Notes on Operations
Technical Services Transparency

Using a LibGuide to Expose the Mysteries of Technical Services

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Technical services departments in academic libraries have long struggled to communicate effectively with other library departments, particularly public services departments. As academic libraries acquire large numbers of digital resources, technical services departments are increasingly responsible for providing current information about those resources to public services staff. The authors of this paper describe the process of creating, testing, and implementing LibGuides (proprietary software for building library portals and facilitating information sharing in libraries) as a new way of communicating much-needed information between technical services and public services staff at Miami University Libraries.

Academic libraries now provide patrons with large numbers of electronic resources. As the number of resources grows, so does the potential number of breakdowns in access. This potential for problems means communication is vital between the technical services staff who manage these resources and the public services staff who interact with patrons.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined communication as the transmission or exchange of information, knowledge, or ideas by means of speech, writing, mechanical, or electronic media.[1] Technical services units often seek to use their departmental documentation, which was originally intended for others within the department, to reduce communication barriers between the library staff who work on the public side of the organization and technical services. While a card catalog and a binder filled with typed procedures used to suffice, technical services staff now must document and communicate information about thousands of resources managed in dozens of different tools. The challenge for technical services units is to find successful ways to communicate pertinent information with all library staff in a rapidly changing technological environment. Examples of information needed by public services staff are how to access e-books and how to report electronic resource access issues.

At Miami University Libraries, the authors of this paper (at the time of the project design and implementation, they served as the bibliographic systems librarian and the electronic resources and serials librarian) sought a new approach to the challenge of documenting and conveying important information to staff outside of the technical services department. Their solution was to choose a platform already familiar to public services staff, LibGuides (http://springshare

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.com/libguides), a web-based application primarily used by librarians for creating subject-specific guides to facilitate patron research. While some libraries may not utilize LibGuides, the process of developing content and implementing a tool for interdepartmental communication would be similar regardless of the specific platform used, thus being of value for all libraries. This paper addresses the use of LibGuides as an interdepartmental communication tool and will discuss design considerations, planning and implementation, content and scope, and reflections on the experience.

Literature Review

Library documentation has received some attention in the literature, particularly in relation to technical services departments. White's 2005 article provides a solid framework for the importance of technical services documentation.[2] She defined documentation as "anything written down in a department that pertains to the present, past, or future operation of the library and can assist in clarifying and confirming the nature of library activities."[3] White stated that library staff tend to rely on institutional memory instead of documented policies and instructions. When staff members retire, the part of the department's history that they experienced may leave with them. When a department relies on institutional memory, documentation is not seen as a priority in day-to-day operations. Documentation prevents this particular form of information loss. White emphasized the importance of the regular review and update of documentation to maintain currency and accuracy. She also discussed the need for this documentation to be shared with staff outside of the technical services department. Sharing documentation reduces workflow inconsistencies between departments and may reduce

time-consuming questions about policy and procedure. White pointed out that a clear record of technical services activities help staff outside of technical services operations in understanding what work is performed in the department.

Academic libraries are increasingly using online tools and applications to record their documentation and relay that information to other library staff. A substantial corpus of library science literature addresses the use of tools such as intranets, blogs, and wikis for documentation and communication in libraries. While many examples of these tools and applications can be found in the literature, few present interdepartmental examples. Most of the examples fall into two categories: the tool is used for a single, very specific purpose or process, or it is used to facilitate staff communication and documentation across many departments or an entire library system.

Mphidi and Snyman wrote about the value of intranets in academic libraries in general.[4] They defined an intranet as "a network that uses Internet concepts and technologies within an organisation in order to be accessed by employees to share knowledge. In addition, such knowledge is stored electronically and access is usually controlled by password."[5] They discussed previously published literature that identified numerous key elements in using an intranet, including consistency, interactivity, ease of use and simplicity of interface, low cost, centralization, flexibility, and timeliness or currency of information. Mphidi and Snyman emphasized that information on the intranet must be up-to-date and must be relevant to those who use it.

Many libraries have adopted blogs as an internal means of communication. Pan, Bradbeer, and Jurries wrote in 2011 about the blog that their library at the University of Colorado Denver Auraria created to help in communicating and resolving electronic resource access problems.[6]

At their institution, a team of three librarians customized a blog to address both managing electronic resource issues and communicating those issues to others in their library. The staff members were responsible for posting information on the blog and organizing it while members of the public and other library staff could read the blog or search it for specific issues. Pan, Bradbeer, and Jurries identified attributes of an effective blog as centralization, ease of use, and low cost.

According to articles by Costello and Bosque and by Yoose, wikis are webpages edited collaboratively through the use of software that allow for user-friendly editing through an interface that does not require knowledge of HTML.[7] Few articles have addressed technical services departmental wikis. One exception described the university libraries at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which employed both wikis and blogs for library-wide communication. Costello and Del Bosque surveyed staff using these tools and observed that the staff wiki's success "may be in part because of the nature of the information stored on it, which can be essential to the operations of the libraries, particularly in regards to procedural information."[8] They also noted that "the study showed that despite both wikis and blogs being fairly easy to use, technology challenges still impede their complete adoption. . . . Staff were much more comfortable using blogs and wikis to receive information than to post it."[9] Ease of use is a major factor in the success of intranets and other communication tools.

Library wikis, like intranets and blogs, are more effective when they are easy to use (though with some caveats in the case of wikis), the information is relevant, and the information is current. In 2008, Murray wrote about using blogs, Google Docs, and wikis as an alternative to using an electronic resource management system.[10] He discussed the role that each of these

technologies might take in the management of electronic resources and his ideas for use cover a larger portion of the lifecycle of electronic resources in an academic library. He noted that blogs offer the advantage of having an integrated archive feature, which, along with the use of labels, allows for simplified searching of past posts. Google Docs spreadsheets are useful because they can be shared between many staff and edited by many staff simultaneously. They also allow for administrative control by users who may not need to edit a document, but only to view it.

Not much literature discusses the use of a LibGuide for anything other than its intended use of creating subject guides. However, England and Fu reported the use of LibGuides for a single specific library process.[11] They used a LibGuide at the University of Maryland University College library to manage the regular evaluation of their electronic resources. England and Fu noted aspects of the LibGuides software that made it highly desirable for use with electronic resource evaluation:

> The embedded Web 2.0 features of LibGuides were considered a good fit for managing the diverse tools of electronic resources. . . . We could post content from the Web and from our home-grown ERMS; embed videos, RSS, and podcasts; customize the look and organization; add widgets and APIs; and distribute content and services. . . . The format was flexible enough to effectively organize disparate resources, tools, and staff into a single site that could show the interconnectivity of all of these.[12]

The literature indicates that many libraries have benefited from the use of intranets, wikis, and blogs for documentation and communication within the library.

Local Environment: Miami University Libraries

Miami University Libraries employs forty-two degreed librarians and fifty part-time and full-time staff. The library system is comprised of a main library, an art and architecture library, a music library, and a science library. Of the ninety-two library employees, twelve library staff (five librarians and seven classified staff) work in a centralized technical services department and are responsible for the acquisition, organization, and maintenance of library resources. Teams within technical services include acquisitions, cataloging, processing, preservation, electronic resources, and serials. The remaining eighty library staff work in archives, library systems (information technology), digital collections, special collections, and public services (circulation and reference staff).

Historically, individual technical services staff were responsible for communicating relevant information and documentation to library staff and departments outside the technical services department. For example, the technical services staff member in charge of electronic resources (e-resources) was responsible for communicating e-resources access issues to library staff outside technical services. Most communications were exchanged in emails between individual technical services staff and staff in other departments. This frequently resulted in inefficiencies and duplicated workflows and increased the spread of misinformation. To create consistency and centralize communication, the electronic resources and serials librarian and the bibliographic systems librarian took on the role of project leaders in designing, creating, and implementing a new tool for interdepartmental communication.

Design Considerations

The Miami University Libraries' technical services department was not interested in creating a tool for use by all staff across the library system or in providing a tool for managing electronic resources (the Miami University Libraries already had an electronic resource management system in place). Instead, the department wanted to implement a tool that could communicate information from technical services staff to public services staff in a user-friendly way. In addition, the tool needed to provide current information about projects, procedures, and problems related to all technical services work in a variety of formats. Before building this tool, however, the project leaders had to address several design considerations.

Communication

The project leaders decided that the primary audience for this tool was the staff who work on the front lines of the Miami University Libraries—those who interact with faculty and students at the information desk, on the phone, and through email and chat reference. These are the people who receive questions about the Libraries' resources, receive problem reports most frequently, and teach bibliographic instruction classes for students. These staff members are integral in passing information about the library resources to patrons. The project leaders, along with the rest of the technical services department, wanted to open a line of communication with these frontline library staff that was both efficient and comprehensive.

The project leaders then explored the best means of communication with the intended audience. In previous years, the most common way of disseminating information to library staff was through mass emails to several in-house electronic discussion lists

maintained by the Miami University Libraries. These lists had been only moderately effective for several reasons. First, each list targeted a specific subset of library staff and these arbitrary subsets did not always include all of the staff who needed a given piece of information. Because of the complexity of the electronic discussion list system and lack of documentation regarding the details, remembering which list served the relevant subset of staff was difficult. This made dissemination of information a haphazard process. In addition, information overload from a combination of email messages, social media, and print mailings both within institutions and from professional affiliations has become normal. Processing all of the information that is received each day is challenging and overlooking something important is easy. Few staff members are able to monitor their email continuously, which means that an email message might not be read until after its usefulness has expired.

Email is not an efficient way to track electronic resource problems and solutions. When troubleshooting an electronic resource problem, analyzing patterns or trends is often helpful. While most email clients have excellent organizational features, information is not stored in a way that supports easy retrieval and analysis. Important information may exist only in one staff member's inbox and is not accessible to others working on the same problem. All these considerations pointed to the need for a communication tool that would bring important information to the attention of the intended audience and be openly accessible and searchable.

Content

Although the technical services department had recently revised and organized its information on the wiki, the department decided that opening that tool to the rest of the Libraries would not be the best solution. The information on the wiki would not help the frontline staff in their day-to-day operations. The intended audience for the technical services wiki is the technical services department, and the structure, tone, and content is tailored to an audience that works with or is intimately familiar with the system codes, jargon, and general workflow of the department. To a staff person outside of that department, the information presented does not have the needed context to aid understanding in what the information means. In addition, an intradepartmental website has information that is not needed by the staff person outside the department; the noise-to-signal ratio would not be conducive to efficient information retrieval and understanding. Following these guidelines gave the project leaders a better focus on what information to provide and in what context to provide it.

Technology

The last major consideration was the appropriate technology to use for the communications tool. Many possibilities were available beyond the email and spreadsheets previously used. The department, along with the Miami University Libraries, had several existing platforms from which to choose. For example, the Libraries use Drupal, an open-source content management system (CMS), for content management, and the department could build a technical services site on top of the existing structure. The Libraries also host wikis and blogs, and use Blackboard, the campus' CMS.

Departmental staff skills heavily influenced which platform to use. For the tool to be successful, it needs to be frequently updated by several departmental staff members with varying skill levels. Flexibility and ease of use are key characteristics in an ideal platform that will be maintained by a limited number of departmental staff.

Planning and Implementation

Because the Miami University Libraries' website and catalog are both run by Drupal, building a proof-of-concept version of the communication tool using Drupal version 6 was attractive. In January 2010, the bibliographic systems librarian created a Drupal mockup of the communication tool containing two pages: a blog for electronic resources updates and information and a form, using the Webforms module, for reporting electronic resources access issues. The most recent blog entry, along with other blog entries from various other Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds, displayed on the front page, with the intention of turning the homepage into a dashboard, where people could see the most important, up-to-date information on the front page.

After a month of customization and testing after the initial configuration of Drupal mockup, the bibliographic systems librarian determined that the long-term maintenance of a similar production instance would require more time and resources to properly maintain the tool than first expected. In addition, the technical services department had only one person with experience in creating and maintaining a Drupal site. Having a single person with Drupal skills in the department meant that one person would be responsible for all changes, a situation that the project leaders wanted to avoid. If that person were reassigned to another project or moved to a different department, then control of the Drupal site would shift outside of the technical services department. Losing the departmental autonomy of the website would be undesirable.

Meanwhile, the public services Department had recently licensed LibGuides and migrated their research guides to the new platform. Several public services librarians, aware of the technical services department's

interest in creating a communication tool, suggested that the department look into LibGuides as a possible platform. Some public services librarians had concerns about using LibGuides for a purpose other than research guides. After discussion in the LibGuides Task Force about this possible nontraditional use of LibGuides, the task force approved the plan and the project leaders received LibGuide accounts in February 2010. Within two days, the bibliographic systems librarian built a second mockup using LibGuides, mimicking the layout used on the Drupal mockup. Although Drupal had most of the functionalities the department wished to include in the tool, the flexibility of LibGuides allowed for better integration of third-party services. Most technical services staff had the skills needed to set up most of the mockup. The week after the LibGuides mockup was created, technical services staff compared the two mockups and overwhelmingly chose LibGuides as the platform.

The mixture of native functionality in LibGuides and the ease of integrating third party applications within it gave the department room to provide a variety of services. The technical services LibGuide integrates three external applications: WordPress, planet toc, and Google Docs. Each provides a different line of communication and service. The pages and tabs help make these services clearly identifiable to staff and give a clear, designated place for certain types of information.

By March 2010, the technical services LibGuide was close to completion. The authors solicited feedback from other technical services staff and a few public services staff. In addition, the project leaders met with various library departments in March to introduce the LibGuide site to staff, explain the site's broad goals, and demonstrate the site, showing what information was included and how the forms worked. The meetings resulted in constructive feedback and the technical services

librarians modified the LibGuide site with that feedback in mind.

The LibGuide site was formally launched in early April 2010 to all library staff. Most of the initial training was through email, because most staff already had experience navigating and using LibGuides for other work purposes. During that summer, staff were given a transitional period during which both the older email method and the new LibGuide were used to communicate. This allowed staff some time to adjust to getting their information from the LibGuide. By September 2010, the technical services department stopped sending system-wide email with the exception of urgent and emergency messages, opting to post most of the information on the LibGuide instead.

Technical Services LibGuide Elements

Homepage

The homepage (see figure 1) has seven elements. Using the RSS feed block on LibGuides, the general RSS feed from the technical services department WordPress blog is fed into the homepage under the heading "TS News" and shows the last five blog entries. This joins five other RSS feeds:

- "ER News," a feed for items tagged with the acronym "ER" (for electronic resources) on the blog
- "ER Free Trials," a feed for blog posts tagged with "trial" for trials of new electronic resources
- "OhioLINK Blog," a feed from the OhioLINK (an Ohio library consortium) blog
- "Fund Activity Report," a feed with updates from the latest fund activity report generated by the integrated library system
- "Recent LIS Journal Articles," a feed from a locally hosted ser-

vice called planet toc, which alerts library staff to recently published issues of library and information science (LIS) journals

The feedback is the seventh element on the homepage. It offers a place for users to submit suggestions about the LibGuide.

Planet toc is a local meta feed aggregator service using the planet venus fork of planetplanet (www.planetplanet.org), a RSS feed aggregator used to create a RSS feed from a group of individual RSS feeds (an example of a planetplanet feed is Planet Cataloging). The planet toc feed is the electronic table of contents service for library journals that the department previously routed to library staff. Most of the routed print journals also were available online in full text without embargo. Switching to an online table of contents delivery system freed staff time once spent in preparation of routing physical journals. Additionally, it ensured that all library staff had simultaneous access to the latest library publications in a timely manner, instead of waiting for a physical issue routed from one person to the next. To build the meta-feed, the department created RSS journal alerts for those journals available through EBSCO's Library and Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA) with full-text database or used existing RSS feeds from publisher websites and fed them into planet toc. While the homepage features all subscribed library and information science journals, staff also have the option to subscribe to individual title feeds from a link to the planet toc page.

Tabs

Tabs that run across the top of the screen link to additional resources, including general information, updates, and special projects. While the initial launch of the LibGuide had

Figure 1. Miami University Libraries Technical Services LibGuide Homepage with Tabs

a single row of tabs, the growth of the LibGuide is evident by the addition of multiple tab rows. Some tabs have a dropdown menu that directs the users to pages under that tab's topic, but most tabs consist of a single page.

Who's Who Tab

Because of recent changes in personnel and departmental structure in the technical services department, many library staff were uncertain who to contact regarding specific questions or issues. The "Who's Who" page lists staff under categories for easier navigation. Staff members outside of Technical Services can choose from a list of common issues (catalog record errors, for example) rather than an alphabetical list of people. Each category has a primary contact and a secondary contact (with the exception of the manager category).

Electronic Resources Access Issues Form and Status Update Tabs

A main feature of the LibGuide deals with electronic resource issues. This feature, split into two tabs, uses Google Docs spreadsheets for both the submission of electronic resources issues to the technical services department and the presentation of status updates

on those reported issues. One tab contains the form to report both local and consortial (OhioLINK) electronic resource issues. The form, built with Google Docs forms, is modeled after the OhioLINK electronic resource issues reporting form, with which many staff are familiar. The form has a core set of required fields, such as name of reporter and description of the error, and optional fields, such as the email address of the patron if he or she wishes to be contacted when the issue has been resolved.

On submission, the form data populates a Google Docs spreadsheet that automatically notifies the electronic resources and serials librarian, bibliographic systems librarian, and government documents librarian via email each time a new entry is submitted. Extra columns were added to the end of the existing form columns to help with internal workflow. One column indicates the person who is working on a particular issue, and the notes section documents steps toward issue resolution. The usual procedure when a notification email arrives in the inbox of the above three librarians is to check the spreadsheet, see if the issue has been reported before, and then note who (if anyone) has taken on the problem. Issues reported to the spreadsheet generally are claimed within one hour.

A separate Google Docs spreadsheet embedded in another tab of the LibGuide records information about the e-resource problem and steps toward resolution. Data elements in the spreadsheet are date reported, name of resource, type of problem, and updates on resolution status. When the problem is resolved, the librarian assigned to that problem changes the row color from red to green, providing a visual cue to distinguish between resolved and ongoing problems.

Report Request Form Tab

Another way the technical services

department uses Google Docs forms is to handle requests from staff for integrated library system (ILS) reports used for various purposes, including collection analysis and weeding. The form includes fields for staff to enter information about location codes and detailed information about what they want to output in the report, ensuring that technical services staff members can run the reports with minimal follow-up. The report form is set up in the same manner as the Electronic Resource Issues form so that an automatic email notification is sent to the same three librarians (i.e., electronic resources and serials librarian, bibliographic systems librarian, and government documents librarian) when a request is submitted. The turnaround time for report requests are a few hours, depending on staff availability and complexity of the report requests.

Policies Tab

The "policies" tab provides staff quick access to the gifts policy, serials policies, and public presentation rights policies. The gifts policy recently changed to accepting only gifts-in-kind and having the updated version posted made it easier for public services staff to reference when talking to potential donors. This part of the LibGuide is the least populated at the moment, but the department plans to grow this section as staff request additional policies to be posted.

Ebrary PDA Reports Tab

The first project to be featured in the LibGuide was the Libraries' patron-driven acquisition (PDA) electronic book (e-book) project with ebrary. This project generates weekly usage and purchase reports, which many staff are interested in downloading for further analysis. Rather than sending spreadsheets attached to email each week, technical services staff saved the report spreadsheets in Google

Docs spreadsheets and embedded the spreadsheets on the LibGuide. Each week the electronic resources and serials librarian receives an updated report from the vendor and updates the spreadsheets and the LibGuide. Library staff can go to the LibGuide tab at any time to view the embedded spreadsheet and download it into Microsoft Excel for further analysis.

E-Books Tab

Public services staff gave positive feedback about the "Ebrary PDA Reports" tab and indicated that they wanted more information about e-books in general. In response to the public services staff requests, a tab, "E-Books," was added for general e-book information. Technical services staff presented an internal cross-training session to public services staff regarding e-books at the Libraries using the LibGuide as part of the presentation. This tab offers information, mainly ordering and access, about e-books broken down by source.

Serials and Databases Tabs

The "Serials" tab was created to communicate differences between locally and consortially purchased serials and specific details about changes in this content that occur throughout the year. The most common questions technical services staff receive are about changes in serial publications. Serials staff track changes in serial format, title, and publisher throughout the year in a spreadsheet that is made available via a Google Docs spreadsheet and linked from this page. Lists of canceled titles from recent serials reviews also are available for downloading. Additional boxes provide details about consortially purchased serials, including title lists by publisher and whether these resources are leased or purchased.

The "Databases" tab is formatted like the "Serials" tab and includes information about significant events,

such as large-scale platform changes. These types of changes frequently generate questions, and this tab allows space for all necessary details. Below the listed changes is a link that allows staff to download a spreadsheet of the Libraries' redirect URLs (shortened, stable URLs that are generated in-house for databases in the Libraries' A-to-Z list). Clicking this link is more efficient than contacting someone in the technical services department and waiting for a response. In addition to URLs, technical services staff also added a box with general information about the proxy server, as librarians frequently ask how to set up a resource for off-campus access. Because so many databases now offer the ability to create individual search boxes (widgets) for placement on a website or LibGuide, technical services staff also created a box with widget information for specific databases.

The Miami University Libraries performed a serials review in 2011; this was an ideal project for inclusion on the LibGuide. The review was conducted through a locally created online serials review tool, but the tool required instruction before use. This led Technical Services staff to create a page under the "Serials" tab that offers details on how to use the custom review tool and describes the type of information it contains. Because the tool included COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) compliant usage reports, the electronic resources and serials librarian added general information about COUNTER reports to the page. After the review started, the authors realized that the difference between journal content provided by aggregators versus content purchased on a title-by-title basis was going to be a recurring question from staff, especially public services librarians. Subsequently, the electronic resources and serials librarian added this information to the page to facilitate staff understanding of the type of titles that

were under review. After the Libraries completed the serials review process, the electronic resources and serials librarian posted links to lists of final cancellation decisions for download by library staff.

E-Resource Usage Stats Tab

The technical services department is frequently asked by librarians for usage reports for electronic resources. The library is experimenting with a commercial product for usage reports, but in the interim, the department is using its LibGuide to post links that allow downloading of spreadsheets of usage statistics for most vendors and platforms. The usage statistics are saved as Google Docs spreadsheets, which allows for the creation of links that will open the spreadsheets in Excel. While creating this statistics page, the electronic resources and serials librarian discovered an add-on for Excel called OffiSync, which made updating multiple spreadsheets simpler. OffiSync for Google Apps is no longer available, but Google Cloud Connect (https://tools.google.com/dlpage/cloudconnect) for Microsoft Office is a viable and free alternative to the OffiSync solution. These add-ons allow a user of both Word and Excel products and Google Docs to save a document simultaneously in both places. Because the usage reports for each vendor generally are received in Excel format, this tool allows staff to save each month's updates in Excel, which then simultaneously updates the Google Docs spreadsheet version used in the LibGuide.

Open Access Tab

In October 2011, Miami University Libraries celebrated "Open Access Week" with an awareness campaign for both library staff and patrons. Librarians who worked at public service points had questions about how to handle open access (OA) inquiries

during that week and about the specifics of the awareness campaign. Technical services staff decided to post general information on the LibGuide as a more efficient method to answer staff questions. In addition to information about open access materials in the library's own collections and catalog, the "Open Access" tab also provides specifics of the awareness campaign.

Marketing and Growth of the LibGuide

The technical services department discovered that the best method of drawing staff to the site is to populate it with high-demand information or frequently requested information about ongoing projects. Much of the content added to the LibGuide after implementation grew out of a need to help library staff understand the content the department purchases and different projects that affect staff beyond one department. For example, the electronic resources and serials librarian started the "E-books" tab in September 2010 after public services staff requested general e-book information. In January 2011, the project leaders gave an orientation and feedback session during a regularly scheduled cross-training session. Giving the session allowed technical services staff to demonstrate the guide to a large number of librarians simultaneously and removed some of the confusion surrounding e-books. This session served as an informative overview of the different ways the library incorporated e-books from different sources and advertised the availability of this information on the LibGuide.

Feedback and Assessment of the LibGuide

Feedback about the LibGuide, its contents, and possible uses came from library staff in both public services and technical services and in a variety of formats. The bibliographic systems librarian included an online feedback form for library staff to submit feedback and suggestions while building the homepage of the LibGuide. The form only received two entries; most feedback about the LibGuide came via other venues. The technical services staff, including the project leaders, received suggestions for additional information and tabs through email and in person. The in-person feedback occurred both in structured and informal settings. The structured sessions were informational presentations about the LibGuide in which time was set aside for discussion and feedback. These presentations took place in both departmental meetings and in cross-departmental meetings to capture most of the intended audience of the LibGuide. In addition, library staff have approached the project leaders and other technical services staff informally with feedback about the LibGuide.

Assessment of the LibGuide has been an informal process because of time and staffing constraints. The project leaders have relied primarily on feedback from staff that have used the guide. Since the launch of the guide, several staff members have requested that specific information be added to the guide. The project leaders see this as a positive indication of use by staff. Additionally, the LibGuides software provides page view statistics. Since March 2010, the homepage has consistently had the most page views compared to the tabs in every month. While all of the tabs have seen use, the tabs with the most pages views are the "ER Issue Tracking" tab, which provides the electronic resources access issues form and status update tabs; the "E-Resources Usage Stats" tab, and the "E-Books" tab. The "Policies" tab received the least number of views during the same period. This is likely because the individual policies under the "Policies" tab were well established and have not changed since the guide was created. Given the changing nature and increasing predominance of electronic resources in the collections, the higher use numbers for the e-resource–specific tabs are unsurprising.

Discussion

The Technical Services LibGuide has evolved significantly from its original incarnation and has received a substantial amount of marketing within the Libraries. The project leaders are now able to look back and reflect on the pros and cons of using a LibGuide in this way.

Advantages of LibGuides as a Technical Services Communication Tool

LibGuides provided what the department needed: a stable, reliable line of communication. The site itself was readily accessible to library staff; public services staff needed no additional authentication steps to access information on the site. Using an application with which library staff were familiar led to easier implementation.

Miami University Libraries is part of OhioLINK, a large library consortium, and the library purchases many of its resources through that consortium. The library also purchases resources locally for use by Miami University patrons only. Because of the number of resources purchased and because they are licensed and purchased by two different organizations, keeping track of where every purchase originated was difficult. The LibGuide allowed the department to provide definitive information about content purchased in both ways. In turn, this made helping patrons and reporting problems far more effective—staff could efficiently report a problem when they knew who was responsible for a problematic resource. Problems

with locally purchased resources generally could be resolved by Technical Services staff, while problems with consortially purchased resources had to be reported to the consortium.

Another benefit of using LibGuides for the department's communication was its flexibility. The ability to embed widgets, forms, and to pull RSS feeds from various sources increased the functionality of the site and the amount of relevant information that could be displayed. Through the use of forms, the department is able to establish a better tracking system for issues and requests. Instead of one staff person having most of a problem's history in his or her email account, issue tracking and resolution is located where multiple staff members may access it. This has improved the department's response to electronic resource issues and allowed better analysis of problem trends in subscribed resources. In addition, having library staff use a standardized form has improved issue reporting overall, reducing the need for departmental staff to check with others to get more information about a particular issue.

The maintenance of the site is focused on the content and not the application itself. Because LibGuides is hosted on the vendor's servers, the technical services department does not have to dedicate a staff member to perform upgrades to a local server and the application. Staff are free to focus on keeping the content up to date. Staff also are able to add new content and functionality to the site because the administrative interface is user-friendly and requires no programming knowledge.

Disadvantages of LibGuides

Using LibGuides for this technical services communication tool has two disadvantages. The first is storing all of the department information in a subscription-based cloud service. Like all libraries, the budget is subject to change on the basis of the economy, and the library is often faced with making cancellation decisions. Because LibGuides is a relatively new acquisition at the Miami University Libraries and staff like the product so much, the library staff are hopeful that they can make a good argument to the library administration if forced to justify the cost of the product. If the Libraries do have to cancel the subscription, export options will support saving and migrating the content created in a LibGuide. Content can be exported for the entire set of guides in XML format and individual guides also can be exported and saved in HTML format. If the department is forced to change systems, migration would not be instantaneous, but much of the content and formatting could be retained with some effort.

The second disadvantage in using a LibGuide is specific to populating the electronic resource usage statistics page. This has little to do with the functionality of the LibGuide itself, but is a matter of staff time—updating usage reports for many resources on a monthly basis is labor-intensive. Because this particular use of the guide is an interim solution for the technical services department, staff are looking at the time investment as a way to become intimately familiar with the library's resources and patron's usage habits.

Lessons Learned

In addition to identifying specific LibGuide pros and cons, the department has learned a tremendous amount about the broader issues of communication and relationships with staff. Of utmost importance is to be open to change and expansion of content. When the project leaders first started developing the LibGuide, they did not consider the uses it could have outside of problem reporting and tracking. Only after working on projects with other library departments did they begin to see additional potential uses for the LibGuide. Once public services staff members saw a site devoted to relevant technical services information, some requested that the project leaders add specific information. What began as a method of submitting problem reports quickly grew into a place to collocate many categories of frequently requested information.

A second lesson is that habits can be hard to change. Staff needed time to remember to go to the LibGuide as a first step in solving a problem or asking a question. For some staff, this was also an issue of trust; they had to become confident that submitting a problem to the department this way was a more efficient solution than sending an email message or making a phone call to an individual. Technical services staff still receive phone calls or email, most frequently when a front line staff member is working directly with a patron. However, the frequency of questions received through these channels has declined as technical services staff add more information to the LibGuide. Each time someone asks technical services staff members for a specific piece of information, staff first check to see if it is already available on the LibGuide—if it is, the staff provides the relevant URL. If it is not, the information is added if it is likely to be requested again. Having specific projects featured in the LibGuide forces staff to look at it, which is slowly altering their information-seeking habits.

The final lesson learned is that a more sophisticated level of communication and increased transparency has led to a much higher level of trust between technical services and public services staff. Public services staff are less likely to question the information

they receive and less likely to contact the technical services department constantly about a problem. They have learned to trust in the problem reporting system, making the process more efficient.

Conclusion

The Miami University technical services department sought a new solution to a persistent problem faced by technical services departments: documenting and conveying important information to staff outside of the department. The project leaders followed three guidelines as they developed their solution. They sought to include vital content that frontline staff need to perform their jobs; provide up-to-date content by constructing a content management plan, including who is responsible for updating specific pieces of information; and avoid excessive information to prevent information overload.

After first creating a mock-up of the proposed web-based information using Drupal, the project leaders decided to use LibGuides, a tool with which staff across the Libraries were familiar and that did not require extensive training or specialized skills to develop and maintain. Feedback solicited from staff in structured settings and as they used the tool, and feedback provided informally to the project leaders has facilitated its continuing development.

LibGuides provides a satisfactory platform that fit the department's need, but the LibGuide is only as good as the content posted on it. The careful design considerations of audience, content, and technical resources helped to hone the site to be an effective tool in communicating important information to other staff in the library. The LibGuide platform, however, added a sense of familiarity

because most public services staff had extensive experience in creating, maintaining, and using LibGuides. In addition to content, the success of the LibGuide also depended on the continuous marketing, growth, and feedback solicitations by members of the technical services department, including the project leaders. Staff habits had to be changed and the technical services department had to be mindful of that fact. If the technical services department simply posted the content but did little else in the way of engagement with the other departments, the LibGuide likely would not be as successful.

In this case study, LibGuides gave the technical services department a valuable tool in addressing the issue of communicating pertinent information to public services staff within Miami University Libraries. However, LibGuides only served as a platform and is not by itself the only way to deal with interdepartmental communication issues. Regardless of the chosen platform, the efforts of the technical services department in making sure that all library staff had both a clear, stable line of communication to the department and the information needed to help serve library users, is time and resources well spent. The time spent on such efforts have improved relationships between technical services staff and other departmental staff, which in turn leads to a higher level of service the library can provide its users.

Libraries may not utilize LibGuides. Regardless, the process of developing content and implementing a tool for interdepartmental communication would be similar no matter which specific platform is used. The steps taken at Miami University Libraries to implement an effective communication tools spanning departments experiences can serve as a model for other libraries.

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