Executive Summary: Petersburg Public Library User Experience (UX) Internship

Summer intern, Amy Poe, undertook a comprehensive look at the experience of library users with the text, *Useful, Usable, Desirable: Applying User Experience Design to Your Library*, as a guide. Each week, the intern examined a different area of the library and its services. In addition to these weekly activities, the intern began a dialog in the Petersburg community with library users and non-users, through interviews, a focus group, and informal conversation, a user experience survey, and an exit survey.

The Library and Its Patrons
The Library resides in a modern facility reflecting the history, culture, and artistic talents of one of the top commercial fishing communities in Alaska. It serves a population of 3,000+ community members—with 2,700 active users. Users blur the lines of traditional demographics. They are children (home and public schooled) and families, young working singles both permanent or seasonal (Spanish speaking included), long-time residents spanning multiple generations—both of Alaska native and Norwegian descent, retirees (some well off and others not), people working multiple jobs to make ends meet, those that are jobless/homeless and summer travelers. The Petersburg population is gradually aging and reflects a broad range of economic circumstances—secure employment, skills/career building, unemployed, underemployed or operating businesses.

There are two types of non Library users—the first, actively disengaged—do not see value in the Library as a community hub. They are not likely to be drawn in except at the invitation of a younger family member who may be a Library user. The second type—passively disengaged—recognize the Library as valuable to the community but, for reasons of lifestyle and financial resources, may opt to buy or access materials through subscription services. This second group represents an opportunity for expanded Library reach, particularly with e-books.

There is broad recognition in Petersburg that many residents feel a sense of isolation. Despite being a tight knit community, social circles are often difficult to penetrate. Affordable housing, unfilled jobs, the impact of the state budget uncertainties, and the unpredictability of fishing from one year to the next are other challenges, as identified in community conversations, that fuel a sense of social isolation. The Library’s stated service plan goal of being “a connection spot offering a comfortable, welcoming, safe community center,” helps to fill this void.

Key Findings
● The facility itself is one of the primary reasons users visit and is arguably a key component of the community’s culture. It sets Petersburg apart from other Alaska rural communities.
● Patrons overwhelming say the front desk is approachable and friendly, both the staff and desk itself, reflecting the Library service plan goal of “exceeding customer expectations.”
● Two thirds of patrons were able to find what they needed without assistance, reflecting the Library’s user centric approach to service and collection development.
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- WiFi/computer access on site are high demand services that fulfill the Library’s goals of “equalizing access and assisting in developing skills.”
- The website is heavily used and is a primary point of access to the catalog and for Library information.
- The Library goes above and beyond to achieve its mission, “we connect you to the world of ideas” through an onsite collection, consortium access to resources state wide, and a responsive purchase on demand program.
- The Library supports patron/economic growth by providing GED tutoring, test proctoring, a quiet place for study/Internet access for online education, and valued meeting spaces, suited to conducting business with reliable access to technology and the Internet.
- The undertaking of the UX audit, in itself, is an extension of the Library’s commitment to extending beyond the building as “Library ambassadors”.

Suggestions — Improving the User Experience

The Library Director has been provided with a comprehensive list; the points below represent but a brief summary of these findings, presented in terms of the stated goals in the Library’s Service Plan. An ongoing list of completed and in progress tasks can be found at http://psglib.org/userexperience.

Physical Space

- **Enhance user access**—Place catalog in main lobby on lower stand for ADA compliance/shorter patrons; Children’s room—improve visibility/access to board books; install outlets with safety covers; Designate a parking space for expectant mothers/elderly and adjust door speed at entrance; Teen Room—change hinge to the right side of the door; Restrooms—add toe pull to doors, light in women’s room stall, flyer frames inside doors, better design of paper towel holders that dispense poorly.
- **Support users in meeting their needs**—Consolidate forms in one location near desk front desk—tax, passport, voting, etc. without cluttering front desk; Reduce density of collection on shelves with more front facing volumes; add overhead light to stacks; Periodicals—weed and reduce retention timeline.

Service Points

- **Enhance user access**—Install sign for Book Drop and clear front desk of all but essential flyers; Copier area—Install shelf for forms and workspace for users and open up space between desk and printer; Move LCD screen—with scaled graphics—directly behind desk for visibility/improved communication.

Policies and Customer Service

- **Professional staff development**—Update procedures/empower staff for quicker response times for patron email/phone messages.
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- **Support users in meeting their needs/Library staff collaborate**—Revisit Library policies in light of Library service philosophy—Equipment authorization for low dollar value items; Two PIN code limit for youth; ID card without Library card requirement.
- **Exceed user expectations**—Work with APT to ensure callers can always leave a voicemail; standardize voicemail greeting and three rings maximum until pickup; shorten initial greeting by putting hours as a menu option; Amnesty week campaign “We want you back” and read off lost item fines.

Signage and Wayfinding and Using the Library
- **Enhance user access**—Implement new visual standards and branding using the Storytellers Pole as core image; Redesign the Library brochure; ensure Spanish brochure version highlights Spanish language resources; Redesign Library Request Forms; place new form holders at catalog locations; New stack signs modeled after DVD collection; Campaign to promote digital library; Promote Libby app; Place iPad catalogs in Teen room and near Fireplace; Displays—Impulse check outs near self-check, “Awesome” box, staff picks; New promotional flyer to replace three “support the library” forms to be placed in Arctic entry with Art Tour brochure.
- **Support users in meeting their needs**—Break out adult fiction/teen collection by genre to create a browsable, retail like experience; Devise new method for “Recommended” titles; Enliven fonts and graphics for top picks signs/bookmarks; Enhance WiFi instructions on LCD/at desk; Explore wireless printing options and eliminate fees for small print jobs.

Online Presence
- **Support users in meeting their needs**—Reformat website to make key user tasks more prominent: searching the catalog, checking the calendar, requesting an item, managing user accounts; Ensure core content of the site displays properly on the mobile version; Highlight/encourage use of Facebook page; Update “About the Library” to promote Library brand and role in the community.

Philosophy, Process, Culture and Wrap Up
- **Resources and programs to explore interests/Assist in developing skills**—Opportunities for program expansion: Employment readiness; Bringing together the elderly and youth; Encourage use of Library spaces for crafting groups; Music programs using local talent.
- **Enhance user access**—Coordinate with new PIA transportation service to promote the Library as a potential stop during regular operating hours; Work with Borough to budget for Sunday hours, the most commonly asked for change to existing Library services.