

Public library overcomes language barriers to support diversifying population

Language Sets offer instant collections in multiple languages



Situation

Salt Lake City has had a rich history of immigration, attracting thousands of people from diverse cultures and multiple continents. In fact, according to census surveys, more than 92 percent of the population growth from 1990 to 2000 was from immigration. Those surveys also show that about 25 percent of the population does not speak English as a primary language, and half of that number claim not to speak English well at all.

Providing a library service to this varied population has a number of challenges—everything from speaking a specific language to understanding the needs of different ethnic groups. While Cathy Brasher and the staff at the Salt Lake City Public Library were able to build some language collections, others proved much more difficult to create. Problems from cataloging to knowing which titles to purchase were limiting their ability to serve certain users, says Brasher.

Solution

As the library's International Language Selector, Brasher decided that the quickest and most reliable way to build several language-specific collections was to acquire Language Sets from OCLC. The Language Sets are available in 13 languages, of which the library purchased sets to support 12. Juvenile sets were selected to expand the library's current Russian and Spanish collections, and adult sets were purchased to support users speaking Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean and six South Asian dialects. Of the many reasons to acquire the Language Sets, the two most important to the library were cataloging and quality of

AT A GLANCE

- Salt Lake City Public Library opened in 1896
- One main library and five branches
- Serves a population of more than 800,000
- Language Sets offers titles in the 17 following languages:

Arabic	Japanese	Spanish
Chinese	Korean	Tagalog
French	Malayalam	Telugu
German	Marathi	Urdu
Gujarati	Panjabi	Vietnamese
Hindi	Russian	

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titles. All set titles include MARC records for easy cataloging, and OCLC's close relationship with publishers means sets are created with titles of high interest to the users they target, says Brasher. “I couldn't have built these collections without this help,” she adds. “It's extremely difficult.”

Results

Today, the main library and three of its five branches use the Language Sets. Circulation of the titles saw increases between 50 percent to more than 100 percent from 2002 to 2003. “A lot of people are telling me how much they like being able to find books in their language,” says Brasher.

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For some immigrants, the concept of a free library was a new one. “We did a focus group with members of our Korean community,” she explains. “They thought the library was only for city employees.” Once they realized they could use the library, circulation of Korean language materials jumped nearly 200 percent.

The net effect of the Language Sets has been extremely positive for the library. Circulation is up and plans to expand collections and add new languages are being developed. “We are very, very pleased,” Cathy adds.

For more information about OCLC Language Sets, visit www.oclc.org/languagesets/, call 1-800-848-5878, ext. 6251 or send e-mail to libservices@oclc.org.