

# MATERIAL MATTERS

UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, INC.

Volume 11, Issue 2

Library Specialists

Fall 2009



## Thank You Once Again

Nicole Atkins  
President & CEO

Thank all of you for making UMS' annual customer survey such a rewarding experience, as usual. You gave us a record-high overall rating of satisfaction — 5.71 on a scale of one to six! As gratifying as that score is for us at Unique, its true value is that it reinforces our commitment to continually seek ways to improve our service to you. Toward that end, your ratings throughout the survey and your many

thoughtful suggestions gave us a lot to consider in putting your feedback to work.

To help you better understand exactly how we use your feedback, I'd like to share with you our process following completion of the survey.

First, results and all accompanying customer comments are presented to the members of our management team and to our owners for thorough review and analysis. We look for trends and compare results with previous years' results to gauge any changes, up or down, for each area of our service. Are there any common themes or recurrences of questions from last year? Do questions or suggestions indicate a need for training? Are we meeting or exceeding your expectations for material recovery, patron goodwill and return on investment? Do you find our service and monthly reports easy to use? In general, is there anything we need to change or add to exceed your expectations?

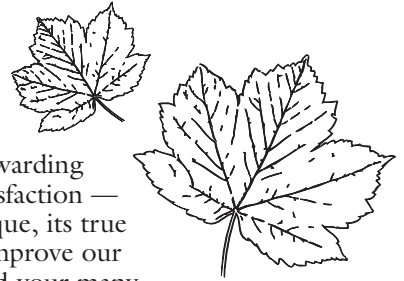
After we've analyzed your input we develop action plans and timetables for implementation. If a particular library identified itself in the survey with a question or suggestion, a UMS customer service specialist will respond individually, right away.

Our aim, always, is to be responsive to your needs and to adjust our service to changing conditions.

Next, we follow our customer survey with an in-depth employee survey to measure how employees feel about their jobs and missions of service. The important thing about this survey is to correlate your satisfaction with employee job satisfaction.

This is obviously important for our employees, but it is also important for our customers. High morale promotes

*(continued on page 3)*



## Help is Just a Phone Call Away

Rob Klaus  
Director of New Business Development

How does your library handle patron phone calls? Do the phones ring constantly at your circ desks? Branch staff overwhelmed when trying to juggle both foot-traffic and phone calls from patrons? Do you have a handle on why and for what reason your patrons call your library?

Unique Management is exploring services designed to help libraries answer the phone. For many years, we've been told by our library customers that we help define the very meaning of customer service to them; so hey, maybe we can help you!

We are in the process of developing a SIP2 or Patron API interface that would allow us to interact with your ILS. When a patron calls the library, this service could potentially off-load some of the basic question and answer processes that occur such as verifying account details, renewing items according to library policy, paying fines, even assisting with placing items on hold. This would be totally separate from our material recovery service and would be managed and staffed by separate UMS staff.

Providing a centralized call center, designed to provide the utmost in customer service to library patrons for basic questions and answers, will allow your existing library staff to truly FOCUS on the things they need to in order to provide top-notch library specific service.

If you are interested, or have any thoughts on the idea, we want to hear from you! Please email Rob Klaus, Director of New Business Development at [rob@unique-mgmt.com](mailto:rob@unique-mgmt.com), or call 800-879-5453.



## Getting the Most Out of UMS' Monthly Management Reports

Cary Luckert  
Customer Service Specialist

Although fiscal years differ by library, one constant theme is that reports become even more important as these periods are winding up. We here at UMS strive to make sure clients have all the information they need for reporting purposes at all times. Below are actual questions and comments from libraries regarding reports and their answers to help make sure you are getting the most out of UMS' Monthly Management Reports.

*"I do not receive monthly reports. How do I get these?"*

UMS' Monthly Management Reports are available via the InfoLink web site. Access to reports is set by the Library Administrator of the site. There are six separate reports that are available by the 7th of every month. An email reminder is available to let you know when new reports are available each month. The available reports are as follows:

- Collection Statement: A thorough listing of transactions that have occurred in previous month
- Month-end Progress Report: Status of all accounts submitted during the previous six months
- Change of Address (COA) Report: A detailed listing of new addresses and phone numbers obtained the previous month.
- Summary Status of Accounts Report: Accompanying the invoice; Historical summary of collection efforts.
- Suspended Accounts Report: List of all accounts suspended by the library.
- Bankruptcy Report: List of all accounts with pending or granted bankruptcies.

*"I prefer hard copy reports, not online. Can these be mailed?"*

In an effort to be environmentally conscious and keep costs low, UMS does not provide these reports in paper form as a normal course of action. However, if the library would prefer paper reports, please contact your Customer Service Specialist to arrange this.

*"I don't always understand all of the reports, is there a written explanation available?"*

There is a very helpful "Monthly Report Terminology" explanation page available on the 'Help' tab of InfoLink. This document explains all the reports and their headings in detail so the library can have an easy to use reference guide. Further assistance is always available by contacting your Customer Service Specialist.

*"On the monthly summary status report, I would prefer to have monthly totals, in addition to the cumulative total."*  
and

*"Is it possible to have the monthly recovery numbers figured out for us rather than having to subtract them ourselves."*

This was a common request from the survey and while not provided on the Summary Status of Accounts, monthly numbers actually are available on the Collection Statement. This report outlines payments made by patrons during the individual month as well listing as a cumulative total for the month at the end of the report as seen below.

DATE	ACCOUNT NAME	ACCOUNT NUMBER	CURR	AMOUNT PAID	PAY	DIS	AGENT	DIS	YR	STARTED	TOTAL PAID	UNPAID
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$20.00	CASH					12/17/2004	\$20.00	\$31.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$102.00	NOT					4/23/2004	\$102.00	\$20.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$87.00	NOT					9/16/2004	\$87.00	\$20.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$102.00	NOT					9/16/2003	\$102.00	\$21.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$46.24	NOT					9/16/2003	\$46.24	\$27.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$8.00	CASH					3/7/1996	\$8.00	\$0.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$36.00	CASH					11/21/1998	\$36.00	\$0.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$84.50	NOT					11/16/2004	\$84.50	\$0.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$0.00	CASH					12/11/1997	\$0.00	\$0.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$2.00	CASH					7/13/1999	\$2.00	\$0.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$37.25	CASH					9/25/2004	\$37.25	\$0.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	40.000	\$5.76	NOT					1/24/1999	\$5.76	\$40.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$20.00	NOT					11/18/2004	\$20.00	\$35.20
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$42.00	NOT					11/1/2004	\$42.00	\$16.00
12/13/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$16.00	CASH					11/1/2004	\$16.00	\$0.00
12/16/2004	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	0.000	\$77.85	NOT					12/17/2003	\$77.85	\$50.00

Cash Received:	\$373.80
Mat Received:	\$1,563.23
Word Received:	\$64.50
<b>Total Received:</b>	<b>\$1,997.83</b>
Commission Due Agency:	\$2.30

*"Is it possible to run some type of program for us to get statistics on a year to year basis? I am often asked to do board reports for an individual year and your staff has been great in supplying me the information but it would also be nice to have that included as a feature easy to access."*

We get so many requests for individualized reports, that it would be nearly impossible and impractical to make every request available to all of our libraries. Some reports, such as generating a list of patrons submitted in a certain timeframe, can be obtained by using the Account Access feature on InfoLink and exporting the information to Excel. Special reports, and answers on the best way to obtain those, are always available by contacting your Customer Service Specialist.

*"You have made some helpful changes with some of the reports already."*

This is a comment that helps illustrate the last point — We are always working to make our reports better and more useful for our libraries! We appreciate your input and are always trying to make sure the reports evolve so the needs of our clients are being met. If you have any questions, ideas, or would like to request a report, please feel free to contact us at your convenience.



## Looking for the Good and Making Good Things Happen

Lyle Stucki  
Owner

With all the terrible things that we observe and experience, it is easy to see the bad. If we are not careful, we can even begin feeling that things are much worse than they really are. No matter how bad things may seem at times, it is hoped that each of us will remember there is much good all around us. We are happier when we look for it, find it, and create it.

The following are things we already know and need to keep reminding each other about.

A positive attitude is contagious. There is tremendous power in simply believing that positive things will happen because often times they do. Part of it is because positive people are pro-active and are anxiously engaged in making good things happen. People can, when they believe they can. Even when something appears to be negative, people with positive attitudes find ways to turn lemons into lemonade by creating something sweet or good from something that appeared to be very sour. All of us can ask ourselves the following questions; “How positive is my attitude?” “How pro-active am I in making good things happen?” “When something bad happens, do I look for the good such as what was learned and how we can benefit?”

Positive people are excited about the prospect of helping others. When someone knows we really care, that alone can make a huge difference in their life. We can never underestimate the impact of a kind word, a smile, a soft answer, a thoughtful suggestion, the extension of a helping hand when needed, a heart felt compliment, a simple thank you, a word of encouragement, etc., etc. I am reminded of a verse in the song entitled, “Have I Done Any Good” written by Will L. Thompson. We might ask ourselves the same questions asked in one of the verses; “Have I done any good in the world today, have I helped anyone in need, have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad, if not I have failed indeed.”

It is important not to “type” people, just try to like them. Say why you like people not why you don’t. Say things from the positive side enough that it becomes habit. Thumper’s mom was right when she said, “If you haven’t got something good to say then don’t say anything at all.” Some people are harder to like than others. However, we can find some good in everyone.

Some of our challenges in life are almost over-whelming. Reaching our goals can take major effort. It has been my experience that when we believe we can achieve something we usually can and will. For an instant lesson just read *The Little Engine That Could*. Read it regularly because it is a philosophy for a lifetime.

If you want to keep things in perspective, count your blessings every day. A good exercise is to think of everything good and make the list as long as you can. It does not take long before we realize that there is a lot of good all around us. When we really reflect, we can many times feel great joy from simple things that are good. A friend of mine encouraged me often to take time to smell the roses. That counsel has helped me find much more enjoyment in life. We find that the fragrance of life is much better when we look for the good, find it, and create it.

## We Are a Part of the Twitter-nation!

Unique Management Services, Inc., has recently joined the ranks of social networking by creating a Twitter account. For those of you not yet familiar with Twitter, it is a free service that allows anyone to “communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?” While our membership is still in the infancy stages, we hope to use this as a means of communicating with our clients. In order to do so, we encourage you to follow our updates. If you already have a Twitter account, please search for us: @UniqueMgmt and become one of our followers or “tweeps.” If you do not have a Twitter account, feel free to join the site, it is free (<http://twitter.com>). We look forward providing updates and hope to hear from you.

## Actual Questions Asked of Librarians:

- ❖ Do you have books here?
- ❖ Do you have any books with photographs of dinosaurs?
- ❖ Can you tell me why so many famous Civil War battles were fought on National Park sites?
- ❖ Where in the library can I find a power socket for my hairdryer?
- ❖ Do you have that book by Rushdie, ‘Satanic Nurses’? [Actual title: ‘Satanic Verses’]
- ❖ I am seeking a directory of laws that I can break, so that I would be returned to jail for a couple of years.

## Thank You Once Again

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teamwork, responsiveness, proactive service and creates a nurturing environment for our relationships with you. As with the customer survey, the management team carefully analyzes employee feedback and develops formal responses and action plans to ensure an optimal working environment at UMS. And the proof is in the pudding — our annual rate of employee turnover is less than 3%.

The concept, of course, is to maintain a feedback loop among customers and team members to guide our efforts toward continual improvement in all facets of our service to you. The side benefit is that it’s great fun! The annual “lottery” that accompanies the survey really gets the juices flowing! And it’s a joy for us to help Friends of Library associations, no matter who wins.

So, thank you so much for allowing us to serve you and for giving us your precious opinions and feedback. Remember: it doesn’t have to be through an annual survey. We are here at any time for your suggestions. Just give us a call!



## What your Patrons Are Asking

Teri Lynn Bullock  
Customer Service Specialist

**W**hat your Patrons are asking Unique Management Services (UMS) *and how we respond.*

Unique Management Services, has a customer service department that handles questions, troubleshooting and training strictly for your library staff members. However, we also have a department at UMS that takes incoming calls from your library patrons.

When patrons call UMS, they may ask why Unique National Collections is listed on their credit report as one of their debtors. We ask for the name of the patron and confirm that the person calling is the actual patron. We then look up the name in our accounts to identify which library owns the debt for the patron. We then read them the Mini-Miranda, "this is an attempt..." We will let them know that they have a debt with the library and give them the name of the library and a phone number to contact the library.

Patrons sometimes ask about the title of the materials checked out from the library. We let the patrons know that we do not have that information at UMS in order to maintain their privacy. We direct patrons to contact the library for title information.

Patrons may claim they have returned the materials to the library and ask why there is still a balance on their account. We direct the patron to contact the library to see if there are outstanding fines or fees on their account or additional materials that may not have been returned damaged.

Patrons may ask if they can make payment to UMS over the telephone. We let the patron know that we do not take payments at UMS. We direct them to the library to make payments.

Patrons may call and ask if an account may be removed from the credit bureaus. We respond that if a patron has an account with the credit bureaus and resolves the account by returning materials and/or paying the balance due on the debt, then their credit bureau account will show as 'Paid In Full' with the credit bureaus. We further explain the only time UMS will remove an account from the credit bureaus is if the account was sent in error to UMS. Examples would be if the materials were found on the shelf, if the account was sent to collection in error, or if the account was attached to the wrong person.

If a person states they have never used a particular library, then we ask the patron to put their dispute in writing and fax it to 812-285-0895. We ask them to include their full name, including middle initials, titles maiden name, aka names (if applicable), current address, phone numbers, date of birth and social security number in order to thoroughly investigate the account. Once the written dispute is received, UMS will take the appropriate steps to investigate the claim and resolve the dispute.

There are many questions that come to UMS every day, and as you see, we answer many questions, but also direct your patrons back to the library to resolve their accounts and regain good standing with your library.



## Cleaning Up Databases Through Purging

Kent Smallwood  
Customer Service Specialist

**W**hile libraries continue to grow and expand, the amount of information in the library's computer database continues to rise. Some libraries look for ways to clear out some data to make room for new information. One way to do this is through purging old inactive accounts. This takes that information from older accounts and deletes it permanently from the library's database. Unique understands the need to do this, but we have a few suggestions when looking at purging old accounts.

First, when looking at a cut off date for purging, we recommend that you not purge anything under 7 years old. Any credit reported accounts stay on the patrons record for up to seven years. If the library has no record of this debt and cannot update UMS of balance changes, we have to clear their debt and the library would not receive the full benefits of credit reporting or potentially recover the balance owed. We receive hundreds of calls a month from patrons looking to clear their credit reported accounts.

Second, if the library does decide to purge accounts, please let your Customer Service Specialist know prior to running the purge. We can help remove these accounts on our end, so that the purge does not show as recovery on your monthly reports. We strive to make sure that we are reporting to the library accurate figures of recovery. Also, this insures that we close out these accounts correctly.

Remember that we are here to help the library bring patrons back to the library in good standing through the recovery of their materials. Accurate records at the library insure that we recover the proper amounts. So, before you do that purge, check and make sure there are not any records that might help the library bring in over due materials.

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.



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or the "Contact Us" page of our website:  
[www.unique-mgmt.com](http://www.unique-mgmt.com)



## Credit Reporting — The Facts

Shannon Daley  
Director of Operations

A driving force in our service to your library is our careful protection of your patron relationships. Our success in recovering materials is very much a result of our *Gentle Nudge™* approach. We appeal to good people to do the right thing by gently encouraging them to clear their obligations with the library.

Our ultimate goal, of course, is to create sufficient urgency with the patron that he or she responds to our contacts by returning materials and/or paying fines. Some patrons respond immediately following our first contact. Some respond a little later in our sequence of contacts. And some respond when they understand that an eventual consequence of failing to settle their account with the library is to be reported to the largest consumer reporting agencies in the United States. Simply, the prospect of being credit reported is the leverage some patrons need to swing into action.

Unique Management's *Gentle Nudge™* approach is a great way to remind patrons that their accounts are still delinquent even after they have returned their materials. Often, patrons will respond and pay their account in full, thus clearing the Library's records and allowing patrons to continue using the Library.

We know that sound credit is important to most patrons. They ask about it and are often concerned about what it means and how the process works. So the following information should be useful to library staff in helping them understand the facts about credit reporting and how to avoid it.

- ❖ Credit reporting occurs only after UMS has had the patron's account for at least 120 days. Most traditional collection agencies credit report accounts after 2 - 4 weeks. We credit report only as a last resort. We want the library to recover its materials, first and foremost, so we give patrons ample time and make numerous attempts to encourage the patron before credit reporting.
- ❖ Referring the patron's account to UMS is not the same as credit reporting. UMS is your material recovery service. The fact that we have a patron's account does not impact the patron's credit in any way. Only after submitting the account to consumer reporting agencies, is the patron's delinquency available to credit grantors — such as mortgage companies and banks.
- ❖ Once credit reported, the library account will stay on the patron's credit report.
- ❖ In most cases, a patron with an unresolved library debt will not be able to obtain credit for loans, credit cards, etc. However, once the debt has been resolved, the debt will show as "paid" on the patron's credit report and should not impede the patron's credit. In other words, the patron can resolve the credit related issue simply by resolving their account with the library. However, it may take 4 - 6 weeks, for the paid debt to be reflected on the patron's credit report. If the patron is pending loan approval, UMS will fax verification to the patron that the debt has been cleared so that credit approval can be granted by the lender. A faster option to reflect the debt as "paid" is to use our InfoLink utility to print out a "paid in full" letter on UMS letter head. If you are unfamiliar with InfoLink, call your UMS Customer Service rep to for set-up. It's really easy!
- ❖ Showing the debt as "paid" on the patron's credit report is not the same as "expunging" the debt from the patron's credit report. When a debt is expunged, it is removed entirely from the patron's record as though it had never been there. UMS has a contractual agreement with the consumer reporting agencies to expunge only those accounts that were reported in error. For example, if the patron cleared the account at the library and we never received the update, the patron could be credit reported in error. In such a case, the credit reporting agencies would agree to expunge the patron's account. If the debt was valid, then it can only be shown as "paid." However, as previously mentioned, we have always found this sufficient to restore credit. Additionally, UMS has made arrangements with the consumer reporting agencies to have paid in full accounts removed from credit reports one year after the paid date.
- ❖ If the patron has extenuating circumstances surrounding the debt, the patron has a legal right to submit a brief, written explanation for inclusion on the credit report. Consumer reporting agencies are required by law to enter such explanations as part of the patron's credit file.
- ❖ Juvenile accounts are not credit reported because the parent or guardian is ultimately the responsible party for the juvenile's debt and because it simply protects patron goodwill for the library when we avoid the image of credit reporting children.

Since our goal in serving your library is to protect your relationships with patrons, we use credit reporting only as a last resort to create sufficient urgency to clear the account. Only a relatively few ever get to that point, but having the facts can help you alleviate patron anxiety and assist patrons in resolving their obligations to the library.

## Quotable Quotes

A library is thought in cold storage.  
~Herbert Samuel

The best of my education has come from the public library... my tuition fee is a bus fare and once in a while, five cents a day for an overdue book. You don't need to know very much to start with, if you know the way to the public library.  
~Lesley Conger

Libraries are the one American institution you shouldn't rip off.  
~Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

As a child, my number one best friend was the librarian in my grade school. I actually believed all those books belonged to her.  
~Erma Bombeck

Libraries are the wardrobes of literature, whence men, properly informed may bring forth something for ornament, much for curiosity, and more for use.  
~William Dyer

We may sit in our library and yet be in all quarters of the earth.  
~John Lubbock

The richest person in the world — in fact all the riches in the world — couldn't provide you with anything like the endless, incredible loot available at your local library.  
~Malcolm Forbes

My books are very few, but then the world is before me — a library open to all — from which poverty of purse cannot exclude me — in which the meanest and most paltry volume is sure to furnish something to amuse, if not to instruct and improve.  
~Joseph Howe, 1824

Here is where people,  
One frequently finds,  
Lower their voices  
And raise their minds.  
~Richard Armour, "Library"

There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.  
~Andrew Carnegie

A truly great library contains something in it to offend everyone.  
~Jo Godwin

What is more important in a library than anything else — than everything else — is the fact that it exists.  
~Archibald MacLeish,  
"The Premise of Meaning,"  
*American Scholar*, 5 June 1972

If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.  
~Cicero

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