

## Terry Beck

Information Services Manager, Sno-Isle Libraries

### Librarians Overcome Distance and Tradition with Virtual Reference Material Solution

Terry Beck, the Information Services Manager for Sno-Isle Libraries north of Seattle, knows firsthand how to deal with logistical nightmares. Beck is responsible for serving approximately 697,000 people in two counties across 21 community libraries. To complicate matters further, Beck lacks a central or main library location from which to work and was quickly running out of room for reference materials.

“We don’t have one great big place,” Beck bemoaned. “We knew we needed to grow our reference collection but we had no room for additional print materials.”

When Beck began searching for a digital solution she encountered some resistance to virtual reference materials from librarians who were loyal to traditional print materials. “Some of the traditional librarians were going to throw themselves in front of the print collection to protect what they loved and cherished.”

That changed quickly though once Beck’s coworkers were introduced to a digital solution that would forever change the way Sno-Isle libraries served its communities.

### LIBRARIANS ADOPT GVRL AND INNOVATIVELY ENGAGE COMMUNITY IN NEW WAYS

Sno-Isle prides itself on being the community’s “doorway to reading and lifelong learning.” However, continuing to fulfill that mission meant Beck and her colleagues had to engage the community in new and exciting ways. Always forward thinking in how they structured the library, they took innovation to the next level.

To grow the library system’s reference collection despite a lack of space, Beck turned to Cengage Learning’s Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL), a cloud-based provider of digital research and educational resources to libraries. GVRL provided Beck the solution her unique problem required. “It was a way for us to get a really high quality product to our customers whenever and wherever they needed or wanted it,” Beck said.

The digital platform also quickly won the hearts and minds of other library staff who once preferred traditional print reference materials. “They’re our biggest advocates now,” Beck boasted. “Some of my best GVRL advocates out there in our libraries are people who were traditional print users and have moved on to this virtual solution.”

### VIRTUAL USAGE SPIKES AS COLLECTION CONTINUES TO BUILD

Sno-Isle’s library users appear to have quickly adopted the technology and the convenience it provides. “Our GVRL usage continues to grow,” Beck proudly said.

#### CHALLENGES

- Library Information Services Manager confronts challenge of delivering digital reference materials to widespread community without a central or main library location and no room to grow.
- Convincing fellow librarians to adopt digital reference resources and adjusting offering to changing curriculum.

#### SOLUTIONS

- Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL)

#### RESULTS

- Librarians once loyal to traditional print collections are now key GVRL advocates.
- GVRL usage grows as collection build out continues and fills void left by state budget cuts.

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“Some of my best advocates now are the librarians who were loyal to traditional print materials and resisted the transition initially.”

**Terry Beck**

Information Services Manager  
Sno-Isle Libraries

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The library’s virtual reference collection has grown steadily over the past eight years and Beck and her team expect the collection build out to continue. “We’ll go out to the high schools and into the communities and promote what we have,” Beck said.

The GVRL platform is also helping meet the changing needs of the community. For instance, Beck points to a changing public school curriculum as well as a large homeschool population that depends on Sno-Isle for current reference material. “It’s really interesting to me every month to see what is being used,” Beck said. “It really reflects our population.”

## **VIRTUAL REFERENCE MATERIALS FILL VOID LEFT BY DEEP BUDGET CUTS**

The GVRL platform is also helping Beck and Sno-Isle step up and fill the void left by recent budget cuts in the state of Washington. “This has become our responsibility whether we like it or not,” Beck says.

Beck is educating area high schools and community colleges impacted by cuts about the resources available to them via GVRL. “So many of these schools have lost so much of their funding that we want to be able to help, if we can, by showing what’s available through the library,” Beck said.

While Beck is quick to recommend GVRL to fellow librarians, she believes the best is yet to come. “It just keeps getting better and better,” Beck said.

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