

Types of Interactions

This chapter provides an overview of library engagement platform interactions and why a library might be interested in these types of software-based customer engagements.

Interactions are organized in six groups:

1. E-mail Interactions
2. CRM (Customer Relationship Management)
3. Registering and Reserving
4. On Your Phone
5. Gathering Data
6. Ads

Let's examine each in detail.

E-mail Interactions

By the time you read this, you will have already dealt with many e-mails today. In fact, you probably have multiple e-mail accounts (I have three) and can probably access your e-mail wherever you are at the moment—by using a phone, a tablet, or a computer.

Most of us use e-mail frequently and for many purposes. Today, for example, I used e-mail to send work e-mails to staff, to set up a calendar appointment for next week, to accomplish some planning via e-mail, and to answer an employee's question.

Other people and organizations used my e-mail inboxes as well. In my work inbox, I received project updates and questions; system updates and notifications from a variety of devices and services, including alerts that a work phone left the library's network; an Office 365 alert; a notification from our finance billing system that there was a requisition to approve; a notification about meeting room setups for tomorrow; and a notification about a short system outage. In my personal e-mail inbox, I received a lot of information on products and services that I use, including

coupons, invites, and reminders about what to watch next on Netflix.

With all that information cluttering up e-mail inboxes, how in the world can e-mail marketing be effective? You'd think everyone would simply hit delete or unsubscribe and be done with it.

That, however, is not the case. According to Campaign Monitor, the average open rate (the percentage of the total number of people who opened an e-mail from an e-mail marketing campaign) for e-mail marketing is 18 percent. That percentage goes up for industries more closely related to libraries. Educational e-mail blasts have an open rate of 24.90 percent. Government and politics open rate is 26.70 percent, and for nonprofits, it's 25.50 percent.¹

More good news for those of us trying to reach customers with our message is that studies show all ages use e-mail. Here's an age breakdown on e-mail use:

- Ages 15–24: 90 percent use e-mail.
- Ages 25–44: 93.6 percent use e-mail.
- Ages 45–64: 90.1 percent use e-mail.
- Ages 65+: 84.1 percent use e-mail.²

In addition, according to 99firms, we check e-mail multiple times a day: "The vast majority of email users log in to check their inboxes at least 3 times a day. 28% of users check their email over 10 times a day, and only 4% have reported doing so less than daily."³

Our messaging not only tends to be seen, but it is often seen early in the day. Fifty-eight percent of e-mail users check e-mail the first thing in the morning, even before checking social media.⁴ Furthermore, "60% of consumers state that they have made a purchase as the result of a marketing message they received by email."⁵

E-mail marketing works for the retail and business world, but what about libraries? Although libraries

don't typically sell a traditional product, we certainly want our customers to participate in the library by checking things out, by registering for events, or by signing up for activities. You can think of activities as a type of transaction with customers, and libraries have a lot of activities (transactions) that we can promote in e-mails to our customers, including the following:

- *Welcome to the library:* Once someone signs up for a library card, we can send a welcome e-mail and provide some “next steps”—suggestions on how to use a new library card.
- *Card renewal time:* If your library cards expire, send out renewal reminders.
- *Renewal notices:* These are reminders to re-check something out or to take it back so it's not overdue.
- *New book notifications:* These notifications can be generalized lists of new books the library added to the collection or curated lists of staff picks. They can also be genre-, subject-, or author-specific, based on what a customer has checked out in the past.
- *Promotional e-mails:* Is a popular author coming to your library? You can send out reminders to sign up for the event.
- *Reminders to use a library card:* If customers haven't used their library card in six months or a year, you can send out targeted e-mails to encourage those people to check something out.
- *Birthdays:* Say happy birthday to your customers using e-mail! Some of the library engagement platforms can be set up to trigger an e-mail when it's the customer's birthday.

Use these ideas as a springboard for your own creativity with e-mail messaging. There are many other ways to use this type of targeted e-mail.

E-newsletters

Another type of e-mail that can be sent is an e-mail newsletter, or e-newsletter. You've probably seen e-newsletters that replace a print newsletter that you may have received in the past.

What can you include in a library e-newsletter? Figure 3.1 is an example from my library. A recent e-newsletter of ours included this content:

- a link to our summer reading website
- a link to one of our blog posts from a staff member recommending music to check out
- another linked blog post focused on fantasy novels
- a reminder about our summer reading challenge (read twelve or more hours to win a prize)

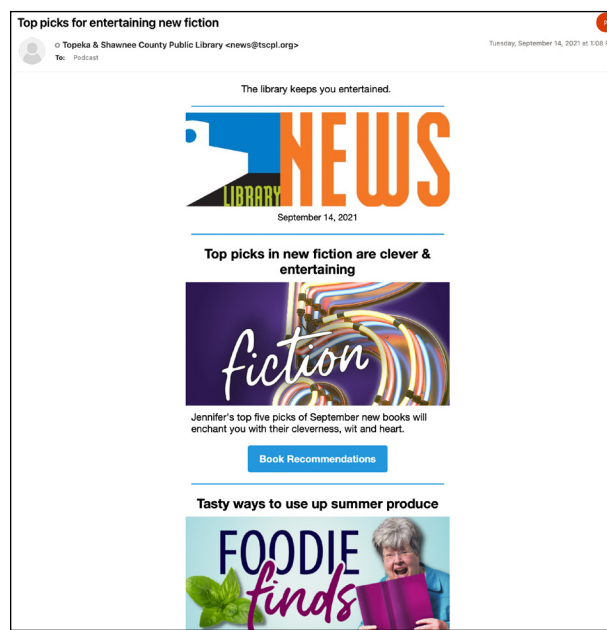


Figure 3.1
Example of a library e-newsletter from Topeka

- a friendly reminder to wear a mask
- an invite to a jazz concert at the library
- a blog post about fun mysteries to read
- links to three of our virtual and in-person events, with a link to see all our library's events
- and a fun trivia question!

That may seem like a lot of information to pack into one e-mail! But those links get clicked, and our articles are read. People do sign up for our events through links in those e-mails. So we find them both useful and effective.

And of course, you probably should include a way for customers to opt out of marketing e-mails. While many of your customers will be interested in library news, not every customer will be.

E-newsletters You Don't Have to Write!

In the example above, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library's marketing department created the e-newsletter. Multiple staff members wrote the articles, created the trivia questions, and wrote and posted the event listings on our website.

If you don't have the staff or the inclination to write your own content, LibraryAware's NextReads newsletters does the work for you. The company writes the articles and links to items in your catalog, so your customers get the same helpful information, but you don't have to do the work.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management)

A customer relationship management (CRM) platform has many uses, dependent on your industry. Here's a good, simple definition of CRM from Salesforce.com:

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a technology for managing all your company's relationships and interactions with customers and potential customers. The goal is simple: Improve business relationships to grow your business. A CRM system helps companies stay connected to customers, streamline processes, and improve profitability.⁶

In other words, a CRM is a database about your customers and how they interact with your company and products. It keeps track of contact information and what people have purchased and shows potential leads. This is a handy tool for anyone who has customers and needs a better way to manage customer relationships.

The examples of library-focused CRMs loop into whatever other products the company offers. For example, Springshare's LibConnect works in conjunction with Springshare's other products, like LibGuides and LibAnswers. It can be a powerful platform to help a library manage and gather customer data by managing individual customers.

Vega (from Innovative) and OCLC Wise are adding CRM functionality into the ILS. This makes a lot of sense, since these systems already keep track of patron data and patron contact information. These CRM systems are adding personalized e-mail marketing to the patron database, and the plan is that the patron information will eventually be able to be used to send automated communications out to customers.

Registering and Reserving

We are all familiar with the ability to register for and make reservations online: you reserve an Uber or a table at a restaurant. As I'm writing this, I'm sitting in a hotel, and I reserved a room online. You can register for an event online. We're still in a pandemic, so you might reserve your parking space at the grocery store for curbside pickup. I'm being reminded right now to "reserve" an appointment with my eye doctor.

We use online tools to register and reserve a lot of spaces, places, things, and time. Our customers are used to that, and they expect an online option from their library as well. Thankfully, with library engagement platforms, there are many ways to provide

online registration and reservation in our libraries. Let's explore some of the options.

Events Calendar

Most libraries have a calendar of events. Modern library calendar systems allow customers to register or reserve their space at events, like classes, story-times, author talks, and book clubs. Some calendar systems also let people sign up even if the meeting is over capacity and will place those people on a waiting list.

Many calendars also offer reminders, like the ability to add the library's event to the person's personal calendar on their smartphone or to send an automated e-mail or text reminder.

Meeting Room Reservations

Calendars are a good solution for library-led events, but what if your customer wants to reserve meeting room space at the library? In today's library, these spaces can be reserved online, using room reservation software. This software is often built into event calendar systems. For example, Communico offers modules for attending or reserving. Library Market's Library-Calendar product combines event and room management into one system.

There are many products that will help you better manage your meeting room and study room reservations. Paper sign-up forms are no longer needed.

Miscellaneous Reservations

Some library engagement platforms include a way to reserve nontraditional items like tools, musical instruments, technology products, or Wi-Fi hotspots. These are items you don't necessarily want to put in your ILS (though some libraries do). For example, during the pandemic, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library repurposed twenty customer training laptops for staff. We used Springshare's LibCal product to allow staff members to check out a laptop, which was convenient and helped us keep track of who had the laptops.

Does your library let customers check out zoo or museum passes, or similar passes with area cultural institutions? If so, some library engagement platforms have a way to keep track of these types of passes.

Appointments with People

There are many reasons someone might need to set up an appointment with a librarian or staff member. Thankfully, library engagement platforms are here to help (figure 3.2)!

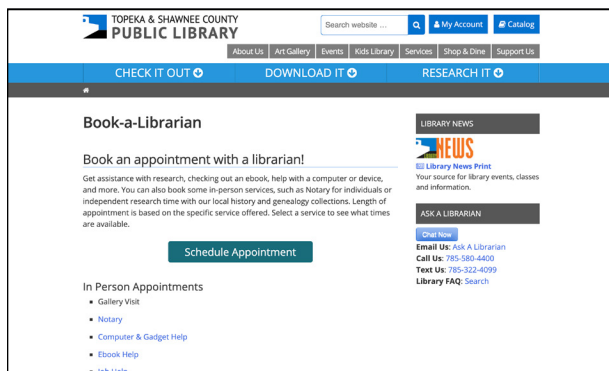


Figure 3.2
Making appointments at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library website

What types of appointments can you set up? Here are some examples:

- You can book time with a specialist—like a reference librarian or a genealogy or local history specialist.
- You can reserve time with a tech-focused librarian for a one-on-one gadget help session.
- Some libraries have social workers on staff and have a way for customers to set up appointments with them.
- Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library offers a notary service. We let customers set up an appointment for that service.
- Topeka also has an online reservation tool where area organizations can book staff to give talks about the library.

Curbside Pickup

Because of the pandemic, many libraries have started offering some type of curbside pickup service. Thankfully, many library engagement platforms quickly built this new service into their products, which has been a lifesaver for many libraries and for our communities.

Asking Questions

Although asking a question online may not seem like reserving anything, it is a type of “borrowing time.” There are many ways to ask questions, including a web-based chat service, e-mail, or an after-hours voice-mail. Customers also ask questions using their favorite social media platforms. Topeka frequently gets Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram questions, for example.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a way to combine all these questions? Thankfully, there is one! Some library engagement platforms funnel questions from different platforms into one handy web-based bucket, so all questions can be easily answered and tracked.

On Your Phone

We use our phones to read, make calls, answer e-mails, check calendars, play games, and listen to music. Today's modern library can also be on our phones. Let's explore mobile apps, social media management, and voice-activated services.

Mobile Apps

Mobile apps aren't usually folded into a larger library engagement platform. Instead, they're often sold as separate products. That said, mobile apps really *are* a type of library engagement platform that keeps customers interacting with and focused on their library. That sounds like library engagement to me.

There are various mobile apps for libraries, including the mobile app version of your library website. A good website app should make it easy for customers to find information on your website, search the catalog, find an event, pull up information on services, and read blog posts.

Customers like to access the website from their phones. Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library currently has the mobile app product from Communico, and we have approximately 5,000 downloads of the app from the Apple and Google app stores. So our website app is on 5,000 customer phones. Do these customers regularly use the app? We can't actually tell.

But here's what we do know, from BuildFire:

The average person uses 9 mobile apps per day and 30 apps per month. If the average smartphone user has 80 apps on their phone, this means that more than 62% of those apps don't get used every month. What does this mean? It's simple. People are downloading apps and not using them. In fact, 25% of apps are used only once after being downloaded, and then never used again.⁷

So your most engaged customers who also enjoy using smartphones to interact with the world will probably use your mobile app. Everyone else? Possibly not. A lot of people who downloaded the app are nominal users or wanted to try it out but quickly forgot about it. Instead, they're using all the most popular apps, like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Gmail, Google Maps, Amazon Shopping, or Zoom Cloud Meetings.

If you want customers to use your library app, you need to promote it often. You'll also need to make sure it is easy to use and meets your customers' needs.

Your customers will also enjoy many other library-related apps that, like OverDrive's Libby, Hoopla, Flipster, or Mango Languages. These apps are all popular because they offer content your customers want. Plus, apps are the only way to access certain content. For

example, if you want to read an e-book, you need the e-book mobile app.

Social Media Management

Another type of library engagement platform is social media. Social media offers direct, two-way customer engagement. It's a good idea to use social media to reach library customers because they are probably already using these platforms.

Your library should probably be on Facebook and YouTube. Anything beyond that really depends on the needs and habits of your customers and your community.

For example, if you want to connect with area professionals and c-suite workers, you should be on LinkedIn. If you want to connect with techie types, local journalists, and PR and marketing professionals, you should think about using Twitter. If you want to connect with a more visual crowd, you can do that on Instagram. Want to connect with teens and twenty-somethings? You need to be on TikTok.

Whatever you choose, social media platforms all work the same way for a library. For each platform, simply share what you do! Share your content, ask and answer questions, be helpful, be a bit goofy or playful at times, and you will gain local followers and start making connections in those digital spaces.

Here's a simple-to-create example from Topeka's Facebook page. We often post a simple question: "What are you reading?" (figure 3.3). Those posts are generally very successful for us! People reading those posts often comment by adding the books they are currently reading.

*Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library
Facebook page*
<https://www.facebook.com/TopekaLibrary>

This post, to date, has received 143 comments, mostly people answering the question and sharing what they are currently reading. The post has also reached 422 people. Reach in Facebook means that over 4,000 people had the opportunity to see that post. The results of this simple question, posted to a social media account, is a large list of reading suggestions based on what people in the library's service area are reading.

Voice-Activated Services

myLIBRO is building voice-activated systems, which is a great idea. Your phone has a microphone and probably includes a personal assistant (Apple's Siri or Google Assistant, for example).

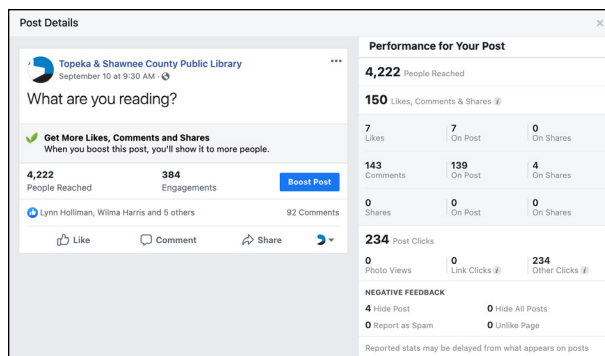


Figure 3.3
Post details from a "What Are You Reading?" Facebook post

Other apps on your phone and devices around your house also interact with voice commands. For example, you may talk to Amazon's Echo Dot or Google's Nest Mini. My Bank of America mobile app has Erica, a voice-activated assistant.

I think we will see more library apps that incorporate voice recognition into their products.

Gathering Data

Now let's shift our focus and discuss analytics and data. All these products and services I've been talking about say they engage your community. We can measure their success by using data from analytics that we collect from library engagement platforms. Here are some examples.

Community Surveys

Some library engagement platforms create and run community surveys. This is an easy way to find out what your community wants without waiting until they come to the library to ask them about it. Surveys can be done online, via e-mail, or they can be mailed.

Website Surveys

You can also create website surveys, which are similar to community surveys but are housed on your website. You can quickly gather and analyze information from website surveys, since responses can be directed to either an e-mail address or a back-end database.

Dashboards

You'll need to analyze the data you collect from your surveys, and some of the companies we looked at in chapter 2 offer a visual dashboard. The dashboard is an easy way to view analytics to quickly see trends or problem areas.

Community Analytics

Some of these tools offer GIS and market segmentation data from your community. This is very helpful when you want to map your community in different ways—like seeing where your customers live in your community. If you want to compare library use from different zip codes, this type of community analytics package could help you quickly find that information.

Ads

Koios will help you set up a nonprofit Google Ads account and can help you create Google Ads that will show up in people's search results if they live in your area.

You can also create ads on a variety of social media platforms. For example, you can create ads in Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. You can make Instagram ads. You can even create video ads that play on YouTube.

Why make ads? Because people click on ads.

Clicks on paid search listings beat out organic clicks by nearly a 2:1 margin for keywords with high commercial intent in the US. In other words, 64.6% of people click on Google Ads when they are looking to buy an item online!⁸

If your library creates an ad to share a service or resource with your community, it will probably get clicked, which is another way to move people from

Google to your library's website for a small amount of money.

There are many ways that library engagement platforms help a library engage with its community. In the next chapter, let's look at some of the custom marketing and promotion services offered by a few of these companies.

Notes

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