Case Study: Derbyshire County Council

TCR Region:	East Midlands
Local Authority Type:	County Council
Population Served:	747,520
Libraries:	46 plus 13 mobile and 2 Prison Libraries
UnityUK Licences:	2
UnityUK Services:	Standard Service ILL Request Management
Requests Made P.A	3288
Requests Supplied P.A	1160
UnityUK Member since:	April 2006

About the service

Members of the public across Derbyshire can place a request for an item in any public library. The local branch then passes requests through to the Central Requests Management Unit, which handles all aspects of the request process. The Derbyshire team uses the Hayes Distribution scheme and is unique in the UK as all items are delivered to a central depot, which is located separately from the Requests Unit. In contrast to this, items supplied by the British Library are delivered directly to the branch. In 2005, Derbyshire placed 3288 requests with other libraries and supplied 1160 items to libraries outside the county.

UnityUK in action

Derbyshire was one of the first authorities to start using the UnityUK service in April 2006. Previously, Derbyshire used UnityWeb for searching other library holdings, and managed ILL requests using a paper-based system. With UnityUK in place, Derbyshire can search other UnityUK members' catalogues, LinkUK members and COPAC with a single search, which saves time as these useful resources are all brought together in one place.

Until recently Derbyshire also searched What's In London's Libraries (WILL) to locate items. UnityUK has the LinkUK library catalogues integrated into the service, which enables Derbyshire to search the holdings of libraries across London and the South East simultaneously and so makes the process of locating items easier and quicker. Erica Childs, Request Manager, sees this trend growing:

"UnityUK is now our first port of call for locating requests. More and more databases are coming online as the service develops, and we have to use other sources less and less".

Derbyshire prefers to use East Midlands Region or members of SINTO - the information partnership for South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire – and then go to CONARLS members, universities and finally the British Library. Prior to using UnityUK, Derbyshire had to keep their rotas short in order to be able to keep track of the progress of a request. Derbyshire's preferences have been set up within UnityUK, and the service now automatically sets up and monitors the rota for every request. Rotas can be as long as necessary and are much quicker to set up, and progress is easy to monitor.

For urgent items and for photocopies, Derbyshire goes directly to The British Library, using UnityUK to place the request. Replies from The British Library are picked up by UnityUK and the request records are automatically updated with the response. This speeds up the process and reduces the administrative overhead for the Requests Unit.

UnityUK brings locating and requesting functions together into one interface. The system can search multiple catalogues and display location and availability information simply and quickly. This saves time and therefore reduces the cost of the interlending process.

Why Use UnityUK?

Derbyshire decided to take UnityUK's integrated ILL service, in addition to the entry level service. This is already proving to be a big time saver for the staff of the Requests Unit.

The integrated ILL service can 'talk' directly to other UnityUK members using the service, without the need for separate emails to update on progress at each step. The service makes the paper-based system redundant and has reduced the filing and administrative overhead of delivering requests to libraries outside Derbyshire. These benefits will continue to increase as more and more UnityUK members come online with the integrated ILL option.

Erica Childs, Requests Manager at Derbyshire County Council, says, "The integrated ILL service has proved to be a big plus for us as we didn't have a system to manage ILL before. Until now, we had to find out where an item was held and then send a series of request emails to a few locations at a time. Now the process is much easier and requires less of our time to manage."

With UnityUK in place, the service now needs less human intervention at every stage of the request and supply processes. For example, UnityUK's ability to automatically create and manage the rota for a request has significantly reduced the staff time needed to carry out this activity.

UnityUK has delivered better visibility and management of requests and provides progress information at every step on the way. Improvements in request monitoring are reducing supply times and easier tracking means that the team can now keep users up to date about the progress of a request. This makes the service more transparent and improves the service to the public. Ultimately, Derbyshire plans to allow the branches access to UnityUK so they can acknowledge receipt of items and alert when items have been returned.

Implementing UnityUK has, inevitably, led to changes in workflow and working practices within the Requests Unit and the team has adopted an open-minded approach to change. Derbyshire has quickly taken to the easier workflow provided by UnityUK for reviewing and actioning requests. In particular it has made it easier to work with BL requests, which are held by the system. UnityUK automatically attaches BL responses to each request and highlights where the team needs to take action.

The staff in the Requests Unit have worked hard to get to grips with the improved functionality offered by UnityUK. Erica comments, "The initial training was very informative and gave us a good start. The level of support is superb with UnityUK and the helpdesk has really helped us to understand what the system can do and how we can get the best out of it".

In the first 7 months of service, Derbyshire used UnityUK to:

carry out 3992 searches

place 2376 requests

Summary

The changes were difficult for Derbyshire to grasp at first but the new workflows are now in place and are already showing real benefits for the team, particularly with regard to rotas.   The team can now leave UnityUK to get on with managing requests and rotas with far less paperwork and less need for human intervention to process routine requests.

Within Derbyshire, the integrated ILL package has delivered a significant benefit for very little extra cost and it has been well worth the money in terms of time savings and process improvements.

Erica summarises their experiences so far, "We knew the first few weeks would be messy so we set our expectations correctly from the start.

UnityUK is going well and is a real boon, with excellent prospects".