Library forgoes phased approach, implements ILLiad in one giant step

University incorporates flexible, intuitive ILL system between semester breaks—without missing a beat with users

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Situation

The Melvin J. Zahnow Library at Saginaw Valley State University serves more than 9,500 students and faculty at its modern, 89,000-square-foot building. In order to maintain a high level of service, the library depends on students to handle many of the day-to-day activities, including its interlibrary loan program.

"When I took over responsibility of interlibrary loan," says Thomas Zantow, Reference/Interlibrary Loan Librarian, "it was a paper-based system where everything had to happen in the library—requests to pickups." According to Zantow, the system required 10 to 12 student-workers, each processing only about four requests per hour.

Within a few months of Zantow taking over ILL, the system moved to an online environment and several new services, such as Ariel and Prospero, were added. "The problem was that every time we added more, the procedures would change," he explains. "Each time you processed a request, you had a lot of thinking to do to make sure you processed it correctly." Training demands and job stress became significant issues. Many student-workers actually left out of frustration.

Solution

In early November 2002, Zantow attended an OCLC Web seminar on ILLiad. "I had to pick my teeth up off the floor," he says of the presentation. He realized that not only could ILLiad keep pace with their service levels, it could also consolidate all of their functions into one simplified workflow. That flexibility would also allow them to add future functions and technologies with only minor tweaks to the process.

AT A GLANCE

Melvin J. Zahnow Library, Saginaw State Valley University, Michigan

- Melvin J. Zahnow Library, Saginaw State Valley University, Michigan
- Library opened in 1987 and is one of the region's largest and most modern libraries
- Supports more than 9,500 students and faculty
- Handles more than 11,000 requests each year

The number of ILL requests jumped 98.8% in the first month.

What happened next, says Zantow, was an impressive feat. A quick feasibility study led to intense discussions with OCLC immediately after Thanksgiving. They concluded that together they could install ILLiad before January classes. Zantow also proposed to go straight from an OPAC-centric online ILL system to full ILLiad, including document delivery, in that same time period. The approach would limit service disruption for users since implementation and training would occur before the new semester began. It was aggressive, but the administration agreed with his plan.

Results

The system was installed on schedule, and before the first week of classes ended, all issues had been resolved. Today, each student-worker can handle up to 20 ILL requests per hour, a 500 percent increase in processing. Additionally, Zantow was able to reduce his team from 10 students to

four, despite a surge in requests. Productivity increased so much they were able to initiate office delivery for faculty and develop document delivery for distance learners.

Regarding the surge in requests, the number jumped 98.8 percent between January and February 2003, yet requests rarely took more than one day to process. "In our second month, our requests doubled to an all-time high," says Zantow, "yet we never broke stride and rarely had requests sit untouched for more than a day." Even more telling is that the requests in February rose 64.6 percent, compared to the previous year, but Zantow's team never missed a beat.

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