

Utilizing Data To Cultivate Community Connection

As a mid-sized library system with nine locations, Frederick County Public Libraries (FCPL) is deeply ingrained in the community it serves, encouraging the connection of people to ideas to foster individual and community growth. As part of the library system's strategic plan, the system aims to expand access and opportunities for public resource use while continuing to cultivate relationships and excite the community.

Beyond providing reading resources to the public, FCPL provides nearly 1,800 children's, 200 teen and 800 adult programs with over 210,000 in attendance annually. Given the vast number of services across multiple branches, there is a multitude of data to track for reporting purposes. In addition to tracking programs, the system also records the number of in-person visits, online visits, items checked out, items in circulation, Wi-Fi & computer users and library cards issued, to name a few. With such a large amount of data across multiple branches and software platforms, FCPL staff spent countless hours exporting data into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for further analysis.

Courtney Brohawn, Project Coordinator for FCPL, needed to simplify the systems reporting and analysis.

From an operational perspective, it is critical that FCPL be able to collect data and analyze the success of our programs to ensure we are delivering on our key objective of fostering individual and community growth" Brohawn said. "With so many data points across multiple software platforms, the reports are labor- and time-intensive, delaying analysis and critical communication and hindering our ability to be responsive in the time needed to affect resourceful change."

Brohawn enlisted the help of Cherry Bekaert Digital Advisory to determine a more automated approach to analysis. Together, the team reviewed FCPL software infrastructure, reporting needs and objectives. Tableau Software, an award-winning interactive data visualization platform, was introduced as a solution that met all FCPL's reporting criteria. Cherry Bekaert's data analysis team began the process of cleaning the data, connecting the various data points and filtering the appropriate data into user-friendly interactive dashboards.

Through the Tableau dashboards, Brohawn and team were able to explore their data in real-time, helping them to identify trends with their programming, circulations, catalogs, e-content vs on-shelf activity and make the appropriate changes to further the system's mission. Through further data exploration, the team identified increases in traffic, usage and checkouts which helped them determine which programs were most effective, including the ability to filter data to individual data points identifying branch locations and timing.

With the filter options, we can quickly analyze program popularity by age group, location and time of the week. The information is useful for our staff when creating new and exciting programming for our community” Brohawn said. Likewise, by leveraging Tableau dashboards, Brohawn and team were able to shave off hours of manual work compiling the data and weeks in preparing reports.

The ability to see our data produced in easy-to-analyze reports in real-time has been transformational to our operations,” Brohawn said. “This analysis is a critical part of measuring the success of new initiatives and helping inform future decisions and goals for our organization. Cherry Bekaert has exceeded our expectations by meeting all our requests. Their knowledge of Tableau and the intricacies of extracting data have been instrumental in developing the many reports we now have at our fingertips.”

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