CASE STUDY

REDUCING DEAD ON ARRIVAL AT FRISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY
BACKGROUND

Frisco, Texas, is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, with a current population of about 180,000 that is increasing by 6.1% annually. The young, educated demographic contributes to the fact that about 70% of the Frisco Public Library’s total circulation is youth material. The Library building is a single location of 55,000 square feet, housing a collection of approximately 224,000 items (physical and digital). The library’s items-to-population ratio currently sits at 1.25 with a goal of 1.52. The library introduced collectionHQ in 2012 and the Evidence-based Selection Planning (ESP) service in 2016 to support collection development.

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

Dead on Arrival (DOA) is a metric used to measure the percentage of items within a library’s collection that have circulated less than twice over a 12-month period within 18 months of purchase. Research conducted by collectionHQ has found that the average DOA in U.S. libraries in 2018 was 16%. Frisco Public Library’s DOA sits at 1.44%, below the U.S. average.

Elizabeth Chase, Senior Librarian along with David Black, Senior Acquisitions Librarian at the Frisco Public Library use DOA as a performance metric to identify trends and prevent buying the wrong material. Elizabeth shared an example: “We determined that the multiple copies purchased for book clubs were significant contributors to our Adult Fiction DOA percentage. That allowed us to re-evaluate the process and timeframe for purchasing and shelving those titles.”

SELECTION

Elizabeth explained that one of the key reasons for low Dead and DOA items, is the library’s focus on increasing circulation to overcome budget and space constraints. She shared: “We start by asking ‘How do I spend each dollar to achieve maximum checkouts?’”

Using the collectionHQ Spending Plans is helping the staff to achieve this goal by allocating budget based on evidence rather than gut instinct or “collector bias”. David elaborated: “We purchase multiple copies of popular titles at the expense of collection diversity, particularly when circulation data indicates guaranteed high circulation.” Introduction of a 4:1 holds-to-copies ratio for the life of a title helps to maintain high circulation while it is still in popular demand.
IMPROVING VISIBILITY

Once purchased, library staff works together to determine what to do with those items when they arrive at the library to maximize check outs. This is achieved by asking questions such as: How can we organize our collections to maximize checkouts? What displays are the most effective? How can we reduce the time needed to reshelve items so they can check out again more quickly?

David shared: “We have a culture of weeding regularly and ruthlessly. Our Dead definition is set to 18 months and we run reports monthly to determine which part of the collection will most benefit from weeding. Keeping our Dead percentage low makes it easier for our guests to find the items that they’re looking for – if they can find it, they’re more likely to check it out.”

To make titles more visible, the library displays items “face-out” where possible, primarily with audiobooks, and new Adult Fiction and Non-Fiction.

The team also introduced a new picture book display which contributed to a drop in DOA across Juvenile Fiction from 1.75% to 0.51%. To track the success of displays or new titles, library staff sometimes uses collectionHQ’s Experimental Placement or Experimental Selection tools.

Elizabeth shared: “Using DOA reports (and soon-to-be DOA reports), we pull titles for display. This year we’d like to experiment with displays that combine DOAs with popular titles to see if this side-by-side visibility increases the circulation of less-known titles.”

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Elizabeth, David, and the team monitor collection performance regularly with collectionHQ to maintain high standards. Elizabeth explained: “We use the data on Dead items to target weeding based on the area(s) of greatest need. If DOA data shows a jump somewhere – or just numbers higher than we’d like to see – we run reports to determine which items are DOA and put them on display or do some root cause analysis to determine why they’re not circulating and develop some countermeasures to prevent the problem from recurring.”

collectionHQ also offers insight into items that are overused and in a “grubby” condition. David shared: “Grubby items are a problem area for us – particularly in our highly-used youth collection. This year we’ve set weeding quotas for youth collections based on the percentage of grubby in each collection. We’re trying to weed each of those monthly.”

CONCLUSION

Consistent collection maintenance and monitoring DOA metrics is helping Frisco Public Library to provide a better collection to patrons. Elizabeth explained: “Since DOA is a lag measure rather than a leading measure, we focus on trying to prevent items from becoming DOA, a goal which aligns with our identity as a popular materials library. We spend most of our budget on items that circulation data shows our community wants and will check out repeatedly.”

David concluded: “We believe this demonstrates our commitment to fiscal responsibility – using our limited resources wisely. Whether talking to stakeholders or community members, it is useful to be able to demonstrate the extremely high rate of use items in the collection achieve.”
KEY BENEFITS

Gather better insight into collection performance

Align the collection with patron demand

Demonstrate efforts to use resources wisely