Evidence-Based Management
CALEDON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Bill Manson, Chief Executive Officer

The Caledon Challenge: Gathering Meaningful Customer Input

Located in the greater Toronto area, the town of Caledon has a population of 58,000 and a geographic area the size of Toronto. Formed by the amalgamation of several small communities, the municipality is a combination of suburban and rural households. Some well-known Canadians, including authors Robertson Davies and Farley Mowat, made their home in the area. Prior to the consolidation, some of the communities had libraries. The continuing presence of the library is an important validation for the community.

The area has been undergoing controlled growth and planning for a new library is underway. According to CEO Bill Manson, town councilors need hard data to support their decision to allocate more money to the library and LibSat from Counting Opinions provides that documentation. "We get 95% of our funding from the town councilors. With the information we gather from LibSat we can show the councilors the value our community places on the library."

Prior to using LibSat Manson says the library was getting positive feedback from users, but it was hard to translate that feedback into dollars. "The job of the Chief Librarian is to shake the money tree. What Counting Opinions does is give me a tool with which to shake that tree," he says.

The LibSat Solution: Translating Positive Feedback into Financial Support

Manson says the community drives library decisions, not the staff and not even the Board. Measuring customer satisfaction over time is a key component of the library's strategy for ensuring stable funding. LibSat data helps him demonstrate that there is more to evaluating customer satisfaction than simply looking at circulation figures.

"In 2008, as the economy dipped, we saw a dramatic increase in circulation. But 2009 and 2010 were relatively flat. These statistics alone might have led the councilors to think interest in the library was declining. But LibSat data showed overall customer satisfaction is higher than ever. Circulation had stagnated because people are dissatisfied with our hours of service. LibSat supported our budget argument that we need more money to stay open more hours to keep our customers happy."

Manson points to the following key benefits of using LibSat.

• **Provides credible customer satisfaction data.** The library had a lot of subjective information, but lacked credible user data. LibSat's professionally designed survey provides the missing information. "Designing a survey instrument is a daunting task," says Manson. "Once staff and Board members saw the data LibSat could provide they were sold on the survey. Having that credibility with the Board is priceless."

• **Ability to compare satisfaction with other libraries.** "We live and die by the Dashboard; staying in the green zone (High) is our ongoing goal," Manson says. The LibSat Dashboard compares Caledon's performance relative to all LibSat subscribers in areas such as Overall Satisfaction, Overall Quality, Average Satisfaction with Staff, and Average Overall Expectation.

• **Ability to collect customer comments.** The verbatim comments tell a very powerful story and provide both the good news and the bad. "When town councilors or Board members question how we know certain things to be true we can point to the voice of the customer gathered through LibSat comments."

• **Supports anecdotal information**. The library relies on two tiers of data—anecdotal and LibSat. The anecdotal information is supported by the LibSat data, which gives staff and Board confidence in the strategic and budget decisions they make. For councilors, it's important that they see their constituents want more money to go into the library.

• **Spot trends and make changes.** Armed with LibSat data about patrons' dissatisfaction with library hours,

Manson says the library is working to expand hours to better meet community needs.

• **Return on investment.** Manson says LibSat costs little and could do a cost recovery for 30 years in one year's budget cycle if you use it the right way. He unabashedly says he uses LibSat as a "sales tool" with the Library Board and town councilors, demonstrating library value and community needs with the data that is gathered. When he asks for more money for the library he feels on solid ground.

Through LibSat Manson says they discovered the positive place in the community that the library has. "We didn't realize the full extent of the commitment to the library and the degree to which our customers see us as a key part of the community. Now we have the ongoing challenge of living up to past performance. LibSat will help us do that."

About the Caledon Public Library

The Town of Caledon came into existence on January 1, 1974 as a result of Ontario government legislation amalgamating several towns and villages in the northern part of the Peel Region. The library serves the community with a collection of 150,000 titles and a 2011 budget of $2.8 million. Circulation in 2010 was 293,000. During the first quarter of 2011, circulation is tracking 15% higher than the same period in 2010.

About Counting Opinions

Facing constant competitive challenges, libraries and library organizations need better tools to understand and manage customer needs and to compete more effectively for scarce resources. In business since 2004, Counting Opinions provides libraries and library organizations with a cost-effective, evidence-based management solutions' platform for the comprehensive management of their performance and customer satisfaction data. Solutions for custom surveys, open-ended customer feedback, trends, benchmarking, outcomes and peer comparisons are also available.

For more information, **www.countingopinions.com**

Note: Interview conducted and case study prepared by JAM Marketing LLC

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