

MATERIAL MATTERS

UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, INC.

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Library Specialists

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A Fresh New Start

By Nicole Atkins
Chief Operating Officer

You may remember from Shannon Daley's last article, that I was recently married. I, along with my sisters, planned my wedding. As some of you may know, that is no small task. Although I was very excited after my now husband proposed, I remember feeling a little overwhelmed. I knew that I was going to need a lot of help to plan the day of which I had always dreamt. My initial thought was to go to a bookstore to buy all of the books that I would need to begin planning my special day. After going to the bookstore, I realized just how expensive books are. Then it occurred to me that many of the resources I needed were probably available at my local library. I am almost ashamed to admit that I was amazed to find everything I needed to help me plan my special day!

Fortunately, most people return materials they have checked out from libraries when they are due so others can use them. However, there is a small percentage of patrons who do not bring materials back by the due date, or even at all. This relatively small number of patrons can cause frustration to those who need to check out those materials. I can imagine the frustration I would have felt had I gone to the library only to find the materials unavailable because they were overdue.

Although the community can become frustrated when the materials they are looking for are not in the library, most people also understand that if library materials are not returned, then tax dollars will have to be used to replace them. That sometimes can mean a tax increase. We have noticed that over the last several years, budget dollars are being cut for many libraries. Because budget dollars are so valuable, to have to use those dollars to replace non-returned items can also be frustrating.

One could ask the question: What is being done to reduce the cost of replacing non-returned materials and increase patron satisfaction of having materials available when needed? Many libraries have recently had to answer this very question. Fortunately, our customers can answer that question by telling the community they are using our material recovery service to help recover the non-returned materials and increase patron satisfaction. Unlike a traditional collection agency, we gently nudge patrons to quickly return items to the library while maintaining patron goodwill. Our goal is to enable patrons to return to the library in good standing.

Reflecting back to the beginning of this article, the library's resources played a key role in helping me with my "fresh new start." Not only did I find the materials I needed, I also returned as a patron. Not only does our material recovery service help with easing the frustration of patrons coming to the library and not having materials available to them, it also gives patrons a "fresh new start" with the library by helping patrons return to the library in good standing. When patrons return to the library in good standing, it increases circulation thus preserving budgeted resources to be used for purchasing new items instead of replacement items.



The Facts about FACTA

By Tim Williamson
Production Manager

On December 4, 2003, President Bush signed into law the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACTA), the goal of which is to ensure that all citizens are treated fairly when they apply for a mortgage or other form of credit. One feature of FACTA is the ability to receive one free copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus (Transunion, Experian, and Equifax) once per year. The purpose of this feature is to make it easier for consumers to check their credit reports for errors.

The annual credit report portion of FACTA will roll out gradually. Currently, it is only available to the Western states (as of December 1, 2004). It will go live in the Midwest March 1, the South June 1, and the East and U.S. Territories on September 1. For more information, go to www.annualcreditreport.com.

How does this new law affect Unique Management Services and our clients?

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Patron Disputes

By Kenes Bowling
Manager, Customer Development

In the course of encouraging patrons to return long overdue materials, we occasionally hear from them that our effort is in error—that they have already returned materials or that someone else checked them out, or, even, that the patron has never been in the library. Although disputes are infrequent, procedures must be in place to respond to them judiciously and with the patron's best interest in mind.

As we know, patron disputes are sometimes valid and sometimes not. However, we always proceed as if the dispute is valid, respecting the patron's assertion of innocence.

Our procedures for responding to disputes closely follow the guidelines of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA). This is the federal law that protects the rights of debtors from untoward practices by third party collectors. It is a good, common sense law that permits an effective process for working with debtors while protecting their dignity, privacy, and right to due process.

The part of the FDCPA that deals with disputes begins with the premise that a person has a right to be informed about the origin of his/her debt as well as a right to challenge the debt if he/she believes it to be in error. So, when a third party (UMS) notifies a debtor (patron) on behalf of an original creditor (the library), the law provides for a 30 day period in which the patron may dispute the debt, in writing, if he/she believes our claim to be invalid. We inform the patron of that right in each of our written communications. If the patron phones our office to dispute the debt, we instruct them to issue the dispute in writing. Having it in writing provides documentation for all parties, protects patron privacy, and complies with FDCPA stipulations.

PROCEDURE

1. When the patron responds to one of our contacts by disputing the debt in writing, we suspend further collection attempts until we can validate the debt, by securing from the library, written proof that the debt is valid.
2. To obtain validation, we fax or e-mail a Validation Request form to our contact person at the library. Validation can be in the form of a screen print from the patron's record or other written form that the library uses to record the patron's obligation.
3. Upon receipt of validation from the library, we forward that information to the patron and encourage the patron to contact the library to resolve the debt. The patron's account is then re-activated.
4. It is important to note that our ability to continue to pursue the patron's account depends on our receiving timely validation from the library. If not received, within 30 days, we are required to close the account on the assumption that the patron's dispute is valid.
5. When validating the patron's debt, the verification must contain the patron's current balance as it appears in the library's patron record, as well as other information that assures the validation appropriately addresses the dispute.
6. When the patron disputes the debt directly with the library, library staff can proceed to resolve it, whenever possible. You are not required to notify UMS, unless you want us to suspend the account while you investigate the patron's claim. Otherwise, changes to the patron's account should come to UMS via the library's usual update procedure.

The most important consideration is to treat the patron with respect and with the presumption that the dispute is valid. As we all know, mistakes occur on occasion. Our practice is to proceed diligently and quickly to resolve disputes in a manner that protects the dignity of the patron, regardless of the outcome of the dispute.

The facts about FACTA

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FACTA will cause an increase in credit inquiries, especially in the first year. Extra inquiries will result in more patrons being reminded of their delinquent accounts at the library. One result of FACTA will be the resolution of more patron accounts.

If a patron requests that an item be removed from their credit report, your first response should be to check if the account is valid. In other words, was the patron truly delinquent in returning materials and paying fines? If the account is valid, then it cannot be removed from the patron's credit report, even if it is paid. A common misconception is that once an account is paid, it is removed from the credit report. This is not correct. Once an account is paid, it will be updated to reflect a paid status, but will still remain on the credit report for up to seven years. It is important that all valid accounts remain on the credit report so that credit grantors will have an accurate credit history for the consumer. Unique Management Services has agreements with the credit bureaus that we will only expunge (remove) accounts if they are not valid.

By providing free annual credit reports, FACTA will help all consumers to better maintain their credit profiles. It will also provide us more opportunities to collect on long overdue accounts, while maintaining the integrity of the credit reporting system.

We hope you enjoy

MATERIAL MATTERS

*A newsletter designed
and produced for library
professionals.*



Strategic Partnerships

By Dick Neal
Manager, Strategic Partnerships and Sales

Strategic Partnerships...what are they? How do these partnerships benefit the library, the ILS Vendor, Unique Management, and most importantly, the libraries customers?

As I pondered this topic numerous thoughts ran through my mind. Are these partnerships really that important? Does anyone really care? I came to the conclusion that the answer to these questions is YES!

This year at Unique Management we have been studying Stephen R. Covey's book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." It has some tremendous insights that I would like to share. Just recently, I teamed up with Melissa Fenton, Assistant Director of Customer Service to present Habit #6, entitled "Synergize." Let's see if we can incorporate this principle into our Strategic Partnerships.

What is synergy? Per Mr. Covey, "synergy is the highest activity in all life....," "simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part." Wow! How does that relate to all the parties involved in a strategic partnership? Let me continue with another statement by Mr. Covey. "The essence of synergy is to value differences-to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses." To "value differences" is certainly easier said than done.

Let me go back in time to the beginning of Unique Management Services. Lyle Stucki and Charlie Gary conducted a survey to identify the most important criteria for a "material recovery service." Library professionals like yourself responded in the following manner: A) Maintain patron goodwill...If Unique could not maintain patron goodwill, then there would be no need for the service. B) Libraries prefer to get the materials returned. This was even more important than getting fines paid. C) The library wanted the ability to transfer files automatically. Make the process simple and to help reduce staff time. D) If Unique could collect enough of the fines and fees to make the process "budget neutral" that would be the icing on the cake. Here's my question to you today: What would have happened if Unique did not seek to understand the libraries needs? What would have happened if the ILS Vendors did not seek to understand our request on the libraries behalf? What would happen if the library did not express their wants and concerns to Unique or the ILS Vendor? In essence, NO SYNERGY!

If there is no synergy, then there is no WIN/WIN per Mr. Covey's book. Tell me if Strategic Partnerships meets this meaning of win/win per the "7 Habits." "Win/Win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying. With a Win/Win solution, all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan. Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena."

The reality is that everyone involved in Strategic Partnerships have their own goals, agendas etc. that they are trying to meet. If we apply the principle of synergy where the "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" and "to value differences-to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses," then the objectives of all involved can be met with a greater satisfaction.

Unique Management Services is appreciative of each Strategic Partner. Our relationship with our ILS Vendors is critical to our success here at Unique as well as our success with each of our client libraries. Without our client libraries, Unique Management Services would not exist. So, as we see it, the "synergy of our strategic partnerships" is truly a Win/Win scenario for all of us.



Lifelong Education Opportunities at Howard County Library

By Valerie J. Gross
Howard County Library Director

Now ranked third in the nation among great public library systems*, Howard County Library takes pride in supporting the lifelong educational needs of everyone, regardless of age, means or background. We do this through our collection of one million items, free access to databases and the Internet, and award-winning programs and services.

PRESCHOOLERS. Because emergent literacy skills are the building blocks of knowledge, the Library offers a multitude of programs to prepare children to learn how to read and write. Classes such as "Play Partners" and "Three, Two, Fun!" introduce letter recognition, counting, rhyme, and alliteration. "Mother Goose Asks Why" teaches parents how to select books and read aloud with enthusiasm.

K-12 STUDENTS. A+ Partners in EducationSM, the partnership between the Library and public school system, assists with eliminating student achievement gaps and improving grades. One way this happens is through **Assignment Alerts**.

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A Dream Come True

By Katie Hoard
Customer Specialist

“You go into the restaurants of a town and you see people with hungry stomachs, but you go into the library of the same town and you will see hungry brains feasting upon their favorites. There are all too few libraries, and far too many restaurants. People should eat less and think more.”
—Matthew Adams

Finally, 80 years after the first call for its own library, Sarasota County has a place wherein its citizens may finally “feast upon their favorites.”

The first efforts to place a public library facility in Sarasota’s Newtown area date back to 1921. On March 4th of that year, a headline in the Sarasota newspaper talked of efforts by the African-American community to establish a library. The next known published report appeared in the early 1990s, when the headline read: “Newtown Library Seeks Ties With County System.” The story went on to say “We are no different than any other subdivision in Sarasota County. We want something to call our own and a library is one thing we would like to have.”

In the Spring of 2001, focus group discussions were held in the Newtown Community Center regarding development of the new library. The group represented differing points of view, including arts & culture, business, Friends of the North Community Library, neighborhood, and schools and educators. These focus group discussions generated responses that were later used to develop the building program, ensuring that the community would get a functional and unique library to call its own.

There were a few obstacles that the library faced during this journey. While the State of Florida is no stranger to summer rainfall; the record setting months of the Summer of 2004 were significantly wetter than normal and occurred at a time when the project was the most vulnerable. When we visited the library in mid-August, they had just been through the hurricane season. The place looked like a dessert with no construction men, who, were working in neighboring cities to help restore power and water. But, no hurricane or weather disaster was going to keep the Sarasota Library from becoming a dream to reality.

Finally, on October 30, 2004 the new library opened



its doors to the community. Parents and children of great number came to the opening ceremony. There are several unique features to the new library. Natural light protrudes through the interior spaces. Natural wildlife plays a huge role in the new library. In the children’s area, a wildlife sculpture that surrounds the entry is in place, along with a 3-D mural that adds to the overall wildlife theme in this area.

I guess you could say this truly is a “Dream Come True” for the community of Sarasota. The community now has a place to explore the wonderful world of reading. The project’s success manifests itself in many areas, but perhaps most importantly in providing a new library to a community that has been long awaiting its construction. Congratulations to the finest advancement for Sarasota, the Sarasota County Library.

If you have comments, suggestions, questions or if you would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact us! We look forward to hearing from you.



By phone – 800-879-5453



By mail – 119 East Maple Street, Jeffersonville, IN 47130.



By computer – nicole@unique-mgmt.com or the “Contact Us” page of our website: www.unique-mgmt.com



Reporting “Unique” Information

By Melissa Fenton
Asst. Director of Customer Service

As all of our valued clients are aware, the Unique Management Services (UMS) monthly management reports are available online for your convenience.

We wanted to take a moment to review the options available to you in the suite of reports. Reports are easily accessible at <https://web.unique-mgmt.com>

A username and password is necessary to access the site and can be obtained from your customer service specialist (or any member of the customer service team). Once logged on, you will enter the suite of reports, which provides a variety of options.

You will see four information tabs: (1) Current Reports, (2) Archived Reports, (3) Help, and (4) Account Access. Each tab provides different information.

Current Reports

This is the most commonly viewed tab on the site and provides a listing of the most recent monthly management reports. At a minimum, a listing of six reports will be available. They are as follows:

- Bankruptcy – list of accounts on which we have been informed a bankruptcy is in process.
- COA Report – the change of address report, a listing of any new addresses we found throughout the month.
- Collection Statement – a detailed listing of accounts on which payments have posted throughout the month.
- Progress Report – a detailed listing of accounts that have been loaded into our system for the past six months. After six months, accounts will no longer appear on this report.
- Summary of Account – the summary status of accounts report. This provides the library with an overall look at collections, including accounts submitted and total recovery.
- Suspended Accounts Report – a list of accounts that are currently in “suspended” status. We recommend the



library review this report monthly to ensure accounts are removed from this list in a timely fashion.

Archived Reports

A list of prior monthly reports, dating back to January 2002.

Help

This tab provides answers to common questions received regarding the monthly reports. Explanations of the various reports are provided, as well as answers to frequently asked questions. Additionally, the help tab provides our clients with the ability to provide feedback, which we appreciate and encourage.

Account Access

The newest feature to our site, account access provides our clients with an increased level of access to patron account information. This includes, but is not limited to, viewing letters that have been mailed, viewing payments that have been posted, suspending and resuming account activity, and printing a paid in full (PIF) letter. If you are interested in having access to this site, please contact your customer service specialist.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas—a place where history comes to life.”

—Norman Cousins

“Perhaps no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest.”

—Lady Bird Johnson

“A circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms throughout the year.”

—Richard Brainsley Sheridan

“The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can’t read them.”

—Mark Twain

“Don’t join the book burners. Don’t think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don’t be afraid to go to your library and read every book.”

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

“If we encounter a man of great intellect, we should ask him what he reads.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Lifelong Education Opportunities

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Teachers communicate with media specialists and Library staff about upcoming assignments, allowing staff to bolster their branch's collection in order to have materials available for students.

Through the Library's web site (www.HCLibrary.org), students have a variety of free resources, including **full-text databases** (e.g., *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Biography Resource Center*, *Access Science*), and **AskUsNow!**, a statewide virtual reference service. Students in grades 4 through 12 also access **online tutors** for help with math, science and English.

Howard County Library offers Dogs Educating and Assisting Readers (DEAR) for reluctant readers. Third graders come to the Library to read to therapy dogs. Students begin the program reading two to five levels below their target level and read at or above grade level upon completion.

The new **Howard County Library Spelling Bee** is inspiring students to improve their spelling and increase their vocabularies. Winners from school bees held last fall will participate in the Library's Spelling Bee in March. The champion will advance to the National Spelling Bee. Sponsored by *The Baltimore Sun*, the Howard County Library Spelling Bee is organized under the rules of the Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee.

ADULTS. The Library offers a vast collection of materials and programs for adults, such as "meet the author" programs and book discussion groups. This year the Library is highlighting programs, services, and resources of special interest to older adults. Upcoming events include a program about a new service that connects people with support services for senior citizens and the disabled and one-on-one sessions to teach people how to navigate the Internet and library databases.

In addition, the Library offers special collections such as **American Sign Language (ASL)** and **Cancer Information**. The ASL collection includes 200 videos, addressing topics such as children's stories, biographies, deaf culture history, and ASL lessons. The Cancer Information collection provides access to understandable and current information about cancer and cancer care for patients and their families. Topics include prevention and wellness, cancer treatment, diet and nutrition, and survivorship issues.

These are just a sampling of Howard County Library's lifelong educational services and programs. Please visit our web site, www.hclibrary.org for more information.

*Hennen's American Public Library Ratings 2004
(*American Libraries*, October 2004)

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Unique Management Services, Inc.
119 E. Maple St.
Jeffersonville, IN 47130