

Case Study: Oxfordshire County Council



TCR Region: South West
Local Authority Type: County Council
Population Served: 620,000
Libraries: 43 plus 7 mobile
UnityUK Licences: 2
UnityUK Services: Standard Service
 Integrated ILL
Requests Made P.A.: 3300
Requests Supplied P.A.: 3100
UnityUK Member since: April 2006

About the service

Around 3,300 requests per year from the public are satisfied by the central Requests Unit, via the local library branch, as are approximately 3,100 requests from other libraries to borrow items from Oxfordshire stock.

The central Requests Unit handle all aspects of the process centrally, and at present have no direct communication with the public who request the items. When the Requests Unit receive a request from a branch they check their own stock to make sure the item is unavailable and then the Selection Panels consider whether the item should be added to the County library stock.

UnityUK in action

If the decision is made not to purchase the item, the Requests Unit set about borrowing a copy of the item from another library, outside Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire use UnityUK to search for, locate and request items from other public libraries, The British Library and from academic libraries. The County also uses UnityUK to manage the process when other UnityUK member libraries request items from Oxfordshire. On occasion, the Requests Unit also uses OCLC FirstSearch, as well as other sources to locate items from other libraries.

With UnityUK, Oxfordshire 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. UnityUK also brings together the locating and

requesting process into one system, using the same interface. This makes it easier to manage both parts of the process and ultimately takes time, and therefore cost, out of the interlending process.

Where possible, Oxfordshire prefers to borrow items from other local public library authorities. Where this is not an option, academic libraries and The British Library are also used, and these can easily be added to the rota for a request. When they first took the service, Oxfordshire received replies from The British Library in a single daily email and then input the information within UnityUK. However, Oxfordshire are looking forward to using UnityUK's automatic BL response management features which will enable the BL responses to be sent directly to UnityUK, and to avoid the need for double handling and additional keying of information.

Automatic management of the request rota is a key feature for Oxfordshire, who previously used shorter rotas and had no in-built facility to track the progress of any request that was made. Using UnityUK, the team have set their supplier preferences up within the system and rotas are now generated automatically by the system, and real-time feedback is often available on the progress of any request, at any time. Special rotas, containing as many suppliers as required, are easy to set up if needed.

The automatic rota management service within UnityUK has really benefited the service, as Ned Morrell, Senior Library Assistant with the Request Unit at Oxfordshire explains, "With our previous system, rotas were time consuming to set up and there was no reliable way of

checking where a request had got to on the list. As a result, we chose to limit our rotas to 3 or 4 suppliers, so that we could trace a request's progress if we didn't get a positive reply. UnityUK changes that; we can now build rotas that are as long as we need, safe in the knowledge that at any time, we know exactly where a request is up to."

Oxfordshire, like an increasing number of other UnityUK members, has taken up the integrated ILL management option available with the service. Using the ILL option enables the Requests Unit to completely remove the need for paper records and email exchanges with supplying libraries, as all communications are handled directly through the UnityUK service. This in turn reduces the administration overhead for managing the process by reducing the double keying of information.

Why Use UnityUK?

Prior to starting with UnityUK in April 2006, Oxfordshire used UnityWeb. The choice to move to UnityUK was an obvious one says Simon Lay, Senior Librarian at Oxfordshire, **"UnityUK offered significant functionality and workflow benefits over our previous service.** With UnityUK, all request management is carried out onscreen and the service has already enabled us to significantly reduce the amount of paper and therefore administration that we have to undertake. We were also excited about being part of this new national interlending service for the UK."

The team at Oxfordshire no longer need to print out and file a copy of each request that is made; all information is held, updated and reported on via the UnityUK screen. The service also enables the staff to write messages and keep notes via the screen. This has reduced the administrative overhead and improved the accuracy and efficiency of the service.

Introducing UnityUK has provided the infrastructure for the Requests Unit to implement a more structured approach to the process, one that is more process based than job based. The system's workflow has speeded up their processes and had a positive impact on the way the Unit works. Now that the information is held consistently and centrally it is easier to share tasks between members of staff, improving efficiency and throughput.



In the first 4 months of service, Oxfordshire used UnityUK to:

**carry out 644 searches
place 885 requests**

Inevitably, UnityUK's additional functionality and improved workflows has led to retraining of staff. Oxfordshire took the new member training provided by OCLC PICA which provided them with the grounding to get the new service up and running. The UnityUK helpdesk service has provided advice on system set up and helped to iron out any practical issues along the way. The Requests Unit is beginning to feel the benefits of being more consistent and operating with a task based workflow.

The Oxfordshire Team is impressed with the potential that the ILL request management facility can offer, and as more UnityUK members come on stream with this feature of the service the benefits will increase. The ILL option reduces the paperwork, improves workflow and enables more than one person to work on a request at the same time.

Summary

Simon Lay summarises the impact that moving to UnityUK has had on the service, "It's still early days for UnityUK but we believe that the improvements in workflow and process management are already freeing up staff time and this will ultimately lead to a faster service. We are considering further developing our service by using more of the functionality offered by UnityUK, including the ability for branches to track the progress of requests directly."