

Case Study: Printing Limits and Fine Blocking Stevens County Library

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Background

The Stevens County Library, located in Hugoton, KS, serves a community of 5520 residents and introduced public Internet access at the library in 1995, with a single computer access point. A building project completed in 2000 added 11 additional computers for patron access, located in a computer lab. The library has a staff of 5.9 FTE, including one staff member who has responsibility for management of the library's 12 public Internet access computers.

The Stevens County Library provides its patrons and visitors from out of the area with free access to the Internet from these computers. Patrons of the computer lab have the ability to print to a black and white printer, which is directly attached to the library's local area network. A nominal fee is charged for prints, which is computed to recoup the cost of paper and toner.

Challenges

Internet access at the Stevens County Library quickly became a heavily used service, and through 2005 the PCs were used by an average of 28 patrons per day. The growing popularity of the service had begun to stretch the resources of the staff.

During this period, the Stevens County Library asked its patrons to limit their use of the PCs to one hour per day. While most patrons complied with the library policy, the staff found it challenging to manage use of the computers by many of the library's school-aged patrons who would flood the library in the late afternoon after school dismissed. During such times, every one of the PCs were almost always in use, and monitoring how long each user had been on the PC was a full-time job. In addition, the library's policies prohibited computer use for any patron who had overdue fines.

In an effort to manage the situation, the library required patrons to register for computer use. The sign-in included a copy of the library's computer policy and went through many incarnations before a marginally satisfactory form was reached. While many patrons used the registration form correctly, others did not fill it out accurately, or disregarded it altogether. The registration was also a concern in terms of privacy and security. The situation was extremely difficult to manage, since registration took valuable time, handwriting on the registration was often illegible, and staff had responsibilities other than cross-checking each registration for accuracy and outstanding materials and fines.

Lastly, due to the location of the printer at the circulation desk, unwanted extra copies and large multi-page files (the size of which were often a shock to patrons!) were being sent to the printer. Even with a minimal cost per page, patrons were often unpleasantly surprised with the total cost due to the number of pages printed.

The Stevens County Library had investigated PC reservation solutions available from software vendors, but those solutions were not a good fit for the library. All of the solutions they evaluated would have required significant charges for up-front software licenses, the creation of modules compatible with existing programming, and additional expenditures in computer hardware, further straining IT resources of both implementation and ongoing maintenance and support. The Stevens County Library had resolved to continue with current processes when they discovered LibraryMetrics.

Solution

Unlike other print control solutions that the Stevens County Library had evaluated, the LibraryMetricks service did not require the purchase of any proprietary hardware or the purchase of any additional computers. Instead, the service was installed on existing machines and purchased at an extremely affordable per PC annual subscription cost

“The staff at LibraryMetricks has been extremely responsive to requests, comments, and suggestions made to improve authentication through our existing system and the simplicity of patron access, and have allowed us to customize the initial login page with our library’s picture and a policy disclaimer. Issues with individual computers or the overall system have been quickly resolved, reducing down time in the lab.”

Eunice Schroeder,
Stevens County Library Director

Functionally, LibraryMetricks gave the Stevens County Library the ability to enforce their one-hour per day usage limit, and to prevent patrons with overdue materials and fines from using the computers. LibraryMetricks’ patent-pending OpenResource authentication allowed the Stevens County Library to integrate its existing patron database, Athena ILS. In order to use the PCs, patrons were required to enter both their patron number and last name into LibraryMetricks and both were validated against Athena.

The library was also able to enforce a 6-page per day printing limit using LibraryMetricks Peer-to-Peer print management solution. No change to their existing print configuration was required. In addition, staff members were now able to easily extend individual user sessions or printing limits through the LibraryMetricks administrative site. Print buttons hit more than once were no longer a problem, as only one print job could be approved at a time. Erroneous print jobs were either explicitly cancelled by the user or simply ignored, and in either case deleted from the print queue.

The Stevens County Library estimates that it saves about 1000 staff hours per year as a result of the LibraryMetricks solution. The login page has been customized with a usage disclaimer taken directly from library policy, and will allow the elimination of paper registration, eliminating privacy and security concerns.