

# MATERIAL MATTERS

UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, INC.

Volume 9, Issue 2

Library Specialists

Winter 2006



## I Have An Opinion

By Nicole Atkins  
Chief Operating Officer

**H**ow often do you find yourself saying, “Why didn’t they ask me?” We all have opinions. We all have preferences as to how we think things should go. We all have constructive criticism—good and bad. However, we do not necessarily have the opportunity to express ourselves—positively or negatively.

Well, Unique Management Services (UMS) invites our customers’ critical feedback, every year with our Customer Satisfaction Survey. Even though we encourage feedback throughout the year, a structured, anonymous customer survey provides a means of garnering information with greater depth. Sandra Nicasio, Circulation Supervisor at Yuma County (AZ) Library District, agreed that surveys are important because “they provide valuable feedback for ways to improve your service and to assure you are meeting customer expectations.”

We know that one of the best ways for UMS to continue to exceed our customers expectations is to continue what we have been doing from the beginning—build our service on the input from library professionals.

Through the survey over the years we have been spring-boarded into adding features such as the InfoLink website that allows clients to view monthly reports and activities on patron accounts, as well as, interaction with UMS on patron accounts. We have also found opportunities to improve our communication in the Sales and Implementation processes. Additionally, we are always encouraged by the numerous positive comments our clients provide us.

This year we did something special — to show our appreciation and to add fun and spice to the process, we developed a new wrinkle — a random drawing of survey

participants for cash donations of \$1,500, \$1,000, or \$500 to the winning library’s “Friends of the Library” group.

Libraries were assigned a number when the survey was completed. After the survey deadline, UMS randomly drew numbers from the pool.

The winners this year were:

**Dayton (OH) Public Library — \$1,500**

**Yuma County (AZ) Library District — \$1,000**

**Mesa County (CO) Public Library District — \$500**

Laurie Uthmann, Head of Circulation at the Mesa County (CO) Public Library District said of the donation prize to the Friends group, “everybody was winning.” She explained further that she filled out the survey as an expression of thanks for the assistance she received from Rob at UMS when she was new to her position and learning how to interact with UMS, and then UMS turned around and thanked her for filling out the survey by making this donation to the Friends group. Laurie said the Friends group was ecstatic; “They were like a bunch of kids at Christmas,” as she made the presentation to them at one of their meetings.

Sandra Nicasio at Yuma County (AZ) Library District said the Friends group was very excited about the donation prize especially at this time. The Friends group has been able to assist in some marketing to promote library services to the community using this money.

The lottery just seemed to take on a life of it’s own.

It was just as exciting for us, at UMS, as it was for our customers, too. So, our promise is to make next year’s survey just as much fun as this year’s. Thanks again to all who participated. And as always, we encourage your feedback, at ANY time!



## Suspending Accounts

By Samantha Ennis  
Customer Service Specialist

**G**reetings! Many of you have asked questions about suspending accounts. This article is intended to clear up any misconceptions about patron account situations that would require an account to be suspended, in addition to the methods used to suspend them. This may be a review for some of you but this may answer those burning questions for other librarians.

### (1) What does it mean to “suspend” an account?

When the library suspends an account that means we temporarily cease all contact with the patron. We will not send letters, make phone call, or (if the account has not already been credit reported) we will not credit report the account during suspension. Suspension is not the same as closing an account. Suspension is similar to pushing “pause” on your VCR. It pauses the account at its current status. The account is not resumed until the library chooses to resume the account.

*(continued on page 3)*



## Tips for Training New Staff

By Kenes Bowling  
Manager of Customer Development

While UMS material recovery process is relatively simple, we all know that specific procedures must be followed to keep it that way. Prior to initiating service with UMS, the library's circulation and technical staffs devote considerable time preparing to manage their new material recovery program. Roles are defined, procedures are documented, and training sessions are held.

Once the process is in place and the staff is trained, it is then just a matter of following procedure, and soon the material recovery program becomes a routine part of library operations.

What happens when a key staff member is promoted to a new position or leaves the library? Unless care is taken to ensure that replacement staff is adequately trained in the material recovery process, slippage can occur. Submissions or updates can be missed, communications with patrons can be inaccurate, and additional work can be created at the library. So, to minimize the likelihood of those occurrences, here are the top ten items for training new staff in the UMS material recovery process. Remembering to communicate these specific things to new staff will help the process remain smooth.

**10. Watch your waivers.** New circulation staff should be encouraged to avoid excessive waiving of fines and fees. It is important to follow the library's policy so that patrons are treated consistently and fairly. Additionally, by following the policy, the library maximizes its recovery of both materials and dollars from those patrons who have created the library's material recovery expense.

**9. Let the software speak.** If your library transmits new accounts and updates electronically, there is no need to call UMS when a patron makes a payment or clears his/her account. It will be reported automatically by your collection agency software.

**8. Fees are fair.** The fee added to accounts flagged for collection, which is typically \$10, is the library's way of recovering its material recovery expense. It passes part of the cost back to the small minority of patrons who created the expense in the first place. New staff should understand that principle in order to clearly explain it to patrons who ask.

**7. Check Addresses.** Always confirm the patrons current address. As we all know, patrons move without telling the library where they are going. If their accounts are submitted for recovery, we will be able to contact them and help them resolve their accounts more quickly with a correct address. If a patron shows up on our monthly Change of Address Report sent to the library, use that as a queue to verify the patron's address the next time he/she is in contact with the library.

**6. Provide Account Balance Totals.** If your library submits accounts manually, make sure updates include the new total account balance. It is important that we contact patrons with balances that match those on the library's patron records. Sending total balances helps to insure accuracy.

**5. Save to history.** With automated systems, be sure that updates to collection accounts are saved in order to be picked up and transmitted to UMS for processing. Occasionally, patrons may insist that their record be cleared after returning materials and paying fines. But the record needs to remain intact for accurate handling of the account. It protects the patron.

**4. Understand Credit Reporting.** No patron is credit reported until UMS has had the account for at least 120 days. The vast majority of patrons clear their accounts with the library well before that time. If a patron is credit reported with an open library account, the patron will likely not be able to obtain credit. Paying the library will show the account as paid on the patron's credit report, and it will no longer impede the patron's credit worthiness. Expunging the account from the patron's credit record can only be done if the account was reported in error. It is helpful when circulation staff can provide this information to patrons who ask.

**3. Recognize the calls.** Circulation staff will frequently receive calls from patrons who say something like: Someone from the library called me but didn't say what it was about. What's going on? That is probably a patron responding to an answering machine message from one of our callers. We carefully protect the patron's privacy by not leaving debt related information on answering machines. But, if the patron responds to the library, then our contact has been successful. When library staff receive such calls, they should locate the patron's record to confirm collection agency status and then work with the patron to resolve the account.

**2. Use UMS' InfoLink Utility.** When the library wants UMS to suspend activity with a patron or wants to review UMS' contact history with a patron or print a paid-in-full letter for the patron on UMS letterhead, simply use our secure, web-based utility for fast patron account access. If you're not sure about how to use our account access utility, contact your UMS customer service rep for easy instructions. This is one web based service you'll be glad you have!

**1. Embrace stewardship.** It is important for staff to understand the basis of the library's decision to use a material recovery service. Simply, it is good stewardship of community resources to secure the return of long overdue library materials for re-circulation and to recover money owed to the library. Usually, less than one percent of patrons are ever submitted for collection. By gently nudging them to do the right thing, UMS helps the library to successfully protect the interest of all its patrons — including the patrons who will return to the library as good customers after resolving their accounts.



## The Book Bin

By Shannon M. Daley  
Director of Operations

**A**re you looking for a quick lesson in improving your customer service? Are you looking for a way to move from being okay in everything you do to being your best in everything you do?

Well, I have happened upon a book that can get you started re-evaluating how you approach everything you do.

*The Ice Cream Maker* lives up to its subtitle: *An Inspiring Tale About Making Quality The Key Ingredient in Everything You Do*. I have to admit I was first drawn to the book by its title and the short length. However, I was pleasantly surprised that so much could be said in 115 pages.

The book is the tale of a manager at an ice cream factory who was faced with a tough choice: allow the factory to close its doors or make it start growing. The book walks through the process the manager uses to turn the factory around. The manager is inspired by a grocery store that is known for its excellent customer service, selection, cleanliness, and overall quality of the products they sell.

The manager finds that the key to the grocery store's success is the very reason the grocery store does not carry the brand of ice cream the manager produces. They expect "above and beyond" quality in the product and that quality includes every aspect of the product: ingredients, packaging, marketing, etc. The factory manager spends several months consulting with the grocery store manager and implementing what he learns along the way in his factory.

There are a lot of key philosophy changes that happen at the ice cream factory. The entire factory takes ownership of the end product and the future of the factory. They learn that "quality is cheaper in the long run than 'good enough'." They learn that:

- Quality is not judged by *their* standards, but rather by the standards of the *customer*.
- They learn that a company is only as good as its weakest sample.
- They learned that one of the keys to success is to "turn what you do every day out of necessity into something you love to do (more than just working for a paycheck).
- They learn that there is always room for improvement; the key is to always strive for perfection.

The lessons in this book are invaluable if applied to your own philosophies and truly show the difference between being good enough and being at the top — the best in the league.

This is a must read for anyone who wants to move themselves and/or their company to the next level in quality service, products, and way of life. It is a quick read that can, indeed, completely change ones way of life.

Chowdhury, Subir. *The Ice Cream Maker: An Inspiring Tale About Making Quality The Key Ingredient In Everything You Do*. New York: Doubleday, 2005. \$16.95.



## Suspending Accounts

(continued from page 1)

### (2) In what cases should I consider Suspending an account?

Your library software has no way to inform us if a patron has set up a payment plan with the library. Suspending accounts is mainly for this purpose. If the patron has come in and set up a payment plan to pay off their account, the library may not want the patron to continue to receive letters or phone calls, and possibly be credit reported (if they had not been credit reported already) while the patron is making good on their payment arrangements. An account can also be suspended if you need to pause collections while further investigating an issue. Suspension is intended to be temporary. If the patron pays off the account, the account will be considered cleared and paid in full. If the account needs to be closed please notify us via email.

### (3) When should I "Resume" a currently suspended account?

If the patron does not live up to their payment arrangement within a reasonable amount of time, it is best to resume their account. We will then continue our efforts to encourage the patron to resolve the account. Accounts can be set to resume automatically at a date you choose — using the Info Link Account Access website.

Unique's InfoLink's Account Access is the best, most accurate, method for suspending and resuming accounts. Using the site you are able to retrieve a list of the currently suspended accounts for your library. This list will also indicate the last reported payment activity. This last payment activity date helps the library determine if the patron has abandoned their payment arrangement.

Should you have any questions about how to suspend and resume using InfoLink Account Access, your customer service specialist would be happy to show that to you. We strive to make our services easy to use. If you haven't yet had a chance to check out the InfoLink Account Access site we do encourage you to do so. We have taken your suggestions over the past few years and have made updates and changes to accommodate you. Please don't hesitate to provide further feedback to us on how our services can better meet your needs.

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



## Technically, Here to Serve

By Rob Klaus  
Manager of Technical Services

Customer service is a central tenet in our mission at Unique, and we feel it is the key reason for our success in serving libraries over the past 12 years. Our Technical Department, here, is very much aware of this. At UMS our tech staff serves two distinct customer bases—external, our customer libraries. And internal, the other staff who serve you on a daily basis. I'd like to introduce all of the tech staff to you...

Many of you are familiar with two of our staff who serve our external library clients; the Technical Analysts who help configure (occasionally help troubleshoot) your ILS software with you. Their sole focus is to know the ins and outs of various ILS debt collection systems.

**Mike Lawrence** has been with Unique Management for 5 years, and has held positions in our Customer Service, and Production departments prior to coming and working in the Technical department 3 years ago. Mike works with our clients that use Unicorn, Polaris, Innovative, and TLC platforms. Away from Unique, Mike is a Volunteer Firefighter in his home community of New Washington, Indiana.

**Steve Christy** has been with Unique for 3 years. He worked as a Contact Specialist in our Call center calling on your library patrons prior to taking a position with us in the Technical Department. Steve works with our Dynix Classic, Horizon, and CARL based clients. Steve is an avid 'tinkerer', spending a lot of time creating various things out of spare electronic equipment. He has occasionally been spotted riding his unicycle to work!

The other half of our department is primarily focused on serving our internal customers. From maintaining our network, servers, computers, printers, phone systems to developing the custom software that allows our staff to serve you as effectively as possible. We keep them pretty busy.

**Todd Corley** has been with Unique for 8 years, and is the original member of our Department. Among many other components of Unique, Todd created our InfoLink account access site, which allows for you to view your patron's accounts in our system 24 hours a day. We were looking at the access logs for this the other day, and last month there were over 15,000 individual account lookups in this system. You can imagine the amount of time this saves both us, and our client base when information about a patron is just a mouse click or two away. Away from Unique, Todd plays the bass guitar in the band *Between Two Lions*, and is now involved in coaching his son's under 5 soccer team.

**Mike Clark** has been working with us for two years, and is our Systems Coordinator. Mike is the one responsible for keeping things running from day to day fixing PCs, printers, servers, etc. If you ever request a customized data report from your Customer Service Rep, chances are Mike is the one that is retrieving that data for you. Lately, Mike has been taking on an increased role in our software development initiatives. Outside of Unique, Mike spends time fishing and camping, and recently returned from a weeklong excursion to Kuala Lumpur!

Finally, I get to split my time serving both sides of our customer base. During my six and a half years with UMS, I have had the opportunity to attend most of the User conferences, and to meet with many of our customers. It has always been one of my favorite things about this position — being able to meet with so many folks who we serve, and hear so much positive feedback about our service. I also spend a lot of time working to develop our internal applications. Away from work, I enjoy traveling, and spending most waking moments with my wife and two perfect daughters.

The tech staff and I are available to you, at any time, to answer questions and to keep our service easy for you to use. Please feel free to phone or e-mail. We are happily here to serve you.



Mike Lawrence



Steve Christy



Todd Corley



Mike Clark

The Greenwich Council Library in London, England began service with UMS late last year — our first customer in the United Kingdom! Slight cultural and lingual differences aside, the issues remain the same — helping the library recover significant amounts of materials and cash while protecting patron goodwill.

We asked Steve Wood, Group Library Manager to tell us about his experience, and this is what he wrote:

### The Unique Experience

When we, i.e. Greenwich Library and Information Service, first made the decision to go with the Horizon Debt Recovery module, and specifically to work with Unique Management Services, the least of my concerns was how we would communicate across the Atlantic in the context of immediate response. The staff at Unique were extremely patient during the course of the following few months (this is a colloquialism for almost a year) while I was attempting to gain permission from our Chief Executive to pursue this arrangement, and by the time that I was successful, we had already built a rapport with some individuals at Unique.

The moment we had the go-ahead, both Greenwich and Unique staff immediately began emailing; we even had a number of conference calls by telephone, and we startled our contacts over the other side of the pond with our knowledge of the Comeback Inn. Hey, we have Google Earth in this part of the world too, you know!

The most successful part of this arrangement is that we regard Unique as partners, not as agents working on our behalf, and that feeling seems to be reciprocated. We exchange emails as if we were dealing with another Council department, we even telephone occasionally, and this just feels as if we're talking to a library down the road, and the real difference in the relationship compared to dealing with other agents (whatever the purpose) is that we all seem to be talking the same language.

So the service we receive is pleasant, efficient, understanding, and best of all it seems to be run by friends! And the only time that the Atlantic gets in the way is when, occasionally, I want to speak to Dick Neal...and he's not out of bed yet!

#### Steve Woods

Group Library Manager, Greenwich Library and Information Service, Greenwich, England  
6th September 2006



From left: *Sylvia Thornton, Greenwich Council Library, Steve Woods, Greenwich County Library, Dick Neal, Manager, Strategic Partnerships, UMS and Jean Wright, Greenwich Council Library.*



## Quotable Quotes

I received the fundamentals of my education in school, but that was not enough. My real education, the superstructure, the details, the true architecture, I got out of the public library. For an impoverished child whose family could not afford to buy books, the library was the open door to wonder and achievement, and I can never be sufficiently grateful that I had the wit to charge through that door and make the most of it. Now, when I read constantly about the way in which library funds are being cut and cut, I can only think that the door is closing and that American society has found one more way to destroy itself.

— *I, Asimov. New York: Doubleday, 1994. Isaac ASIMOV*

### New Laws of Librarianship:

Libraries serve humanity.

Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated.

Use technology intelligently to enhance service.

Protect free access to knowledge.

Honor the past & create the future.

— *Michael GORMAN (American Libraries 9/95)*

### Ranganathan's Five Laws:

Books are for use.

Books are for all; or Every reader his book.

Every book its reader.

Save the time of the reader.

A library is a growing organism.

— *Shiyali Ramamrita RANGANATHAN (1892-1972)*

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*

The reflections and histories of men and women throughout the world are contained in books...America's greatness is not only recorded in books, but it is also dependent upon each and every citizen being able to utilize public libraries.

— *Terence COOKE (1921-1983)*

The public library has been historically a vital instrument of democracy and opportunity in the United States...Our history has been greatly shaped by people who read their way to opportunity and achievements in public libraries.

— *Arthur Meier SCHLESINGER (1888-1965)*

So the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries.

— *Kurt VONNEGUT [In These Times, 8/6/2004]*

PRSRRT STD  
U. S. Postage  
Paid  
New Albany,  
IN  
Permit # 62

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