

Reasons Why People Counting is **Essential** for **Libraries**

**HOW LIBRARIES CAN TRACK FOOT TRAFFIC
TO STAY CURRENT AND KEEP RECORDS**



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With the introduction of eBooks and eReaders – as well as the internet and the iPad – it is becoming harder for print media to keep up. Hard copies of books, newspapers, journals and other resources are being eliminated or developed into a digital version for readers' convenience. However, there is a loophole: libraries.

Public and school libraries cannot simply be replaced by eReaders because they serve as a valuable community resource – a learning place for people of all ages and backgrounds. Although they cannot be replaced, they can be optimized.

It is becoming increasingly important for libraries to embrace the digital age. As technology advances, libraries can act as a vehicle to allow the community to grow with technology. Also, they can provide technology to those who can't afford to access it on their own. In order to do so, libraries should offer access to digital media and technological resources in addition to traditional books.

That's where a people counting system comes in.

Technology isn't cheap and libraries don't generate much revenue. People counting serves dual purpose in the digital takeover: they not only provide libraries with a technologically advanced way to keep records, but also provide them with hard facts to use in requests for additional technology.

Digital resources and services are often used while patrons are inside the facility, and aren't checked out. Without check-out transactions being made, it is difficult to determine how many people are using them. So as library services go digital, knowing the amount of people who enter and exit the building becomes much more important than knowing the amount of books that are being checked out. People counting systems are able to provide this necessary information.



Why do they need this information? Libraries don't generate much revenue, yet they are still responsible for providing resources to the community.

- According to the American Library Association (ALA), Americans spend nearly three times as much on candy as they do on public libraries. They spend \$35.81 a year — about the average cost of one hardcover book.
- College libraries typically receive less than three cents of every dollar spent on higher education.
- However, research shows the highest achieving students attend schools with well-staffed and well-funded libraries.
- In a 2012 poll, 94 percent of respondents agreed that public libraries play an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed because they provide free access to materials and resources.

In the 2012 ALA study mentioned above, as well as others, there are plenty of statistics about the number of books checked out and the amount spent, but there are hardly any about the amount of people who use these facilities. How can libraries determine how to serve their patrons if they don't know how many there are? Also, with limited funding and an unknown amount of patrons, library workers struggle to spread their time and money.

People counters are mounted above doorways to count the number of patrons who enter and exit the facility during a certain period of time, generating data about the library's foot traffic. This information allows library workers to gain insight into their peak traffic periods, as well as labor and resource needs.

Libraries need to fit technology into their tight budgets, and sometimes funding requests are the only way they are able to do so. To make a sound request, they must just include statistics about their facility's foot traffic – which can be provided by a people counting system – to prove the necessity of these resources and ensure that they will be put to good use. For example, they can show that “x” number of people use the computer lab – or “x” percent of their total traffic – and therefore prove that it is a valuable resource.



Here are the top reasons why people counting is necessary for today's libraries:

1. Make informed business decisions

The Library Journal's 2012 budget survey revealed that "public libraries are, at best, furiously treading water." Overall, the libraries that responded projected decreases in their total budget for operations and materials. Budget cuts across the board can – and often do – lead to cuts to staffing and operating hours, making it difficult for libraries to serve their communities.

Door counters allow libraries to learn which entrances are used most and which rooms and times are the busiest. With this knowledge, they can guide the placement and operating hours of cafes, refreshments, kiosks, exhibits, guest speakers, study groups, etc.

Library workers can install people counters above each room, seating area or wing of the facility to gain information about foot traffic in each area. This will answer questions like:

- Which areas experience light traffic?
- Which areas experience heavy traffic?
- What are the peak periods for these areas?

By comparing the traffic numbers of different areas, they can understand the best and most easily accessed areas to place these resources. They can also compare areas that house existing technology or resources to determine which resources visitors use most often or find most useful. That way they can cut out the least-used resources when their budget tightens. Knowing which areas of the library receive the most traffic tells library workers where to allocate the budget money. Heavily-traveled areas are more likely to return the money the money spent.

2. Keep in compliance

Library workers must report statistics to the state as needed. They must also stay within budget restrictions by maintaining labor percentages or limiting technology usage. A people counting system provides accurate information about the usage of their facility and resources that they can 1) present to the state, or 2) use them to keep in compliance with state standards.



Why do libraries need information about their foot traffic to keep in compliance? Not everyone who enters a library rents materials. Some read while they are there and put the book back on the shelf before leaving; some conduct research in the computer lab; some read materials that aren't able to be checked out, like microfilm. That's why emphasis has moved from the number of circulations to the people libraries serve. Traffic reports generated from a people counting system allow libraries to provide accurate data.

Taxpayers want to know what their tax dollars are being spent on, and if those dollars are being put to good use. Likewise, state governments and organizations want to know that the money they've invested in libraries is being used wisely.

While standards vary from state to state, many use them to determine libraries' worth and eligibility. In some states, public libraries run the risk of losing their funding if they do not meet set standards. These standards could include hours of operation, staff training and education, materials per capita and circulation – all of which can be challenging to maintain with a limited budget.

3. Make cases to administration

According to a recent survey by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, public libraries across the country have experienced reductions to their operating revenue, service hours and staffing, yet circulation, program attendance and computer use continue to trend upward. So libraries are experiencing an increase in demand for their resources, yet many of them don't have access to the funds needed to provide those resources to the public.

Only half of America's public libraries offer internet speeds above the Federal Communication

Commission's home broadband recommendation of 4 mbps. This means that many people who come to the library to research, study or get work done may have to work with very slow internet speeds. Recently, the ALA asked the FCC to speed up the deployment of the high-capacity broadband needed to serve their communities. It's hard for libraries to act as a learning environment if they are unable to provide adequate materials.



With people counting data, libraries can share their foot traffic reports with elected officials or board members to prove their need for increased hours of operation and additional staffing, technology or services. These numbers allow them to prove that library usage has increased, even if library circulation is down.

For additional resources: For example, although the community hasn't been checking out as many books, they can prove that patrons have been taking advantage of in-house digital resources. By installing a door counter above the computer lab and other rooms, libraries can use those traffic numbers to gauge their building's technology usage. Using impressive numbers, they can make a case to administration for additional technology.

For additional labor: Libraries that have been forced to decrease their hours of operation have the opportunity to gain them back by proving how many people use the facility on a daily basis. Libraries can also make a case for additional staff members or hours of operation by proving that more labor is needed to adequately accommodate the number of patrons in the building with accurate data about daily traffic and peak time periods.

When petitions and pleas fall flat, these numbers help libraries to make a more solid case. With adequate staffing, funding and resources, libraries can better support its community and bridge the digital divide. They can show that they are still a valuable resource in an age where Kindles and tablets are common household objects.

About Traf-Sys

From our headquarters and Data Center in Pittsburgh, PA, Traf-Sys Inc. provides people counting systems, software and support to more than 7,000 locations. We offer a broad range of traffic counting solutions that deliver unparalleled accuracy and reliability. Our people counting solutions solve a variety of traffic monitoring challenges for all types of organizations including some of the largest shopping centers, retail store chains, universities, libraries and casinos in the United States.

Whether you are trying to measure traffic to support project funding, optimize labor, determine advertising effectiveness, or increase conversion ratios, Traf-Sys provides the tools to leverage key metrics to improve the performance of your business. Our people counting solutions provide actionable information that helps organizations increase profitability and optimize operational efficiency by analyzing visitor traffic to make informed business decisions.