Library Services and Library Systems

The public library is a hub for learning, research, entertainment, and hands-on experience. It's used by our 16,000 cardholders and patrons in dozens of different ways. We offer genealogy databases for researching family history, access to local and national newspapers and digital archives, access to Consumer Reports and auto pricing guides, passport and notary services, scanning, printing and much, much more! Hundreds of kids attend storytime each week, and with over 1,500 library events during the year, we try to provide everyone with opportunities to learn and have fun. There are cooking classes, jazz performances, author talks, piano recitals, painting workshops, coffee tastings, living history speakers, magicians, jugglers, and of course, the Bubble Lady.

Libraries are changing and adapting to new technology. We've added events monitors, scheduling and registration software for events, better wi-fi, and faster internet. We've added download and streaming services, and plan to add more. Our services are available twenty-four, seven, through our website. Of course we still answer hundreds of questions a day, in person at our reference and children's reference desks. We want to provide you with the services you need and that you want, delivered in the most convenient way for you, which may be via smartphone or ipad.

Our service offerings are increasing, and our PR department has produced colorful, instructional brochures for patrons to utilize those services. Our services depend on underlying systems, and we'll talk about those systems in a few minutes. First let's examine the main services that the library provides:

The Collection is managed through the Integrated Library System (ILS). There are physical and virtual collections. The virtual collection (e-materials and streaming) is much larger than the physical collection. The physical collection is curated onsite, while the virtual collection is curated by the provider. Tech Services catalogs the physical materials and we currently offer more than 110,000 items in our local collection, including books, audiobooks, DVD's and CD's.

Patrons want to interact with the library through mobile devices. Free apps deliver e-book, audiobook and video content. Our circulation of e-books and e-materials is increasing at rate of approximately 8% per year. Compare that with the circulation of traditional materials, which has slowly, but steadily declined. That demand pushes libraries to adopt more and more e-services, like Overdrive (Libby), Hoopla, and SearchOhio. We have hundreds of thousands of titles available for download through our online services, and millions of items that can be ordered from our partners.

Online collection services compete on pricing, terms, collection and availability, with Hoopla offering the most titles. Hoopla offers streaming audio and video, audiobooks, e-books, and a comic book viewer that can go frame-by-frame. Hoopla is backed by Baker and Taylor, one of the largest distributors of traditional library materials and supplies. It's an expensive service that charges per item checked out, so many libraries limit patrons on their monthly checkouts. Our library allows each library patron ten monthly checkouts with Hoopla.

Internet access, public computers, free wi-fi and our high-speed internet are a big draw for patrons. Dozens of people every day work on their laptop or device at the library. We can offer higher speeds and bigger bandwidth because our internet is provided through the library consortium, known as the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN). As part of our strategic technology plan, we upgraded the public computers to the newest Windows 10 and MacIntosh operating systems, and added 27-inch displays. Patrons enjoy watching movies, listening to music, and playing online games at our patron stations. Patrons have two hours on the public computers each day, but they can use their own laptop all day long. The quiet study area is popular with teachers and students, and it looks out on the library's lovely reading garden. The tables are wired with outlets, and have low privacy dividers to define individual workspaces.

Event programming is a service that we are very proud of. Our Public Relations department is adept at promoting annual events like the Dessert Extravaganza, which benefits the library foundation, as well as promoting regular events like the "Popcorn and a Movie" film series and our chef-led cooking series, and special events like Campfire Story Time and Pride in Library Day. PR has built relationships with local sponsors, local artists and photographers, and local newspapers that ensures that the word gets out about upcoming events. There is no charge for events, although we request pre-registration. Many events do fill up, and we maintain a waiting list in case of cancellations.

Storytime visitors make up a large percentage of our event attendance. Special events for kids, like our annual Harry Potter celebration, life-size Candyland, Doctor Who Fest, Touch-a truck, and life-size Monopoly are some of the library's most popular events. For example, the most recent Harry Potter event brought almost 600 people into the library.

Other popular events are cooking classes, music performances, and movie screenings. We recently hosted the Escher String Quartet, performing classical music with a modern interpretation. Apollo's Fire have been regular performers, as well as local jazz, folk and Bavarian bands. Events bring patrons into the library, and gives us a chance to tell them about our library services and future events. Events bring the community together and highlight our public services.

Increasing our event offerings is part of re-imagining the library as a community center. We plan to grow the library facilities to host more visitors in the future and to provide a larger community gathering space.

The Website and Online Services are available 24 hours a day. Newspapers, research databases, e-book checkouts, online renewals, holds and interlibrary loan requests, contact and feedback forms, newsletter downloads, local history files and scans, reading lists, maps, photos and library videos are all available online. With more than a thousand nodes, the website offers rich resources, and we are always working to get more information up there for the public. Grants helped us digitize local history documents and photos, which may extend their life, and provide an online record for future historians to consult.

Our goal is to make the website easier to navigate, and to make more information available through the site.

Reference Services are very important to the library's financial well-being. Reference librarians are trained in passport and notary services, and our passport program has brought in more than $200,000 for the library. Reference librarians offer Tech Tuesday and Tech Thursday training to library patrons in a one-on-one, concierge-style service. Patrons learn how to access library services with their devices. Reference librarians love to answer questions, and they'll find or order the rarest and most unique materials for you. Stop by our central reference desk for service!

Childrens Services provide the essential building blocks of reading and comprehension, with entertaining programming and custom services including storytime, puppets, teacher boxes, tutoring space, puzzles, and reading to service dogs.

Outreach Services is a smaller department, but vital, nonetheless, for those who are homebound, or unable to get to the library. We offer adult and children's outreach visits to schools, cafes, senior centers, and even the Maplewood pool. Outreach is a daily effort that includes its own collection of large-print materials.

But what goes on behind the scenes? How does this all work so smoothly and efficiently? That's where the Administrative, Public Relations, Tech Services and Systems departments come in. The public doesn't see what we do, directly, but they do appreciate it when they read about a special event on our monitors, get a targeted e-mail about a service they use regularly, or place an order for an interlibrary loan. Let's look at some of these background services, and the systems they depend on.

Tech Services is where new books are ordered, received and processed. They depend on complex functions and custom reports from our ILS system, Koha. Koha is an open-source catalog, and the key software to locate, order and circulate materials. As long as we have electricity, we are able to renew, return and check out materials to patrons. Without Tech Services there would be no items in the catalog. Their constant and thorough cataloging makes all of our reference and circulation services possible.

Administrative Services assure continuity and infrastructure for the library. We can't run computers if the roof is leaking. Administration listens to the departments and manages the budget to best distribute resources. They are also responsible for negotiating some of our biggest donations, which have paid for events monitors, building renovations, new equipment, a comfortable staff lounge, and event promotion. Monthly meetings connect and inform staff.

Public Relations is a core service with a large budget. They are responsible for promoting events, selecting library furniture, preparing library signage, designing print materials and newsletters, writing press releases, and reaching out to donors and sponsors through annual fundraisers. PR creates exciting graphics to promote the library's brand.

Branding is a key element of any promotional campaign. We use specific fonts and styles in our print and online content, and specific color schemes. Branding is also about consistency in our message, and consistency across media channels. In our modern, internet-savvy society, we need to blanket multiple media channels with coverage, with an increasing focus on social media. We budget for facebook and Instagram promotions, and post regularly to our Twitter, Snapchat and Pinterest accounts. Our branding and image are reflected in our lit signage, and fifteen-foot glowing logo that catch the eyes of passing drivers. PR also programs our outdoor electronic sign board, which alerts patrons to our extensive event offerings.

In the end, all of these efforts depend on the Library Systems. While we do employ some cloud services, a lot of our service originate onsite, from our racked Dell servers, running VMWare and hosting dozens of virtual machine servers running Microsoft and Linux, and serving up the ILS / catalog, the website, and the staff network.

The Library Systems services encompass everything from facilities, roofing, HVAC, boilers, security cameras and parking lots, to the workstations, printers, cameras, and search terminals that power library services. Critical information technology hardware includes the servers, which have strong, built-in redundancies, the switch equipment and cabling infrastructure that empowers the enterprise network, and the wi-fi controllers that empower open access to the internet. Other critical systems include our secured finance network, our telephony, the internet fiber-optic line, and the fire detection systems.

The Systems department is specifically tasked with maintaining the servers and network hardware. The Systems department supports the network services and operating systems, and the software and applications that run on our staff and patron workstations. Systems is responsible for data integrity and availability, and for providing connectivity without significant downtime. Systems is tasked to report on hardware inventory, cybersecurity, and disaster recovery while managing hardware and software lifecycles and providing strategic technology planning and pricing.

The Reliability and Availability of the library systems is critical to their success. We've built redundant systems that can endure power failures, internet failures, and phone system failures. Utilizing tools from vmWare, we can easily spin down and back up a server to the cloud. Our uptime has gotten consistently better with updates and improvements to our software, and our website and catalog services rarely experience downtime other than scheduled maintenance and the occasional power outage.

The Drupal content management system leverages user roles and permissions to determine who can edit what on the website, and provides consistent templating and navigation across all pages. Our website is updated on a daily basis, and our website designers work hard to convey information through colorful and eye-catching graphics, including rotating ads for event promotion, downloadable newsletters and children's brochures, and annual reports on library usage. The website remains our best way to convey information to the public, and can be used at home or in-house on our patron computers. Patrons sign up for events online using our custom-built Drupal event registration module.

The website powers our core services. Ideally it maps to every library service. It is essential for the delivery of specific services, including the Bestsellers Club, access to the local history digital archives, access to our collection of databases, and offsite access to the catalog system. Patrons can renew materials, place holds and verify their checkouts at any time.

Koha Integrated Library System (KOHA-ILS) serves as our cataloging software. Koha is free, open source, and supported by a library consortium that includes more than 600 libraries, and several commercial support services. Koha has been in development for twenty years, and is fully-tested and ready to deploy. Libraries can customize Koha through a large preference panel, making it easy to add branch libraries, to template banners and menus, to program page functions, and to set up self-checkout stations. The Koha community is dedicated to releasing an annual update package, along with a development version for contributors. It's a dynamic product that functions very well in our mid-size library.

Open Source software is one key to our success. Our ILS runs on open-source software, as do many of our critical systems. We deploy virtual Linux servers, running Apache on the LAMP stack, to manage our catalog, our website, our timesheets, our scheduling software, and our events monitor system; all deployed on free, open-source software.

We want to offer the patron the best services. Studying what's working well at other libraries is an important part of staff and organizational development. Tested and proven systems spread quickly through library networks all over the country, and globally. Regional libraries communicate primarily through the Northeast Ohio Regional Libraries network, the Ohio Public Library Information Network, the Ohio College Library Center, and through the CleveNet system. Sharing services, like the recent state contract for Linda.com, and our shared internet provisioning through OPLIN, are wonderful ways for libraries to reduce costs, and a benefit that exemplifies the traditional, cooperative spirit of library institutions.

Contract services that are popular with Ohio libraries include Overdrive and Hoopla for e-materials and streaming, SearchOhio which provides access to dozens of library and academic collections, the Gale and Ebsco database collections that help navigate vast amounts of information, and the Deep Freeze or Smart Shield services for locking down patron internet computers. These large library partners can leverage economies of scale to provide services at a reasonable cost. Companies like Baker and Taylor, and Amazon become important sources for materials, supplies and services.

While we chose open-source Koha for our ILS, a lot of regional libraries have selected Triple-I Encore, Triple-I Sierra, or Sirsi-Dynix Symphony. CleveNET is a related paid service that provides cloud-based services to their regional network. There is a big push toward the cloud that affects every industry's technology profile. While cloud-based services are attractive from a cost perspective, they do add a management layer, and dependence on the internet connection.

At the Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library, we've chosen to host our critical systems onsite, with cloud as our backup. If local services suffer catastrophic damage, we can redeploy from the cloud. By operating a strong, local enterprise network, we are able to continue providing onsite library services even when our incoming fiber optic connections fail.

As a repository of community information, we need to be able to continue operating through cyberattacks, disasters and catastrophes, and to continue to provide the public with assistance finding critical resources. That's why we are diligent in our efforts to back up, secure and monitor all network systems.

The data we hold in trust for the community is rich in depth and broad in scope. Our library systems are always available for free to the public, and we welcome community support and participation. We are an inclusive community center and we welcome everyone, young and old to participate in our mission.

That mission is three-fold: To provide excellence in service to all who seek information and materials of any format, to promote the well-being of the community through programs and cooperative efforts, and to create a community where ideas, culture, and knowledge thrive by providing materials, equipment and services to all people. When we provide those services to our community of library patrons, we succeed.

As we continue to add new services, we measure their success, and budget resources appropriately. We're guided by the needs of our patrons, and add services whenever we can provide more value to the patron, or improve their library experience. Our library team is talented, trained, and friendly, and our policies, procedures and systems are reliable and practical. Our number one focus is on our patrons, and providing them with the best customer service possible.

The results of our organizational development can be measured in many ways, such as our increasing foot traffic, our increased circulation, our greater attendance at events, our increases in sponsorship and fundraising, our new equipment, new technology, new patron work areas, new furnishings, and our overall patron satisfaction.

Public service continues to be our calling here at the Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library, and the library is here for you! We offer our services to you on a daily basis at the library, and welcome you to utilize the library services 24-7 on our website. The library systems and infrastructure are a vital community resource that we hold in trust, for all. We welcome your ideas and feedback, and encourage you to visit. Thank you for your continued support!