Forging Stronger Connections Between Readers And Librarians

External Outcomes Evaluation of the My Librarian Readers’ Advisory Service

December 2014

Presentation by Discovery Collaborative for:

RESEARCH FUNDED BY THE PAUL G. ALLEN FAMILY FOUNDATION
Forging Stronger Connections

Research Objectives

Overall goal was to evaluate the pilot of the My Librarian readers’ advisory service that aims to engage patrons in a more meaningful relationship with librarians. Specific objectives:

– Assess whether the My Librarian pilot achieved the set targets and anticipated outcomes;
– Determine the key success factors that may have impacted these results;
– Gauge the impact My Librarian had on patrons and the community at large.
Methodology

Two phase process:

- In October 2014, 203 of the 600 users completed an online survey providing ±5.6% statistical reliability for the total sample with a 34% response rate.

- In November 2014, in-depth phone interviews were then conducted with fourteen of the 100 survey respondents who expressed a willingness to participate in a follow-on discussion.
  
  - Interview participants represented a strong mix by gender, age and library use.
  - Discussions averaged 30-minutes in length.

### Online Survey Respondent Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Break Outs By Age/Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Age Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In-Depth Interview Respondent Profile

| Median number of books read in past 12 months | 30 books |
| Mean percentage of books checked out         | 61%      | 61%      |
Overall the pilot of My Librarian was a success, with 95% of the survey respondents saying they were satisfied with the experience.

- Users praised Multnomah County Library for developing such a thoughtful and useful service.
- Users explain their high levels of satisfaction with My Librarian were thanks to:
  - The ease with which users submit their requests combined with the speed and highly personalized nature of the librarians’ responses.
  - Most importantly, users report recommendations were “spot-on” and inspired them to not only read, but to share book recommendations with family and friends.
9 out of 10 agreed the words “friendly,” “thoughtful,” “timely,” “relevant,” and “engaging” accurately described their response from the librarian.

- All were impressed with the effort the librarians put into crafting recommendations.
- Many mentioned how nice it was to receive a **personal email from the librarian** that let them know she/he would be working on the request.
- They specifically appreciated how the librarians’ gave **thoughtful explanations** for the books recommended that reflected in-depth understanding of what the users were hoping to find.

**I was half expecting a computer survey that spits out results, so I was so happy when a real person wrote back and made the recommendations.**
My Librarian stimulates more reading, higher quality reading experiences and expanded reading interests into new authors and even new genres.

- Survey respondents reported the following positives about their experience:
  - 82% said even though they only communicated electronically, they felt they had a meaningful conversation with the librarian.
  - 3 out of 4 users (77%) said this service helped them start a conversation with a librarian that they wouldn’t have initiated otherwise.
  - 3 out of 4 users (74%) said this service saved them hours of searching and several “not quite right” reads.
  - 58% said using this service gave them a better understanding of why they are drawn to the books they love.

- Interview respondents echoed these findings and explained how connecting with librarians expanded their reading experience.

Earlier this year I got discouraged in my search (for a good book) and stopped reading for fun. Now I am back with a stack of books on my bedside table!

The librarian’s email was so inspiring that I sent her recommendations to my acupuncturist and my grandson’s kindergarten teacher. Now I am working on a larger list of book recommendations for them!

She recommended The Golem and the Jinni, a book outside my typical areas of interest. She was so good at predicting my interest in the others though that I read it and really enjoyed it.
My Librarian enhances patron understanding of and appreciation for the work of librarians and reinforces high esteem for Multnomah County Library.

- Survey respondents reported that My Librarian positively impacts perceptions of librarians as follows:
  - 3 out of 4 users (79%) said experiencing this service made them appreciate librarians more than they did before.
  - 69% of users said experiencing this service made them see the role of librarians in a different light.
- Interview respondents explained how My Librarian provided them access to a personalized, professional resource that is superior to other book recommendation resources available to them today.

**Intended Outcomes**

- **97%** Valued getting book recommendations from a librarian with their *same reading interests*.
- **97%** Appreciated having a *real person* pay attention to their interests and make recommendations just for them.
- **96%** Valued getting book recommendations from a librarian who is an *expert on today’s best reads*.
- **92%** Said a personal recommendation from a librarian is *more valuable than* a book recommendation generated by a *search algorithm*.

*I wouldn’t usually go up to a librarian because they seemed busy. Now I realize they are approachable.*

*Personalized recommendations-- not just from a real person, but from an expert!*
My Librarian builds users’ confidence in book selection and inspires them to connect more with others about books.

- Many said they recommended My Librarian to friends and family, a few even posted about My Librarian on Facebook.
- Some explained My Librarian inspired them to invest more time and energy in connecting with others about books.
- A few added that when the librarian’s recommendations included books they had read and enjoyed, it validated their own personal book selection.

I have told everyone I know about the service and sent the book recommendations to colleagues who read similar books.

It would be interesting to meet people who read the same books and have a discussion analyzing one or more of the them.

Seeing books I liked on her recommended list made me feel more confident in my own choices.
Forging Stronger Connections

Key Success Factors

Continued emphasis on online promotion and personalized responses are likely to facilitate sustained positive outcomes for My Librarian.

1. Promotion of My Librarian through the library website is most effective.
2. Librarian profiles are instrumental to drawing in new users.
3. Profiles that balance librarian’s reading interests and expertise with their personalities, personal hobbies, styles and sensibilities pique interest and establish trust.
4. Thoughtfully crafted, prompt responses drive satisfaction.

How did you first learn about My Librarian?

To what extend did the following influence your decision to try out My Librarian?
Users consistently recommend three ways in which My Librarian can expand its reach and stay better connected with past users.

1. Expand the diversity of librarians participating in the service.
2. Make My Librarian links more prominently displayed and save past recommendations in users’ My MCL accounts.
3. Allow users to initiate future contact with librarians with clear paths for doing so.

It was a real white group. It would have been nice to see someone who expressed interest in the Asian American experience or black history.

I am not sure where to find it. “Using the Library” is that what it is under?

I wasn’t sure whether it would be OK to write back and ask for more. It would have been good for him to be clear about that in his email.

I wish she had been a little clearer on ways to stay in touch. A monthly email with her latest book recommendations would be great.
Conclusions and Recommendations

• My Librarian has succeeded at demonstrating how online engagement between library patrons and librarians can lead to meaningful connections.
• Its strong online presence brings the personalities and book expertise of individual librarians to patrons, and forges new relationships.
• Librarians’ thoughtful, personalized book recommendations are expanding both the quality and frequency of users reading experiences.
• Based on this initial success, it is recommended that the library continue the pilot and look at ways to address user recommendations and broaden reach.
• It is also recommended that the library share the My Librarian service model nationally to be implemented by other libraries.
Conclusions and Recommendations—Future Evaluation

• To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the program, include evaluation of inputs, outputs and outcomes in future studies.
• Consider on-going use of a revised user survey to track satisfaction, collect user feedback and identify potential service enhancements.
• To ensure My Librarian serves all patrons, consider adding questions to identify any unmet needs with regard to reading interests or diversity of librarian team and general demographics.
Survey Responses in Question Order
Q1: How did you first learn about My Librarian?

Answered: 201  Skipped: 2

- On the library's website: 55%
- In a library e-newsletter: 16%
- From a librarian: 11%
- From a friend or family member: 8%
- Other (please specify): 6%
- On Facebook (or other social media): 3%
- At a library event: 0%
- Story on TV, newspaper or radio: 0%
- Ad on Google: 0%
- Poster or bookmark at the library: 0%
Q2: To what extent did each of the following influence your decision to try out My Librarian?

Answered: 201    Skipped: 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Type</th>
<th>Very Influential</th>
<th>Moderately Influential</th>
<th>Slightly Influential</th>
<th>Not at all Influential</th>
<th>I didn't use/see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Librarian profiles</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian booklists</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-news</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook/Twitter</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster/display</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3: In which of the following ways did you ask to receive your custom reading suggestions?

Answered: 201    Skipped: 2
Q4: To what extent do the words below describe the response/book recommendations you received from the librarian? Please use a 1- to 5-point scale, where a 1 means "Does not describe at all" and a 5 means "Describes perfectly."

Answered: 201    Skipped: 2
Q5: Since receiving the librarian's response, have you read one or more of the books that were recommended?

Answered: 201    Skipped: 2
Q6: Overall, how satisfied are you with My Librarian?

Answered: 201    Skipped: 2
Q8: How likely are you to use My Librarian again?

Answered: 198    Skipped: 5

- Not at all Likely: 3%
- Slightly likely: 12%
- Moderately likely: 38%
- Very likely: 46%
- Completely likely: 9%

(discoverycollaborative)
Q9: How likely are you to recommend My Librarian to friends and family?
Answered: 198  Skipped: 5

![Bar chart showing the responses to Q9. The chart indicates the percentage of respondents who are not at all likely, slightly likely, moderately likely, very likely, and completely likely to recommend My Librarian. The percentages are: Not at all likely (25%), Slightly likely (10%), Moderately likely (34%), Very likely (49%).]
Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the My Librarian service?

Answered: 198   Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes about librarians</th>
<th>Average rating</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value getting book recommendations from a librarian who shares my reading interests.</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I appreciate having a real person pay attention to my interests and make a recommendation just for me.</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value getting book recommendations from a librarian who is an expert on today’s best reads.</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A personal recommendation from a librarian is more valuable than a book recommendation generated by a search algorithm.</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even though we only communicated electronically, I felt like I had a meaningful conversation with the librarian.</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service helped me start a conversation with a librarian that I wouldn’t have initiated otherwise.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service saved me hours of searching and several not-quite-right reads.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Q11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about librarians and the library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes about the library</th>
<th>Average rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Librarians are at the heart of what makes public libraries uniquely valuable.</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think we sometimes take for granted the difference that libraries make in our lives.</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing this service made me appreciate librarians more than I did before.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing this service made me see the role of librarians in a different light.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using this service gave me a better understanding of why I love the books I do.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **15%** Strongly disagree
- **28%** Somewhat disagree
- **66%** Neither agree nor disagree
- **15%** Somewhat agree
- **5%** Strongly agree

Answered: 198  Skipped: 5
Q14: In the past 12 months, about how many books did you read for pleasure either all or part of the way through? Please include any print, electronic, or audiobooks you may have read or listened to. Your best guess is fine.
Answered: 192   Skipped: 11
Q15: What percentage of those books were checked out from Multnomah County Library (as opposed to purchased or borrowed from a friend)? Your best guess is fine.

Answered: 192  Skipped: 11

![Bar chart showing 61%]
Q16: What is your gender?
Answered: 187   Skipped: 16

- 22% Male
- 78% Female
Q17: What is your age?

Answered: 189   Skipped: 14

The chart shows the age distribution of respondents, with the following breakdown:
- 10% 18 to 24
- 13% 25 to 34
- 20% 35 to 44
- 17% 45 to 54
- 20% 55 to 64
- 17% 65 to 74
- 3% 75 or older
Q19: Multnomah County Library will be conducting follow-up phone interviews with people who have used the My Librarian service. Would you be willing to answer some additional questions about your experience? Please let us know if you would be willing to receive an invitation to participate in a follow-up phone interview.
Q15. How would you describe My Librarian to a friend?