

Library Engagement Platforms' End Goal

We have examined a range of library engagement platforms and have discussed functionality and marketing aspects. In this final chapter, let's focus on the end results: when these services and engagement platforms make sense to reach library goals, what that interaction might look like to the customer, and why the customer might be interested in these types of connections to the local library.

Creating Touchpoints

Let's begin by taking a look at touchpoints: a marketing and customer experience term. SurveyMonkey explains what touchpoints are:

Customer touchpoints are your brand's points of customer contact, from start to finish. For example, customers may find your business online or in an ad, see ratings and reviews, visit your website, shop at your retail store, or contact your customer service. Seems like a long list, but these are just a few of your touchpoints!¹

Libraries have a lot of touchpoints—many of them built-in and traditional. For example, when a customer visits a reference desk with a question, that's a touchpoint. When a customer checks out a book at the circulation desk, that interaction and experience is a touchpoint. When a customer enters your building? Another touchpoint. When that customer finds an article on your website or scrolls to your most recent Facebook post? These are also touchpoints.

All the library engagement platforms we have been discussing—newsletters, e-mail marketing, reservation and sign-up software, delivery services, and mobile apps also have many built-in touchpoints.

E-mails and Our Library Catalogs

First, let's talk about touchpoints in regard to library catalogs. We learned about two ILSs that have some customer relationship management (CRM) features built in, or at least have some direct e-mail marketing components built into the system.

The catalog experience is filled with touchpoints. For example, when you search the library catalog for something to read, watch, or listen to and put that selection on hold, you are engaging with touchpoints. These touchpoints include finding the website, finding the link to the library catalog, logging into the catalog with your library account, searching the catalog, and putting an item on hold. These touchpoints don't provide much customer engagement with the library.

Other touchpoints can be created with our library engagement platforms by using the direct e-mail functionality built into some of these newer systems. Here are some examples of automated e-mails you can send using these systems:

- *Getting a library card:* Once customers have signed up for a library card, you can send them a Welcome to the Library e-mail. This e-mail can share ideas about card usage. Customers probably know they can check out books using their new library card, but you can share other capabilities, like downloading e-books or digital audiobooks, using a library database, or reserving a computer. If you have a zoo passport program at your library, you can explain how to use a library card to access passes, or if you have events that require a reservation using a library card, you can share how that process works.
- *Reminder to use the card:* Some customers get a library card for a specific reason, and they don't

use their card again. Take the opportunity to e-mail and remind customers that they have a library card and that they can use it for books, movies, music, and so on. Sending a reminder to use the card might pique interest enough to visit the library again and check something out.

- *Renewal reminder:* If your system's library cards expire after a set amount of time or after a set amount of time with no use, send out a renewal reminder to customers' e-mail addresses. And, of course, take that opportunity to remind those customers of ways to use their library card.
- *What to read next:* You probably have plenty of customers who use their library card regularly. Consider sending recommendations to those customers. Some of these CRM-based systems can look at what the customer generally checks out and can e-mail them a list of reading recommendations. Or you can send an e-mail to notify the people who have checked out an author's books when there's a newly published one to read. You can even send a general e-mail that has a list of the newest books the library has purchased.
- *Fun things:* You can also send some fun e-mails, like a happy birthday e-mail or a library card anniversary e-mail.

E-newsletters

While we're talking about e-mail, let's think about e-newsletters. Instead of an e-mail targeted to an individual, these are e-mails targeting a wider range of customers.

E-newsletters are a good way to use your e-mail lists to get library information into the hands (and e-mail inboxes) of your customers. If you gather e-mails in your ILS, you have those e-mails available to use in other products (like your library engagement platforms).

Many of these systems also have a way to track interactions. For example, you can tell when a customer clicks a link to an article that was in the e-newsletter. This type of data about your e-newsletters can be something you share in a board report or at an internal library meeting. Similarly, you can measure the click-through rate (CTR) of people clicking from the e-newsletter to your library's website.

Most of these products require that you create the content. This can be fairly easy to do if you pull content from your library's news or blog posts and create a list of books to go along with it.

But if you want to simplify the process further, LibraryAware can write the e-newsletters for you. It provides stories and links to material in your library catalog. So, if you work at a small library with no staff or time to create an e-newsletter, or you are too busy

to devote time to writing articles, you can pay someone else to do it for you.

Data-Based Collection Shaping

Another thing ILSs connected to patron data can do is to help shape your collection. For example, some systems will make purchase and discard recommendations based on previous checkouts. Using library data in this way can help shape a collection (even at the local branch level) so you have materials of interest to customers.

Signing Up

Many libraries have events and classes happening either at the library or in the community that people must reserve a space to attend. This process is like getting a ticket for the concert—seating is limited!

Your customers can sign up for and reserve any number of things by using library engagement platforms. This is an active type of touchpoint. Your customers want to sign up for or reserve something, and through the platform software, they're able to accomplish their goal (i.e., signing up or reserving an item).

This functionality empowers the customer and shows you what types of programs your customers like. With this information, you can tailor your events to your customer needs.

Meeting room reservations are similar. Streamlining the process improves your customer touchpoints. When people sign up and use your meeting spaces, this also creates customer data and is a good way to show library use over time.

Pickup and Delivery Services

During the pandemic, many libraries have created new contactless services: curbside pickup and other delivery methods. Curbside pickup services have been around for a long time. For example, restaurants often provide curbside pickup services for carryouts. Grocery stores, restaurants, and even music stores have adapted and have developed curbside pickup services to operate during the current pandemic.

Some libraries have drive-through-window-styled pickup services, which is handy for customers on the go. At those libraries, customers simply put something on hold and designate drive-through. Once customers get a notification that the item is ready, they drive to the library's pickup window to check out the item.

While most libraries don't have a drive-through service, many have recently created a hastily built

curbside pickup service. For example, at Topeka we marked some parking spaces in our parking lot with flags. Then we placed holds in an outdoor sunroom building that is adjacent to those parking spaces. We added a few staff circulation computers in the room, installed phones—and voilà! We had curbside pickup.

Now, we are reclaiming that sunroom for its intended use (meeting and eating space). We moved the staff part of curbside pickup to another area of the building. It's still the same process for a customer, but we needed to adapt the service as we have continued to slowly open our buildings back up.

As we adapted, we also started using Springshare's Pickup Manager to manage our curbside pickup service. Here's what Springshare says about Pickup Manager:

Pickup Manager helps you streamline the holds pickup process while adhering to your COVID-19 safety guidelines. Patrons can easily request their holds via their ILS, schedule a pickup, and enjoy 2-way SMS/text and chat communication when they've arrived. Pickup Manager has so many features to not only make your current day-to-day easier but when COVID-19 is a thing of the past, you'll wonder how you ever did holds pickup "the old way."²

Home Delivery Service

Home delivery services are yet another option. Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library has had home delivery services for a long time for our older customers. We have regular routes and take books to those customers who normally can't get to the library.

Our TSCPL@Home service has expanded that concept to include everyone in our community. Customers simply designate TSCPL@Home when they place a book on hold in our ILS. Then we'll deliver books to the customer every two weeks (assuming the customer has items checked out). This is a growing service in my community.

Curbside pickup and home delivery have become popular services. My guess is these types of services will continue to be offered because they are a convenience many industries are now offering. There's a whole service industry devoted to third-party deliveries, with familiar names like DoorDash, Instacart, or Grubhub. Uber is even getting into the delivery game with its Uber Eats service. Curbside pickup and home delivery services are probably here to stay, presenting an exciting growth area for libraries and library engagement platforms.

Mobile Apps

Library-focused mobile apps are handy tools to have in your pocket and on your smartphones. When your customers have added your library's mobile apps to their smartphones, they have an enhanced opportunity to connect with the library.

To maintain customer interest, make sure your library app is useful. If you are building a mobile app from scratch, find out what your customers really want. For example, they might want to use the app to access the library catalog and put things on hold or to sign up for classes and events. They might also want to check their accounts to see what they have checked out. Customers probably also expect to get reminders in the form of notifications.

Your library probably also has a bunch of other mobile apps. For example, you might have OverDrive's Libby app for e-books. You might also have Hoopla, Flipster, or LinkedIn Learning apps as well. You might have a summer reading app like Beanstack or a language learning app like Mango Languages.

A good question to ask is this—does your customer know about your mobile apps? You will need to continually promote your mobile apps to customers. Create a mobile apps page on your library's website as well. This page should list the library's mobile apps and should include links to the Google and Apple app stores.

Custom Marketing Help

Do you have a large marketing department? No? Thought not. My library has a four-person marketing department . . . and enough work for at least twice that many people at any given time. There's always a ton of programs, events, services, and other awareness opportunities that a library wants to promote. Add to that workload all the other everyday things, like "bathroom out of order" signs that staff need to quickly create.

Yet despite personnel issues, marketing and promoting in libraries is crucial to today's modern library. That's why we need solid marketing and promotion strategies. The good news is that even if you have a small marketing department or if you just really need help developing marketing and promotion plans, you can use one of the companies that help with developing marketing, promotion, and branding strategies that were discussed earlier.

A great thing about the library engagement platform companies that offer marketing services is that they are all library-focused organizations. They are already familiar with libraries. That is so important! If

you have worked with an outside company that didn't know what libraries really do, you'll understand what I mean. You can waste valuable time explaining the width and breadth of a modern library to a company that is new to the library industry. Why spend time on education when you can use a company or product that already understands libraries?

Ad Space

Ads are a handy way to engage people with a click and, as I shared earlier in this publication, people do click on online ads.

Google Ads help place library services at the top of a Google Search. That function alone is probably worth your time and money. Don't think of your ad as spam that unsuspecting people might click. Instead, think of it as a way to put the thing that person was searching for at the top spot on their search results page. By doing that, you just saved that customer time by offering the information they wanted in a Google Ad—and for just a little money.

The same principle applies to other types of ads. Topeka has used Facebook Ads, Google Ads, and YouTube video ads, all with good levels of success. These types of ads are an easy way to provide the information people want, and at the top of their searches.

One More Thing

We have been focused on library engagement via software. In some ways, it can feel a bit like we are using software to invade our customers' space. Doing this might seem intrusive, especially when we are talking about ads, notifications on a smartphone, or direct marketing via e-mail and e-newsletters.

Here's the thing—our customers are used to this kind of engagement, and actually expect it. Every other company they interact with uses these forms of

engagement. For example, when you buy something online, you have also probably provided your e-mail address and are signed up for marketing e-mails.

Sometimes that's a bit irritating. But often, we're OK with it because we like the company and the product we bought, and we might find the e-mails interesting. It's possible it will even prompt us to make future purchases.

Remember, our library customers like the library. They signed up for a library card and want to interact with the library. They provided their e-mail address willingly, downloaded the mobile app, and maybe reserved a meeting room space. So our customers expect us to interact along those touchpoints. This type of interaction is a normal, expected, everyday activity for a modern business or organization.

Not only is it expected, but our customers also want these interactions. Unlike a traditional product that involves a purchase, an upgrade, or an extended warranty reminder, the library provides many free services. We are a valued community resource that many customers hold near and dear to their hearts.

Libraries provide books, information, and answers. We help people change their lives—through a new job, or a new skill, or knowledge, or even through a few moments of escape with a fun story.

What are you doing to meet your customers' need for connections? Library engagement platforms can engage customers in ways beyond the circulation desk. So start exploring these emerging opportunities packed into a software platform, and connect with your community in new and meaningful ways.

Notes

1. "How to Identify Your Customer Touchpoints," SurveyMonkey, accessed August 28, 2021, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/identify-customer-touchpoints/>.
2. Talia, "Pickup Manager Is Here!" *Springshare Blog*, October 14, 2020, <https://blog.springshare.com/2020/10/14/pickup-manager-is-here/>.