

Case Study: Denver Public Library

Library Uses Partnerships to Deliver Economic Development Services

The shrinking economy and a growing immigrant population have created new opportunities for the Denver Public Library to play a leadership role in the economic stabilization and growth of the community, garnering recognition from city government and the local media.

At a glance:

Location: Denver, Colorado

Population Served: 592,000

Number of Locations: 23

BusinessDecision Customer Since:
2008

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Economy Creates Challenges and Opportunities

Faced with the attrition of customers, business people need to get more creative, using new tools, exploring new markets and, in some cases reinventing their businesses or careers. Dixie Malone, outreach librarian at the Denver Public Library (DPL), says the shrinking economy creates an opportunity for the library to play a leadership role in the economic stabilization and growth of the community. “For some people, the relationship of the library to real-world business challenges is an oxymoron—they don’t put the two things together. When we show them how BusinessDecision can help their businesses, they are amazed.”

The Denver area experienced a doubling of its immigration population in the 1990s, creating a high concentration of new immigrants. While economic conditions and language barriers can make it difficult for them to get jobs, many can start small businesses such as groceries, restaurants or dry cleaners and employ others in their communities. Malone says using BusinessDecision to help businesses take

root creates jobs and raises DPL’s profile with members of Denver City Government, who are highly supportive of library business initiatives.

Helping Business People Think Strategically

Malone says BusinessDecision is unique in that it goes beyond statistics to encourage people to think about their business in a more strategic way. If someone wants to start a restaurant or grow their existing restaurant traffic, it makes sense to concentrate their marketing dollars on reaching the people who go out to eat frequently. BusinessDecision can help find those people and pinpoint where they live.

“Business people can’t believe this kind of information exists for free through the library. We work hard to identify and acquire the very best resources we can for our customers. Why would we settle for less than this?”

Evangelical is a word to describe Malone’s view of the library’s role in supporting economic development in the Denver area.

"We want to be a partner in the economic success of our community by providing the very best resources we can to our customers. I can't imagine why we would settle for less than what we can get with BusinessDecision."

Dixie Malone
 Outreach Librarian
 Denver Public Library

"I want to take a person who shines shoes and turn him into a person who runs a shoeshine business. If people are buying a lot of shoes, they probably spend more on shoeshines, so where do the frequent shoe buyers live? BusinessDecision, with its numerous graphs and maps, is the perfect tool to demonstrate this."

Partnerships are Key

In Colorado, 98 percent of businesses have fewer than 100 employees. Recognizing the impact of small businesses on the economy, the mayor of Denver and the Denver Office of Economic Development initiated GrowDenver to focus on economic development and improve the viability of small businesses. "We want to be a partner in the economic success of our community," Malone said. "BusinessDecision is a key tool in the library's arsenal to push the mayor's initiative forward."

This partnership philosophy means engaging community organizations with the library on several levels. CIVICTechnologies provided BusinessDecision training to representatives from partner organizations so they could offer services directly to people the library might not otherwise reach. "Business people don't generally think about the library as a resource," Malone said. "We rely on our partners to do more than simply refer people to the library. Our partners work with large, small and start-up businesses and use library resources to provide the help

people need. This expands the use of BusinessDecision in ways we couldn't do on our own."

An example of the partnership strategy is the Annual Small Business Resource Fair, celebrating its 10th year in 2009. The Fair is sponsored by DPL and various business organizations including the U.S. Small Business Administration, GrowDenver, the Minority and Women Chambers' Coalition, SCORE, the Colorado Minority Business and Women's Office, and the Colorado SBDC Network. The Fair provides the library with the opportunity to showcase BusinessDecision as well as other business resources.

Library staff schedule one-on-one sessions to demonstrate how to use BusinessDecision. For group sessions, they have found that piggybacking with other entities offering business education and mentoring is helpful in capturing and attracting a business audience. Sometimes these partnerships are non-traditional, as is the case with the Create Denver Expo, an event to help creative artists become better business managers, at which Malone gave a presentation on using BusinessDecision's psychodemographics to find customers.

Malone says her goal is to find partners who touch the people the library wants to reach and then invest the time to educate them about library services. Partners include

*Denver Westword named the
Denver Public Library's
offering of
BusinessDecision
the Best Free Service of 2009.*



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organizations that provide advice and counsel to small businesses as well as those likely to interact with people looking for business financing. A firm believer that library outreach is more than just "showing up," she is an active participant in a variety of community organizations.

Malone encourages libraries considering BusinessDecision to try it for their own library business, examining the demographics and market segments of their service areas. "Use it to analyze your own customer base. I'd be surprised if you weren't amazed by what you find out."

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About BusinessDecision

BusinessDecision is a business database offered through public libraries that helps small businesses succeed by increasing their market share and growing their clientele, and that helps public libraries promote economic sustainability in their local community by meeting the needs of small businesses and other entrepreneurs. BusinessDecision Academic is a business database offered through academic libraries to help students and faculty undertake classroom and research projects. For more about BusinessDecision visit www.businessdecision.info or contact Julie Peterson toll free at (888) 606-7600 or by email at Julie@businessdecision.info.

About CIVICTechnologies

CIVICTechnologies provides a full suite of web services, customized applications and consulting services to meet the complete geographic information systems (GIS) needs of libraries and businesses—from small and medium enterprises to Fortune 500 companies—across a diverse range of industries. CIVICTechnologies enables its customers to visualize data in new and innovative ways in order to deliver more effective products and services, make better informed decisions, build consensus faster, allocate resources more wisely, and implement organization-wide solutions more effectively. For more information, call Marc Futterman toll free at (888) 606-7600 or email him at maf@civicttechnologies.com; or visit www.civicttechnologies.com.