

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Google Drive or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Online Forms

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In 2009, the Miller Business Resource Center received a grant from JP Morgan Chase to provide local small businesses and budding entrepreneurs the opportunity to take introductory computer programs for free. I was thrilled when I was given the task to manage the Entrepreneur's Computer Toolkit Series and create programming for our patrons. I was even more delighted with the fact that since the series was supported by a grant these programs would be open to the public, expanding our reach beyond our local community.

In normal circumstances, in order for "out of district" patrons to be registered for a program, they'd need a valid library card to be entered into our system and fill out our standard paperwork, a process that needed to be done in-person and could take, on a normal day, at least 15 minutes to complete. In the past having our out of district patrons go through this process, especially small business owners who were busy, was somewhat discouraging. I approached the Tech Department co-ordinator to see if there was an easier solution to having our potential attendees go through the rigamarole of registering their local library cards with us. (Not to mention those business owners who don't have library cards...forgive them!)

Bypassing our registration requirements for our system would not be possible. Without the means of having patrons sign up easily, I considered going "old school" and would take to simply putting my phone number on our marketing materials and having patrons sign up by calling me at my desk.

The thought of personally taking phone registrations led me to search for an alternative. Google Docs, as it was known at the time, provided a timely and free solution to my registration problem. By creating an online form for registration, I was not only collecting the pertinent information I needed for our programs, but I was also doing something that our in-house system could not: gather demographic information, as well as e-mail addresses.

Now known as Google Drive, this free service is a collection of cloud-based resources that allows you to create presentations, documents, forms, spreadsheets, and even drawings from anywhere in the world. It also serves as a depository for any type of file that you wish to have access to. Users can also share files and folders inside Drive, allowing for easy collaboration.

When signing up for a Toolkit program, patrons are required to enter their name, telephone number and email address (the primary means of communicating to them a reminder, as well as any changes to the

programming). By doing so, we have slowly built an e-mail list that has, as of writing, grown to almost 200 patrons. Additionally, patrons are asked in an optional section of their registration form to indicate their level of computer know-how, whether or not they own a business, if they've taken a Toolkit program before, and so on. These questions can be changed to fit our needs.

Building a form is easy. Google has created an interface full of tooltips and links to help. Users select the type of question they wish to ask using a drop down box: multiple choice, checkboxes, text, etc. You will also be able to edit a confirmation message after your patron's form has been submitted, or forward them to another form or web page based on their answers.

It will be necessary for you to set up an account in Google. If you already have a GMail account, you can access your Drive account by visiting <http://drive.google.com>. When creating any document, you will have the option of sharing it with other members of your team by entering their email address and assigning them different levels of access. Users can either edit, comment or view the data. Editors will have access to all the data, including the form's design. Viewers will be able to see the results of your registrations, but not be able to edit the contents of the form or the results spreadsheet.

It is important when setting up your sharing options to make sure to share the results file. This is the file created by Drive to collect your responses and is labeled as such. Since the information is collected by Google and compiled into a handy spreadsheet, it can be edited, manipulated, and exported to your liking.

The benefits of using Drive doesn't stop at program registration. If you have access to a tablet, smartphone or laptop for your program, you can check-in attendees as they arrive right from your registration spreadsheet and even add those pesky drop-in patrons on the fly.

Now that you've had success in taking registrations, sharing that information with your programming department, and using your list to check in attendees on-the-fly, what else can you do? How about a follow up: since you have the email addresses of your attendees, why not survey them on the program they attended? In addition to text fields and drop-down menus, Drive allows you to add scales to allow your patrons to rate your instructor, let you know what they may be interested in as far as future programs, or let you know how easy it was to register for your program!

Since we started using Drive as a means of collecting information from our patrons, we've used it in many ways, including:

- Keeping track of reference questions for our bi-annual survey
- Logging how much time was spent on business reference questions for our grant
- Survey patrons on their interest in future programming ideas
- For a recent bus trip that offered lunch choices, ask patrons for their menu selection
- Created a Drive spreadsheet to keep track of expenses during the last ALA conference

Once you have designed your form and are ready to start accepting responses, you will have the option of either embedding it into an existing web page (which may require some web design know-how) or making it a web link. Google also allows you to share your form using various social networking outlets such as Facebook and Google+. When a patron visits the link, they are forwarded directly to your online form. Since this link is unique and permanent, you have the option of editing your existing form at any time without having to change your web link.

The possibilities are endless and the price is right. With just a few clicks, you can have an online form up and running in no time using Google Drive. Want to see online program registration using Google Drive in action? Check out this link: <http://www.tinyurl.com/ectkreg>