



THE USER EXPERIENCE

Studying Use, Sharing Space

By Aaron Schmidt

A BIG PART OF IMPROVING LIBRARY user experience is designing libraries based on user preferences and behavior. There's no way to optimize touchpoints or create meaningful services if you don't know anything about who you're trying to serve, right?

Many libraries collect and analyze user opinions, but fewer dive deeper into **examining actual user behavior.**

Measure the Future, founded by Jason Griffey of Evenly Distributed, a technology solutions company for libraries, and a 2009 *LJ* Mover & Shaker, is developing a way for libraries to measure and analyze the activity in their physical buildings. The intro blurb on its website (measurethefuture.net) says is best:

Imagine having a Google-Analytics-style dashboard for your library building: number of visits, what patrons browsed, what parts of the library were busy during which parts of the day, and more. Measure the Future is going to make that happen by using simple and inexpensive sensors that can collect data about building usage that is now invisible. Making these invisible occurrences explicit will allow librarians to make strategic decisions that create more efficient and effective experiences for their patrons.

There are a variety of ways we can learn about people's behavior (e.g., contextual inquiry projects, usability testing), and the forthcoming stuff from Measure the Future will be an important and powerful part of this toolkit. Consider this list—one that is not exhaustive, to be sure—of some things a library could learn:

- Which stacks get the most traffic
- Which stacks have high traffic but low circ rates
- Where users dwell the longest
- Which spaces are underused

- How long the average self-check transaction takes
- What is the most popular piece of furniture in the library
- How many people look at a book display.

Once a library gathers data, it can conduct A/B tests by creating different arrangements and measuring the impact.

opens up the opportunity for a diverse collection of library programs and in the process will change people's perception of the library. By supporting the community's intellectual, cultural, and physical well-being, the library will demonstrate that it's not just a building full of books. With these opportunities, the library will have the means to focus on creating meaningful experiences.

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I haven't been this excited by a library project in quite some time.

One of the best parts is that it will use open source hardware and software. Many libraries will be able to implement some of this on their own. Measure the Future was one of eight winners of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Knight News Challenge, with each receiving between \$130,000 and \$600,000. Initial project partners include the State University of New York at Potsdam College Libraries and the Meridian Public Library in Idaho.

Measure the Future wants your input. Please take the "Measure the Future Assumption Survey" at bit.ly/MtFforLJ.

Sharing space

Speaking of the Meridian Public Library (Director Gretchen Caserotti is a 2010 *LJ* Mover & Shaker), it's embarking on a very exciting project—partnering with the local school district and the YMCA to create a shared 90,000 square foot facility.

The plan—still contingent upon a couple of bond measures—makes so much sense. By joining together, the school district, YMCA, and library will all save money and be able to provide better service to their users.

The library will have access to things that it otherwise wouldn't, like sports facilities and an industrial kitchen. This

It isn't just the library that will benefit. The elementary school will have access to a full library staffed by professionals, sadly a rarity these days. What's more, all institutions will benefit from the multiple streams of traffic arriving at the space. With more than one draw, the space is more likely to become a hotbed of activity. Thus, partnering reduces some of the risk involved with choosing a new site location. Reaping the benefits of collectivization is central to libraries, so I hope we see more of these collaborations in the future.

Check it out

The second issue of *Weave: Journal of Library User Experience*, is out. It is an open access journal and free to read on the web. I encourage you to take a look at "Service Design: An Introduction to a Holistic Assessment Methodology of Library Services" by Joe Marquez and Annie Downey of Reed College. And the tech-needs out there will love "An Internet of Pings: Enhancing the Web User Experience of Physically Present Patrons with Bluetooth Beacons."

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