

The Problem/Need for the Program

Many libraries today are caught in a storm of debate about the role of the library in the modern world. At CCPL, our role is focused not purely on access to information, but on helping customers find what they need, and use it to improve their lives – in short, we offer not just information, but the opportunity and means to transform that data and information into usable knowledge. This ability to meet the exact and immediate needs of our customers came sharply into play when the library began to offer loans on eBooks.

In September 2009, three percent of adults in the United States owned an eBook reader, but that number was rising. (Pew Internet and American Life Project, January 2012. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/E-readers-and-tablets/Findings.aspx>)

This number reflected not just changing formats, but the changing needs of our customers – for convenient, portable materials that would fit into people’s busy lives.

In anticipation of these changing needs, in October 2009 CCPL developed a digital collection, called the Downloadable Digital Library. This collection consists of audiobooks and eBooks, which can be “borrowed” from the electronic library via OverDrive©, and read or listened to on personal devices. Specialized software keeps track of when the book was “borrowed,” and “returns” the book by deactivating the file at the end of the loan period. Library customers can access this Downloadable Digital Library online at any time of day. By November 2010, the number of eReader owners had doubled to six percent of adults in the US, and by May 2011 – in just six

months – ownership had doubled yet again, to 12 percent. (Pew Internet, January 2012.) At the same time, many of these eReader owners began to realize that the use of eBooks and eReaders might not be as simple as they expected – eBooks aren't free (in fact, they're often more expensive than a mass-market paperback), and eReaders require some technical knowledge – for set-up, start-up and downloading books.

Some tech-savvy customers are able to navigate these details on their own, but some customers found themselves lost in this sea of information and technical demands. Many people don't have the time to sift through complicated instructions, or spend hours on the phone with tech support. CCPL looked for an innovative way to fill this knowledge gap, and to help customers “get in, get what they need, and get out” with the knowledge of how to take full advantage of their eReaders and the digital collection. In a time where some library systems are saying that they simply can't devote the necessary resources to such projects, CCPL is serving as a model of responsiveness to customer need in the development and provision of programs and services. Our program has evolved the point where neighboring library systems are asking to share our materials, techniques and overall approach.

Description of the program

As the digital collection grew and developed, library staff developed a broad, multifaceted plan to address customer questions and needs. Instead of simply giving people a set of instructions, or directing them to contact customer service, CCPL

wanted to ensure that customers would gain a solid knowledge of how to use their devices. As the high number of eReader questions continued, staff began working on training documents for their peers, and instructions to use as teaching aids. In the spring of 2011 – a time when eReader ownership was doubling (Pew Internet, January 2012), and Downloadable Digital Library usership had reached 7,000 checkouts per month, among 1,400 borrowers - librarians proposed a series of workshops that would answer questions in detail. The intention was to create a forum where customers could gain the knowledge they needed to use the Downloadable Digital Library service, in a format that would make sure customer questions were answered.

The first series of workshops were designed as large-format presentations, where customers could follow along with their own devices. Eleven of these workshops were held in the summer of 2011, with at least one workshop taking place at every library branch. Customer input was extremely positive – as one customer said about successfully using her eReader for the first time, “Without you, it would still be gathering dust on the shelf!” Evaluations were distributed at every workshop, and staff collected informal comments from customers. Staff members reviewed this feedback on a regular basis; in response, the maximum number of registrations at each workshop was reduced from 20 to 10, since it was more important to provide high-quality hands-on assistance, even if it affected attendance numbers.

When the first series of workshops ended in August 2011, CCPL still wanted to continue offering workshops. Feedback was collected and reviewed from both customers and staff, and a data-driven decision was made to adjust the format. Two changes were made: the Downloadable Digital Library workshops were added to our regular schedule of fall 2011 computer classes, and classes were separated into two different sessions, one for audiobooks and one for eBooks. Twenty-two classes took place during the September-December computer class season, and more have been scheduled for January-May of 2012. Staff members continue to collect feedback through formal evaluations and through one-on-one connections with customers.

In addition to holding regular classes about the Downloadable Digital Library, CCPL has developed other creative ways to connect with customers and address questions. In anticipation of the 2012 “post-Christmas season,” when library customers seek help for the devices they received for Christmas, instructional documents were developed for the two best-selling devices, the Kindle Fire and the Nook Color. These documents were initially intended for staff to use as a teaching tool, but they have since been adapted for distribution to the public.

The Friends of the Chesterfield County Public Library purchased eReaders for each library branch – again, one Kindle Fire and one Nook Color – to help staff maintain an expert level of knowledge for answering questions about these devices, and to enable staff demonstrations of their use. One library branch set up a table with a sign that

offered to help people with eReaders they had received as Christmas gifts. A staff member with a dedicated computer provided a “one-stop shop” where a patron could get a library card, set up an account, and get help with the eReader itself. Over 200 people received help at this “one-stop shop” in December 2011 and January 2012. As one staff member put it, “Many came in desperate but left very happy.”

We were on target and timely with this effort. C|net news reported that Barclay’s analyst Anthony DiClemente estimated that Amazon sold 5.5 million Kindle Fire devices in the last quarter of 2011. (http://news.cnet.com/8301-13506_3-57355059-17/kindle-fire-sales-were-on-fire-last-quarter-analyst-says/). Additionally, eBook reader ownership in the United States doubled in December from 10 percent of the population to 19 percent. (<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/E-readers-and-tablets/Findings.aspx>)

CCPL has also developed the “Your Personal Librarian” service, in which patrons can make a 15- or 30-minute one-on-one appointment with a librarian, for help with any topic, including the Downloadable Digital Library. This allows librarians to offer even more flexibility, and to help people at their own pace if the class format doesn’t meet their needs. These options for one-on-one interactions allow us to ensure that every customer gets the knowledge they need.

Staff Training

Behind the scenes of the assistance offered to customers, dedicated staff members have kept pace with constantly changing formats through formal training and self-directed, peer-to-peer learning. When the service first launched, all staff attended web-based training about the Downloadable Digital Library service. From that point on, staff members participated in continuous learning about different eReader devices. Staff members use the Downloadable Digital Library on their personal devices, and share results and tips with their co-workers, often providing demonstrations and valuable hands-on experiences. To facilitate peer-to-peer training, a page was created on the staff's shared workspace, our PBWorks.com "Wiki," about "Overdrive and eMedia Troubleshooting."

In teaching the summer workshop, staff members who were proficient in eReader knowledge were paired with staff members who were less confident. This peer-to-peer mentoring during the summer was highly instrumental in allowing CCPL to expand the number of workshops in the fall; staff members gained the additional confidence they needed to teach classes about the Downloadable Digital Library.

CCPL was also selected as a site for the Library of Virginia's "Technology Petting Zoo," a collection of various eReaders and other devices, designed to serve as a learning tool for libraries throughout the state. Thirteen staff members attended a day-long training session at the Library of Virginia where they learned how to conduct training workshops for other Virginia libraries.

The Cost of the Program

Program costs mainly consisted of staff hours. The three staff members who proposed the first series of workshops spent 20-30 hours each planning the workshops and creating educational materials. The 11 summer workshops required two staff leaders each, working about two hours (including prep for a 1.5-hour workshop) for a total of 44 staff hours. Approximately 20 staff hours went into the development and production of Kindle Fire and Nook color instructional documents. The Friends of the Library purchased nine Kindle Fire devices for \$199 each, and nine Nook Color devices for \$199 each, for an approximate total of \$3,600.

The Results/Success of the Program

The first workshops took place in the summer of 2011, in combination with publicity to encourage users to explore the Downloadable Digital Library with the help of librarians. Eleven workshops were held, with a total attendance of 107 people.

Comments included:

"Without you, [my device] would still be gathering dust on the shelf!"

"I can actually use the program now"

"Very helpful – answered questions I had re: the process to download"

"I couldn't have done it without you"

In response to customer and staff feedback, CCPL redesigned the workshops for fall 2011, by lowering the maximum class size, and splitting the classes into two

presentations, one for downloading eBooks and one for downloading audiobooks.

With the smaller class sizes, 100 people attended workshops in September 2011-January 2012.

In evaluations from fall 2011, all participants rated themselves as "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with the class - in fact, 92 percent of survey respondents selected the highest option of "Very Satisfied." Every participant answered "Yes" to the question, "Was this information useful to you?"

Comments from fall classes included:

"Very informative and helpful"

"The computer class was well taught with all questions answered. Individual attention was given to everyone as needed. Very knowledgeable teacher."

In addition to customers served by the formal classes, librarians helped countless customers with questions and issues on a day-to-day, one-on-one basis. The staff's tirelessness in keeping abreast of current mobile devices demonstrates a true commitment to the customer. Commensurate with these efforts, use of the Downloadable Digital Library has soared. When the first workshops were proposed, the Downloadable Digital Library had 1,390 active users, and 7,137 checkouts per month. In December 2011, the number of active Downloadable Digital Library users was over 3,000, and monthly checkouts reached 13,819.