

Library users help identify opportunities during challenging times

Situation

Rick Anderson at the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library believes that listening carefully to users is what best provides opportunities for libraries during turbulent times.

To start this process, he has a few simple questions:

- Who are our primary constituents?
- What problems are we solving for them?
- How do we know if we're solving those problems?
- Which of our processes and practices have the most impact on our patrons, and which ones have the least?

"The more we ask ourselves those kinds of questions, the more opportunities we'll find—both opportunities to do more of some things, and to do less of others," says Anderson, Associate Director for Scholarly Resources and Collections.

"And though the answers to those questions may be different from institution to institution, I think the questions are the same regardless of your financial or organizational environment."

A few years ago, leaders at the Marriott Library faced some difficult choices due to budget cuts. Answering the questions above and listening to their users led them in some new directions:

- Outsourcing more of the traditional, MARC-based cataloging and physical processing;
- Buying fewer books on a speculative basis and instead using patron-driven acquisition models when possible;
- Making eBooks the default format when possible.

"The goal is to do less of what others can do for us so that we can do more of the work that only we can do—work that requires local expertise or access to unique materials."

Rick Anderson, Marriott Library

AT A GLANCE

Marriott Library at a glance

- Serves 29,300 students, 2,800 faculty and 20,000 staff
- Offers nearly 3 million volumes, including more than 200,000 e-books
- Provides access to 12 million digital CONTENTdm files, including 350,000 newspaper pages that are supported by the world's largest CONTENTdm server
- Switch to shelf-ready materials and outsourced cataloging services created time for staff to work on unique digital collections

Solution

According to Anderson, the Marriott Library accomplished the first goal in two ways: by getting virtually all of the books it buys from its primary vendor shelf-ready, and by arranging for the remainder (along with most books from secondary vendors) to be sent directly to OCLC[®] for cataloging and processing, after which the books are sent to the library.

"We're accomplishing the second and third goals by being as strategic as we can in managing our sharply reduced collections budget. This means buying fewer books—partly in order to protect our subscriptions and databases, partly because our circulation statistics are dropping drastically, and partly because our patrons only seem to use roughly half of the books we select for them," says Anderson.

OCLC provides the Marriott Library with MARC cataloging through its Contract Cataloging service, which includes physical processing (spine labels, property stamps, barcodes, security strips, etc.) for books and music scores in both English and foreign languages in both Latin and non-Latin alphabets.

Anderson explains that this takes most of the traditional MARC-based cataloging out of the hands of a significant number of staff and librarians in technical services.

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These staff and librarians are being trained to use OCLC's CONTENTdm® Digital Collection Management Software, enabling their time to be redirected toward the description and processing of unique digital materials, of which the library has extensive unprocessed collections.

“The goal is to do less of what others can do for us so that we can do more of the work that only we can do—work that requires local expertise or access to unique materials that are only available onsite,” says Anderson.

“Anyone can catalog a 1995 edition of *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, but only someone on the Marriott Library staff can work with one of our unique pioneer diaries.”

Results

The budget cuts at the Marriott Library didn't prompt the decision to expose digital materials, notes Anderson; access to digital materials was a goal expressed long ago. But staff reallocation made the decision to outsource easier, and it freed up cataloger time that was then redirected toward improving access to the library's digital collections.

Anderson offers this advice: “Don't take your importance for granted. When the budget is cut, take every opportunity both to talk and to listen. Talk publicly and frequently, to

individuals and groups, about the fantastic things your library has been doing and can continue to do; mention the things you're cutting back on, but always frame those comments in the context of how wonderful the services have always been and still are.

“Don't ask them how the library can help them—knowing how the library can help them is your job, not theirs. Just get them to talk about the barriers they're encountering, and then figure out how the library can help them surmount those barriers.”

It's good practice, according to Anderson, to encourage library staff to actively research library user needs and to share proposed solutions with them.

“Make it so that when people talk about the library, they're frequently mentioning the concrete things that the library has done to help them. The more that kind of talk happens, the better the library's position will be when the next round of budget cuts occurs—or when budgets revive.”

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The J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah hosts more than 100 outstanding digital collections, containing digital photographs, newspapers, maps, books, audio recordings and other items.

This is one of the 29 double-folio plates digitized from Andreas Cellarius' *Harmonia Macrocosmica*, a title from the library's rare book collection. The second edition was published in 1661 and is a celestial atlas of the Ptolomaic, Copernican and Tyconic world systems. The title of this plate is “The spiral revolution of the Sun around the Earth.” View all of the Marriott Library's digital collections at: <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm4/digitalcollections.php>