

Lauren Stokes

Virtual Library Manager, Las Vegas-Clark County Library District

Educators Embrace Technology to Verify Digital Resource Quality

Lauren Stokes, the Virtual Library Manager at the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District, often envisions customers in their bedtime pajamas. “I want them to be nice and comfortable,” Stokes joked. Stokes has good reason to picture users in this manner. It’s her job to ensure the 1.2 million people served by the 25 libraries in her county not only have access to but are using the district’s investment of digital resources.

To accomplish her goal, Stokes first had to convince educators and customers the library’s digital offerings were of the same quality as its print collection. “It just didn’t seem to click that it’s the same content whether you’re looking at it online or on a piece of paper,” Stokes said.

Convincing educators and students the library’s databases were equivalent to its print materials would turn into a multi-year effort. “It’s the same information that’s in the book,” Stokes said. Ironically, the same technology educators were initially skeptical of would ultimately be what persuaded them to become digital advocates.

INNOVATION PLUS OUTREACH PROGRAM CONVINCES SKEPTICS AND INCREASES USAGE

Stokes credits an innovative feature for converting educators into advocates of Cengage Learning’s Gale suite of products, a cloud-based offering that provides digital content, tools, and services to libraries. “The ability to actually see the book was key,” Stokes boasted. “When that feature came out, teachers and students could actually see the book and realized the digital version they were looking at was the same thing as the print version on the shelf.”

The innovation, combined with an outreach effort aimed at educating schools about the library’s digital resources, resulted in an avalanche of support and dramatically increased usage. “If it comes from the library, it’s okay to use,” Stokes says she heard one teacher tell her students. “I knew we were getting through when I heard teachers telling students that they could trust and rely on anything we provided on our web site.”

Stokes now routinely sees monthly usage spikes when students are assigned big homework projects. “It’s obvious people like it,” she said. “And I like that it’s being used.”

GALE CLASSROOM SUCCESS EXTENDS LIBRARY RESOURCES REMOTELY WITH ONE CLICK ACCESS

“They want simplicity,” Stokes said of customers accessing library materials remotely. “People just want to click on something and have the information right there in front of them.” But to make the library’s digital collection easier to access Stokes had to get creative.



CHALLENGES

- Convincing educators the library’s expanding digital collection contains the same high quality, authoritative, and trusted content found in physical or print offerings.
- Delivering digital library resources remotely with “one click” ease and accessibility.

SOLUTIONS

- Cengage Learning’s Gale suite of products, which includes digital content, tools, and services for libraries

RESULTS

- Educators discover digital content is just as good, if not better, than the library’s physical collection which results in usage growth.
- Customers now have “one click” access to digital content via the library’s web site or via third-party search.

“Libraries are changing and Gale helps deliver content on-demand.”

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To learn more about this and other resources provided by Gale, visit:
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The Gale databases were not showing up in search engine queries people had become accustomed to making. It's why Stokes created The Librarian's Brain, a blog she used to highlight and promote Gale database content. "I'd create a post with links to the database," Stokes said.

The blog posts became popular and often ranked high in search engine results which drove traffic to the databases where customers could immediately access the information they desired in just one click. "I did this for our students and patrons," Stokes said. "But even if you're not one of our patrons our blog posts pop up when you search with certain keywords and point you to our Gale databases."

It's one reason why 75 percent of the library's web site traffic is now comprised of remote users.

DIGITAL LIBRARY EXPANDING AND PROVIDING AROUND THE CLOCK SERVICE

The people served by the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District should expect their digital resource access to expand further. "We're constantly looking for material," Stokes mentioned. "We're promoting our resources even to preschoolers who are learning numbers and colors."

Besides enabling older students to access reference materials at 9 o'clock at night for an assignment due the next morning, the digital expansion is also beneficial to rural or outlying libraries which often have less shelf space for printed reference materials.

"They need shelf space for popular reading and DVDs," Stokes said. "Putting all of the reference material online frees up space, provides access even when libraries are closed, and allows libraries to reinvent themselves and provide different services."

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