JESSE HARO  PHOENIX PUBLIC LIBRARY

Customer Focused

Jesse Haro is not a librarian. But this software engineer, who once designed sites for companies like Harry and David, listens to librarians. Carefully. As web services manager for the Phoenix Public Library (PPL), Haro heard librarians tell him that they wanted a web site that was easy to use and that promoted and gave seamless access to all library services.

What he built was a site that did all that and had the look and functionality of a high-end commercial site. When www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org launched in September 2003, one library user said, “I love your new web site; it has such a fun ‘let’s go shopping’ feel.”

That’s because when planning the site, Haro and the library’s web team looked to their real-world competitors: Google, Amazon.com, and other successful commercial sites, which allow you to search through their entire product line with one, friendly user interface.

That kind of seamlessness when you’re working with multiple databases from multiple vendors is a challenge. The Quick Search Haro created searches through the catalog, the event calendar, and library web pages. Soon it will also search all databases and present all results on one page.

Haro has insisted that vendors allow search results to appear within the library’s own interface. “When our users access information from our catalog, we want them to know they’re still in the same world they started out in.”

PPL director Toni Garvey admires Haro: “Jesse keeps our librarians focused on customer expectations in the larger virtual world.”

“I view the library’s purpose as to promote growth, development, and creativity,” Haro says. “Deciding how to foster that offers greater fulfillment than any project I’ve worked on before.”

JAMES MIECZKOWSKI  GIS INFORMATION SYSTEMS, SYRACUSE, NY

General Contractor

When LJ spoke with James Mieczkowski about its nascent best sellers list (”books most borrowed”), Mieczkowski not only “got it,” he was already working on software that would help make it happen. Mieczkowski, the chief information office at GIS Information Systems, was just finishing a “Most Popular” sort for the company’s Polaris users so they could retrieve information about their own collections.

Using his knowledge of libraries, their data, and the Polaris database design, Mieczkowski was able to expand on the idea of the report to generate best seller statistics.

“Jim and his team took this project one step further and modified Polaris to use this ‘popularity’ rating as a method of relevancy ranking,” says William Schickling, CEO of GIS. “For some patrons, the most relevant search result is what other people are reading. It’s a well-received new feature.”

Mieczkowski believes it’s important for librarians to leverage technology “to get things done in a smarter, less expensive way.” Online booksellers and the Internet “have presented the library with stiff competition for the patron’s attention,” a situation the library community “has been reluctant to accept, but it’s clear that is changing.”

Today, the role of the integrated library system (ILS) vendor has shifted to that of general contractor, says Mieczkowski. This means that vendors must “enable the open integration of the ILS to third-party products that can provide operational efficiencies.” Savings can be put into improved service—like shifting staff from behind-the-scenes work to direct public service.

For Mieczkowski, it’s all about creating tools that allow librarians to embrace change, take risks, and create the libraries of tomorrow.