

# MATERIAL MATTERS

UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, INC.

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*Library Specialists*

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## Memorable Service Creates Positive Talk

By Lyle Stucki  
President

**H**ow much positive talk have you created among your patrons, lately? Memorable service is one important way to create positive talk. I walked into my local library, recently, with my daughter, Amanda, who needed some information for a report. When we stopped at the reference desk and told the librarian what my daughter was looking for, we were directed to a computer. We did a couple of searches and couldn't find what Amanda needed.

Another librarian walked by and asked if she could help. We again explained our situation; she sat down at the computer with Amanda, showed her how to do several different searches, explained what everything on the screen meant, identified books that would help and explained how she could easily find them on the shelves.

The beauty of this experience was twofold. My daughter found what she was looking for quickly so she could finish her report. But more importantly, she learned how to more effectively use the resources of the library when she goes back. As a parent, I was delighted because she had such a good experience and began to catch a glimpse of how valuable our libraries can be. Experiences like that will continue to shape her positive feelings about libraries.

The service provided was simple yet memorable. This experience created positive talk because I shared it with friends as I'm sharing it with you now. The librarian who helped Amanda understood the importance of customer service. Some librarians almost hide so they don't have to help people and others are always looking for opportunities to help. Why the difference in customer service mentalities?

I believe there are many factors which have an impact on the quality of customer service. In previous newsletters, we have talked about the importance of leadership and persistence in creating a customer service culture. This culture is maintained by whatever every staff member does everyday. Excellent customer service boils down to one person, with a positive attitude truly helping another person. Of course, to really help, a librarian must be knowledgeable and capable. Most are. Attitude is usually the difference. I have a poster in my office that reads: "Attitude is a little thing that makes a BIG difference." Through over half a century of living, I know that this statement is true.

The following are behaviors that nurture positive attitudes and help improve effectiveness in customer service:

- Believe in yourself.
- Believe in others.
- Synergize—use the ideas of others to come up with better solutions.
- Commit to building a positive attitude and work at it by reading and listening to good material. Invest in yourself.
- Have fun at what you do.
- Be proactive. Be a doer.
- Take small achievement steps everyday.
- Begin with the end in mind. Don't lose sight of the big picture.
- Finish what you start.
- Value your time. Focus on priorities. Keep first things first.
- Build on success and celebrate success.
- Create mutually beneficial situations among peers and customers. Thank win-win.
- Hang around people with good attitudes.
- Practice listening every day. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Focus on the customer as if he or she is the only person on the planet.
- Demonstrate excellence in a world of mediocrity.
- Use "thank you" often.
- Dream big dreams. There are no unreasonable goals; just unrealistic deadlines.
- Keep and make resolutions.
- Work hard. Almost anything will work if you will.

Attitudes make the BIG difference when it comes to providing excellent customer service. Great attitudes produce memorable service and positive talk. What are patrons saying about you and your library?

Good luck in nurturing your attitude. It is a lifelong quest for all of us that takes constant effort. Enjoy the journey!



## Raising the Bar

By Kenes Bowling  
Manager of Customer Development

The noise coming from under the hood of my car told me that it was time to replace the manifold. My stress wasn't so much about the repair as it was about how long I might be without my car? When I called my mechanic, he asked, "Could you bring the car in first thing tomorrow morning?" I asked, "When will I get it back?" "By noon, I promise!" he replied.

The rising temperature in our office suggested that something was amiss with our air conditioner. I called our service company. Again, an appointment was made and the problem was solved the same day—to the undying appreciation of our staff!

On an early Friday morning, I broke a tooth while eating breakfast. I had a plane to catch at 11:30 that morning. I called my dentist feeling sure he would tell me to take an aspirin and call him when I returned the following week. Instead, he got me into his office immediately and fixed my tooth in time for me to catch my plane.

My guess is that you read these short vignettes with skepticism. The sad truth is, these levels of service are hardly the norm. Our usual, day-to-day experience has lowered our expectations for quality service. We have allowed ourselves to be trained to expect less.

The good news in these examples is that it is easier than ever to stand out. When you are good, people will notice. When you are excellent, they will not only return—they will sing your praises! You don't have to travel miles to move ahead. Sometimes the difference is only a matter of inches. Anytime we are in a position to serve others, a little can go along way.

Below are four steps that organizations can take to continually improve levels of service to customers. These are simple measures that help us focus on our customers' real needs and deliver service that addresses their needs and meets their expectations.

### What You Can Do

1. **ASK YOUR CUSTOMERS.** Talk to those you have served. Find out from them, how well you have met their expectations. What are their expectations? What about the library's service is not excellent? Listen to their feedback. Simply listen. Simple, "drop in the box" questionnaires placed at the check out counter is one way to garner patron input. Random mailings with self addressed stamped envelopes is another.
2. **Determine the standard you want.** Remember that customers' expectations may not be very high based on their experience with service providers, in general. Take their feedback and ideas into account, but remember that it is your responsibility to set the level of excellence you want to reach. Set the bar as high as you wish. For example, perhaps patrons ask not to be placed on hold for inordinate periods of time when they call the library. Have a standard that no call be placed on hold for more than 30 seconds without someone returning to the caller.
3. **Under promise and over deliver.** Make promises based on your current capacity, not your fondest wish. Make the promise, then deliver more. Then raise the level of your promise a bit the next time. Steady and slow wins the race – and remember: keeping promises is the sine qua non of customer service!
4. **Measure performance.** You've set new standards for yourself and the library. The only way to reach them and maintain them is to measure your performance against those standards. Depending on the standards you set this may be very simple or quite complex. Don't make the measurement more difficult than necessary, but remember to measure.

It's time to raise the bar. It's time to set new standards of service that will make your patrons' experiences memorable. Standards won't raise themselves; we must raise them consciously and consistently. The steps above will help you take that conscious action.



## Credit Reporting — The Real Score!

By Rob Klaus  
Manager of Information Systems

Recently, the national news media has focused on the use of Unique Management Services by libraries across the country. Components of these articles have addressed the issue of credit reporting library debts, and the impact it may have on a consumer's credit record. Some claims have asserted that a typical debt from a library could reduce their 'credit score' by 100 points. Only debts with values in the thousands of dollars could have such an impact. Our experience with the consumer credit agencies indicates that a typical *unpaid* library debt would have the effect of decreasing a person's credit score by less than 10 points, and a *paid* debt would have a negligible, impact. The news media do note, that **none** of the articles that assert a 100-point impact are attributed to direct quotes from any of the consumer credit reporting companies.

Credit scores are based on many different factors. The effect of one particular item can be difficult to determine. Fair Isaac, the leading provider of credit scores lists over 20 different elements that go into a credit score at their website, myfico.com. If you directly ask a company, like Fair Isaac, what type of impact a library-based debt will have on a score, you will never receive a direct answer, because so many potential factors are in play.

UMS has over 12 years of experience in working to recover library assets. We have used the strategy of reporting long overdue debts to credit agencies throughout that time. Our experience, and the experiences of our clients throughout that time have indicated that a *paid* library-based report on a credit report has no damaging impact. The vast majority of our clients use credit reporting as a tool to recover their assets from patrons who have chosen to not return their borrowed items.

(continued on page 6)



## The Book Bin

By Shannon M. Daley  
Director of Operations

Companies spend a lot of money developing eye-catching logos to identify themselves easily. This logo becomes their brand symbol. However, after the initial visual appeal, what qualities come to mind when the public reflects on the entity behind the logo?

I have recently read an excellent book that discusses this very topic, *Branded Customer Service: the New Competitive Edge* by Janelle Barlow and Paul Stewart. Consumers may buy into a brand for a time based on popularity or visual appeal. However, if the character of the company does not match the standards expected by the consumer, it will be but a fad. On the other hand, if the brand/logo is backed up by high standards that create a positive experience, consumers will return to the company time and time again.

Barlow and Stewart discuss the need and method of developing high quality customer service that will be thought of every time a consumer sees a company's logo or hears a company's name. "Brands are the values, beliefs, and service experiences that underpin them" (23). The most successful brands are those that every employee believes in the very core of their being. The brand then becomes a natural outpouring of who they are.

For the consumer, "branding occurs when a distinct head and heart response happens in relationship to a company symbol or logo" (20). When a consumer is made to feel personally appreciated a relationship begins to form. A continuous relationship develops as that same appreciation and sense of value is tapped every time the consumer returns to the company.

Many companies boast that they provide customer service. Yet, they are not all successful. Barlow and Stewart say that is because most companies offer generic customer service. Most companies put employees in the public, dealing with customers, expecting them to just know how to interact with customers. If training occurs, it is minimal at best. "Generic service will not enhance your customer's experience about the uniqueness of your brand. Customer exchanges must illuminate features of the brand promise or brand values" (60-61). Barlow and Stewart say that time and money must be spent training employees about the core values of the company and connecting those with the core values of the employee. This allows the employee to connect with customers to meet their needs while creating a relationship of trust and loyalty through promises made and kept.

Barlow and Stewart also assert there is an added bonus to branding. "A strong brand is a powerful draw for recruitment. It is also a pull to retain valued staff" (158). While delivering a brand and creating relationships of trust and loyalty with customers, employees are also developing the same type of relationship with the company.

The book ends with a toolbox of practical activities that can be used when branding the customer service behind your logo. It is also packed full of case studies that demonstrate actual experiences of on- and off-brand customer service. I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking for a way to stand out above those who provide generic customer service and create trust and loyalty with customers.

This idea of branded customer service is a concept that Unique Management Services bought into years ago and continues to fuel today. Our "brand" of customer service keeps libraries with us and brings patrons back to libraries, which is what has made Unique Management Services a success.

We are frequently asked where we get our customer service training. The answer is we do it ourselves as we sell our brand to our employees during recruiting and training. Since it is a value system they personally relate to and agree with, our employees continue to forge ahead in promoting UMS' "brand" of customer service.

Barlow, Janelle and Paul Stewart. *Branded Customer Service: The New Competitive Edge*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishing, Inc., 2004. \$27.95



## Fun Facts

The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.

—Tom Clancy

A writer is congenitally unable to tell the truth and that is why we call what he writes fiction.

—William Faulkner

I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.

—Peter De Vries

I was going to buy a copy of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and then I thought: What good would that do?

—Ronnie Shakes

A bookstore (or library) is one of the only pieces of evidence we have that people are still thinking.

—Jerry Seinfeld

The worst thing about reading new books is that they keep us from reading the old ones.

—Joseph Joubert

When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.

—Desiderius Erasmus

The best effect of any book is that it excites the reader to self activity.

—Thomas Carlyle

Book: A garden carried in a pocket.

—Arabian Proverb

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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## The Most 3 Significant Variables that Impact Our/Your Recovery!

By Brad Rainier  
Customer Service Specialist

A question we frequently hear from prospective customers is: “How successful will UMS’ recovery efforts be, over time?” The answer is that a library can expect between a 50% and 70% activation rate. (Patron response rate). Now — why the 20% difference on average? Well, there are as you might suspect, multiple variables that can impact our recovery of materials and cash. The good news is that all are within a measure of the library’s control. The following four significant variables can determine the ultimate success rate of our material recovery efforts:

1. **Updated Patron Information.** If a library is diligent about regularly updating patron records (current phone numbers, current addresses, providing date of birth and Social Security Number <if possible> — this is a GREAT starting point in helping us to bring your materials back through your doors and/or cash in your hands! When we receive accurate contact information, we are very effective in encouraging patrons to return materials and clear their balances.
2. **Age of Accounts.** It is very important to make sure we get accounts that are not too old. Not too old is between 60 and 90 days overdue. Keep in mind- that is between 2 and 3 months overdue with your library which is quite a significant period of time. Every day is important and can mean the difference of collecting an account sooner rather than later.
3. **Dollar figure of accounts/balance:** As you have probably seen in past newsletters or even in our sales/introductory information- it is much easier for patrons to pay off accounts at the lower dollar figures (\$25 to \$50). The lower the balance, the easier it is to settle the account. Many libraries are beginning to benefit from UMS’ Small Balance Program. This is our very gentle patron contact process for account balances between \$10 and \$25. The library usually has a large number of accounts in this dollar range. Recovery results are very high and many patrons, whose cards are blocked, are able to return to the library in good standing.

I hope this information has shed a little light on the most significant variables that impact recovery. There are many more ‘minor’ variables that play a role such as the library’s notice structure, collection agency technology/resources, staff training at the agency and at the library, the time frames an agency uses in contacting patrons, the letter and phone call intervals used by an agency, public announcements made by the library.

Please feel free to contact any member of our Customer Service Team to discuss any aspect of our service. We are always open to suggestions on how to improve our service to you and are always here to help you first and foremost!



## Loving Libraries

By Shannon M. Daley  
Director of Operations

Libraries like you around the Country celebrated Library Lovers’ Month in February. "Library Lovers' Month is a month-long celebration of school, public, and private libraries of

all types. This is a time for everyone, especially library support groups, to recognize the value of libraries and to work to assure that the Nation's libraries will continue to serve" ([www.librarysupport.net/librarylovers](http://www.librarysupport.net/librarylovers)).

In honor of this celebration, the Upper Arlington (OH) Public Library put out hearts that patron's could sign and put up at the Circulation Desk. As you can see from the pictures the library shared with UMS, they received an overwhelming positive response from their patrons.

It is UMS’ hope that all the wonderful libraries we work with feel loved and appreciated everyday. If we at UMS do not tell you enough, we greatly appreciate you and the services you provide to your communities.



## A GIANT Success

By Kate Burlette, Head of Circulation  
Gail Borden public Library District (Elgin, IL)

The Gail Borden Public Library experienced a dinosaur invasion in the summer of 2005. Dinos on Parade, twenty-six 4 by 8 foot artist decorated fiberglass dinos, began appearing around the community in July. Their message? Have fun with us – take pictures – think dinosaurs! Think library, because the BIG dinosaurs are coming to the library in September.

The exhibit *GIANTS: African Dinosaurs created by Project Exploration*, featuring magnificent towering dinosaurs, fossils, interactive displays and dynamic videos, opened in September for a four-month stay at the library.

And people came to the library in record numbers.

This innovative and dynamic project designed and executed by the Gail Borden Public Library has galvanized the community through more than 50 partnerships, 226 new volunteers, 65 programs, and over 11,000 visiting school children. The library has achieved all that it wanted to achieve in creating public awareness of the library, igniting the community’s imagination, forging lasting partnerships, and reaching out to an underserved population.

The “dinosaurs at the library” buzz continues to stretch across northern Illinois and beyond. The *Giants* exhibit has captured a  
*(continued on page 6)*



## Meet Customer Service

By Samantha Ennis

Many of you may already be familiar with your personally assigned customer service specialist, however, we would like to take this time to introduce you to the whole team. Customer Service is made up of well-qualified specialists.

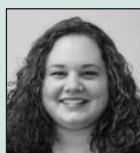


**Andy Harp**  
*Director of Customer Service*



**Melissa Fenton**  
*Assistant Director*

### Quality Department



**Samantha Ennis**  
*Moving to Quality Department*

### Customer Service Specialists



**Brad Rainier**



**Kent Smallwood**  
*NEW to UMS!*



**Cary Luckert**  
*NEW to UMS!*

Unique Management Services (UMS) has a goal of providing personalized customer service to library staff. Each library is assigned to a specific Customer Service Specialist. That way, when you call Unique, you are not using a bothersome automated service or getting a different specialist every time. It can be very frustrating to deal with companies that offer non-personalized service. With non-personalized service, each time you call you have to remind the random representative of your special situation. This wastes precious work time at the library. Your specific customer service specialist can help you with your individual needs by being more familiar with how your library functions. They do this by personally reviewing your monthly management reports, creating special recovery reports as requested, answering staff questions, getting the library in touch with our technical department for any technical related problems, and much more.

Our service is personalized. You have a specialist that is more familiar with you, your library and your libraries functionality. However, in the event that your representative is unavailable, any customer service specialist has the ability to assist you.

*We would like to welcome Kent Smallwood and Cary Luckert to UMS!* They joined our customer service team this Spring. Samantha Ennis will be transitioning from the Customer Service Department effective July 1st and has accepted a position in our Quality Department. She will work closely with the Director of Operations on methods to continually improve Unique’s processes. Kent Smallwood will now be the Customer Service Specialist for those libraries that worked with her.

Library staff may ask for their customer service specialist directly and may call UMS toll free 1-800-879-5453. If patrons need to speak with UMS directly they can call us at (812) 285-0886. Patrons will speak to our receptionist, Lynn James. Lynn is trained to take patron calls. She can help answer questions and resolve issues. UMS can be reached from 8:00am - 5:00pm Eastern time Monday through Friday. Please contact us with any questions or concerns that you might have. We are here to serve you!

## A GIANT Success

*(continued from page 5)*

positive synergy that is revitalizing the role of the library as a leader and innovator in the community.

*GIANTS* has been a bold and innovative step for a library to take in order to spark the imagination and lead people through the door, to books, materials and library services. Towering giant dinosaur skeletons among stacks of books have wedded resources and wonderment for a dynamic result.

Project Exploration, a not-for-profit organization co-founded by University of Chicago paleontologist Dr. Paul Sereno and educator Gabrielle Lyon, strives to make science accessible to the public, especially by reaching the under-represented populations; inspiring children to learn and achieve through innovative hands-on science experience; and connecting with students, teachers, and families. It achieves this by showcasing dinosaurs, newly discovered in Africa, who lived 135 million years ago with original fossil material as well as touchable exhibitory and interactive components. Gail Borden Library's desire to host the exhibit was quite attractive to Dr. Sereno as he said during a press conference at the library this August, "every expedition begins in a library." Library leaders and Project Exploration saw this as the perfect environment to show the public the important role the library plays in scientific discoveries.

Our goals have been realized with this project. We provided a stunning and awe-invoking exhibit for area residents, free of charge, and one that 1) enhances Elgin's image and economy; 2) promotes literacy and readership by making books of relevance and interest available; 3) reaches at-risk and minority families and 4) establishes a new role for the library as a Community Center and as an able curator of public space. We have created awareness of the library and built community connections. In addition, it has created excitement about libraries.

Nancy Fishman, Executive Director of the Grand Victoria Foundation, primary funder for the exhibit, said about this project, "...you are witnessing a once in a lifetime occurrence, not only in Elgin, but in the whole way that libraries operate."

## Credit Reporting – The Real Score!

*(continued from page 2)*

Credit reporting is used as a tool of last resort by UMS. Many traditional collection agencies will report data on a debt to the credit bureaus within a month of referral. UMS waits a minimum 120 days, during which significant efforts are made to notify patrons to clear their obligation to the library. Typically, an account will already be 45 days overdue when referred to UMS, and the library will have sent several overdue/bill notices to the patron. So after about 6 months, and numerous contacts from the library, and us, the debt will be reported.

Credit reporting is a necessary tool when working with some cases. Of the \$42 million dollars in materials and fines that UMS recovered last year for our library clients, \$5.5 million of that recovery is attributed to accounts that had previously been credit reported. This is hardly unfair given that 98% of a library's patrons are upholding their agreement to return the items they have borrowed.

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