to all of the data necessary to accomplish our goals.”

Library collections generate a lot of data, however, most libraries tend to focus on circulation metrics, because they are the easiest to gather. “There are many data points that need to be considered to enable libraries to optimize their limited collection budgets,” explained Landrum. “One of the most important factors is making sure the collection is based on the needs and values of the local community. But like most libraries, we have limited resources and needed help gathering and analyzing all the pertinent data to make better strategic decisions.”

SUPPORTING MULTIPLE FORMATS

Balancing materials formats and allocating for digital versus print was top of mind for EVPL, but there was still room for improvement. “It wasn’t a big issue, but like many libraries we over-allocated for digital with the assumption it was going to grow faster than traditional print formats. As a result, we were spending at a rate that did not align with actual circulation. Further, our budget had been static for a long time, and we simply didn’t have time to look at industry trends and determine how to reallocate funds,” admitted Landrum.

LIMITED STAFF RESOURCES

EVPL’s Collections and Technical Services department is responsible for all collection management tasks across a \$2 million annual budget. “Our staff was so busy that there was no time left to work directly with branch managers or individual selectors in certain subject areas,” explained Landrum. “Liaison work at the local level and having ‘eyes on the shelves’ simply didn’t happen.”



ACCESSING & ANALYZING DATA

Consistent with many libraries, EVPL invested in a collection management software tool but quickly realized that in order to yield valuable insights, a significant investment in time and resources is required. Obtaining high-level information was possible, but easily accessing more detailed, critical information for budget allocation, selection and marketing was beyond reach. Landrum noted, “The tool simply required too much people power to be effective.”

LEVERAGING LIBRARYIQ AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER

In 2018, EVPL enlisted the help of LibraryIQ Collection Management experts to provide a Comprehensive Evaluation of all collections and the collection management process. In addition to harvesting and analyzing an extensive amount of data, the LibraryIQ team visited each branch to interview staff and evaluate collections.

While the LibraryIQ team quickly recognized that EVPL takes great pride in its facilities, staff and collections, actionable recommendations were made to improve collection performance, circulation and efficiency. Key recommendations included:

- Implement a comprehensive Collection Management Plan to allocate funds to specific collection areas, establish performance targets and track real-time performance.
- Align materials budget allocations with circulation – by format, branch and collection code – to ensure that funds are allocated effectively and that materials are available to satisfy patron demand.
- Weed regularly to maximize benefits of the collection management process.
- Request fully cataloged and shelf-ready materials from vendors.
- Reorganize the Technical Services Department to align staff with workload, resulting in stronger collection support services and more effective use of resources.



The LibraryIQ team uncovered critical insights for EVPL, discovering that the ILS was only collecting partial circulation data. Thus, extrapolation of that data was resulting in inaccurate collection performance metrics. LibraryIQ experts also identified opportunities to optimize EVPL's ILS and add-on systems, as well as vendor contracts and agreements.



The LibraryIQ experts analyzed all of our data and circulation statistics, and compared it to our budget," explained Landrum. "As a result, they highlighted critical findings into different areas of our collection and provided suggestions for budget allocation, staff efficiency and organization, as well as some very innovative recommendations for merchandising our collections. In short, their advice has enabled us to make much more effective use of our limited budgets.



A HANDS-ON APPROACH

LibraryIQ Collection Management services are provided by people – experts with decades of library collection experience. "I really liked the hands-on approach and comprehensive nature of the LibraryIQ team," said Landrum. "They didn't just pull data from our ILS and tell us what to do, they actually visited our eight branches and physically touched all of our collections. They spent time with staff at each branch to understand local needs and concerns."

SERVING THE VANDERBURGH COUNTY COMMUNITY TODAY AND TOMORROW

As a result of the Collection Evaluation, EVPL has partnered with LibraryIQ to develop a comprehensive collection management plan and provide quarterly performance analytics and monitoring. This effort will ensure EVPL continues to optimize its collection, budget and staff to best meet the needs of the Vanderburgh County community.



We are very pleased with all of the insights and recommendations LibraryIQ provided and are thrilled to be able to better serve the needs of our community. I would highly recommend LibraryIQ to any organization that doesn't have the internal expertise, tools or significant staff time required to properly manage and optimize collections. Relying on collection management experts was truly eye opening and EVPL couldn't be happier with the results!

