

Amy Calhoun, Virtual Branch Coordinator, Sacramento Public Library (top)

Laurie Willis, Electronic Resources Librarian, San Jose Public Library

Librarians Bridge Access and Availability Gaps with Technology

Part of any librarian's job is to provide access to information people may not immediately know they need, exists, or is accessible. Amy Calhoun, Virtual Branch Coordinator at the Sacramento Public Library, understands this challenge as well as anyone. It's why she and her counterpart Laurie Willis, an Electronic Resources Librarian at the San Jose Public Library, both set out to find a solution designed to ensure people would have access to information when and where it was needed.

"It just made sense to expand our offerings," Calhoun said. Expanding her library's science-related content and making sure the information was current quickly became a priority.

Likewise, Willis was determined to carry out her library's mission of providing access to an array of information but also wanted to make the material easier to use. "Anything we can do to make what we offer accessible to people at home is a good thing," Willis said.

The two California librarians obviously had the will. All they needed next was a way.

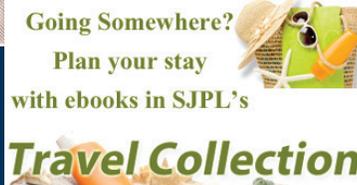
DIGITAL CONTENT INCREASES LIBRARY ACCESS AND USAGE

Calhoun and Willis were both able to execute their plans and grow their libraries with Cengage Learning's Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL), an online library of reference titles for multi-disciplinary research, including texts related to American and world history, biography, health, arts, business, travel, religion, and multicultural studies. GVRL, which they had been using for quite a while, provided the librarians with on-demand content that quickly became attractive to a wide range of users. "We use several Gale products, which are popular with high school students and adults," Calhoun said.

The accessibility to GVRL also knocked down some of the barriers that can prevent people from accessing the information they desire or need. "One advantage to the Gale offering over other electronic resources is that there's no need to download anything, buy a device, or acquire a special application," Willis said.

Once word spread in Sacramento and San Jose that reliable information was convenient and easy to access from home, even those who were skeptical of the technology and loyal to more traditional print materials were convinced. "Our usage numbers got big all of a sudden," Willis boasted.

Similar usage growth is evident at Calhoun's library where she says the digital material is clearly superior in some cases, "I've seen staff become more comfortable using and recommending GVRL and realizing the advantages the electronic collection has over the print collection."



CHALLENGES

- Reaching new users who otherwise may not be able to afford or consume premium resources.
- Convincing traditional library users to embrace electronic library resources.

SOLUTIONS

- Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL)

RESULTS

- Virtual library resource use grows as a result of platform's usability, accessibility, and convenience.
- Library customers who may not be able to afford or find premium content enjoy access they otherwise might not.

“It’s easy to convey the library’s value when you’re able to offer free premium content people would have to pay for elsewhere.”

Amy Calhoun

Virtual Branch Coordinator
Sacramento Public Library

To learn more about this and other resources provided by Gale, visit:
www.gale.cengage.com

GALE CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH PREMIUM CONTENT THEY MAY OTHERWISE NOT BE ABLE TO ACCESS

Gale has what Google does not. It’s one of the reasons why Willis launched a marketing campaign that touted the library’s expanded collection of current travel books, which the library acquired through a sale, just in time for the summer travel season. These are titles that cannot be viewed in their entirety after a quick Google search and were featured prominently on the library’s web site. “It’s why I think our usage statistics went up quite a bit in the last few months,” Willis noted.

The value proposition Gale offers is one librarians say cannot be matched by search engines. For instance, children in Sacramento can access premium test preparation materials. Likewise, do-it-yourself mechanics can access repair manuals that would cost them money elsewhere. “We have premium content that our customers cannot find online without paying for,” Calhoun said.

It’s one reason today’s libraries are more valuable than ever.

GALE EMPOWERS LIBRARIES TO IMPROVE THEIR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

The people of San Jose not only depend on their library for lifelong learning but also for access to ideas without barriers or delays. The Gale Virtual Reference Library is helping the library earn a reputation of which it’s proud. “With some of our other products I have to do a lot of troubleshooting. That’s not the case with Gale. Nobody gets stuck or has trouble figuring out how to use it,” Willis commented.

The benefit to the community extends even further though. In Sacramento, the library has partnered with area schools to create joint-use facilities so students can access Gale to complete their assignments. “The teachers are on board,” Calhoun said. “They’re basically promoting Gale to students as a great way to answer their homework problems and questions.”

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