

Introduction

Abstract

Chapter 1 of *Library Technology Reports* (vol. 48, no. 6) “*Running the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Operating the Library Website*” by David Lee King provides an explanation of the contents of this Library Technology Report, which include changes made to the library’s website, customer engagement, daily operations of the digital branch, statistics, social media, and what’s next for websites.

In August 2009, I published my first issue of *Library Technology Reports (LTR)*: “Building the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Transforming Your Library Website.” In that *LTR*, I talked about the idea of a digital branch for a library:

The digital branch [is] a library website that is a vital, functional resource for patrons and enhances the library’s place within its community. The report outlines an efficient process for creating a digital branch, from the initial phases of gathering information and sketching out a design, to winning approval from management, hiring qualified IT staff, and maintaining and upgrading the site once it is built. Throughout the report, the author regularly uses his experience at his own library as an example of how the process can unfold and what pitfalls to avoid.¹

Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) has run our digital branch for over four years now and even redesigned the digital branch in 2011. Our redesign made our digital branch more useful, and we were able to fix some glaring problems.

This *LTR* should be considered a companion piece to the first one. The first report discussed how TSCPL

built our digital branch. This report explains what to do after your library’s digital branch is up and running.

Opening day is the exciting virtual ribbon cutting, but it takes a lot of planning and hard work to get to that point. Now that you’ve finally made it past your initial launch, what do you do next? You’ll most likely have questions like these: How do you staff a digital branch? What types of activities can customers undertake while visiting the digital branch? What work-related activities will staff need to perform? How do you fix problems and make improvements?

This *LTR* answers those questions. I will focus on these areas:

- tweaks we’ve made to the digital branch
- use and engagement on the digital branch
- how we operate the digital branch
- statistics
- social media
- what’s next

Tweaks We’ve Made to the Digital Branch

Chapter 2 focuses on what worked and what didn’t in our first digital branch iteration and on the tweaks we have made to the digital branch since going live.

There were some things that we built into the digital branch that simply didn’t work. If you have ever built a website, you have probably discovered that some really cool ideas that you built into the site—that you thought your library’s customers would think were awesome—simply didn’t work according to plan.

On the other hand, maybe there was something important that you or your web team forgot to create.

That important tidbit was lost among the details. I'll discuss what those missteps were for my library's digital branch and explain how we fixed them.

Use and Engagement on the Digital Branch

Once a digital branch is running well, the next question is, is it being used? We wanted to know if our customers were reading and subscribing to our blog posts. Chapter 3 answers those questions.

How We Operate the Digital Branch

Now that we have operated our digital branch for four years, we know what works and what doesn't for our library, and we have created some goals and a strategy for reaching those goals, both for the website and for social media. In chapter 4, I will describe our goals for the digital branch and how we meet those goals.

I'll also discuss the various teams that work on our digital branch, what types of meetings we have, who's in charge of what, and how those groups interact with the rest of the library.

Statistics

Statistics and analytics are vital to successfully running a digital branch. In chapter 5, I'll discuss what we track and why, and how those numbers can help meet your library's goals. A discussion of tools used to track statistics will also be included.

Social Media

Social media has taken the world by storm, and your library's customers are definitely using it—probably multiple times a day. I'd guess that you probably do, too. But personal use of social media is very different from organizational use. In chapter 6, I will discuss how to use social media as the face of a library. I'll share what social media tools TSCPL uses and how we use them. I will also discuss how using these social tools helps our library meet our organizational goals.

What's Next

Finally, in chapter 7, I'll get out my crystal ball and we'll talk about trends—what I see coming for websites and digital branches in the next three to five years. The discussion will include a list of trends in web design to watch and possibly try out.

Sound like fun? I think so—let's get started!

Note

1. David Lee King, "Building the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Transforming Your Library Website," *Library Technology Reports* 45, no. 6 (August–September 2009), ALA TechSource webpage, accessed July 15, 2012, www.alatechsource.org/ltr/building-the-digital-branch-guidelines-for-transforming-your-library-website.